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CONNECTIVITY IN MOTION

Island Hubs in the
Indian Ocean World

*Edited by Burkhard Schnepel
and Edward A. Alpers*



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Burkhard Schnepel · Edward A. Alpers
Editors

Connectivity in Motion

Island Hubs in the Indian Ocean World

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PROLOGUE

With one exception, the chapters in this collection were first presented at the international conference on “The Art of Hubbing: The Role of Small Islands in Indian Ocean Connectivity,” held on October 15–17, 2015 at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle, Germany. The conference was the second such gathering organized by Burkhard Schnepel as part of the Max Planck Fellow Group on “Connectivity in Motion: Port Cities of the Indian Ocean,” of which he is the Director.¹ The exchanges at the conference were lively and substantive, as have been those between the two editors and the individual contributors to this volume. One consequence of these exchanges is that the title of the book has been changed from that of the conference. Thus, while we have not abandoned the notion of “hubs”—highly frequented and energized nodes along the routes taken by transmaritime movements—as an important conceptual frame for studying and understanding Indian Ocean islands, we agree that “connectivity in motion” is a more critical analytical tool than “the art of hubbing.” Accordingly, the contributions in our collection focus primarily on different elements of connectivity, mobility, and hubs as they relate to both broad methodological approaches and specific regionally and historically framed case studies. One other significant change is the decision to drop “small” from our definition of the islands studied here. Smallness is, after all, a *relative* matter of comparison, though, as some authors in this volume argue, at some point size also matters in an absolute sense, especially when it becomes miniscule, as is the case with some of the islets discussed in the

volume. In any case, there are no papers on the really big islands in the Indian Ocean—such as Madagascar, Sumatra, and Java—so the focus of the chapters is mainly on relatively small islands.

The contributors bring a range of methodological approaches and tools to their chapters, which, taken together, reveal the rich possibilities for studying islands in the Indian Ocean World (IOW). Most contributors have been trained as either social anthropologists or historians, but virtually all of them straddle these methodologies in one way or another. Similarly, although we have organized the contents into two broad parts, namely “Themes” and “Case Studies” (the latter with what we hope are four appropriate regional subheadings), virtually all the authors make good use of a variety of approaches and bring a wide range of evidence and methodological perspectives into play. In particular, in the context of our connectivity in motion-focus, all our authors also look beyond the limited geographical frame of the islands or archipelagos they are studying to discuss the many movements and links of even the remotest island to other places in the Indian Ocean World.

We draw several main conclusions from this collaborative effort. First, the literature and the common imaginaries that emphasize isolation as a factor notwithstanding, there is compelling evidence in these contributions that many if not most islands do indeed connect, no matter how small and remote they are. Second, even when one describes the character of island connectivity as a form of network, the actual connections involved are much more complex, nuanced, and historically changeable than a rigorous application of network theory might imply. Third, the concept of “connectivity in motion” is central to the ideas that run through the entire volume, whether we are speaking of the movement of people, flora and fauna, things, political systems, languages, rituals, forms of art, beliefs, or ideas. Last, the interplay between ethnographic and historical approaches is especially rewarding in the former’s ability to engage directly with islanders whose lives are usually as messy, cosmopolitan, multifaceted, and mobile as are those of the contributors themselves, as well as in the latter’s ability to add historical depth to any observations of contemporary life.

This volume, then, is a contribution to the ever-growing and developing scientific literature and research concerned with transmaritime exchanges across the Indian Ocean World and with the various kinds of connectivities that are created through these movements and exchanges.

One important dimension that quite naturally stands to the fore of many of these investigations is constituted by the very places and agents that function as the entry and exit points of such movements. Among these are, of course, the various port cities of the Indian Ocean World, with all their innumerable variations in size, function, character, and other respects. Such a focus on ports and port cities constitutes precisely the point at which the present volume is located, though it specifically concentrates on hubs that are located on islands. This focus on “island hubs” makes the volume special, given the fact that, even though islands have not, of course, escaped scholarly attention so far, “islandness” has seldom been turned into an explicit empirical and methodological issue, as the authors assembled here have sought to do.

To provide a short overview of the chapters that follow, the “Themes” section contains contributions by Burkhard Schnepel, Edward A. Alpers, Andre Gingrich, and Godfrey Baldacchino. It is worth noting that three of these scholars were trained in anthropology and/or sociology, while Alpers was trained in history. Schnepel’s paper reflects his deep thinking about the issues around which the Max Planck Fellow Group is organized. As an introduction to the themes of this volume, his contribution reflects the input of many voices and has served as a touchstone for individual contributions. Specifically, Schnepel builds on Alpers’ idea of the significance of “the island factor” in the Indian Ocean by pointing out the centrality of islands in the history of maritime movements and exchanges in the Indian Ocean World, suggesting that they have served as critical hubs in the circulation of people, things, and ideas. He also argues for the relevance of the concept of “islandness” to both the historical and contemporary practice of islanders and to island imaginaries. We believe that this introduction provides a thread of intellectual coherence throughout the volume. Of course, not all contributors agree with everything that Schnepel has to say in this major intervention, or specifically refer to his chapter, but even differences with him demonstrate the significance of his ideas.

Alpers takes up the central themes of the volume by testing the ideas of connectivity, smallness, translocality, and the unique situation of islands against case studies of the Comoro and Mascarene Islands. His chapter thus both enters into an intellectual exchange with Schnepel’s introductory chapter and anticipates other chapters in the volume. Gingrich brings a critical perspective to the central themes of the Max Planck Fellow Group Program by exploring both the terminology of

its central ideas and the sources available for studying them. His deep knowledge of medieval Arabic sources suggests a number of possible channels for future research. In addition, Gingrich discusses two conceptual notions of “network-based” approaches that imply different ways of understanding maritime movements and local knowledge. Ranging across the northern reaches of the Indian Ocean, his illustrative examples add significant historical depth to our appreciation of exchanges across that part of the Indian Ocean World. Against the background of his long and deep involvement with, and seminal influence on, “island studies,” both more generally and beyond the Indian Ocean World, Baldacchino offers a chronological contrast to Gingrich by organizing his thoughts on modern Indian Ocean island states and the still mysterious disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370. His analysis of “passengers” and of islands as “taskscape” provides the reader with new ways of considering both islands and movement in the Indian Ocean World.

The broadly defined part of the volume entitled “Case Studies” begins with four very different papers—the first two by historians, the remainder by anthropologists—that examine the Swahili-Comorian world. Gwyn Campbell opens the section with an overview of the long history of Kilwa’s place in the trading networks of the western Indian Ocean. Drawing upon extensive scholarly literature and published primary sources, as well as on an important unpublished mid-nineteenth-century French report on the slave trade at Kilwa, Campbell situates Kilwa squarely at the southern limits of the Indian Ocean monsoon system, including its trading extensions across the Mozambique Channel to northwest Madagascar. Jeremy Prestholdt examines the place of Zanzibar Town as a critical hub connecting East Africa, the western Indian Ocean, Europe, and the United States to this longstanding multicultural, cosmopolitan island-city. He reveals how the movement of merchandise, people, and ideas about how to dress, speak, or worship reveals a world of connections that all came together in this suddenly vibrant East African port city. Iain Walker offers a quite different notion of what, or who in this case, constitutes a hub. His microstudy of a Comorian Zanzibari named Ali Mfaume shows him to be at the center—the hub, he argues—of a set of personal connections stretching from Zanzibar to Ngazidja (Grande Comore) to Madagascar to South Africa. Thus, by examining the life of a unique individual, Walker makes us think about different ways to conceive and define hubs as crucial agents of connectivity in motion. Similarly, Kjersti Larsen probes the shifting identities of

a different Comorian Zanzibari family in Zanzibar Town. Basing herself on a long period of ethnographic fieldwork, she analyzes how religious identities were defined by death and inheritance as the men of the family moved away from Zanzibar to Ngazidja and Muscat, Oman. She also describes how spirit possession, here involving spirits from Madagascar, provides yet another realm in which the movement of people and ideas demonstrates connectivity in motion.

A further section we call “Mid-Ocean Archipelagos” contains chapters on Mauritius, the Chagos Archipelago and the Maldives as seen from quite distinct perspectives. We begin with a chapter by historian Vijaya Teelock on the process whereby Port Louis, the capital of Mauritius, took shape both spatially and socially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Her chapter represents the first step in what she anticipates will be a major study of how space, power, and ethnic identity were formed and formulated in colonial Mauritius. Burkhard Schnepel initiates four chapters by very differently oriented ethnographers. He traces the rise of Mauritius as a hub from its earliest phase as a maritime port of call through different stages of existence, first as a source of provisions and a rest area for colonial sailors, then as a mercantile hub and colonial plantation economy, more recently as a service hub catering to tourists and textile manufacturers, and finally as a contemporary financial and communications hub for the southwestern Indian Ocean and beyond. Next Steffen F. Johannessen argues that the Chagos Islands, which have become notorious for the way in which Anglo-American geopolitical concerns led to the removal of its native inhabitants to exile in Mauritius, have a complex history and present that involve overlapping issues of strategic military power focused on Diego Garcia and the environmental protection of threatened maritime resources. Like other scholars who have worked on the Chagos situation, he pays close attention to the actions and aspirations of Chagossians themselves, most interestingly the way in which they have come to re-imagine their homeland in religio-ecological terms (“the Garden of Eden” effect). While he does not try to identify the Chagos Archipelago as a hub in general, he contends that it has become both a military hub and an eco-hot spot, that is, an environmental hub.

Boris Wille approaches the Maldivian Islands in terms of their insularity and the historical dominance of a kind of Big Man politics that has come to dominate political and economic life across this vast archipelago. Because of the isolation of virtually all the different Maldivian Islands,

Wille argues that these “Big Men” have also served as hubs, though in a very different way from Walker’s account of Ali Mfaume, who was anything but a powerful economic or political figure. In terms of connectivity in motion, what makes the role of these men as both nodes and centers significant is the way in which they dominate movement, not (just) from Male’ to South Asia, but also, and most prominently in this account, among and between the innumerable inhabited Maldivian Islands, including the tourist resorts, with Male’ as their hub. Eva-Maria Knoll begins her chapter by describing the existence of a potentially fatal medical condition called thalassemia that developed historically from malaria and by showing how this disease affects a whole range of socio-medical issues in the Maldives. Because of the accelerating centralization of services and wealth on the capital Male’ (and here there is certainly a kind of parallel to Wille’s argument about nodes and centers), medical services are equally integrated into the hub functions of the capital. As only limited medical services are available on the outlying islands, thalassemia patients must first travel to Male’ and in many cases on to medical centers in Sri Lanka and south India that specialize in treating Maldivian patients. Thus, Male’ has become both an internal and an external hub, as well as a source of connectivity in motion, for a medically defined group of Maldivians.

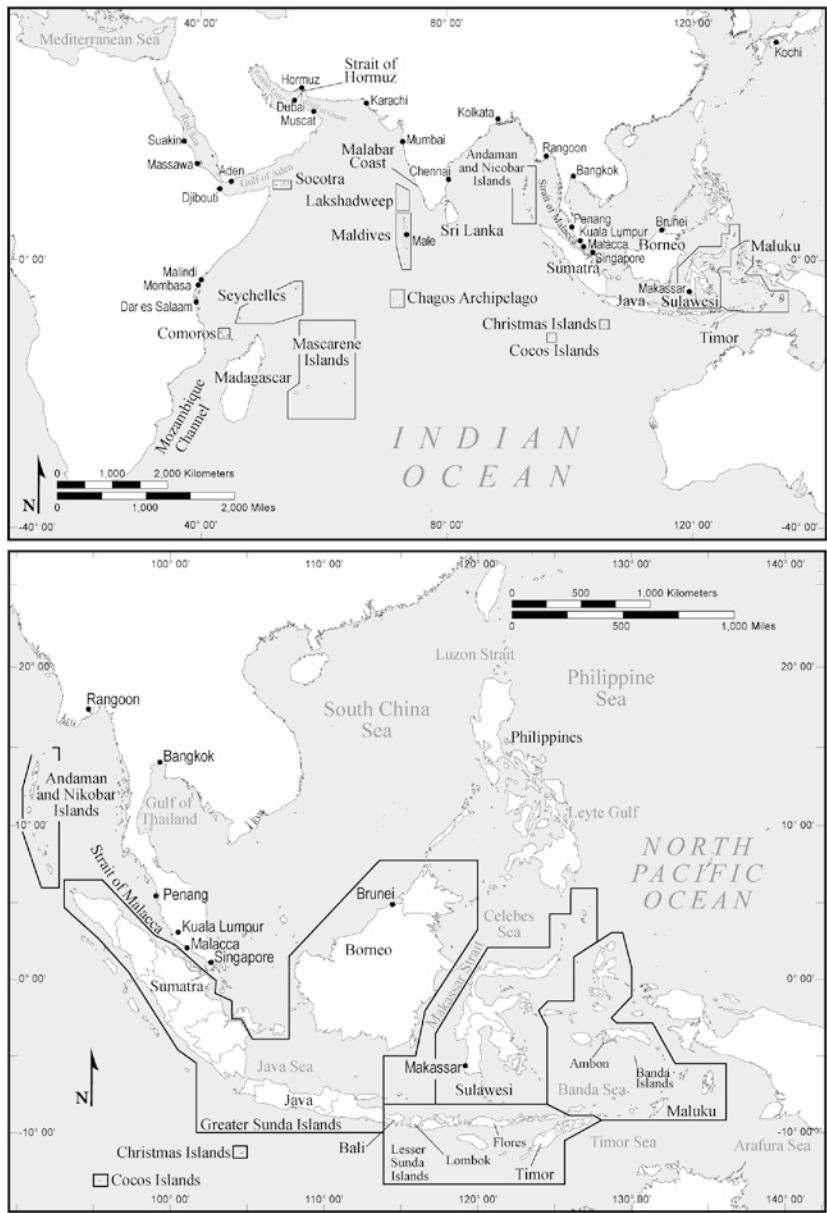
The final section of chapters includes a wide range of studies on South and Southeast Asia. Utilizing both archaeological and literary sources, archaeologist Himanshu Prabha Ray follows cultural routes across the northern Arabian Sea that link the island of Socotra, off the tip of the Horn of Africa, and Salsette, one of the constituent islands that was consolidated into Bombay in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Her chapter pushes our ability to consider notions of both connectivity and hubs in the Indian Ocean back in time, as well as the ways in which these ancient sites are regarded today as UNESCO Heritage sites. Historian Tansen Sen’s knowledge of ancient Chinese sources provides a perspective on how the Chinese understood the larger island of Sri Lanka between the fifth and fifteenth centuries. He situates these sources in the context of Buddhist religious and economic networks linking the Bay of Bengal to China, as well as diplomatic exchanges between Sri Lanka and the Chinese court after the tenth century.

The last two chapters explore different aspects of the colonial history of island port cities and connectivity in the Indonesian Archipelago. Jürgen G. Nagel looks at Makassar on Sulawesi Island from its origins as

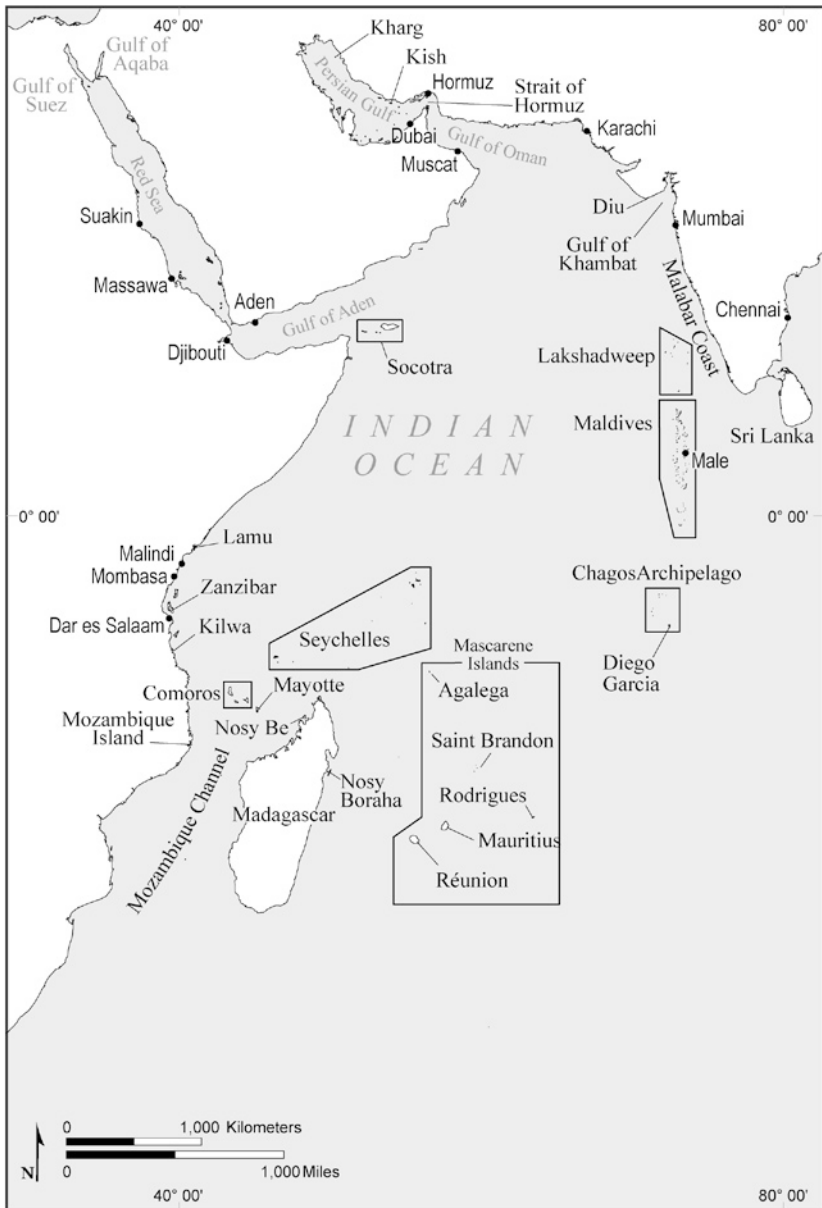
an independent Muslim state linking the major powers of Sumatra and Java with the more diffuse societies of eastern Indonesia through control of the spice trade and its conquest and colonization by the Dutch East Indies Company (VOC). He then goes on to show how, even under these new constraints, Makassar continued to play a role as a regional hub, especially in the slave trade. Finally, Keebet von Benda-Beckmann takes us still further east to Ambon, from which she seeks to appreciate the same kind of transition from a dominant spice-trade hub to a strategically important outpost of first the Dutch colonial regime and, ultimately, of independent Indonesia. Discussing some of the same themes as Nagel in his chapter, her account connects the colonial past of Ambon to the present and helps us to appreciate its place in both modern Indonesia and the wider Indian Ocean world.

Taken together, this diverse set of essays struggles with the important analytical and methodological issues set out in Schnepel's introductory chapter at several levels and from a variety of quite distinct perspectives. In addition, they provide a wide range of case studies across time and space that, we believe, contribute significantly to the development of Indian Ocean studies

Edward A. Alpers
Burkhard Schnepel



Map 0.1 The Indian Ocean World



Map 0.2 The Indian Ocean World

NOTE

1. We would like to express our gratitude to the Max Planck Society, Munich, as well as to the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle, for generously supporting the program and its conferences financially and organizationally. We also like to thank Dr. Robert Parkin, Oxford, and Cornelia Schnepel, Halle, for their expert work in making this volume linguistically and stylistically coherent.

PART I

Themes

Introduction

Burkhard Schnepel

THE “ISLAND FACTOR”

For many centuries, even millennia, the Indian Ocean has been traversed in all directions by vessels not only transporting human beings and commercial goods of many diverse kinds, but also circulating flora, fauna, ideas, ideologies, deities, rituals, charities, *materia medica* and therapeutics, sociocultural practices, habitus, performances, art genres, political systems, technologies, languages, and unfortunately also waste and diseases. These movements, and the maritime exchanges that have accompanied them, have been enthusiastically investigated by historians, geographers, anthropologists, archaeologists, and scholars of other disciplines. Their studies, too numerous to mention,¹ have thrown light on the various means and modes of circulating these animate and inanimate “things” across the sea, as well as providing insights into the various translations in meaning and function which they experience before, during, and after their journeys. Thus far, Indian Ocean Studies have also

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given us a useful picture of the various more or less stable networks that have arisen out of these movements and exchanges over time. This, by and large, is the field of knowledge, which we wish to capture by the concept of “connectivity in motion.”²

To be sure, much more collaborative work still needs to be done on such a vast region with such a long history. Among other fields of inquiry, there is the continuing challenge to look more closely at the very places and their inhabitants who are instrumental in circulating people, objects, and ideas and whose sociocultural, politico-economic, and mental characteristics have, in turn, been shaped by these activities, functions, and ideational arrangements in typical ways. Here, these special places-cum-people—paradigmatically port cities and certain islands (including their ports and even port cities)—are identified by the term “hub,” by which is meant an agentive knot in a network of transportation systems, including the transportation of information and knowledge through the World Wide Web. As “the effective center of an activity, region, or network” (*Oxford Dictionary Online*), hubs are significant points, indeed “actants,” of convergence, entanglement, and divergence in the global streams of human beings, animals, finances, ideas, and other matters, as well as being instrumental in the networks that these streams create. Hubs, then, are understood as crucial elements of “connectivity in motion.” The activities of these hubs could be called, for matters of convenience, “hubbing.”

This volume looks at connectivity in motion across the Indian Ocean with a special look at the significant role, which islands or, better, “island hubs,” have played in history and today in maritime exchanges, translations and networks across the Indian Ocean world. In an article first published in 2000, Edward A. Alpers (2009, 39–54) identifies what he calls “the island factor.” Writing especially with regard to studies of the premodern economic history of the Indian Ocean, he deplores “the continental perspective” (*ibid.*, 41), which “only discusses islands in passing” (*ibid.*). In fact, his own main focus is on the African side of the Indian Ocean. Nonetheless, his statement that “although islands have certainly been recognized as an important factor in the Indian Ocean world by any number of scholars, no one has previously attempted to locate all the islands of the Indian Ocean in their relationship to the history of eastern Africa” (*ibid.*, 40) can be extended to the history of the Indian Ocean world at large. Furthermore, his observation can also be used to draw attention to a gap in scholarship with regard not only to history, but to other dimensions and fields of knowledge as well, such

as human geography, social anthropology, the study of political and economic relations, or investigations into the geostrategical and military dimensions of the Indian Ocean world.

I therefore suggest that it is time to draw encouragement from Alpers' observation and tackle the "island factor," that is, "the integral role that these islands have played and continue to play over several millennia in the history of Indian Ocean Africa" (*ibid.*, 54). By extension, I suggest doing so with regard to the Indian Ocean as a whole, and doing so in more all-embracing interdisciplinary as well as systematic terms. This endeavor will be undertaken here with a focus on those islands in the Indian Ocean that count as "small." This special focus is not meant to neglect the importance and the "insular" role of larger islands such as Madagascar, Sri Lanka, or Sumatra, which will not be left unacknowledged in the articles that follow. However, our prime attention will be drawn to "smallness" not just empirically, but also methodologically, by inquiring whether the criteria of size has made a difference and, if so, how. Smallness may count in other ways than a sense of size alone. Island identities and island imaginaries, which are significant when it comes to considering the role of islands in Indian Ocean connectivity, are ideal typically linked to small islands, while on large islands such as Madagascar or Java, a quite substantial number of people can lead and experience their lives without experiencing a sense of insularity.³

This volume includes scholars who are delving deeply into the history and sociocultural, politico-economic, geostrategic, and religious worlds of particular Indian Ocean islands and who are inquiring especially about their structural and historical roles as hubs in the Indian Ocean world. In order to enable the reader, who may not be familiar with the overall image of islands in the Indian Ocean, to locate these studies of specific places and historical periods within a larger framework, this introduction continues with an overview of the Indian Ocean world islands before raising some theoretical and methodological issues concerning islands, island hubs, and the issue of connectivity in motion in the sections that follow.

THE INDIAN OCEAN WORLD OF ISLANDS: AN OVERVIEW

There are various criteria according to which the extremely manifold and heterogeneous Indian Ocean world of islands could be envisaged in a holistic and systematic way.⁴ One criterion is their "whereabouts" within the ocean which the maps provided in this volume will help to identify if unknown before. Furthermore, looking at their geophysical origins

and constitutions, the Indian Ocean islands can be divided into three types. Some have been built up, often over millennia, by the growth of corals, one well-known example being the Maldives. Others, such as Réunion, the Comoros, or the northern Moluccas, have emerged more rapidly from volcanic eruptions; and yet others are granite-based islands that have split off from continental or subcontinental landmasses. To this group belong Madagascar and Sri Lanka, as well as smaller islands such as Socotra in the Gulf of Aden and parts of the Seychelles. To apply yet another criterion: Size undoubtedly matters in many respects, even though any *absolute* determination of whether an island is small or large is complicated by the fact that there are so many different sizes on a putative scale that it is hard to draw a distinguishing line between larg(er) and small(er) islands. Most of the islands in the Indian Ocean (as indeed in the other oceans of the world)⁵ are indeed small(er), so that under this criterion of size, it is easier to single out those islands which are undoubtedly large. Under this heading one must, of course, subsume Madagascar, which, with an area of just under 600,000 square kilometers and a population of roughly 24 million, is the third-largest island in the world. Then, there are the larger islands of Sri Lanka in South Asia as well as the so-called Greater Sunda Islands of Sumatra, Java, Borneo, and Sulawesi in Southeast Asia.

To take a further possible criterion of systematization, any empirical overview of the Indian Ocean world of islands could distinguish between those islands which are close(r) to the mainland and those which lie further out in the sea. To the first category belong the numerous islands that stretch along the East African coast, also known as the Swahili coast, from Somalia in the north to the mouth of the Zambezi River in the modern nation state of Mozambique in the south. These islands and their port cities, such as Mombasa, Lamu, Kilwa, or Mozambique, are often so close to the mainland that, at the scales that most maps use to depict this coast, they are not easily discernible as being islands at all. Similar to these inshore islands along the Swahili coast, one finds numerous coral islands situated close to the western shore of the Red Sea. Some of these Red Sea islets functioned and still function as the seats of regionally important port cities, with Suakin in the Sudan and Massawa in Eritrea representing two prime examples. Further east, and still belonging to this “coastal group,” there are the (originally) seven islands out of which was formed the present megacity of Mumbai (Bombay), while further south on the western Indian coast, we also find

the port city of Cochin, hardly ever recognized on maps as being located (in part) on an island. Then, there are the innumerable small islands stretching close inshore along the Southeast Asian coasts of Bangladesh, Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, and Sumatra. Some of the latter have only acquired significance in the age of tourism, while others have remained perpetually in oblivion, and yet others have acquired some role in history, such as Penang in Malaysia, with its port city of George Town. Comparable to these coastal islands and still within this category are a) those islands which lie in the mouths of rivers, such as Sofala at the entrance to the Buzi River; b) located in or close to gulfs, such as the island of Kharg in the Persian Gulf or Diu at the entrance to the Gulf of Khambat in northwest India; or c) “choke-point islands,” such as most prominently represented by Hormuz in the Persian Gulf or Singapore at the southeastern tip of the Straits of Malacca. This category can be complemented, if one adds those islands that lie close to the “mainland” of larger islands. For example, “*la grand île*” of Madagascar has many small islands immediately off its coasts, such as Nosy Boraha (Île Sainte Marie) to the northeast and Nosy Be to the northwest.

As far as the other part of this criterion of closeness or distance to a given mainland is concerned, there are a number of archipelagos scattered all over the Indian Ocean at some distance away from any territorial landmasses. In Southeast Asia, roughly 25,000 islands form the Malay Archipelago. Most of them, around 18,000 (of which approximately 6,000 are inhabited), today belong to the Republic of Indonesia, with its more than a quarter of a billion inhabitants. Stretching roughly northwest to southeast, the Sunda Islands include the (physically smaller) “Lesser Sunda Islands” of Bali, Lombok, Flores, and Timor. East of Sulawesi and west of New Guinea are the roughly one thousand Moluccas (Maluku) Islands, with their approximately two million inhabitants, to mention here only the larger islands of Halmahera in the north and Ceram in the south of this archipelago as well as the smaller but arguably more important islands of Ternate and Tidore in the northern Moluccas and the Banda Islands and Ambon in the south.

In the southwest subregion of the Indian Ocean, there are three archipelagos, namely the Comores, the Seychelles, and the Mascarenes, which, apart from their relative geographical proximity to each other, form some kind of unity for three reasons. First, initially, they all came to be inhabited in significant numbers by Africans. This factor has shaped the demography of these islands so significantly that there is

some justification for regarding them as “Africa in the Indian Ocean.”⁶ Secondly, notwithstanding the many historical particularities and contingencies that these islands have experienced, eventually they all came under French colonial influence and rule.⁷ Therefore, a French legacy and continuing impact are quite marked on these islands until today, not only in language and culture, but in important social, political, military, economic, and legal respects as well. Thirdly, they all had and still have important plantation economies, which did not just determine the economic fate of these islands, but also their settlement histories and present-day sociocultural arrangements. The four islands of the Comoros Archipelago, namely Grande Comore (Ngazidja), Mohéli (Mwali), Anjouan (Ndzuani), and Mayotte (Maore), found themselves at the southernmost limit that sailors could still reach and depart from using the regular pattern of the monsoon winds. The three main islands making up the Mascarenes lying 700, 900 and 1,500 kilometers, respectively, east of Madagascar, namely Réunion, Mauritius, and Rodrigues, had not been settled before Europeans arrived in the region from the seventeenth century onwards, so that their human history is essentially a colonial one. They were not only meant to function as ports of call for successive European East Indianmen, but eventually also came to host extensive plantations, a fact which required large masses of imported labor, usually African slaves, in the eighteenth century and Indian “coolies” in the nineteenth. While Mauritius, Rodrigues and a number of smaller islands now form the Republic of Mauritius with altogether just over 2,000 square kilometers and roughly 1.3 million citizens, the island of Réunion (approximately 2,500 square kilometers; 835,000 inhabitants) opted to stay with France as “Département d’outre-mer” (as did the Comorian Mayotte). More than one thousand miles northeast of the Mascarenes and for a long time belonging to the British colony of Mauritius as dependency, one finds the Chagos Archipelago. Shortly before Mauritius was granted independence from the British, the latter, in a move that is still controversial today, established a “British Indian Ocean Territory” (BIOT) out of these 65 coral islands and the waters surrounding them.⁸ Situated at about the same latitude as the Chagos Archipelago, namely immediately south of the equator, and around 1,500 kilometers away from the East African coast lies the Seychelles Archipelago, consisting of more than a hundred islands spread over a vast maritime region. The three “Inner Islands” of Mahé, Prasline, and La Digue contain the great majority of the Seychellois population of just over 90,000. In terms of

population and land area (around 450 km²), the archipelago represents the smallest African state, though the Seychelles' maritime Exclusive Economic Zone of 1.3 million square kilometers is immense.

Clearly Asian in character are two archipelagos lying around 200 to 400 kilometers off the southwest coasts of India and Sri Lanka, namely Lakshadweep and, further south, the Maldives. The populations of both of these archipelagos are in the great majority Muslim. The Islamization of these two archipelagos happened as early as the twelfth century, though their settlement took place several centuries earlier by migrants from south India and Sri Lanka. With the arrival of Europeans on the scene, both archipelagos were submitted to first Portuguese, then Dutch, and finally British control. Lakshadweep consists of 27 coral islands of which, however, only ten are inhabited by 65,000 Malayalam-speaking inhabitants. The Republic of the Maldives consists of two chains of 26 atolls, with almost 1,200 coral islands and islets, stretching in a north-south direction. The majority of these islands are not inhabited; numerous others just provide space for foreign-owned luxury hotels and their affluent guests enjoying sun, sand, and sea. Roughly one third of the almost 400,000 speakers of Dhivehi, an Indo-Aryan language, reside in the capital Male', which counts as one of the most densely populated islands/port cities in the world.

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands form the eastern counterparts to the Maldives and Lakshadweep in the western Indian Ocean. Even though these two archipelagos in the so-called Andaman Sea are already mentioned in early Tang-Chinese sources, they never ever developed into, or harbored, a regularly frequented port of call, let alone a hub. For a long time in history, the indigenous inhabitants of these islands, Sentinelese people of Paleolithic origins, were well known for their unwillingness to enter into any kind of regular communication or trade with outsiders. The remoteness and unwelcome character of these archipelagos had another usage in store for them: From the nineteenth century onwards, one of the Andaman Islands was turned into an infamous place of detention. Today, the two archipelagos, consisting of almost 600 islands with roughly 400,000 inhabitants of predominantly Hindu denomination, live in the capital, Port Blair.

Concluding my attempt in this section to systematize the Indian Ocean world of islands and put some order into the existing multitude naturally leaves numerous islands unmentioned. To be sure, any systematization striving to be more thorough would have to consider a number

of other important distinguishing and systematizing criteria, which go beyond the geofocus applied so far. If in this section, demographic, social, political, economic, and religious aspects, and historical structures and contingencies have only been mentioned in passing, this is definitely not to imply that they are insignificant as such for a systematization and analytical understanding of the Indian Ocean world of islands. However, the main concern of this volume lies, to repeat, in an exploration of those aspects and factors of the Indian Ocean world which are pertinent to its maritime exchanges, translations, and networks and to the significant roles and functions which island hubs have played in these. While the geological and geographical criteria, which stood at the fore of attention in this section, certainly constitute important elements in the ways in which some islands have played, and continue to play, their roles in connectivity in motion across the Indian Ocean, this should not encourage one to adopt any form of geographical determinism. In sociocultural, politico-economic, and historical investigations of the kind pursued here, there are too many other factors that have to be taken into consideration and that make far-reaching generalizations difficult, if not impossible. Let us therefore look at some of these “hub factors.”

“HUB FACTORS”

Not all, or even most, of the islands in the Indian Ocean made it into stopover places, and even fewer developed into sought-after ports of call for refuge and refreshment, let alone into regionally and transregionally important hubs. However, many small Indian Ocean islands had *the potential to become* a port of call and hub, which quite a number realized. Or, to put the matter the other way round, the fact that not a few important port cities and other places of maritime exchange in the Indian Ocean world were and are based on small islands (and not, for example, located in bays or natural harbors on mainland coasts close by) leads one to assume that there is something which makes islands, especially small ones, particularly well-suited to becoming knots in maritime networks of relations and in exchanges of both material and ideational items. What might this “something” be?

To start with, in order to establish ports and even port cities and thus become hubs for maritime transactions, small islands need to have a natural harbor or at least a sheltered bay, and the winds and currents leading to and away from them need to be navigable for most of

the year. These “natural ecology” factors, which are important not only for sail, must combine with, or translate into, favorable geostrategic and geopolitical positions. Islands can have all the qualifications that seafarers look for, yet leave their potential to become hubs unfulfilled simply on account of their not being *en route*. If this is the case, and if, in addition, they have nothing to offer themselves, even islands with good harbors and the best nautical affordances may not be able to realize their potential as hubs and thus will be left behind, as in the case of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Those islands which *have* something to offer themselves, but which do not lie along a major trading route, such as the Maldives with their cowrie shells or the spice Moluccas, usually only constitute destinations and starting points for intermediate, short- or middle-range routes that link up with longer ones. Thus, in the age of sail, the transport of cowrie shells went on local boats from the coral archipelago of the Maldives to Ceylon (modern Sri Lanka), southwest India and Bengal only, where they were transferred to intercontinental vessels making longer journeys. Likewise, the traffic in nutmeg and cloves from the northern Moluccan Islands and the Banda Islands first went to Ambon or Makassar on Sulawesi, two insular “centers out there,” before reaching their final destinations as far away as Europe in the west or China in the east.

Other small islands, which had little or nothing to offer themselves, nevertheless managed to acquire important positions as ports of call and even *entrepôts* just because they were lying *en route*. One could mention here the Indonesian Riau Islands and Bangka–Belitung Islands, which lie right in the middle of major trading routes between West Kalimantan (Borneo) in the east and Singapore, Malaysia, and Sumatra in the west. Another prime example of this is Socotra, five hundred miles east of Aden, at a crossroads between the Red Sea, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Swahili coast. Socotra is known to have been used as a stopover by ships from Egypt, Rome, Arabia, the Gulf, and India, as well as by pirates, as early as the beginning of the common era. However, if routes did change direction historically for various nautical, economic, political, or other reasons, or if new routes were discovered and/or became important or possible through technological innovation, then an island whose potential as a hub had so far lain dormant might become one, while another island that had this function might lose it. This latter fate happened when the almost simultaneous introduction of steamships and the opening of the Suez Canal in the second half of the nineteenth century left the Comoros and Mascarene Islands somewhat isolated in

the southwest of the Indian Ocean. They then lost their status as hubs (though not their potential as such), which they had assumed around three and a half centuries earlier, once European sailors had managed to round the Cape of Good Hope.

Yet another element that must be considered when it comes to analyze the roles of islands as hubs in Indian Ocean connectivity is the fact that islands usually come in groups. How are the islands that form an archipelago related to each other? Is there a relative equality among them, or are their interrelations hierarchical? Is there a division of labor between them? Has one island become dominant, and if so what were the decisive factors enabling it to achieve this? Is the “significant other” that is needed for the self-identification of a given island population a place on the mainland or the mainland as such, or is it another island, perhaps visible from its shores and within reach within a day or two? This also raises the question, especially with regard to those small islands near the mainland, why people have settled on them and not on the mainland. In this context, there is especially the question of why, from the ninth century onwards, Swahili merchants and later the Portuguese, followed by French, Dutch, and British colonialists, chose some of these islands as their abodes and strongholds. Was it the geostrategic capacity of these islands to protect their inhabitants? And, if so, was the threat seen to come from the sea or the land? Alternatively, were there simply pragmatic nautical reasons, or were there other considerations of a more imaginary type, in which insular tropes and fantasies played a role? Last but not least, against the background of the fact that islands usually appear as groups or archipelagos, the question of maritime communication (or the lack of it) arises not just with reference to the connectedness of the main island(s) of a given archipelago to other archipelagos, to the mainland, or even to transcontinental trading destinations. Also of great practical and ideational significance was and is the extent and affordability of shipping services *between* the islands of a single archipelago, which, more often than not, may lie at considerable distances from one another.⁹

Furthermore, there is what Warrington and Milne call the “imperial connection” (2007, 385). They write: “Consider what is possibly the most important element of an island’s political economy, namely its geo-strategic profile, that is, whether it is central or peripheral in relation to the forces and powers at play in its neighbourhood” (ibid., 384).¹⁰ Were and are islands considered to belong to the domain of one or other European or Asian imperial power? If this was and is the case, how has

this belonging manifested itself on a scale from subjugation to relative autonomy? Where, on a scale from center to periphery, did the forced or voluntary submission of an island to a superordinate maritime power place it? Did the imperial or dominant power see the main function of an island as being a fortress, an *entrepôt*, a fief, or a colony to be settled and made into a plantation economy? Did the imperial power have an interest in an island's own resources and territory, or was it just important for reasons of maritime security, that is, to control the wider sea lanes, with their traffic passing by?¹¹

When it comes to having a *colonial* history, small islands do not, of course, differ very much from most terrestrial parts of the Indian Ocean world. However, islands have played a special role in the colonial and imperial ambitions of the maritime powers that arrived from the Iberian Peninsula and northern Europe from the sixteenth century onwards in ever larger and militarily more powerful numbers. This special place of islands, especially small islands, in colonial endeavors fact has also been influenced, as McCusker and Soares (2011, xi) argue, by a “Western gaze,” which “frequently imagined the island as an inferior, marginal or easily dominated space, as an obvious site for subjugation and organization by the colonizer. ... Historically, the island was considered as an ideal locale, even laboratory, in which to materialize the colonial will” (ibid.).¹² In such remote island “laboratories,” experiments and actions can and do take place that are far from being intended to enhance the knowledge of mankind. As Newitt points out: “... small islands are open to exploitation in a way that continental states are not. The very isolation that attracts the romantics provides havens for the scoundrels who can dump their waste, launder their illegal money, explode their bombs, or excavate for phosphates or sand out of sight, and therefore out of mind, of the rest of the world” (1992, 3).¹³

The various colonial pasts to which the islands of the Indian Ocean world were subjected have of course shaped and even determined their postcolonial presents. These paths have led in many different directions, the variety of which is most poignantly manifested in the diversity of constitutional statuses that small islands exhibit at present. Some have been integrated into, or at least associated with, their former colonial powers: Réunion and the Chagos Archipelago come to mind here.¹⁴ Other islands have become integrated (with varying degrees of autonomy and different status) into mainland states, take Zanzibar into Tanzania, Lakshadweep and the Andaman Islands as “Union Territories”

into India, or Penang into Malaysia. As a result of these processes, some archipelagos lost their erstwhile geopolitical and, arguably, sociocultural cohesiveness, one prime example being the Islamic *Union des Comores* with its “breakaway” island of Mayotte whose inhabitants opted to stay with France. The East Indonesian island of Timor is an example of how such a split can even cut right through the middle of one small island alone. Other islands and archipelagos became independent, and not only the larger ones such as Madagascar or Sri Lanka, but also the archipelagos of the Comoros, Mascarenes, Seychelles, and Maldives which today count officially as “Small Island Developing States.”¹⁵ By contrast, far from being small in sum total, there is also Indonesia, the fourth most populous state and the largest island state in the world.¹⁶ Economically, some islands of the Indian Ocean world are (still) among the poorest in the world, while others have developed into relatively prosperous economies, such as the Seychelles, and some are even rich, most prominently Singapore, though overall prosperity of this sort does not mean the absence of considerable cleavages in wealth and education within the populations of these islands.

Yet another aspect important to consider when investigating the “hub factors” that have determined the roles of small islands in Indian Ocean connectivity has been identified by Pearson in connection with East African port cities. He distinguishes between, first, the *umland*, that is, “the immediate surrounding area, directly connected to the city, frequently because it provides foodstuffs for the city” (1998, 67); secondly, the *foreland*, that is, “the areas of the overseas world with which the port is linked through shipping, trade, and passenger traffic” (ibid.); and finally, the *hinterland*, which “radiates out from the port city inland and so begins at the end of the umland” (ibid.). Pearson concludes by observing that, “while all cities have umland and hinterlands only port cities also have forelands” (ibid.). Applied to small islands, or at least to those that have acquired the role of ports, one could thus say that, while they all have *forelands*, some have *umlands*, but only a few larger ones could be seen to have a *hinterland*.¹⁷ This leaves us to distinguish between small islands that have *umlands* and those that do not. Islands of the barren-no-*umland* type are usually compelled to import not only luxuries but also what is necessary for the day-to-day survival of their inhabitants. In some extreme cases,

this includes even drinking water. However, there are also quite a number of islands, including small ones, which do not just have maritime products such as shells or seafood to offer, but even have an *umland* suitable for agriculture. These can sustain their populations without substantial help from the outside, an economic fact that has crucial implications for other domains, such as the political economy. Some of these islands, such as Zanzibar, even have sustained plantations producing cloves, ginger, sugar, coffee, tea, rubber, or other products on a large scale for global export. One could also add here numerous tiny palm oil- and spice-producing islands, such as the Lakshadweep and the Banda Islands, respectively. In recent decades, some islands that had plantation economies have established free export processing zones (EPZ), especially for the textile industry (for example, Mauritius), or else have resorted to that special kind of plantation, namely tourism as an alternative to their dependence on one economy alone.

While studying the world of Indian Ocean islands does mean studying colonial and postcolonial history, it is also important to remain sensitive to the contingencies that can determine or change the fate of an island in any conceivable direction, from becoming a world leader in today's container shipping, like Singapore, to becoming a key US military base, like Diego Garcia, to representing a Paradise Island in the flourishing tourist industry, like Bali, or to becoming a prison and detention island like the Andaman or the Cocos Islands, and again the Seychelles under both Napoleonic and British rule.¹⁸ In addition to these unforeseeable and coincidental events of all kinds, studies of the Indian Ocean world may confound scholars who adhere to a school of thought according to which the course of history is not just influenced by the deeds of (apparently) "great men," and that one also needs to include the activities of subaltern groups in one's analysis. Somewhat against this premise, it is always striking how often the fates of island populations were in fact determined by the individual activities of those who might be labeled "big men." Small islands are places where individual, usually male agency has a better chance of making itself felt. Often these individuals or "big men" founded, or were representatives of, dynastic families, or else they represented an island's influential but tiny elite that influenced the island's destiny both internally and with respect to external mainland and colonial forces.

WHAT SORT OF “CULTURAL ISLANDS” ARE ACTUAL ISLANDS?

In recent decades, island studies, both empirical and theoretical in kind, have experienced a boost. Here, one could refer to and make use of quite a number of both specialized and general studies.¹⁹ In the context of my present argument, however, it will suffice to take the argumentative lead of one study alone. Thomas Hylland Eriksen argues (1993) that island populations have always been active in extensive networks of communication and exchange and that, therefore, “the island is not necessarily more isolated in socio-cultural respects than other places” (Eriksen 1993, 135). If, then, one of the supposedly most striking characteristics of islands, namely their insularity (in the emphatic sense of representing isolated *isolas*), does not even apply to islands, how much less does an island metaphor or an insular model of society apply to the more landlocked communities that anthropologists and others have studied? Eriksen here rightly observes that some of the key studies that were instrumental in shaping modern social and cultural anthropology were studies of islands or island groups, such as Malinowski’s *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) on the Trobriand Islands or Margret Mead’s path-breaking study of Samoa (1928).²⁰ Even those early social and cultural anthropologists, such as Evans-Pritchard, Meyer Fortes, Redfield, and others who did not study islands but terrestrial societies, treated “their” tribes, village communities, subcastes, or ethnic groups *as if they were* islands, namely as clearly bounded units not only territorially, but also socioculturally. In the words of Eriksen: “In a sense, a dominant paradigm in social anthropology still defines societies as islands—as virtually self-sustaining systems to be understood primarily in their own terms. Although it is useful in comparison, this idea should be abandoned since it was wrong from the beginning” (Eriksen 1993, 135).

This dedicated position of the early nineties against the “old” way of seeing societies and cultures as static and encapsulated units, advocating instead a position which looks at processes, fluid boundaries, interconnectedness, and mobility, is still the order of the day. And, no doubt, a volume emerging from a research program on “connectivity in motion” has to be firmly situated within a theoretical and methodological paradigm of this sort. However, any “de-essentialized” and dynamic view of society or of cultural boundaries needs to be qualified, and not only when it comes to studying islands. As Eriksen also points out, “it is obvious that worldwide cultural variation remains discontinuous,

notwithstanding the effects of globalization. There are, in other words, strong entropy-resistant mechanisms at work preventing the dissolution of cultural and social boundaries, which enable anthropologists to delineate the boundaries on which we depend in order to study cultural variation and social integration” (ibid., 136). From the actors’ points of view, the social, cultural, territorial, and biological units in which they live and organize their lives are conceived very much as being essential; that is, they are conceived as being based on the values of shared blood or bones, a sacral common territory, the digestion of the same food or breathing the same air, or on the idea of belonging to an eternal, divinely chosen group. Deviously escaping anti-essentialist anthropological paradigms, then, most actors are sturdy essentialists, and it turns out that the realities they construct appear and operate on the basis of and in accordance with essentialist paradigms. Certainly, Eriksen is fully aware of the ambiguity and dialectics involved in this issue when, at the end of his article, he stresses that “isolation is always relative” (ibid., 143), but also that “societies remain to a greater or lesser extent isolated in important respects, lest they cease to be societies” (ibid.). Cultural islands, in this perspective, have relative and dynamically opening and closing “system boundaries of exclusion and inclusion” (ibid.).

When it comes to studying the small islands of the Indian Ocean world, one immediately realizes that these *cultural* islands are special and that they therefore need particular methodological and theoretical treatment, simply because they are islands—*literal* islands. What difference does it make to the approach I have briefly sketched so far if a cultural island under examination happens to be a real, geophysical island? This crucial question ultimately gets lost in Eriksen’s perspective, even though Mauritius represents a prime case for developing his line of argument, and even though he also operates with a distinction between “metaphorical islands” and “literal islands” (ibid., 135). But what exactly is that it turns an island not only into a cultural island, but into a cultural island that is located on a literal island? Does the interplay of opening and closing social, cultural, religious, economic, political, and other identity-making and unmaking boundaries on small islands reveal particularities that must be accounted for?

One of the localizing forces, or, in Eriksen’s words, “entropy-resisting mechanisms” which shape and influence the socio-politico-economic and even geophysical *realities* of islands are the locally and globally held and exhibited *imaginaries*²¹ of islands, or in other words, what actors

conceive an island is, and should be, influences how an island *actually* is or becomes one. What, then, if islanders themselves, and those who deal with them, consider themselves, or are considered by others, to be *insular* islanders? And what if the imaginary of insularity and isolation shapes a given island's society, culture, economics, politics, and religious and mental characteristics in both its internal and its external interactions? Eriksen certainly acknowledges this possibility when he writes, in a section of his article entitled "Mauritians and insularity," that "the most significant forms of isolation in Mauritius are actually brought about because agents themselves are determined to form an island in one respect or another; that is to say, it is their conscious wish that they should be isolated" (ibid., 141). However, Eriksen then goes on to argue that the various groups *within* Mauritius distinguish themselves from one another along ethnic lines. He does not consider the possibility that Mauritians (and, again by implication, the inhabitants of other islands as well) might identify and distinguish themselves *as an island* vis-à-vis some mainland or other islands.

This is exactly the point at which it is necessary to take up the work. How do the populations of the Indian Ocean's small islands conceive their respective islands *as islands* and act accordingly *qua* islands? And how does this geophysical and geopolitical experience, this everyday awareness of being an island and being *on* one, shape one's life on an island and the role of islands in Indian Ocean connectivity? How does the conscious will to be an island and to be isolated as such in one's external relations in certain specific ways accord with the (sometimes extraordinary) capacity of islanders and islands to connect with the outside world?

INSULAR IMAGINARIES AND OTHER REALITIES

All human societies, even those on small, remote islands, are both open and closed, both connected and isolated. They are so in a relative and relational sense, not an absolute sense. The movements between these two poles are full of contestation and tension, constraints and opportunities, and contradictions and ambiguities. Island life is no different in this regard, but the particular combination of geology, ecology, geography, and history which shapes island lives does, of course, bring out a particular imprint in this respect. In the words of Warrington and

Milne: “*Geography tends towards isolation*: it permits or favours autarchy, distinctiveness, stability and evolution propelled endogenously. *History*, on the other hand, *tends towards contact*: it permits or favours dependence (or interdependence), assimilation, change and evolution propelled exogenously” (2007, 383, their emphases). Small islands are therefore not only special biotopes (as has been well known since Charles Darwin’s visit to, among others, the Australian Cocos or Keeling Islands south-west of Sumatra), but also “sociotopes” that are also special with regard to processes of social inclusion and exclusion. The particularity of islands arises—and this is the point being put forward in this section—not just from their being literal islands with all the biogeographical and historical concerns that go with this; it also emerges from a combination and conflation of island *realities* with island *imaginaries*.

Islands are more than just geophysical realities; they are also spaces or *topoi* of the human imagination, and very important ones as well, and not only in European thought.²² These two sides of islands, the factual and the ideational, the literal and the metaphorical, and the real and the imaginary, go hand in hand; they interact and are interdependent. On the one hand, of course, the natural and geophysical characteristics of a given island, or of islands as such, predetermine and shape our imaginations and imaginaries. But our island imaginaries also lead an independent life, being nourished by other social, cultural, political, economic and psychological sources, desires, and intentions. These imaginaries find in islands suitable templates for the material manifestations and realizations they greatly aspire to, from where these fantasies and imaginations also contribute quite substantially to the making of island realities.

This is not to ignore that islands are certainly ambivalent in character and imagination. On the one hand, they seem to offer places of retreat, often being connected to the ideas of paradise and the Garden of Eden. In this imaginary, islands and their beaches have become the objects of multibillion dollar enterprises worldwide, forming the destinations of tourists coming from far and near to consume that specific island experience. On the other hand, while islands seem to be perfect for retreat and consolation, for fleeing from the hustle and bustle of the world, islands can also be used as prisons (Robben Island, the Andaman Islands), or as places of detention for refugees and asylum-seekers (the Australian Christmas Island), or else they figure as places of involuntary banishment for persons inflicted with leprosy or other diseases, for shipwrecks or for those left behind for various reasons by their ships.²³

In the following, I shall point out five typical island imaginaries: 1) isolation; 2) islands as a virgin “no-man’s land;” 3) diversity and *créolité*; 4) liminality; and 5) finite geographies, relating these to the overriding issue of connectivity in motion. With all of these, it will be argued, the interplay of imaginary and factual island factors makes islands, at least potentially, into places which are especially suitable for becoming a hub and for acting successfully as a hub.

Isolation

One of the most prominent and seemingly also most natural elements in island imaginaries is that of the isolation of islands. The idea of isolation and insularity involves seeing a place, a person, or a group as being some distance apart, even secluded, from the rest of the world or humanity. With regard to islands, notions of distance also imply that there are barriers or voids of some kind, usually water, which need to be overcome if one wants to reach an island. Therefore, the isolation of islands is not just measured in kilometers or nautical miles, it also applies to those islands that are close to the mainland. For, even in these cases, the fact remains that islands are surrounded by a natural barrier on all sides. However, this barrier is permeable and can be overcome, making isolation, just like closure, relative and even dispensable. The distance that has to be covered in order to reach an island is a matter of degree, not only as far as the distance from the island is concerned, but also with regard to the nature of the water that separates it from the rest of the world, as well as the kind of transportation technology available. Is the water deep, and does it have a strong current? Is it infested with sharks, treacherous reefs, or pirates? Or is it easy to cross, even for swimmers or on foot at low tide? Is there a bridge connecting it to the mainland?

To move toward a distant and isolated island, to find it (often without being able to see it for long stretches of a journey) and to get safely close to its windswept shores past coral reefs and other obstacles, one needs technical equipment, such as a floating vessel of some kind, and certain skills, such as the ability to sail or handle a container ship, or to read the stars, the flight of the birds, a compass, a map, or a computer chart. Once having arrived at the shore, access to an island may be technically difficult and even dangerous. And access, more often than not, is regulated and restricted politically and militarily by those who have reached

and settled there first, or who in course of time have acquired local dominance. Some of the late arrivals may have the privilege of entering, doing business and even settling on an island, while others are barred from doing so. In many cases, the right to enter an island in order to trade or settle has to be paid for in one way or another, for example, by paying custom dues or port fees, or, in the case of pirates wishing to settle, by having to submit all their weapons, treasure, and slaves.²⁴ An isolated island in the distance, moreover, has to secure its existence by routinizing and constantly renewing the flow of information to and from it. The real and/or imagined isolation of an island therefore requires and brings forth quite a number of human skills, activities, and human–technical interfaces which are vital to establishing and preserving connectivity in motion and to becoming, and successfully acting as, a hub.²⁵

Islands as a Virgin “No-man’s Land”

“A significant component of the contemporary intoxicating ‘lure’ or ‘fascination’ of islands,” Baldacchino (2007, 6) writes, “has to do with the fact that islands suggest themselves as *terrae nullius*, empty spaces waiting, wanting to be possessed: potential laboratories for any conceivable and uninhibited human project, in thought or in action.” This observation of islands as laboratories, which was already addressed in connection with the Western, colonial “gaze” that made the colonial history of islands special, does not just apply to *contemporary* island fantasies. In fact, for a relatively long time in human history, many Indian Ocean islands were uninhabited or were, by an extension of the *mare liberum* ideology to islands, at least conceived and treated as if they were no-man’s land.²⁶ Archipelagos like the Mascarenes can even be considered to represent the world’s last habitable places to experience human settlement. This “virginity” of islands, real or assumed, combined with their “splendid isolation,” is another factor which has made them places well suited (or conceived to be suitable) to being turned into spaces of one’s own design, free from external or already existing internal power structures. This is why islands have always attracted people with utopian and heterotopian designs for social, cultural, religious, and political ways of life wishing to use islands as laboratories to implement these designs. Or they have simply settled down with the hope and intention of being able to trade, connect and interact with others freely.

Diversity and Créolité

Many islands of the Indian Ocean were settled by people who came from different places and backgrounds, from near and far, arriving together in one boat or settling in waves. All brought their own, often diverse cultures, religions, languages, and ideals of governance or communal living with them. Therefore, as far as their demography is concerned, islands, instead of being places of incest, homogeneity, and uniformity as often assumed, had a good chance—and arguably a better chance than many mainland locations—to develop into places of cultural diversity, cosmopolitanism, and openness to the world. Alpers underscores this fact when he points to “the extraordinary cross-fertilization of cultures, traditions, and languages that characterizes the islands of the Indian Ocean” (2009, 42), while Pearson likewise states that on islands “one would expect to find ... more concentrated mixings from various cultural influences” (1998, 38). However, both authors would readily admit that insular encounters and dealings between different cultures, religions, languages, et cetera hardly ever took place in a power vacuum. Those who arrived on an island were more often than not in unequal positions: From one and the same ship could disembark both high-caste Brahmans and Untouchables, both *petits blancs* and powerful governors, or, in the most extreme case of inequality, both white plantation owners and black slaves. Rather than being utopian examples of communal equality, islands were, according to Alpers, “absolutely central to the rise of the export slave trade in the Southwest Indian Ocean” (2009, 49), as well as to the *import* of slaves, as in the cases of the plantation economies of Dutch Java and the French Mascarenes. The system of indentured labor, which followed the abolition of slavery during the nineteenth century, represents a similar case, at least as far as the social hierarchies and politico-economic inequalities of islands are concerned.²⁷

But even where the politico-economic and social status of the diverse segments of an island population have been less drastically differentiated, there have always been struggles and contestations for privileged access to an island’s limited natural and human resources. These resources include, most significantly, the island’s bays, natural harbors, ports, and beaches—that is, they comprise the control of an island’s circulation (and translation) of external arrivals and departures, both human and material. Some of these struggles over resources have led

to the expulsion and even extermination of weaker groups, often indigenous ones, while others have been followed by the subordination or assimilation, partial or complete, of subaltern groups under or into an island's dominant regimes, such as happened on many islands of independent Indonesia. Last but not least, in some instances, the ongoing contestations and entangled histories have led to the sort of sociocultural cross-fertilization mentioned above and thus to the emergence of polyglot, multicultural, and even cosmopolitan island populations. At places in which the principle of "unity in diversity" was established and where *créolité* came to be a valued asset (as, among others, in Mayotte, Réunion, and Mauritius), an island population's diversity can well prove to be an important and even decisive asset in its dealings with outsiders and in controlling the flows of goods coming from and going to the world in many directions.

Liminality

In their geostrategic positions, most Indian Ocean islands are neither peripheral nor marginal; they are liminal, to use the well-worn but still useful concept of Victor Turner's (1969). In this state of being, they may find themselves awkwardly in an in-between-and-between position, one that is precarious and has to be carefully balanced. However, liminality can also be turned into a strategically useful and exploitable resource. With reference to at least two shores, liminality means that islands and islanders can activate the valuable capacity of being both "both-and" and "neither-nor." Several Indian Ocean islands are inhabited by people from both Africa and India, and as such they are, sooner or later, also inhabited by "Coloreds" and "Creoles," whose whereabouts, upbringings, phenotypes, religious commitments, sociocultural identities, historical identifications, and mentalities are the outcome of *métissage*; that is, they are confluences of both (all) sides of the Ocean. This picture naturally becomes more complicated if we include the numerous subgroups that are encompassed by these wider categories. In this sense, liminality is a positive capacity furthering connectivity. The liminality of small islands in the Indian Ocean and the potential to become the hubs that liminality brings with it are, then, both geographical and demographic in kind.

Finite Geographies

Islands, and especially small islands with their “finite geography” (Baldacchino 2007, 4), have the capacity to be considered, and to be treated practically, as clearly demarcated and self-contained and therefore as readily manageable, comprehensible and relatively easily controllable closed units. This quality of islands constitutes an important point at which island imaginaries, coupled with island realities, acquire a positive capacity, furthering and even forming the basis of connectivity in motion. A small island can be circumambulated or circumnavigated, and through this circulation, the island is domesticated and turned from being a mere stopover “place” into a “space.”²⁸ As such, it can be better regulated (or so at least it is thought) than places on land, not only in external dealings, but also internally. Finite geographies, such as those prototypically represented by small islands (and by oases surrounded by deserts), have a greater chance to establish an interior organization and inner life, which are (considered) good to govern. And this governability assures that they are most suitable for becoming or being a successful and efficient hub.²⁹

Insularity, now clearly understood not as a deficiency but as a potential, does not hamper the active role of islands in establishing and maintaining connectivity in motion across the Indian Ocean; by contrast, it furthers it. Insularity on the one hand and connectedness coupled with cosmopolitanism on the other hand are not diametrically opposed characteristics, but interdependent ones. In a nutshell, insularity is not detrimental to globality, but integral to it. And this is *not* because islanders feel an urge or a strong desire to get rid of their insularity and “battle against isolation,” as Eriksen (1993, 142) argues. Rather, it is precisely this positively imagined and actual insularity that offers the strong potential and the basis for an island to be or become a hub.

STUDYING MARITIME (IM-)MOBILITIES

In studies guided by the concept of “connectivity in motion,” islands and port cities are seen less as essentialized and *a priori* foundations of the networks, movements, transits, and translations of which they are parts than as their *relational effects*, that is, as *emerging* products which constantly define, redefine, shape, make, and unmake one another. As more or less stable results of relational processes, port cities and insular

hubs (here, decidedly seen as places-*cum*-people with intentionality) may no doubt achieve some stability and agency of their own and thus become important actors in the interplay of a vast number of other human as well as non-human actors. All of these, however, are the outcome of the dynamic, ever-changing, and precarious relations between heterogeneous human and non-human elements and actors. Studying “connectivity in motion” in the sense proposed here, therefore, is more concerned with activities and processes of “networking” than with networks; it is about changing relations *between* elements as much as it is about changes *of* and *within* already existing elements, and it is about the constitution of new ones as well as the disappearance of old ones in ever-changing, constantly extending or shrinking networks. Finally, in this line of thought and relativizing this emphasis on agency, studying “connectivity in motion” is also concerned with those elements which are being acted upon rather than actively acting. Hence, it is also about the “patients” and not just the “agents” in these processes, as well as being concerned with the dialectics of power and suffering in history and space.

This is the place to dampen somewhat any overexalted “celebration” of mobility, circulation and flow, which has entered the humanities, social sciences, and historical sciences during the last couple of decades. Already in a publication which may well count as one of the triggers of “mobility studies,” Clifford (1997) has rightly pointed out that, when studying “traveling culture,” as he called it, one always studies the dialectics of traveling and dwelling. In other words, there are always people who do not move and have to remain where they are. In fact, it may even be essential for those who move that some people do not and cannot move. In an argument “against flows,” one could refer to Salazar when he writes:

The fashionable imagery of flows is badly chosen if we want to describe how people, objects and ideas move around the world. Global forces are evidently not neutral but always subject to economic privileges and political agendas. ... Tsing reminds us that flow is ‘movement stimulated through political and economic channels’ and urges scholars to pay attention to ‘the missed encounters, clashes, misfires and confusions that are as much part of global linkages as simple “flow” (2000: 338).’ In a similar vein, Ferguson argues ‘the “global” does not “flow” thereby connecting and watering contiguous space; it hops instead, efficiently connecting the

enclaved points in the network while excluding (with equal efficiency) the spaces that lie between the points' (2006: 47). (Salazar 2010, 8).

Overemphasizing mobility, circulation and flow, therefore, may entail the danger of ignoring those places and times where and when people, things, and ideas did not and do not move, where and when there were and are encumbrances and stagnation.

Furthermore, and equally important, such a view will fail to identify the crucial points in space and time where things start to flow again and, more often than not, with Ferguson (2006), even hop or jump. What is required in this context is an identification of the "jumping off points" in history and space. What are the specific incentives or vital forces that make people, things, or ideas hop (or prevent them from doing so)? How far does a leap reach? And does it go on or continue to leap in time and *en route*, as when one successfully skims a stone along a water surface? What is needed, in a nutshell, is a "*punctum saliens*" perspective on (im-)mobilities.³⁰

In studying the small islands of the Indian Ocean world against the backdrop of these theoretical and methodological ponderings, one will find important empirical, theoretical, and methodological clues to understanding such larger issues as diasporic living, the creation of new "creole" spaces and populations, colonialism, imperial expansion, the postcolonial, maritime mobility, migration history, regimes of unfree labor and plantation societies, networking across larger distances, hubs and their inner working, sociocultural exchanges and translations, globalization, mobility studies, and the issue of "connectivity in motion." But after these more general and principal elaborations on the study of islands and on the fact that islands matter, it is time to look at islands in more empirical, concrete ways; to consider the confluences of geography, history, and insular imaginaries; to study the inhabitants of islands, their "islandness" as a state of mind and their insular identifications (by self and other); to consider their sociocultural and politico-economic institutions; to bring into focus their habitus, habits, mentalities, and religions; to look at the relations of one island to other islands, the mainland coasts and the world; to examine the seminal role of small islands in connectivity across the Indian Ocean; and to pursue the question of how all these factors came about, worked together and developed or changed over time.

NOTES

1. For a very recent study, see Alpers (2014). See also Barendse (2002), McPherson (1993), Pearson (2003), and the pioneering Toussaint (1966).
2. Further specifications about this concept will be given at the end of this introduction. More recent studies which take up the issues of connectivity and mobility are, among others, Pearson (ed., 2015) and Sheriff and Ho (eds, 2014).
3. On the “importance of being small” with regard to islands, see Hintjens and Newitt (1992); Royle (2007, 42–43); Hannerz and Gingrich (eds. 2017).
4. As far as the Indian Ocean world of islands *as a whole* is concerned, the most comprehensive study to date is Guéborg’s (1999). Numerous studies dealing with individual archipelagos and islands of the Indian Ocean, such as Chandra, Arunchalam, and Suryanarayan (1993), the last section in Gupta, Hofmeyr, and Pearson (eds. 2010, 275–360), or more recently Sellström (2014), complete our knowledge of this theme, though only in fragmented ways.
5. See Baldacchino (2007, 2).
6. See Sellström (2014). The odd one out, demographically at least, is the island of Mauritius with, today, almost 70 percent of the population being Indian in origin.
7. France also claims possession of some smaller islands, known as the Scattered Islands, lying in the Mozambique Channel and two small coral islets north of Madagascar, supporting its claims with military posts.
8. They leased one of these islands, Diego Garcia, to the United States of America, which established one its largest naval and air force bases in the Indian Ocean there. In the process, all the island’s inhabitants, the so-called Chagossians, were forced to leave.
9. This also raises the question of internal migration from an archipelago’s peripheries to its center, as Newitt (1992, 12–13) and other articles in Hintjens and Newitt (1992) have shown in particular.
10. A distinction, inspired by world systems theory à la Wallerstein (1974–1989) or Beaujard (2012), between “cores,” “semi-peripheries,” and “peripheries” may help to bring order into the dynamic and at times confusing overall picture, but it has the disadvantage that small islands always come out as peripheries and that their seminal function in providing hubs may thus go unnoticed.
11. For a more detailed discussion of these points, see Warrington and Milne (2007, especially pp. 398–415).

12. With regard to sugar crop sciences and the post-slavery labor needed to produce such crops, Mauritius was clearly such a “laboratory,” as especially Storey (1997), and has shown.
13. The important imaginary and practical role of small islands for European colonization has been exemplarily studied by Grove (1995).
14. The different ways in which France and Britain have dealt with their former small island colonies, not just in the Indian Ocean but in other oceans as well, are addressed in several articles in the volume edited by Hintjen and Newitt (1992).
15. This category was created, and acknowledged as special, at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992.
16. As far as the larger islands of the Indian Ocean are concerned, while Madagascar and Sri Lanka became island states on their own, Sumatra, Java, and Sulawesi were integrated into and form the vital bases of Indonesia. Borneo, by contrast, became internally divided between three states, namely Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei, with only the latter being based solely on the island (and being the only independent state on Borneo).
17. One should add here the interesting cases where small islands, such as Mombasa or Diu, without a *hinterland*, and even without an *umland*, have these types of land on the nearby mainland.
18. For the latter archipelago, see Sellström (2014, 270–71).
19. See, for example, Baldacchino (ed., 2007), Clark (2001), Edmond and Smith (2003), Hintjens and Newitt (1992), McCusker and Soares (eds., 2011), Skinner and Hills (2006), the numerous articles in the *Island Studies Journal*, launched in 2006, and the open-access journal *Urban Island Studies*, started in 2015. See also, *Emergences: Journal for the Study of Media and Composite Cultures* 10(2), 2000, for a special issue on islands.
20. One could add to this list Radcliffe-Brown’s *Andaman Islands* (1922) and Raymond Firth’s study of Tikopia (1936).
21. Here I use the word “imaginary” in the sense of constituting a coherent bundle of socially held and shared imaginations about someone or something. See Salazar (2010, 5–13).
22. For a very learned and insightful discussion of the imprint of islands on European thought from Homer to modern tourism, see Billig (2010).
23. On this point, see also Royle (2007, 50).
24. See Schnepel (2014).
25. On these points, see also Billig (2010, 20–21).
26. Even if they actually were not uninhabited, sailors and newly arriving settlers treated these islands as if they were virgin soil to be exploited and governed by them, simply on account of the fact that they could do so.

An example here would be the (now Indonesian) Banda Islands, the ancient population of which was too weak, at least in maritime terms, to ward off Muslim, Portuguese, and finally Dutch traders and governors to rule over and abuse them.

27. Hofmeyr has identified “one broad theme of Indian Ocean studies” (2007, 9) that builds on “the idea of the island as an epitome of Indian Ocean experiences of slavery and indenture” (ibid.), pointing to scholars such as Carter and Torabully (2002), who have sought “to understand the islands as Creole spaces, as the histories of people without reference to a nation: a kind of ultra-Caribbean model of European, African, and Asian traditions being violently brought together” (Hofmeyr 2007, 9).
28. See Ingold (2009).
29. On “island governance,” see Warrington and Milne (2007).
30. The terms “saliency” and “salient” are often used these days simply in the sense of something or someone as being significant. Reminding us of the Latin originals of *salire* and *salient* may bring back an awareness of the leaping character which many manifestations of mobility through time and/or space exhibit and which I wish to capture by the term of *punctum saliens*. The German equivalent of “*der springende Punkt*” is often used, even in everyday talk.

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Islands Connect: People, Things, and Ideas Among the Small Islands of the Western Indian Ocean

Edward A. Alpers

SOME METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

More than 15 years ago, I published a short overview of what I called “the island factor” in Indian Ocean Africa (Alpers 2000; Alpers 2009, 39–54). Whatever the virtues of that essay, I did not specifically address the questions of “connectivity in motion” that constitute the central theme of this book. To be sure, connections abound in what I wrote, but the larger point I made was to argue generally for the relevance of Indian Ocean islands in the history of eastern Africa rather than of connectivity as such. Indeed, only a fleeting reference to “the tangled web of island connections that integrated East Africa into the commercial affairs of the Indian Ocean” and a single allusion to “this complex network” in my discussion of the slave trade in the southwest Indian Ocean (Alpers 2000, 377 and 380; 2009, 45 and 50) suggest anything like the subtleties of connectivity that I believe interest us all in this current project.

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The title of our volume raises some interesting semantic questions. First, what exactly do we imply by the term “hub?” Leaving aside physical definitions connected to a wheel, dictionary definitions suggest that a hub is “the effective center of an activity, region, or network” or simply “a center of activity.”¹ This last meaning only came into common usage after 1858, when Oliver Wendell Holmes opined that “Boston State-House is the hub of the solar system.”² For our purposes, I suggest we first consider focusing on the notion of connectedness through certain critical nodal points, which is to say the small islands of the western Indian Ocean, only then determining if we regard any of these nodal points as hubs. Next, exactly how are we to define “small islands?”

In his pioneering study of the small islands of the Indian Ocean, French geographer Jean-Louis Guébourg acknowledges “the problem of limits and that of micro-insularity.” He adopts Pierre George’s definition of an island as “a land isolated on all sides by water,” noting that George’s inclusion of “the term ‘isolated’ is not neutral [as] the author insists on insular isolation as a primordial concept” (Guébourg 1999, 13; George 1970).³ Insularity has important consequences for human identity, he notes, and indeed much of the recent literature on islands reveals that questions of identity loom large, though this is not our primary concern in this volume. Indeed, our focus is on connectivity rather than on isolation. More important, perhaps, is Guébourg’s categorization of different kinds of islands, for which he employs “a coastal index, which is the relationship existing between the highest limit of oceanic waters and the surface of the island” (Guébourg 1999, 13).⁴ If the ratio is equal to or more than one, he writes “the island offers a small surface and an important land-sea [ratio of] contact” (ibid., 13). For islands that have sheer coasts, like the Comoros and La Réunion, this index falls to between 1/2 and 1/10, even 1/20. Using this scale, Ngazidja (Grande Comore) has a ratio of 1/6, whereas Sri Lanka equals 1/60 and is thus considered to be “continental.” In addition, Guébourg takes account of both the extent of an island’s shoreline and its topography; an island that has many lagoons and inlets, such as those that feature mangroves, for example, will be more attuned to the ocean than one with precipitous cliffs marking its shores, which will cause it to turn to its interior (Guébourg 1999, 14). It remains to be seen just how useful such distinctions are for our purposes, but in his own book, this definition excludes

only Sri Lanka, Madagascar, and the major islands of the Indonesian Archipelago.

In the abstract that I submitted for the workshop that gave rise to this collection of essays, I indicated that “I will explore the multiple linkages that historically connected, and in many cases still connect today, the small islands of the Western Indian Ocean” (cf. Alpers [forthcoming](#)). Although my initial thinking was to do so by employing the kind of “network approach” advocated by Francesca Trivellato (2002, 62–65), my reading of Julia Verne’s book on translocality in contemporary Swahili trade suggested that I might attempt a somewhat different approach.⁵ Verne provides a carefully argued critique of network analysis “by calling for an image that is less static and schematic than most conceptualizations of networks still dominant today.” Instead, she prefers “the metaphor of the rhizome” (Verne 2012, 16, 10). To be specific, “the metaphor of the rhizome serves ... to account for the complex, dynamic and genuine relational character of translocal connections, getting to grips with the questions of how the connections are made, what they consist of and how they manage to endure” (ibid., 23). She contends that this image enables one to understand how translocality “incorporates the tension and interplay between mobility and situatedness, movement and stability,” something that in her own way, Trivellato similarly recognizes as a methodological problem in her adoption of a “network approach.” In her very dense epistemological analysis, Verne argues for the superiority of the rhizome metaphor because it enables the researcher “to do justice to complexity and grasp the best we can what is actually happening” in the ever-changing way in which networks actually function. Thus, she continues, “the ‘rhizome’ is imagined as a continuously changing process” (ibid., 18, 25, 29). Verne’s grounded research, which she describes as “a mobile ethnography of translocal trading practices,” (ibid., 33–67) took her from a base in Zanzibar on field trips in the company of several Swahili traders to upcountry Tanzania and Dubai. In her conclusions, she rethinks “the relationship between mobility and cosmopolitanism in the Swahili context” and challenges “a rather idealized image of Swahiliness.” What Verne argues for is that “living in a translocal space and engaging with many different places does not necessarily mean that one ends up being at home in the world and maneuvering expertly in different social and

cultural contexts.” Accordingly, she believes, “Instead of producing extroverted, cosmopolitan cultures, translocality thus translocalizes the sense of home, always including social exclusion, as this translocal home cannot be home to everyone. ... On the contrary, translocal space offers a way to be constantly at home despite being mobile” (ibid., 234–38).

This is admittedly pretty heavy theoretical sledding, but it finds an interesting complement in Engseng Ho’s question, “How does one write transregionalism that is thick, socially and historically?” Writing about a stimulating set of papers that address the historical use of different legal regimes in pre-independence Indian Ocean history, he emphasizes that, for historians, “*disaggregation* is a key methodological step for moving away from a unitary frame.” Stated differently, by eschewing broad generalizations and breaking a topic into its component parts, we gain real interpretive leverage. Taking this idea a step further, he writes that “disaggregation enables *mobility*,” in these cases of people and ideas, “separately and together” (Ho 2014, 885). In his summary of the article by Fahad Bishara (2014a) in this same collection, he notes both a “dense network of social relations across the ocean, between regions” and “the horizontal patterns of circulation” that Bishara describes (Ho 2014, 888; cf. Bishara 2014b). What I appreciate about Verne’s approach and Ho’s related question and observations is that they suggest ways to think about connectivity that account for time and space, social and cultural complexity, and the contradictions that macro- and micro-historical analyses involve.

There is no way that I can hope to replicate the kinds of detailed analysis that marks the work of Verne and Bishara in this chapter. What I do hope to accomplish is to isolate a number of themes and topics reflecting connectivity that are discernible in the scholarly literature or that emerge from the available primary sources, and then to suggest ways in which Verne’s and Ho’s insights might point the way toward a more complex, historically thick understanding of what they represent and how they might have changed over time. First of all, for me, this initial survey emphasizes that the most significant kind of connectivity that occupies our attention is not between islands as whole entities, but rather between the island–towns. Second, these connections are determined neither by geography nor by islandness as such, but rather by the people who inhabit these island–towns. Third, it seems to me that, in the wider context of the western Indian Ocean, we cannot divorce these island connections from littoral towns that are part of their maritime networks.

Some of these locations will, of course, be inshore islands, but others will be on the continental land mass.

Because the western Indian Ocean contains literally thousands of small islands, hundreds of which are or have historically been inhabited, in the remainder of this chapter, I will focus on the small islands of Indian Ocean Africa that lie from the Benaadir coast of southern Somalia down into the Mozambique Channel, together with the two main Mascarene Islands of La Réunion and Mauritius. The most immediate source of island connectivity across this broad region reflects the movement of people both from continental or mainland littorals and from other islands. In the case of the small African islands, these movements include migrations beginning in the first millennium of the Current Era from Africa, Arabia, the Gulf and even Southeast Asia. The Mascarenes, which were uninhabited until they were settled by the Dutch and then the French in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, clearly represent a later and quite distinct era of island settlement, but once inhabited they became integrated into the older set of connections that linked Africa's Indian Ocean islands. In different eras and in different ways, the diasporas represented by these continuing and overlapping population movements are one basic element in the complex process of rhizome formation. What we cannot demonstrate evidentially for the earlier foundational processes of island settlement, however, is just how such movements took place. Archaeological, linguistic, and genetic evidence are invaluable artifacts in enabling scholars to disaggregate the origins and components of the modern populations of these islands, but they do not reveal the fine detail of human history or the agency of the individuals and family groups that constructed these island populations over time.

THE COMORO ISLANDS AS A CASE STUDY

To take one relatively well-documented example, let us examine how this combination of methodologies plays out for the premodern history of the Comoros. Archaeology indicates that the islands were settled from about 800 CE by a combination of Arabs and Africans in what archaeologists call the Dembeni phase. In reminding his readers that archaeology cannot reconstruct past societies, Henry Wright (1984, 55) nevertheless offers the very helpful observation that we can still view these communities “as an integrated system of social actors and actions, tools and techniques, and meanings and strategies, a cultural foundation upon which

subsequent developments all depend.” Following the Dembeni phase, there is further archaeological evidence from the original Dembeni site on Maore (Mayotte) of later settlement from Madagascar (Allibert and Verin 1996). One intriguing aspect of these data is the identification that “some thirteen species of fish had been eaten whose location today, as far as they are known, are in some cases limited to the eastern coast of Africa and in others restricted to the coast of Madagascar. Such exterior origins of fish implies the transportation of food and its preservation in salt to be sold ...” (ibid., 465).⁶ In short, it would appear that the inhabitants of Dembeni were in contact with the coasts of both eastern Africa and western Madagascar. By the fifteenth century, the southern half of Maore was fully populated by Sakalava from western Madagascar, with the northern half being settled by “Arabo-Shirazis,” both on a base population of Africans (Rombi 1983).⁷

Reflecting again the African connection, the language evidence clearly links the individual island dialects of Shikomori or Shimaswa, the “language of islands,” to the larger Sabaki branch of northeast Coast Bantu, which includes Kiswahili, while the historical spread of this Bantu language along the East African littoral jibes chronologically with the archaeological evidence for the settlement of the Comoros (Nurse and Hinnebusch 1993). Yet while Shikomori is a blanket term for the four island languages of the archipelago, there is a marked difference between the languages spoken by the inhabitants of the two westernmost islands, Ngazidja and Mwali, and the two more southerly islands that are closest to Madagascar, Ndzuwani and Maore. Perhaps this distinction reflects the greater orientation of the former toward continental Africa, while the latter two looked more to Madagascar. Genetic research based on blood samples taken from 577 unrelated Comorians (men = 381, women = 196) from Ngazidja, Ndzuwani, and Mwali reveals that the gene pool of Comorians is predominately African (72 percent), with important contributions from western Asia (17 percent) and Southeast Asia (11 percent), a combination that both confirms much of what we know about the settlement history of the Comoros and raises numerous questions about how, exactly, this settlement occurred (Msaidie et al. 2011). Of the African haplogroups, the authors of this study identify Kenya and Tanzania as the most likely origin of the Y chromosome haplogroup and Mozambique as the probable source for the mitochondrial haplogroup, suggesting the possibility that more male Africans came from the former and more females from the latter. Additional evidence

of a Mozambican connection may be seen in Mahorais, the language of Maore. According to the French linguistic anthropologist Marie-Françoise Rombi (2003, 307), “occasionally one even finds there, in parts of songs, some magical formulas, incomprehensible to Mahorais today, that are actually from makua [eMakhuwa], a language spoken in northern Mozambique, which shows that contacts between Mayotte and the African coast have been complex (properties very ancient besides those more recent tied to the modern Indian Ocean slave trade).” Returning to Wright’s observation, by reviewing the history of the human settlement of the Comoros before about 1500, we can discern the existence of numerous lines of dense connectivity that were implicitly, if not explicitly, overlaid one on top of another over the course of six or seven centuries.

Historical evidence for the centuries after about 1500 is fairly abundant with respect to commercial exchanges connecting the individual Comoro islands to a web of sites within the Mozambique Channel and north of Cape Delgado to the Swahili coast, most especially to Zanzibar Town (Newitt 1983). These sources enable us to document the goods exchanged, but are less forthcoming on the human relations associated with these economic transactions. At certain moments in time, however, such sources provide some insight into the impact of commercial exchange on specific strata of Comorian society. The most thorough example is Jeremy Prestholdt’s analysis of what he calls similitude in the history of self-representation among the ruling elites of Mutsamudu, the main port and capital of the Ndzuwani sultanate (Prestholdt 2008, 13–33; for Ngazidja, cf. Walker 2005). What Prestholdt achieves, however, illustrates the intersection of insularity with global forces and influences more effectively than it does the connections of these elites over time with other regional small islands. What I would like to examine more closely are those more mundane exchanges that linked the commercial, political, and learned classes of the different Comorian towns to each other and to the other small islands of the western Indian Ocean.

This exercise means revisiting the movement of Hadrami and Yemeni men from Arabia to coastal East Africa and thence to the Comoros. In some respects, this is a fairly well-understood process thanks to the pioneering work of B.G. Martin (1974) and Randall L. Pouwels (1987, 37–42), who have traced the most important Hadrami family networks that settled the coast and its islands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. More recently, by focusing on the ‘Alawī *sāda*, Anne

Bang (2003, 23–34) has meticulously reconstructed the most important of these kinship structures. In the 1500s, certain Hadrami families settled in the principal continental towns of the Benaadir, Mogadishu and Barawa; others moved on to establish themselves at Pate and Lamu. In the following century, some of these island-based lineages extended their settlements to the Comoros, creating a tightly integrated commercial network that operated across the western Indian Ocean (and even as far as Indonesia) (Blanchy 2016). A vivid testimony to how family ties facilitated trade is revealed in a letter written in 1907 by an elder of a Hadrami family from Tarim that was prominent in Singapore, but by analogy I think we can imagine that similar advice was given to junior members of Hadrami trading families that operated in the western Indian Ocean:

When you reach al-Mukallā, you should stay with Sayyid Ḥusayn b. Ḥāmid al-Miḥdār [...] All the money you might require, you will obtain from Sālim Yazidī whom we have notified. Send presents and letters to your family and children and to us – write us from everywhere so that we can rejoice at your well-being.

Once you have arrived in Aden: We have notified ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Abd Allāh, he will write you a letter of introduction. When you have met him, follow his instructions. ... [my ellipses] We have also asked Muḥammad Jabār in Aden to provide you with everything you need.

If there is honey available in al-Mukallā, get some as presents for the relatives in Singapore. Everything you might need from my money, whether little or much, is at your disposal [...]

When you travel to Singapore, reserve private cabins in the second or third class. Once you arrive in Singapore, follow the advice of your uncle, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Abd Allāh. On the day that you arrive in Aden, send a card to al-Kaf, Abū Bakr b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, so that he knows you are in Aden.⁸ (Bang 2003, 24)

Even allowing for the difference in means and speed of travel on the sea—that is, by steamship rather than dhow—the availability of cash and credit, letters of introduction, gift-giving, and reminders to stay in touch with the family at home—all the elements in this set of instructions to a young man about to embark on a career of trading in the Indian Ocean world—very likely applied to ‘Alawī family networks linking the Hadramawt, the Lamu Archipelago, the Comoros, northwestern

Madagascar, and eventually Zanzibar. As the German traveler Otto Kersten noted when he stayed in the small town of Kitanda, in Itsandra sultanate, in 1864, for the people of Ngazidja “the city of Zanzibar was like the embodiment of everything beautiful and great” (Kersten 1871, 231; cf. Walker et al. forthcoming).⁹ During his visit to Ngazidja, “not far from the beach, we met several people, among them some acquaintances from Zanzibar, emigrated Comorians, who had received vacation time to visit their homeland. One of them, an overseer of O’Swald and Co., [the important German trading company based in Hamburg] had come here in order to take a wife, even though having already married in Zanzibar” (ibid., 238). A good illustration of how effective inter-island communication had become by the late nineteenth century is the fact that, when the recently “liberated” Mariamo Hali (an elite young woman from Ngazidja who had been captured in a slave raid) arrived at Zanzibar from Mwali on board a British Royal Navy vessel in 1883, she was greeted by her maternal uncle, who was waiting for her at dockside (Alpers 2016).

Some of these Hadrami actors also established small sultanates in Ngazidja, Ndzuwani, and Mwali. Most, but not all, claimed to be *shurafa*, that is, descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. While historians have recognized the importance of their trading activities, it is as pious religious leaders that they have attracted the most attention to date. By posing a completely different set of questions, however, Thomas Vernet adds an important dimension to previous discussions of the Hadrami diaspora in East Africa. Drawing upon his unrivaled knowledge of the Portuguese sources, Vernet argues persuasively that a complex chain of slave-trading ties developed among northwestern Madagascar, the Comoros, the Lamu Archipelago, and Arabia (Vernet 2009). Building on the scholarship of Martin and Pouwels, he attributes these connections to the expansion into East African waters of Hadrami and Yemeni family groups in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. According to Vernet, “we can surmise that these networks were partly based on the Malagasy slave trade,” on which he elaborates further in his chapter (ibid., 45).

In the absence of contemporary sources for the period before about 1800, how can we imagine the evolving process by which these intrepid Hadramis carried out their business as slave-traders, built their family networks, engaged with the host populations that they encountered on the islands where they settled, and pursued their activities as carriers of

a specific kind of Islam? Although it is methodologically unsatisfactory and threatens to lead us into static notions of “tradition,” let me suggest that we can at least suggest some ways of thinking about these questions by resort to evidence from more recent history. First, there is no contradiction between trade and proselytization (*da‘wa*). Although Vernet states, regarding the Madagascar trade, that “most of the slave purchasers were Swahili from cities of the ‘Malindi coast,’ that is to say from Mombasa to Mogadishu,” he also provides evidence that at least some of the slavers were indeed *sharifian* “priests” (2009, 43, 46). We cannot ascertain whether or not any of these individuals regularly both traded in slaves and engaged in *da‘wa*, but Kersten records that the most important person in Kitanda, a *sharifian* trader named Sherif Said Abubakari ben Abdallah ben Semedi, “was tolerant of practitioners of other religions and was not shy to speak about religion” (Kersten 1871, 231).¹⁰ In fact, this individual was the founder of the prominent Āl bin Sumayṭ family in Ngazidja, Abū Bakr b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Sumayṭ (Walker et al. forthcoming; Bang 2003). A quite different example from twentieth-century Tanzania suggests that business and proselytization could go hand in hand. At one point in the career of Sh. Nūr al-Dīn b. Ḥusayn, at the time the *khalīfa* of the *ṭarīqa* Shādhiliyya Yashruṭiyya in East Africa, he engaged in trading fish from his base at Kilwa into Zambia. In the words of Chanfi Ahmed, who interviewed Sh. Nūr in 2002:

The *shaykh* always combined his business trips with *da‘wa* activities, as indicated by a slogan written on the front of his car referring to the Prophet Muḥammad (*Akazaliwa Makka S. W.*; “He was born in Mecca, God bless him and grant him peace”). On the completion of his daily work, he would go to the mosques to pray and preach. (Ahmed 2006, 336)

What this brief glimpse into the life of an itinerant Muslim fish-trader and teacher brings into focus is that the life of a slave-trader could just as easily have allowed for proselytization as it did for Sh. Nūr al-Dīn. Moreover, since we know that Islam was well established in northwest Madagascar and in the Comoros by the sixteenth century, such an individual could well have prayed and preached the ‘Alawī understanding of Islam in local mosques.

Proselytization of specific, inevitably reform Islamic tendencies represents one way in which commercial networks provided an opening for a thickening of the character of relationships between one category of

island inhabitants and those co-religionists with whom they did business. Within this same social group of local traders, another way in which such networks were made more complex was by intermarriage. Writing about the Muslim Antalaotsy of northwest Madagascar, Noël Gueunier has commented:

We know that in the 19th century, and undoubtedly already a long time before, they were bilingual, speaking Malagasy and Kiswahili; they had, and some families continue until the present, a tradition of overseas matrimonial alliances (in the Comoros and on the East African coast), allowing them to have bonds between the two coasts of the Mozambique Channel ... (Gueunier 1994, 41).

Several examples of this kind of family connection, one of which explicitly involved fellow slave-traders, are known to have existed between various Comorian rulers and their counterparts on the Mozambique coast. Some of these connections provided links to important families in the mainland village of Sancul, to the south of Mozambique Island, while others joined them with leading families on Quitangonha Island, at the north entrance to Conducia Bay, just north of Mozambique Island. Some of these are no more than casual references in official letters between the Portuguese authorities at Mozambique Island and different Comorian sultans (Alpers 2009, 149–53). However, a letter from Sultan Said Bakar of Ngazidja, written in 1878 from Moroni to an official at Sancul, Molidi Vulai, begins by requesting that the latter keep tabs on three slaves whom the Sultan had sent to Sancul. The author, who was later to write the authoritative *Chronicle of Ngazidja*, then comments: “Your brother’s young nephew is on Mohilla [Mwali] and Allah willing when he finishes his studies I will send him home to Mozambique” (Hafkin 1973, 56–57; Ahmed 1977). It appears, as well, that there existed marital alliances between prominent families from Iconi, on Ngazidja, and the Murrapahine lineage on the mainland around Mozambique Island. In the words of a Portuguese colonial intelligence officer writing in the late 1960s, “They do not know how to give a good explanation for the family and clan ties to Iconi canton in the Comoros, of which many are natives who come to these lands,” noting later in the same report that the original marital connection was apparently between a Comorian man and Mozambican woman in the last quarter of the nineteenth century (Alpers 2009, 161).¹¹ More generally,

the most powerful Comorian connections in that century were with the rulers of Angoche Island, the leading Mozambican slave-trading port in the second half of the nineteenth century (Newitt 1972).

Although the imposition of effective French colonial rule in the Comoros and Portuguese colonial rule in northern Mozambique disrupted many of the older commercial activities in the Mozambique Channel, the emergence of Ngazidja as the center for the expansion of the Shādhiliyya Yashruṭiyya added another layer of inter-island contact to the inshore islands of northern Mozambique (Bonate 2007, 73–112). What we do not yet know, however, is what—if any—back and forth connections continued between the Comoro centers of this *ṭariqā* and its branches based on Mozambique Island, the site of its initial implantation on the coast, into the colonial period and after independence. If colonial boundaries weakened or obliterated some of the linkages that had developed over previous centuries between the Comoros and the small inshore islands of the Mozambique littoral, I expect that they did not repress those that connected the four islands of the archipelago to each other, at least not until the Mahorais voted against independence and to remain a French dependency, as they still are today. Once again, however, the nature of scholarly inquiry has focused either on the political history of the islands or on the anthropology of its different communities, rather than on communication between the islands and its families. In the case of Ngazidja, of course, we do know that the considerable migration of many of its residents to Zanzibar Town from the end of the nineteenth century established a set of relationships that remained strong until the Zanzibar Revolution of 1964. These ties are reflected in both the Islamic history of the coast and the regular movement between Zanzibar and the Comoros (Saleh 1995; Clockers 2009; Walker 2014 and this volume). One notable example is the history of the ‘Alawī Ḥabīb Ṣāliḥ, who settled in Lamu in about 1870 and became a major figure in Islamic reform there until his death in 1936. As Anne Bang carefully shows, Ḥabīb Ṣāliḥ first journeyed to Lamu with an uncle, returning to Ngazidja a year later to marry a cousin of a woman who later married Ibn Sumayṭ, founder of the Shādhiliyya Yashruṭiyya in East Africa (Bang 2003, 100–101). This tendency to seek marriage partners among the Ba ‘Alawī appears to have been reinforced during the colonial period (Blanchy 2016). Thus, at least among the most important *shurafa* families, intermarriage continued to be a prominent feature that consolidated inter-island communication. A challenge for future small island research

is to disentangle these ‘Alawī and Hadrami linkages from among the larger networks that connected them to the Hadramawt and the greater Muslim world.

THE MASCARENE ISLANDS AND THEIR MARITIME EXTENSIONS

A quite different coming together of small island connectivity dates to the establishment of a French colonial presence on the Mascarene Islands and, later, at Nosy Be and Mayotte. The many connections—administrative, familial, educational, religious—between La Réunion and Mauritius, even after the latter island was captured and claimed by the British in the Napoleonic Wars, are well known and require little elaboration here. Both before and after the abolition of slavery, however, the Mascarenes were part of a complex system of forced labor migration that included sources at Mozambique Island, the Kerimba Islands that dot the northern coast of Mozambique, Zanzibar, Kilwa Kisiwani, Nosy Be, and the Comoro Islands. Before looking into these connections more carefully, I would be remiss were I not to note that the most important island for the Mascarenes was Madagascar, scarcely a small island, but an island nonetheless (Larson 2009). The earliest of these links date to the first half of the eighteenth century and focus on the activities of French slavers on the Mozambique coast, where conniving Portuguese authorities and willing Swahili merchants were only too glad to do business with them (Alpers 1970). In the mid-1770s, an enterprising French slaver named Jean-Vincent Morice shipped a large number of captive Africans from Zanzibar to Île de France (now Mauritius) and shortly thereafter negotiated for a slave-trading treaty with the Sultan of Kilwa Kisiwani, Hasan b. Ibrahim b. Yusuf, to provide labor to the Mascarenes on an exclusive basis (Freeman-Grenville 1965; Vernet 2011). Abdul Sheriff succinctly reviews the several decades of this traffic that extended from the 1770s until the imposition of the first antislavery treaty by the British on the Sultan of Zanzibar in 1822, the so-called Moresby Treaty (Sheriff 1987, 41–48; also Allen 2014, 63–107). Similarly, Richard Allen meticulously reconstructs the illegal slave trade to the Mascarenes after this Treaty was concluded (*ibid.*, 141–78). Yet, although this rich scholarship on the French slave trade reveals commercial linkages among several generations of European slavers, with the exception of the ties they had to several Swahili and Arab political figures, they tell us nothing at all about anything other than the one-way traffic of captive Africans

(and Malagasy). Who crewed the slave ships, what were the onshore social networks of the French slavers, and similar questions that would enrich our understanding of these commercial networks remain largely unasked.¹²

The same problems of procuring labor held true in the aftermath of slavery, when, after its abolition in 1848, the French relied on the *libre engagé* or free labor emigration scheme that they first devised in 1828 in anticipation of abolition (Chaillou 2010). In 1840, France colonized the small island of Nosy Be, just off the northwest coast of Madagascar. A year later, the Sakalava king of Mayotte ceded the island to France. Both islands were intimately linked to the much older, and larger, French colony of La Réunion, as Île Bourbon was renamed by the French in 1848. According to Jehanne-Emmanuel Monnier, Nosy Be suffered a “triple insularity,” combining its isolation with administrative and economic dependency on both Mayotte and Réunion (Monnier 2006, 28–29; Gevrey 1870, 137). When the cultivation of sugar came to dominate all three French colonial islands by the end of that decade, these ties became even more profound. As Monnier demonstrates, what she describes as the second generation of colonists were all either Réunionnais Creoles or “creolized” Europeans who had lived for decades on Réunion. “For the most part,” she writes, “they already knew each other, maintaining either commercial relations or ties of friendship and kinship” (Monnier 2006: 58). These men represented the larger island’s élite; very few ordinary colonists were among their number. Although they invested their energies and capital in the sugar plantations of Nosy Be, most left their wives and children on Réunion (ibid., 58–62; cf. Kersten 1871, 204). Réunionnais Creoles also were the predominant settlers at Mayotte, although Jean Martin suggests that they were of a distinctly lower social order than those who gravitated to Nosy Be (Martin 1983, vol. 1, 204–205).

Despite these social differences, it seems to me that there is an interesting parallel to be drawn between the Creole connections linking these three small French colonial islands in the southwest Indian Ocean and those of the Comorian Hadramis who spread out to the inshore and off-shore islands of the Swahili and Mozambique coasts. Today, there is a regular traffic between Mayotte and Réunion that is made possible by their mutual designation as overseas departments of France. Where this connection is most noticeable is in the numerous Mahorais who, dressed like typical Swahili/Comorians, can be seen around the Central Market

in St. Denis.¹³ Still another example of how such family networks might be constructed comes from the case of the small Khoja community on Madagascar, some of whom resided on Nosy Be. According to Sophie Blanchy (1995, 84, 143, 171, 180, 285), although families preferred marriages within their local community in Madagascar, their second choice would be among Khoja families resident in Réunion or France because most of these came from Madagascar. Indeed, other examples of how commercial travel by Indian Muslims, including Sunnis, as well as Hindus, resulted in the creation of scattered families across the southwest Indian Ocean from Mombasa to the Mascarenes are peppered throughout Blanchy's detailed study (*ibid.*, 123–24).¹⁴ Although many of the nodal points of such networks were not specifically on small islands, many were. Finally, Blanchy notes that Muslim Indians regularly participated in mixed marriages as “a way of coastal life” (*mode de vie côtier*) that connected them to local families across the many settlements, including those on small islands, across the western Indian Ocean (*ibid.*, 314).

SOME CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTION-RAISING

No doubt there are other examples of small island connectivities that existed historically or that have developed in the more recent past and persist into the present (cf. Bakar 1988); these I leave for others to explore. What I would like to do now is return to the ideas with which I began this chapter regarding definitions and concepts. The first of these concerns the idea of a “hub.” While I am not convinced that any of the small islands or the towns upon them in the western Indian Ocean served as meaningful hubs, there are certainly two notable exceptions. The first is Mozambique Island from the mid-eighteenth to the end of the nineteenth century, when Lourenço Marques (now Maputo) replaced it as the administrative center of Portuguese East Africa; the second is Zanzibar Town during the nineteenth century, until its conquest by Great Britain in 1896. Both of these urban centers were, in fact, colonial capitals, which surely highlighted their respective roles as hubs, although they acted as such well beyond the confines of other small islands. Perhaps there are other candidates for inclusion as hubs among the small islands of the western Indian Ocean, such as Kilwa Kisiwani in the late medieval period or Lamu in the seventeenth century, but whatever their significance in regional Indian Ocean history, I remain skeptical of their designation as hubs.¹⁵

When we turn to the idea of “connectivity,” I return to my earlier suggestion that we need to focus on island towns, rather than on islands as whole entities. Except for the smaller islands—Lamu, Mombasa, and Kilwa are good examples here, as their agricultural hinterlands were on the continent—there remained a historical division between town residents and rural inhabitants with respect to their connections beyond the island on which they resided. The former were Muslims, hierarchically organized internally, with a strong externally oriented outlook, while the latter were, until the twentieth century for the most part, non-Muslims and agriculturalists whose village social organization placed them on the fringes of urban society. For instance, on virtually all of the Comoro Islands, a sharp distinction was drawn between urban dwellers and rural inhabitants, whether free or enslaved. In her detailed analysis of the *makabaila*, the *sharifian* elite of Ndzuwani, Sophie Blanchy identifies this class as a “literate, urban, merchant society.” In the same place, she also notes the sharp distinction made on that island between the *makabaila* and the free rural inhabitants, who were known as “bushmen” (*wamat-saha*), as distinct from slaves (*warumwa*) (Blanchy 2016). A similar argument can be made about nineteenth-century Unguja, with its division between the inhabitants of Zanzibar Town and the rest of the islanders, although in that instance both townsmen and rural farmers would arguably have been Muslim. Lacking a major urban center, the same would have been true for the history of Pemba Island as a whole after about 1500.

In the case of the southwest Indian Ocean, it is also abundantly clear that the central location of Madagascar and its intimate links over time both with the Mascarenes, to its east, and the Comoros and the East African littoral, to its west, make it impossible to separate meaningfully this largest of African islands from the small islands of these waters. More broadly considered, I also remain convinced that the connections of the numerous small islands of the western Indian Ocean cannot arbitrarily be isolated from those equally small continental settlements to which they were so often joined by trade, religion, and family.

Finally, what about the subterranean, vegetal rhizome as a metaphor or theoretical approach to the kinds of connectivity with which we are concerned? While I still admire Julia Verne’s ingenious use of the rhizome as an ethnographic method for analyzing the kind of translocality that lies at the center of her study of contemporary Swahili traders, without much more fine detail over time about a whole range of topics

related to small island connectivity in the Indian Ocean, I think that historians do better by sticking to the “network approach” espoused by Francesca Trivellato. Such an approach is readily grasped by the reader and is sufficiently flexible to facilitate a wide range of analytical tools and sources of evidence.¹⁶ The depth and complexity that Verne seeks in her “rhizome approach” is no less available to scholars who appreciate the many dimensions of small island connectivity inherent in a network approach. Still, I think that Verne points the way to making greater sense of the kinds of identity that emerged historically among elite islanders whose travels and connections shifted them between “mobility and situatedness, movement and stability” (Verne 2012, 18). To illustrate this point, let me take the example of everyone’s favorite medieval Muslim traveler, Ibn Battuta.

Extending the brilliant work of Sheldon Pollock (2006) on the rise of a Sanskrit cosmopolis in South and Southeast Asia, Ronit Ricci employs the concept of an “Arabic cosmopolis” to encompass “a shared meta-mode of discourse” that “fostered a consciousness of belonging to a trans-local community” (Ricci 2010, 18, 19; Ricci 2011). It was into this translocal community that Ibn Battuta moved so seamlessly in the fourteenth century as he traveled from Mogadishu to Mombasa and Kilwa, and eventually to the Maldives, the most important small islands of the Islamic world he encountered. Certainly Ibn Battuta was mobile, but he was always moving in a world in which he felt at home. At Kilwa, he makes a very clear distinction between the highly civilized Islamic court of its benevolent ruler, al-Hasan ibn Sulaiman, known as Abu al-Mawahib or “father of gifts,” and the uncivilized mainland “heathen Zanj,” whom his troops regularly raided for booty (Gibb 1983, 112). As Verne concludes (2012, 238), “translocal space offers a way to be constantly at home despite being mobile.” To what extent was this kind of translocality also true for others who participated in the world of Indian Ocean small island connectivity? For a learned individual like Ibn Sumayt, it was certainly the same. Neither he nor Ibn Battuta really ever engaged seriously with individuals or groups who lay outside the Islamic cosmopolis. By way of contrast, however, Ḥabīb Šāliḥ’s reputation as an Islamic reformer included his outreach to lower class Muslims and the incorporation of African music into local Islamic rituals in Lamu (Kresse 2006, 17–18; Sessemann 2006, 238–39). What was the case for the ordinary Ngazidjans who worked in Zanzibar and were encountered by Kersten in the 1860s? For those men from Iconi who forged marital ties with

Mozambican families in the late nineteenth century, something much less insular (pun intended) was taking place than was experienced by more elite Comorians. What we can perceive in these few examples, then, is a range of possibilities arising from connections among people, things, and ideas in the western Indian Ocean that suggest the possibility of reconstructing a socially and historically thick transregionalism. What is required now is for future researchers to take up this challenge.

NOTES

1. http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/hub and <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hub>, accessed July 17, 2015.
2. Quoted in <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/hubbing>, accessed May 5, 2015.
3. All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.
4. See <http://www.aquaportail.com/definition-4370-trait-de-cote.html> and *À l'interface entre terre et mer: la gestion du trait de côte*, Ministère de l'Écologie du Développement durable et de la Mer, November 2009, http://www.developpement-durable.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/Gestion_du_trait_de_cote.pdf, both accessed July 20, 2015.
5. For a pioneering article on Swahili traders in the early modern period, see Vernet (2015).
6. The authors add the phrase “as stated by Idrisi,” but the reference in Idrisi to curing fish for sale would seem to refer to the Somali and northern Swahili coast, rather than the Comoros (Freeman-Grenville 1962, 20).
7. The use of the name “Afro-Shirazis” reflects the commonly held Comorian traditions that the original Muslim settlers were Shirazis.
8. Bracketed ellipses in original. Hadrami kinship networks apparently functioned in the same way as early as the seventeenth century, for which see Ho (2007, 355).
9. My thanks to Dr Constanze Weise for this translation. I am equally grateful to Dr Iain Walker for sharing a forthcoming French translation of this valuable source and for clarifying several points in the text for me (Walker et al. forthcoming).
10. Kersten also reports that this man told him “about his family of which some members lived in Java and others in Muscat” (Kersten 1871, 232).
11. Iconi is located south of Moroni; together, they were the two leading towns in the Bambao sultanate in southwest Ngazidja.
12. For an intriguing note on the crew of an Indian-owned dhow at Nosy Be, see Sanchez (2007, 123–25).

13. Personal observation, 2003; for a more scientific account, see Lambek [forthcoming](#).
14. An informal interview I conducted with the founder of Bijouterie Ravior in Quatre Bornes, Mauritius, in June 1999, also revealed his family diaspora on several small islands of the southwest Indian Ocean.
15. It is worth noting that Blanchy (2016) describes Ndzuwani as a *noeud* or node, rather than as a *moyeu* or hub.
16. For one example of how the application of a mathematical concept of network and nodal points can be used to illuminate a more complex socio-economic history, see Suzuki (2017).

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Small Island Hubs and Connectivity in the Indian Ocean World: Some Concepts and Hypotheses from Historical Anthropology

Andre Gingrich

This contribution to the present volume discusses the connectivity of small island hubs in the Indian Ocean world through a methodological focus on concepts and hypotheses that are derived from experiences and perspectives in historical anthropology. The main concern is therefore the open question of what kind of concepts and (related) hypotheses historical anthropologists might provide for wider trans- and interdisciplinary research within the fields of Indian Ocean studies under scrutiny here. The present endeavor's modest goal is thus defined by the aspiration to provide a number of conceptual and methodological suggestions in dialogue with the great advances achieved by others in elucidating the “island factor” (Alpers 2000) in the Indian Ocean world. This text begins by providing a few terminological specifications before setting out

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to discuss potentially relevant concepts and hypotheses in three sections. A brief summary concludes the chapter.¹

TERMINOLOGICAL SPECIFICATIONS

“Connectivity” as used in the humanities and social sciences today emerged as a metaphor borrowed from technical research, the physical sciences, and professional transportation, as well as communication practices and related IT developments. As a metaphor, it remains open to a broad range of interpretations. Still, a core semantic element of this metaphor alludes to directed movements and processes that are going to or coming from elsewhere, while approaching an *appropriate* targeted hub or departing from it. Through these incoming and outgoing movements and processes, a hub enters directly or indirectly into some kind of interaction with other hubs. In turn, these directed movements and processes either fail to reach the next suitable hub or, if they succeed, may be transformed as a result of their arrival in them. Hubs and processes thus are not merely interconnected; rather, they fundamentally condition each other. Except in the special case of expeditions into the unknown, no movement (in the present sociohistorical and metaphorical sense) can be usefully directed anywhere without aspiring to reach an appropriate hub, while, conversely, no site can be activated as an adequate hub without movements that arrive at or depart from it.

From the outset, then, hubs and connectivity imply well-defined temporal and spatial dimensions, and we are invited to consider creative ways of applying them to specific regional and historical contexts. Directed processes include both outgoing (successful or failing) and incoming movements. In these systematic combinations of “hubs and directed processes,” hubs—the somewhat more stable component—are outnumbered by the more volatile element, namely the directed processes. The focus on Indian Ocean worlds implies that the “hubs” in question here are close to the sea and its shores, while “directed processes” take or took place across more or less distant waters. The term “hub” nevertheless encompasses the immediate hinterland and refers to additional specific categories of land (here: small islands). For example, as the Maldivian archipelago’s main hub for centuries, Male’ would thus relate to a whole range of other inhabited Maldivian atolls as its maritime “hinterland”; Hadibu as the main coastal town and hub of northern Socotra (Yemen), on the other hand, would have the inhabited parts of

that same island (and of the entire island group) as its hinterland. From the outset, therefore, this volume's main title and theme, "connectivity in motion," focuses on changes related to both components: the more stable, land-based island hubs and the more volatile, maritime processes associated with them. In turn, the wider relevance of a given hub in its time depends to an extent on how it was connected to a higher or lower intensity of directed processes.

Moreover, the title, "Connectivity in Motion: [Small] Island Hubs in the Indian Ocean World," introduces an additional important qualifier: Not all kinds of islands and their hubs are at issue here, but only those hubs on islands classified as small. "Smallness" is thus proposed as a comparative yet indeterminate quantifier. As far as islands are concerned, "smallness" primarily emphasizes two related aspects. First, it draws attention specifically to those islands whose littoral zones almost by definition cover a greater area than their inland zones (Pearson 2006). Generally speaking, the smaller an inhabited island's surface, the greater the proportion of its inhabited littoral areas in relation to the island's nonlittoral inland zone. As a consequence, the qualities of small islands imply a larger part of their population living very close to the sea and engaging in sea-related activities. There is a systematic, distinct littoral quality in small islands' sociocultural forms of organization. For example, Sri Lanka's size may look small, but only when compared to neighboring India's. In terms of historical proportions, however, the number of residents in its rich and fertile inland areas (including the island's precolonial capitals) was usually equal to, if not much greater than, those living in Sri Lanka's littoral zones. Together with its overall historical demographics, this is the main reason why Sri Lanka rarely is considered as a "small" island, by contrast with Socotra, the Maldives or the Nicobar islands. Secondly, a perspective on smallness also compares these minor, sea-oriented islands with others of a similar size, as well as smaller and larger ones. The criterion of "smallness" introduces an element of scale, but it also addresses which points of comparison are being employed. In that sense, smallness raises questions about the extent of territory as well as numbers of human inhabitants—but while answering these, "smallness" also investigates such questions in other, similar contexts.

By semantic necessity, the term "small" therefore guides us to include considerations not only of "size" but also of "scales" in the analyses of limited land entities at varying distances from shores across the maritime surfaces under scrutiny. In turn, this also concerns the densities of those

maritime connections and related networks—how closely, frequently, and consequentially are these hubs connected with interconnected systems of what size? Whatever may count as “small” in this sense will always depend on historical and regional contexts. Of necessity, this in turn obliges any analysis to compare precisely these contexts: For instance, such comparative considerations of “small but unavoidable since no other alternatives were available” would yield quite a different insight, by contrast, from those of “small in relation to three major hubs nearby.” In short, apart from its “littoral” emphasis, the notion of smallness does not provide any additional *a priori* definition, but sets the task of comparative consideration and investigation.

The two terms still needing some clarification in this introductory section are “historical anthropology” and “Indian Ocean world.” Regarding Indian Ocean world(s), I largely follow Schnepel’s outline in his introduction to this volume. Building on earlier debates on the issue, mainly carried out by historians, philologists, and archaeologists, but also geographers, Schnepel basically points out the relevance of understanding the Indian Ocean as a changing set of maritime and insular arenas—arenas (Turner 1974) that were always spatially and temporally embedded within the sociocultural conglomerates and entities along the adjoining shores and their respective hinterlands. Such an understanding will focus on historical and contemporary interactions not only within each of these arenas, but also among them, as well as between a few or some of them and sociocultural entities on the larger islands and in mainland areas. Moreover, the term emphasizes “world(s)” as sets of lived experience from local, regional, maritime, and wider coastal perspectives. From the outset, this emphasis implies a healthy *caveat* against any kind of historiography that would begin and end with Eurocentric narratives. Instead, the idea of (an) Indian Ocean world(s) directs our attention to maritime, insular, and coastal experiences that represent semiautonomous local and regional fields (Moore 1973) of historical interactions in their own right. It goes without saying that such an approach does not attribute any historical priority to colonial or western narratives, while a strong emphasis is placed on relevant local perspectives, as well as on environmental forces and constraints. This outlines the rationale informing the present chapter’s main topical and historical thrust, with its primary interest in “medieval” precolonial agents such as Zanzibar-based sailors along the Swahili coast, Chinese merchants in Southeast Asia, or South Arabian ships’ captains and merchants in South Asia.

Historical anthropology, finally, represents a minor but vital subfield of today's global sociocultural anthropology. This subfield comprises many stronger clusters, with some priority given to recent and colonial history, but also quite a few with primary interests in various precolonial eras. Common methodological orientations are an emphasis on critically considering and assessing local and regional indigenous sources of all kinds. This may also (but need not necessarily) include careful and self-reflexive approaches toward hypothetically applying those concepts, models, and abstractions that are derived from more recent ethnographic analyses to the different circumstances in the more distant past. In addition, existing theoretical concepts elaborated through other field examples, which are then "tested" (in the qualitative sense of the word) elsewhere with satisfying results, can be introduced comparatively to substantiate a potential hypothesis on the ground. Until recently, among those currents in historical anthropology with a predominant interest in precolonial history, most were influenced either by a stronger legacy in local historiography ("ethnohistory"; see Sturtevant 1966), or by one of the traditions in structural and regional history (i.e., primarily analyses of *longue durée* relations) (Braudel 1958), or by some combination of both. Since the works of Eric Wolf (1982) and Jack Goody (1990), the ensuing paradigmatic changes have opened up historical anthropology to a much richer inventory of theoretical approaches that combine local and regional time depths with intercontinental and global perspectives. In turn, this has resulted in a productive and dialogical tension with occasional shifts of emphasis between orientations of one or the other version of *longue durée* perspectives and those with "ethnohistorical," local historiographical, or *histoire événementielle* priorities.

To these general terminological clarifications may be added some remarks on two specific empirical sources that have also inspired this inquiry. First, although I do have some familiarity with the island worlds and shorelines of the Indian Ocean in South and Southeast Asia, my main regional expertise relates to South Arabia and to some of the Arab interactions across history and across the Indian Ocean (including East Africa and South Asia). I would therefore place myself in the Arab Studies branch of regional and structural traditions within historical anthropology (Gingrich 2015a). Some of my earlier work was on the historical traditions and ethnographic contexts of Yemeni and Hijazi folk astronomy that occasionally had strong maritime and navigational aspects. Secondly, and by contrast, my other empirical background is

rooted in the present and relates to comparative analyses of various contemporary sociocultural phenomena. Within that wider interest in qualitative methodologies and their analytical application, over the course of several years, Ulf Hannerz and I have been pursuing a very specific interest in “small countries,” and, as a wider collaborative effort, a related research and publication project now coming to completion (Hannerz and Gingrich 2017). This comparative methodological interest, combined with the topic of size and scale, will also inform some of the suggestions for elaboration in what follows.

The terminological equipment as outlined above can now be applied in the following three sections on concepts and hypotheses useful for the present endeavor. Section one is methodological; section two is conceptual in a comparative sense; section three is analytical along structural lines.

METHODOLOGY: DIVERSITIES, PERIODS, AND RELATIONS

This section will focus on three methodological priorities: namely the need, first, to observe diverse language-based sources, and secondly, to engage properly with environmental and navigational conditions. Thirdly, a network-based approach will be suggested as potentially helpful in the pursuit of many research issues in the present context. While the first two of these methodological priorities are unavoidable and indispensable, the third is framed not as a necessity, but rather as a useful, feasible, and promising possibility.

The terminological clarifications in the introduction have already indicated the need for regional and historical contextualization regarding the overarching theme of this volume. In methodological terms, this premise implies a respect for local and distant source materials. Many of these materials may not be language-based, for example, environmental or archaeological evidence. When it comes to language-based sources, however, these may take oral (as in oral history) or textual form. Both oral and textual sources usually include materials from more than just one language. Even if it is self-evident that most textual and verbal sources at hand are available primarily in one language or just a few, the search for sources in other languages remains an enduring methodological prerequisite. From the outset, the premise of historical and regional contextualization therefore includes a binding, practical openness *firstly* to the diversity of relevant source materials and, within that, to *a diversity*

of *language-based sources* or “fragmented archives” in Larson’s (2011) words. Beyond its testimonial and descriptive value, the latter allows for additional considerations (i.e., if not already suggested by sources in primary languages) of shifting perspectives, for example, by outsiders and insiders, from the margins and from the respective centers, and so forth. An appreciation of the diversity of language-based sources is intrinsically another indicator of those complex interplays between local and wider influences encountered wherever “connectivity in motion” is concerned. This becomes even more relevant in the present endeavor, where complex macrocultural settings have shaped, and continue to influence, many shorelines around the Indian Ocean and beyond. Ignoring the diversity of these sources and their changing relevance over time would amount to a neglect of cultural diversity and related interactions in the entire region (Rosenthal 2012).

Another methodological challenge has more to do, *secondly*, with changes and transformations in various regional sets of knowledge and practices. When it comes to the connectivity of Indian Ocean small islands across history, it is significant which *specific navigational techniques* were mastered and practiced by specific actors, and whether these techniques could be combined with sufficient regional maritime knowledge about safe or dangerous times and routes. Whether a Yemeni crew set out to sail along the Swahili coast without the aid of astronomical observation and a navigational handbook, as perhaps in the twelfth century, or with such aids, as was usually the case in the fourteenth century, made a crucial difference. Consequently, any research endeavor addressing small island hubs in the Indian Ocean world through the perspective of “connectivity in motion” must interact with two primary cross-maritime temporal rhythms: the respective navigational “*longue durée*” period;² and the annual monsoon cycles of main winds, currents, rains, and quiet seasons with their overall effects across the Indian Ocean—entailing general natural movements yet with different consequences in various local arenas. For example, it is well known that in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries CE, the early Omani and Yemeni presence on the islands of Zanzibar (today part of Tanzania) largely had to rely on sailing with the monsoon winds’ rhythms along South Arabia’s and East Africa’s shores to ensure active interactions with Arabia.

The respective *longue durée* (Gingrich 2015a) of navigational skills and their corresponding spatial distribution and dissemination will

determine the ways in which these skills were enacted to master the annual cycles out of a given hub, or between several sets of hubs in question. Navigational skills include patterns of knowledge and expertise, techniques and crafting, including ship-building, the setting of sails, and techniques of maintenance and repair. In methodological terms, it seems useful to operate in this regard with notions of local (and small region) diversity in navigational skills and techniques, combined with wider regional—sometimes even intercontinental—hegemonies. Certain navigational skills were better suited than others for specific purposes and distances; some techniques for crossing long maritime distances were unique in their time. These more or less unique navigational skills were often unevenly distributed not only socially within a given region, but also culturally across diverse regions. They would enable those who mastered and controlled them to advance, creating uneven spheres of influence. Under such circumstances, a specific *longue durée* period was marked by corresponding sets of hegemonies (competing, perhaps, among each other), while other local and small regional forms continued to coexist and to interact, with each other as well as with hegemonic forms of navigational techniques (Pearson 2010).

Thirdly, the terminological and methodological specifications outlined so far *in toto* seem to strongly suggest the *introduction of (historical) network analysis* into this type of research and related debates.³ The overarching theme provides a focus on maritime connectivity, from where we have further specified the mutual conditioning between small island hubs with incoming and outgoing movements and directed processes that indeed “connect” one hub with several others, thereby establishing, maintaining, or reactivating relations, weak and strong. In turn, the necessary focus on a plurality of language-based sources suggests a consideration of wider influences of cultural diversity upon, and of wider interactions with, any given hub through precisely such directed movements. Finally, the unavoidable emphasis on “*longue durée*” periods of navigational skills that allow for mastery of specific maritime environments has pre-alerted us to the significance of more or less widely enacted practices, to unequally distributed forms, and to hegemonic sets of techniques. In sum, many of these aspects can be usefully addressed through network analysis in the forms preferred—out of necessity—by historians, philologists, and anthropologists alike, namely in primarily qualitative procedures that address connections and relations (“ties” or “edges”) between peripheral, intermediate, and central “nodes” and

“intersections.” This implies strong analytical advantages for assessing a small island hub’s relevance—in terms of its spatial, economic, and cognitive scales by being connected loosely or densely to prevailing maritime regional and intercontinental networks. In that sense, hubs should be understood here as specific variants of nodes interacting with adequately directed processes, here in the historical contexts of small Indian Ocean islands.

The methodological advantage of (qualitative, historical) network analysis lies in its potential to provide approaches to systematic overviews while entirely acknowledging the occasionally chaotic and always multifaceted local and regional conditions, especially so during phases of transition, when some elements are fading out or disappearing, while others are emerging or becoming stronger. In that sense, “thinking with networks” is useful for the present endeavor not only within a given period, but also during transformations from one “*longue durée*” period to the next (Hannerz 1992; Schnegg 2010; Schönhuth 2011; see also elaborations on Trivellato’s term “network approach” by Alpers in this volume).

Based on source materials that are relevant from an historical anthropological perspective, these three methodological priorities allow for analyses of “connectivity in motion” within *long durée* periods as much as across their historical transformations by means of networks that have the qualities of *settings* as well as of *arenas* of agency and its effects. At the end of this section, a brief example may illustrate what these methodological priorities reveal.

From the tenth and early eleventh centuries, South Arabian crews were already more or less regularly navigating along East African as well as South Asian shores, as testified in medieval Yemeni geographical and astronomical texts, as well as in commercial documents such as those known from the Cairo *Geniza* (see Goitein and Friedman 2008). These texts indicate that at this time, and for some centuries afterward, most of these ships were equipped and sent out by private merchants rather than by state authorities. The range of South Arabian navigation changed considerably after the introduction of the magnetic compass, which had been invented in China during the late eleventh century. Together with other important innovations—ranging from techniques of construction and navigation to the use of maps, naval handbooks, and stellar orientation with ensuing cognitive consequences for expanding and differentiating world views—sailing with magnetic compasses reduced the risks of navigating across the open sea in addition to sailing along the

shoreline routes. With these improvements in navigational knowledge and practices, the extent of West Asian and South Arabian maritime influence across the Indian Ocean expanded considerably after the tenth century, and especially from about 1250 CE onward. By then, Omani and Yemeni trading vessels were reported as regular visitors, part-time residents, and early emigrants in East Africa, Southeast Asia, and South Asia—particularly so in Malabar and in Sri Lanka’s southwestern ports and river deltas. In regional terms, this lasted until well into the period of the early Ottoman and Portuguese presence in South Arabia (sixteenth century). During the period after the early thirteenth century, islands that could not previously be reached were now sometimes becoming useful and even essential logistical stopovers for crews under Omani or Yemeni captains. From such a South Arabian perspective of agency along and across the western and northwestern Indian Ocean, after the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, new and wider webs of connectivity were thus established that had either not existed at all before that period, or only to a much more limited and sporadic extent (Alpers 2000; Forbes 1981; Margariti 2008; Pearson 2010; Whitewright 2012, 2015).

This example, primarily based on interpretations of Arabic sources, together with some evidence from Sri Lanka and China, highlights the potential of the methodological priorities proposed in this section. It also reminds us of the conceptual necessity of combining local, regional, and intercontinental perspectives for a given *longue durée* period—which here was one of the peak periods of “Arab” navigational hegemony⁴ in the western and northern parts of the Indian Ocean before Ottoman times.

For the analysis of what connectivity and smallness meant for specific islands and island groups in their respective contexts, these methodological considerations therefore lead to the conclusion that, within changing and transforming networks, smallness in the sense of size/scale and connectivity in the sense of hubs intertwined with directed movements are to be treated as dependent and relative factors or entities, rather than as independent, let alone absolute variables. Having established these methodological priorities and how they might guide us toward identifying relevant periods and relations, we may now turn to some of the concepts that inform our methodological procedures, and *vice versa*.

CONCEPTS: PROCESSES WITH PAUSES, ASYMMETRIES OF LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

By contrast to the methodological features discussed in the previous section, this section will address two conceptual features of network-based approaches suitable for our purposes. In the section's first half, a number of theoretical and conceptual points will be discussed that suggest a focus on fairly stable yet interrupted "directed processes" as sequences and circles of maritime movements. The second half will then proceed to address additional forms of asymmetry, but now in relation to intercontinental and long-distance as well as to local knowledge, the latter regarding a certain type of "node" among our small island hubs in historical Indian Ocean worlds.

As soon as we take the methodological and conceptual decision to frame connectivity as a flexible and changing notion of interactive networks and webs of networks, to an extent we prioritize this approach over possible alternatives. The concept of "rhizomes" might represent one such alternative. In fact, network-based approaches share a number of advantages with the possible alternative of "rhizomes," ranging from an openness to messy clusters, through their awareness of seemingly chaotic proliferation, on to their caution regarding predefined dichotomies and rigid cognitive hierarchies (Deleuze and Guattari 2004). Yet, in addition, network-based approaches also provide for sharper attention to systematic methodological inventories, including recurrent constellations of both rivalry and cooperation, and for conceptualizing powerful asymmetries wherever they become relevant. To my mind, the notion of interactive networks and webs of networks also is the more useful and appropriate analytical concept for our present purposes than other possible ways of thinking through "flows."

Elsewhere, I have already argued in more detail (Gingrich 2015b) that flows and networks may be understood and analytically employed as nonexclusive, simultaneously occurring component parts within one and the same constellation, relation, and process, similar to electronic communication "flows" in IT "networks," electricity flows in cable networks, and the like. Indeed, there are many contemporary and historical phenomena for which it is useful and, in fact, indispensable to work with both concepts in that they are dialectically intertwined and mutually conditioning. Yet it seems to me that, if approached through a historicizing lens of "connectivity in motion," then "small island hubs in the Indian

Ocean world” do not really invite researchers to pursue such a dialectical co-usage of both concepts—at least not for a while.

As much as they may be dialectically intertwined in many situations and constellations, this is not necessarily the case on all occasions: Networks and flows are not *a priori* identical. In the humanities and social sciences, “flow” usually refers to the more volatile, transitory, almost unstoppable movement of ideas, people, and/or things. By contrast, “network” indicates somewhat more enduring interactive relations that can be repeated and reactivated across time. Flows emphasize at least one if not several forms of liquidity and direction, while networks highlight more enduring main directions that always include by definition (i.e., by insisting on the relevance of “nodes”) stopover, pause, and redirection. From a conceptual angle already, identifying and assessing maritime networks not only acquire a higher priority for the present endeavor: In addition, the concept *per se* more adequately corresponds to the empirical evidence at hand, as well as to requirements for theorizing it. Moreover, historical anthropologists, philologists, archaeologists, and historians will all tend to agree that our source materials are somewhat more likely to deliver fairly reliable evidence for maritime networks. By contrast, it may sometimes be much more difficult to demonstrate how flows of ideas, people, or goods may be revealed through the available sources.

Besides, a few additional theoretical reasons also support such a conceptual priority, at least in the immediate sense, for qualitative, changing networks and webs of networks over rhizomes and flows. For instance, recent contributions on how to best reassess notions of “civilization” for current debates in the humanities and social sciences speak to this point. One may follow Jóhan Árnason and Chris Hann ([in press](#)) in this regard by understanding “civilizations” as referring to the more distant past as macrocultural clusters. Along important sections of the Indian Ocean rim, such a perspective on historical macrocultural clusters and constellations is indeed indispensable for describing and understanding the relative weight of directed movements across the Indian Ocean, as well as some of the key points of departure and destination. By virtue of their links with richly heterogeneous macrocultural conglomerates in their mainland vicinity, port cities in south China, South Asia, or South Arabia, for instance, served as such key destination and departure points for maritime networks across the Indian Ocean down the centuries. Even if the focus in this volume and chapter is on the connectivity

of small islands, it would be misleading to entirely lose sight of the fact that many “key nodes” of departure and destination in these maritime networks were mainland ports, some of the most relevant among them representing macrocultural gates and outlets. (Aden in the northwestern corners of the Indian Ocean represented one significant example.) The maritime networks in question thus had important and fairly stable “hooks” tying them often albeit not always to continents and larger islands. It may be possible to do something similar with the alternative concepts of rhizomes or flows, but this is certainly more complicated, given that these potential alternatives tend to attenuate enduring factors of structure (*longue durée*) and asymmetry, as well as of tension and conflict. Moreover, network-based approaches continue to allow for sufficient agency regarding that plethora of small island nodes that lie outside the direct influence of these macrocultural clusters and constellations. In turn, this also marks a healthy critical distance vis-à-vis some of the old diffusionist legacies (Barth et al. 2005)—for instance, in German-speaking archaeology, history, and anthropology—that tend to see all agency as emanating primarily from particular civilizations’ alleged genius and superiority.

Finally, to conclude the first half of this section, a decisive advantage in conceptualizing changing settings of historical and interactive networks, as well as connectivity as their integral element, is related to directed movements. As already briefly indicated, directed movements have arrivals and departures, periods of travel, minor or major failures, pauses, and reorientations as their repeatable component elements. This intersects with an important point made by Burkhard Schnepel in his Introduction and his chapter on Mauritius to this volume. Interactive processes that take place between several island hubs often have to be understood as partially disconnected sequences of processes that sort of “hop” from one hub to the next (rather than “flow” through them as if they were an uninterrupted current). So, following Schnepel in this regard, while also paraphrasing Marilyn Strathern’s (2004) more general argument, this type of *partially (dis)connected sequence* of movement from one island hub to—perhaps—the next hub is a final reason for prioritizing an understanding of networks as suggested for our purposes. The conceptual introduction of this partially disconnected element has the additional empirical advantage of systematically allowing for the consideration of unintended failure and collapse, as in cases of shipwreck or piracy.

The second part of this section will now further elaborate some dimensions of these notions of “processes with a pause” and of “partially disconnected” sequences of directed movement to address once more the topic of the asymmetric dissemination of navigational skills. At the end of this chapter’s first section, the topic of asymmetric navigational skills was addressed from the perspective of a particular macrocultural cluster—“South Arabian” maritime expansion across the western and northern Indian Ocean (and beyond) between the eleventh and the early sixteenth centuries CE. At the end of this second section, the advances so far achieved now allow us to address the same topic in a conceptual manner for agency in an interregional and intercontinental sense, as well as from specified local, microcultural perspectives.

At first, the conceptual focus is on interregional and intercontinental agency. It was pointed out at the end of the first section that, and how, long-distance trade between South Arabia, South Asia, and East Africa basically expanded continuously from the tenth/eleventh centuries CE onward, with a growing Middle Eastern and Muslim factor as part of these interactions, which also included Jews, Christians, and representatives of other Asian and African religions and language groups (Goitein and Friedman 2008, Margariti 2008, Vallet 2010). In a sense, this historical series of new peaks in commercial interactions across the Indian Ocean was the “medieval” successor to previous peaks in pre-Islamic times, that is, several centuries earlier, as indicated by the cave Hoq inscriptions on Socotra from the fifth century CE (Strauch 2012; Ray, this volume). Under the new conditions of the tenth and eleventh centuries and subsequent precolonial periods, the number of key agents involved in intercontinental and interregional interactions across the Indian Ocean certainly grew, yet in demographic terms they continued to be elite minorities. The Geniza documents demonstrate that many of the traveling merchants and traders involved were literate, by professional necessity in fact, often in more than just in one language and/or script (Margariti 2014). The same can safely be said about the crews’ captains, and possibly also about a few other leading members of their crews, including interpreters. (In fact, the cave Hoq inscriptions had already been signed by ships’ captains in most cases). These small groups of elite minorities constituted the pools out of which came the particular format of experts being addressed here. I propose to consider the anthropological concept of “*cosmopolitans*” for this class of personalities.

This concept has its earlier history in other fields of the social sciences. For the purposes of this chapter, however, the proposition by Ulf Hannerz (1990, and subsequent contributions by the same author) is most useful, provided its original discussion for late twentieth-century purposes is carefully translated into the precolonial historical circumstances under scrutiny here. This translational effort produces a number of characteristics. Cosmopolitans entertain, and engage in, a plurality of relationships with representatives of other cultural settings than their own by developing a personal ability to make their way into other cultures. “Being on the move” is therefore part of their professional lifestyle, which usually distinguishes them from refugees, exiles, diplomats, migrants, and other expatriates. Cosmopolitans on the move come equipped with special intercultural and cultural knowledge that need not be tied to particular other persons (although this might certainly help), but refers primarily to different structures of meaning. Cosmopolitans abroad therefore may more or less frequently achieve to transform themselves from suspicious intruders into acceptable guests, while the same cosmopolitans at home tend to remain somewhat detached from the locals by occupying a more or less privileged position (Hannerz 1990, 239, 241, 246–48). This chapter’s first conceptual suggestion therefore proposes to consider calling “cosmopolitans” the small class of key agents in long-distance maritime activities involving small islands, especially for precolonial periods in the Indian Ocean world.

We now leave cosmopolitans for a moment, only to return to them through their local counterparts later on in this section. Before that, however, it is necessary to specify what kind of locality will be assessed. For that purpose, a final and somewhat challenging methodological exercise is required in order to identify in terms of network analysis a specific subset of nodes with their respective links and corresponding microcultural perspectives.

From an actor-centered perspective, one may basically distinguish those connections and their related hubs in the sense of optional nodes that could be avoided more or less easily whenever it suited, from those other nodes that could not be avoided at all, or not so easily under given historical circumstances. In terms of (geometrical) graph theory and its application, I refer here to unavoidable, as opposed to optional, maritime connections or “ties” and their nodes. The subset in question includes only those connections for which there is no realistic basic alternative if you want to move, with available navigational skills, from A to C. The

graph theoretical situation thus to be considered refers to B as an “unavoidable” area of sea “passage” for any maritime path between A and C, or C and A. B, this (set of larger or) smaller island(s), therefore occupies a location that everybody coming from some distance has to stop at, or pass by. Such a “negative or maritime isthmus” or oceanic “eye of a needle” phenomenon is denoted in graph theory versions of network analysis by the terms “cut vertex” (for B) and “bridge” (for the respective links by A or C to B) (Harary and Hage 1984).

As in the case of Indian Ocean hubs on small islands in general, historical circumstances and prevailing navigational practices determine the extent to which a specific (cluster of) small islands moves into, or out of, the status of such a potential maritime “cut vertex,” or what I will hereafter refer to using the metaphorical expressions “eye of the needle” or “unavoidable passage.” Historically and socioculturally, such an unavoidable maritime eye of a needle has hardly any absolute dimensions or inherent qualities. Yet for a given *longue durée* period, it may be useful to distinguish between “strong” and “weak” forms, depending on whether navigation through these unavoidable passages encountered high or low risks of failure. In turn, this would then imply a greater or lesser need for those navigating in from outside to rely on the services and expertise of a trustworthy pilot (with ensuing stops to hire such a person). As a result, the *pilot’s position and range of agency* bring in *local and regional knowledge* as a necessary component of all interregional and intercontinental Indian Ocean navigational history. The role of pilots has certainly changed in modern times, partly because of air transportation, partly because of the use of modern technologies in maritime traffic. While the numbers of ship’s pilots today has dwindled—without them, however, disappearing altogether—the importance of the historical pilot cannot be emphasized enough. Wherever difficult waters had to be negotiated, pilots were indispensable: Thus, in the case of the maritime eye of a needle, pilots were simply the more visible and urgently needed specialist within the wider spectrum of regional and local experts in historical Indian Ocean worlds.

Depending on the respective coastal or island region between or near East Africa, West Asia, Southeast Asia, or South Asia, these pilots would be male or sometimes also female experts with an at least part-time if not full-time specialization based on accumulated experience and expert knowledge of maritime passages and obstacles in their region across the seasons.⁵ Through this specialization, they would strive to build up and

maintain a certain reputation and fame that would make them known within and beyond their immediate home communities. Their more or less frequent interactions with “cosmopolitans,” that is, with outside crews (and their middlemen), might enhance a certain familiarity with additional languages and alien customs. Their specialized environmental and maritime knowledge was thus also likely to combine with some expertise as “cultural brokers” (Lindquist 2015). Part, if not the majority, of their overall living was made through their piloting activities. In that sense, they were also an intersection in economic terms between some of the relative wealth brought in by external crews and the local communities living along these unavoidable areas of passage. In short, pilots were bound to be well connected with their own communities, as well as those middlemen who brought in cosmopolitans as new or familiar outside crews and potential clients. Moreover, this expertise would also be understood as an important asset for local communities beyond one generation: Some type of relationship between expert teacher and junior novice is inherent in these forms of local and regional specialization. In many or most cases, a pilot would thus work with at least one junior assistant or apprentice. In their local and wider regional communities, these senior and junior pilots were figures of considerable reputation and professional renown. They earned their more or less regular, or at least some extra income from piloting expertise employed at irregular intervals and during their absences of unpredictable duration. The frequency, intensity, and duration of their recruitment as pilots would vary depending not only on their actual skills and corresponding reputations, but also on the annual seasons, and, most importantly, on their respective passage area’s relevance within the wider networks of maritime connections in their time.

In any given *longue durée* period, there would be a large number of passage areas whose wider significance would be limited and would thus be confined to only small-scale relevance. These would be complemented by a smaller number of passage areas of potentially large-scale relevance, including for any long-distance navigation coming through their waters. This does not imply any deterministic assumptions, of course. Environmental and navigational factors played an important role in the *possibility* that those in command of a certain site would aspire to attain an “eye of a needle” position. Yet whether such aspirations were successful or not—and if so, for how long—depended on a variety of other (commercial, political, or military) factors. To summarize, local and

regional maritime knowledge and expertise were in general indispensable for the safe employment of navigational skills, especially for unavoidable passages of the eye of a needle type. Moreover, where these passages had large-scale relevance—either because they were unavoidable for anyone passing and/or stopping over, or because their waters or straits were extremely dangerous, or both—specialized environmental and maritime knowledge would result in asymmetrical advantage, and there would be opportunities for providing repair facilities, provisions, and logistics. However, while such strategic positioning would undoubtedly bring commercial benefits, there would also be potential consequences in terms of health and safety, plus violent threats and attacks.

For those who inhabited small islands in such an eye of a needle position of large-scale relevance, providing or not providing pilots to outsiders always represented one among several options and was thus also a valuable bargaining chip in pursuit of other goals—symbolic, political, material, or a combination of all of these. Exercising local or regional political control over pilots' expertise could therefore become a strategic element in local and regional constellations of power. As long as local residents could protect their locations, their asymmetric command over local and regional maritime knowledge put them at a crucial navigational advantage. While outsiders were unable to pass through by themselves without a very high risk of failure, locals, by contrast, were able to leave and return much more easily in their local boats. Asymmetric local maritime knowledge (and pilots' related specialized expertise) in an eye of the needle island position thus represented a political and strategic resource in its own right.

The *"eye of a needle" position*, and, where applicable, corresponding *pilots' expertise* (as both local maritime experts and cultural brokers) within certain small island hubs in the Indian Ocean world thus form the next cluster of methodological and conceptual avenues to be proposed from this network-analytical exercise in historical anthropology. Built upon underlying insights into disconnected yet directed processes, as well as into the simultaneous yet asymmetrical relevance of hegemonic, regional, and local (pilots') navigational skills, two main versions of small-scale and large-scale "unavoidable passages" (here used as synonymous with the "eye of a needle" image) were identified, namely risky straits and unique stopovers. If we include among these considerations those mainland and larger island ports that were previously addressed as the macrocultural "hooks" of maritime networks, then we may add

the ocean mouths of certain rivers as an additional (third) form of the “eye of a needle.” For instance, Arab merchant ships approached some of Sri Lanka’s destinations near its southwestern coast in medieval times through river mouths that could be difficult to navigate. Already in the first century CE, the *Periplus* had referred to the Narmada River approach to Bharuch in today’s Gujarat.

To close this second section by means of another historical example, several fields of possible application for this conceptual proposal come to mind. One set of examples comprises the history of the straits of Melaka (Malacca) around 1000 CE. By that time, the region (which today includes Kuala Lumpur and the island state of Singapore)

had been the keystone of a long-distance maritime system for almost a millennium. The earliest major trading kingdom had been located in the lower Mekong valley, but Funan had close relations with the isthmian region of the Malay Peninsula. By the beginning of the historic period in Southeast Asia, several trading ports had formed along the shores of the Straits, taking advantage of the waterway’s strategic location between the three seas and the local products that formed part of international luxury trade. The system was both flexible and stable. Many harbours in the region exhibited several features of the port-of-trade model, but also possessed various idiosyncrasies. ... Archaeological data suggest but cannot prove that enclaves of merchants and craftsmen from various parts of the Indian Ocean existed in Southeast Asia before AD 1000. No historical sources refer to permanent settlements of foreigners during the first millennium. Residents in these enclaves may have come and gone frequently rather than settling in them permanently. This situation may have changed in the eleventh century. (Miksic 2013, 92)

This was the final period of Srivijayan hegemony, centered on Sumatra, over the Straits. “As the eleventh century dawned ... wealthy and powerful Srivijaya, the overlord of the Straits of Melaka, was about to fall” (Miksic 2013, 93). During the subsequent three centuries, what is today Singapore never became a major political or commercial center, but rather was a minor small island hub nonetheless interesting enough to be fought over by local and regional powers. It was thus merely one among several harbors in this unavoidable passage, but also one among only a few in the region located on a “small island.”

This example, taken from a recent study by one of the leading historians and archaeologists of the region, therefore by and large corroborates

and illustrates the concept of “unavoidable passages” in their large-scale dimension for a small island hub of the risky straits variety. The comparative reasoning informing our concept would also suggest that the fluctuating presence of foreigners around 1000 CE, as addressed in the quote above, was accompanied by a particularly strong presence of local pilots in view of the region’s long-lasting and well-established role in maritime long-distance trade. Moreover, the Straits region in general, but also, to an extent, the island today known as Singapore in particular, already represented among these constellations a strategic resource that attracted local and regional powers. That resource, as I have already emphasized, included local (pilots’) maritime knowledge as one among several elements to bargain with, while military threat was only used as a last resort. This, in turn, is the logic behind Miksic’s debatable but interesting reference to Karl Polanyi’s “port-of-trade” model (Polanyi 1963) for corresponding contexts. In Polanyi’s perspective, a port of trade typically represents a gateway and outlet for long-distance trade for a state center that usually has its main location elsewhere at some distance, but maintains some military and financial as well as administrative control at this main intersection with the outside world. By consequence, a port of trade easily becomes a meeting place and a more or less enduring residence location for representatives of all the parties involved. Although a Polanyi-inspired model along these lines requires corresponding evidence on the ground, it may indeed be a useful tool for theorizing the roles of major hubs on those small Indian Ocean islands where state control was effective enough.⁶ In strategic situations of “unavoidable passage,” regional polities may then indeed have tended to develop an interest in these small island hubs and their connectivity to transform them into their ports of trade. At its most basic, such a port of trade would include nonmarket as well as market-driven elements of exchange (with goods and services), some administered trade, and inhabitants who were representatives of a dominant political center located some distance away, but also many other residents—some of them in situ for shorter periods, others of a more permanent type—affiliated to additional parties with interests in the region and in passages through it, including those with local and regional backgrounds.

In sum, many small island hubs in the Indian Ocean world included local pilots among the resident population, particularly in constellations of unavoidable passages. Among the unavoidable passages of major and large-scale significance, regional powers’ strategic and political interests

might transform some of these hubs into ports of trade with corresponding professional, linguistic, religious, and general sociocultural diversity, including various forms of cultural brokers and brokerage. The threat of violence was always present in these ports of trade in unavoidable passages, working both ways: It could become an option for the local forces in power, and at times, it also represented a possible alternative for outsiders. Still, it mostly remained merely a last resort as long as profiting from trade was possible by peaceful means. For a minority of cases, however, imposing (the threat of) force or violence may well have represented a strategic alternative in its own right (see, e.g., Margariti 2008 and 2010). After all, “cut vertex” does imply precisely that.

STRUCTURAL CONSTELLATIONS IN HISTORICAL AND SPATIAL CONTEXT

This final section will focus on the “smallness” of Indian Ocean island hubs by elaborating on the arguments proposed in the preceding sections, but now applying them to the more specific historical scales and general constellations of small islands. This chapter’s introduction already suggested that any (historical) notion of the smallness of islands also requires a comparative assessment of “smallness of what, and in relation to what.” We subsequently added that the smallness of islands should be contextualized within settings of changing wider networks and webs of networks under the condition of respective *longue durée* periods. (In colonial times, for instance, most of the Indian Ocean’s small island hubs and their respective networks had their ultimate power centers in one or the other West European capital.) As already indicated above, insular smallness has a more stable dimension of territorial extent, as well as a more volatile dimension of demographic size; both dimensions are usually interrelated (but not necessarily so under all circumstances). For the argument that follows here, territorial smallness is taken as the first, demographic smallness as the second criterion of distinction. It is evident that these criteria are primarily based on outsiders’ perspectives, above all those of a research investigation, while relying on locals’ perspectives merely occasionally as an additional resource whenever sources allow for this as well.

In addition to their primary “littoral” features, small islands of course share to a somewhat more explicit extent all those features that have

been defined for other islands by geographers, environmental historians, and ecological anthropologists. These features include a limited relevance for historically changing “circumscription,” its demographic consequences for “carrying capacities,” and their undeniable but equally limited weight (Erikson 1993); and varying environmental diversity among deep waters, coastal waters, shores, and inland, or the enhanced need for some specialization among islanders in order to inhabit their environments in their wider contexts under given historical conditions.

On the basis of these general premises, small islands—similar in that regard to other spatial entities (Hannerz and Gingrich 2017)—may then be qualified as “constellations” according to their spatial positioning along and within the maritime waters under scrutiny. The qualifier of spatial positioning certainly is, once again, based on historical *longue durée* contexts, but it does have absolute dimensions to it that may be expressed in terms of distance and proximity in various directions. Yet trying to cross a thousand nautical miles of open Indian Ocean waters in the fourteenth century to reach a group of small islands still meant something different from crossing the same thousand miles during the same annual season but in the late nineteenth century because of changes in prevailing navigational skills. *Small island constellations* with their respective spatial positionings thus are suggested here as the next—third and final—conceptual step in this network-based analysis by means of historical anthropology. This perspective on settings or maritime networks and webs of networks privileges a consideration of less volatile and more enduring, sometimes *longue durée*-type constellations, of relative smallness. It will be suggested that we distinguish at least five such conceptual (or prototypical) constellations for the relational positionings of small Indian Ocean islands within wider networks during a given *longue durée* period. This is understood as being of primary relevance for periods before the mid-twentieth century, when air transportation began on a more massive scale.

The ensuing five or more conceptual constellations, however, are in no way intended to be seen as anything like Weberian ideal types, but rather as fairly loose forms of relational models, with all kinds of intermediate variants and combinations among them. These constellations build on medieval Arabic classifications—such as, oceanic, coastal, and archipelagic—while further elaborating and contextualizing such older legacies. Here, they are being put forward as part of a methodological legacy of “structural relativity” that dates back to Evans-Pritchard (1940) and in

fact to Marcel Mauss. This implies that, from the outset, the potentials of structural properties as well as structural transformations are included within this differentiation into five or more loose and intersecting forms of small islands with hubs or potential hubs. Consequently, a given small island, or a group of small islands, under certain conditions of *longue durée* transformations, may well shift its own structural position from one dominant constellation to another, or from a combination of various constellations in which one was dominant into another. These specifications inform the proposed distinction among the Indian Ocean's small islands and their hubs into at least five basic constellations:

- (1) "zero" forms
- (2) "isolated" small islands or island groups
- (3) "binary" constellations
- (4) "clusters"
- (5) "buffer" constellations of small islands.

As long as we confine ourselves within the narrow limits of human presence, the term "zero" forms (1) designates uninhabited small islands. From such a narrow anthropocentric perspective, all small islands in the Indian Ocean world have passed through their "zero" condition for longer or shorter periods. Some of them left their "zero" condition in prehistory, others during early history. Yet a few among the latter were transformed into one of the four (at least) other constellations only in fairly recent historical periods. As far as we know from early archaeological or historical records, the Seychelle Islands, the Chagos Archipelago, the Cocos and Christmas Islands, and the Mascarene Islands would all be included in this residual category of a "late zero" form before African, European, and Asian settlers began to inhabit them, intentionally or against their own will, during early modernity. A few early Arab, Malay, or South Asian seafarers seem to have approached some of these islands (Chagos and perhaps the Seychelles) even before that, but the evidence has often proved unreliable in this regard. Before permanent settlement was initiated, these "late zero" forms of small islands were either entirely unknown, or regarded as too distant for contemporary navigational skills, and/or as not yet offering sufficient advantages for permanent settlement. For subsequent periods, when the threshold of permanent human presence had been crossed, these "late zero" islands may then be

assessed and analyzed using one or more of the other four basic constellations suggested.

“Isolated” constellations (2), as the term suggests, include those small islands or groups of small islands positioned at what would qualify as large maritime distances under most historical conditions of navigational skills. For instance, the scanty evidence available for the islands of Socotra from pre-Islamic times during the late second and early first millennium BCE could be interpreted along the lines that, under the navigational skills current at the time, Socotra was still quite difficult to reach, not only out of Egypt and other parts of East Africa, but also from Persian-controlled shores, and to an extent also from the South Arabian mainland. This inaccessibility was partly caused by the absence of any deep water harbor along Socotra’s shores. Subsequent epigraphic evidence from the Hoq cave for the period between the first century BCE and the fifth century CE indicates Indian (Brahmi) and, *inter alia*, South Arabian and Ethiopian connections (Strauch 2012). Archaeological evidence for littoral settlements may indicate the earlier presence of Ancient South Arabian language speakers, who were gradually (re-) connecting with the South Arabian mainland. Later indications regarding Socotra’s role in exporting frankincense and the (somewhat contested) early presence of Christian beliefs suggest that, even before the Islamic era, Socotra had already emerged quite clearly from any enduring isolation, moving on to more frequent shifts between the “binary” and “buffer” constellations outlined later in this section. Yet even after the rise of Islam, which in turn promoted linguistic Arabization in many parts of mainland South Arabia, Socotra islanders preserved their non-Arabic Semitic language, which was and continues to be spoken by related minorities elsewhere in Yemen and Oman (Robin 1991). In turn, this would suggest that Socotra’s subsequent binary-or-buffer position regarding the South Arabian coast to the north of it, and occasional interactions with the Horn of Africa to its west, as well as with Persia to the northeast, were based on some form of relative local autonomy. This included economic specialization and ensuing trading encounters with dominant forces in the outside world, which could be carried out both through a few specialized middlemen assisted by local pilots and by the islanders themselves.

While Socotra lies fairly close to the mainland but is difficult to reach in the absence of any natural harbor for deep boats, other “isolated” constellations were indeed off the main routes of navigation in all

longue durée periods before the nineteenth century, such as the Cocos and Christmas Islands even after first European outposts were established there. The Mascarene Islands, on the other hand, acquired the qualities of an “unavoidable passage” (i.e., of the cut vertex form in graph theory) once they became a decisive navigational option for Portuguese and French ships at first, but primarily for Dutch and British sailors taking the eastern route from the Cape to Indonesia and Australia. These three brief examples seem to indicate that, contrary to the case of some Pacific island constellations, small islands in the Indian Ocean, though sometimes isolated for short historical moments, were rarely isolated for any long historical periods. Even if we counted up these rare examples, their number would be much smaller in the Indian Ocean than the equivalent in, say, Polynesia.

“Binary” constellations (3) are often called offshore islands by geographers and those in related fields. Along the Swahili coast, the most notable (small) examples of this sort of constellation are the Lamu Archipelago (in today’s Kenya), the Mafia Islands (Tanzania), and the Kerimba Islands (Mozambique). Whether they are single insular entities or small groups, chains, or larger archipelagos of small islands, their qualities of smallness are relative to one major shoreline nearby. The inherent dualism between small offshore islands and one major shoreline often implies the potential for specialization and protection, as well as for isolation and more difficult access to wider developments in the region for these small islands’ inhabitants. Whether marking deficiencies and elements of absence, or, conversely, prevailing features of unilateral presence and influence, the binary constellation thus indicates a primary relationship among a small island’s external interactions.

Along the northwestern shores of the Indian Ocean, the small island of Kish/Qays in the Persian/Arabian Gulf close to the Hormuz Straits lies just a few miles off the Iranian mainland. It provides an example of a trajectory that is quite different from that of Socotra, especially between the late eleventh and early thirteenth centuries. During those decades, “Kish became the major entrepot in the Gulf, and in its bid for control over maritime space appears to have acted as a direct competitor of Aden” (Margariti 2008, 556), the most important harbor in the northwestern parts of the Indian Ocean for centuries. Although sometimes criticized by outsiders in its time as a refuge for “pirates,” Qays/Kish was not a hideaway for stateless outlaws. In fact, this was a small island state ruled by a Sultan who at times even managed to expand his

influence far beyond the island's immediate vicinity, to an extent that occasionally took on "predatory" features. This was achieved by successfully challenging the declining influence of the mainland port of Siraf, and locally by placing a special premium on maritime expertise. In his well-known travelogues, the medieval author Ibn al-Mujawir underlines the island's *entrepôt* status, its market, and the roles of ship-building and shipping technology as special assets for the position of Qays and its rulers (Margariti 2008, 557 and 558). After the thirteenth century, Kish became part of a power based elsewhere. "Conversely, Hormuz becomes an expansive power, based on an island but controlling much more in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in this region" (Margariti, personal communication, May13, 2016). Again, these sequences remind us that the "eye of a needle" and the "unavoidable passage" are conceptual tools without any deterministic implications: They merely indicate a possible strategic option with ample room for competition, as well as for rise and fall.

Today Kish is a well-known Iranian free-trade zone and tourist destination. Yet on several occasions in pre-Islamic times, it was already mentioned as a strategically relevant island location. Quite evidently, the island's position in a "binary" constellation (near the Iranian coastline), combined with its status as an "unavoidable passage" (near the Hormuz Strait), repeatedly allowed for fairly powerful and influential phases in both its local and its wider regional history.

"Cluster" constellations (4) are larger groups and entire archipelago settings of small islands, with some portion of them being inhabited by humans. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands form one set of examples of fairly long periods of locally and regionally prevailing cluster constellations that seem worth closer examination along such lines in future research. Yet furthermore, some of the small island groups mentioned in this section as examples primarily of other constellations also display "cluster" features that may have become more significant during certain phases of their history: Chagos, the Mascarene Islands, and the Seychelles might be assessed in that manner during some phases of their modern history, as might the Maldives during certain periods in their Islamic precolonial record, as well as during early colonial times in South Asia (i.e., between the Portuguese defeat in the Maldives by 1573 and the rise of British influence during the late nineteenth century).

Whether it is a dominant or a secondary structural feature, a cluster situation basically requires an elementary level of internal, domestic

interactions among the regional sets of neighboring or adjacent small islands or island groups. Small-scale interactions *between* local small island groups may then prevail, in a “zigzag” and “crisscross” pattern that would involve gift exchange, dispute and violence, legal settlements, trade, services, marriage relations, elements of ceremonial life, and so forth. To phrase it in rather different terms, what Malinowski (notwithstanding the scholarly bias in his perspectives) once analyzed as various ethnographic dimensions of Trobriand (Kiriwina) islanders’ lives in a remote Melanesian small island group had profoundly different yet in a general sense equivalent counterparts in certain precolonial and early colonial groups of Indian Ocean small islands (Radcliffe-Brown 1922; Singh 2006; Vaidik 2010). The point to be emphasized here is that the inhabitants of these cluster groups of small islands entertained and developed a regional and maritime socioeconomic and cultural diversity among themselves, as well as distinctively regional ways of interactive small island life, and moreover, they had an awareness of being part of these larger regional clusters. For sure, these clusters were never entirely isolated from relations with, and influences from, the outside world; but sometimes these external influences were stronger to the point of being dominant, while during other phases, they were less relevant or even minimal. Notwithstanding the enduring presence of external influences, then, there were at times regional contexts of varying duration when these domestic “cluster” constellations prevailed, while external relations were subordinate.

“Buffer” constellations (5) are those groups or single small islands that are situated within navigational reach of more than just one mainland or large island area. This opens up specific possibilities of tension, contest, or rivalry, but for the small islands, it also makes possible options and choices within this constellation. Small islands’ inhabitants in a buffer constellation will thus be exposed to, but at times may also exploit interactions with, those two or more major forces in their nearby or distant vicinities across the sea. “The Comoros would seem to be a good example here, located as they are between continental Africa and Madagascar” (Alpers, personal communication, April 04, 2016).

For the precolonial period, one may argue that the Maldives formed a “buffer” constellation between southern India, Sri Lanka, and Arabia that at certain times was characteristic—this was particularly the case between the late period of the Buddhist presence on the archipelago and the early period of Islamic dominance, which began in 1153 CE. The

islanders' local language, Divehi, is related to Sri Lanka's majority language, Sinhala, and ample archaeological and textual evidence testifies to a Buddhist era on the Maldives (Forbes and Reynolds 2012) before the mid-twelfth century. The exact circumstances of Islamization on the Maldives still require detailed clarification, but a distinct and common element in all existing lines of interpretation seems to be that the early dissemination of Islam on the islands was related to the presence of a Muslim preacher or scholar from the Arab world, or several of them in sequence. About two hundred years later, when the famous Arab scholar Ibn Battuta served for more than half a year as a high-ranking judge for the Sultan of Male' (1343/4 and 46 CE), a majority of the archipelago's inhabitants were already following Islam to an extent. These two centuries between the mid-twelfth and the mid-fourteenth century thus are identical with the first period of Islamic hegemony on the Maldives, which was related to a strong Arab maritime presence in the region (Forbes 1981). The navigational background to that presence was outlined at the end of this chapter's first section.

Before that first period of Islamic hegemony, however, one may safely propose that, for a *longer or shorter intermediate period*, Buddhism on the Maldives was still dominant while Muslim influences were on the rise. It is that intermediate period for which the concept of a "buffer constellation" might be useful in understanding the Maldives' position. It must have been situated between an older local dominance by Buddhist representatives, with their main spiritual and textual centers to the northeast (i.e., primarily in Sri Lanka), and the more recent, emerging presence of Arab-speaking and Muslim representatives coming sometimes from the northwest (i.e., primarily from South Arabia and the Gulf region), but also calling fairly regularly at Male' during return voyages from Southeast Asia. Whether that intermediate period before the mid-twelfth century lasted several centuries or merely several decades cannot yet be determined. It seems likely, however, that it may have begun in the course of the late ninth or early tenth century CE, together with the first regular commercial maritime expeditions from Arabia to South Asia and beyond. As long as it may have lasted, that intermediate period offered the Maldives and their rulers certain "buffer" options to be tried out between both regional centers of gravity and influence in their maritime vicinity. These buffer options were further enhanced by the archipelago's maritime and environmental qualities as coral island reefs along a major navigational route between, precisely, Arabia and Sri Lanka or

southern India. In navigating from Sri Lanka or Southeast Asia to South Arabia, given prevailing currents and monsoon winds, passing by the Maldives was almost unavoidable. If long-distance trade with Sri Lanka and India had become increasingly interesting for Arab merchants of different faiths by the tenth century, then this provided an additional stimulus (beyond the dissemination of the faith) to gain some presence on that almost unavoidable archipelago.

The Maldives' coral island reef situation made local pilots' expertise indispensable for any ships navigating in from the outside, while by the same token any major or minor small island harbor within the lagoons was fairly well protected against external (medieval) interests. In turn, this implies that a major harbor under these historical conditions could well have been an "atypical port of trade" in the sense that it could have been identical with the center of regional power. Because of difficult and dangerous maritime access by inexperienced outsiders, that regional archipelago's center of power would not have required any additional protection by distance on land, and, more importantly, there is no "distance on land" available anywhere on the Maldives (by contrast to the Straits of Malacca's hinterland). In short, it makes perfect sense that the regional center of political power was already situated in today's Male' during the "intermediate buffer" period, as much as it was later on during the subsequent historical period of Islam's hegemony on the archipelago leading up to Ibn Battuta's Maldivian sojourn.

Male' during the "intermediate buffer" period before the mid-twelfth century can thus be envisaged as an atypical port of trade (although this particular concept is not indispensable for the present hypothesis). At any rate, Male' must have been a small island Indian Ocean harbor in which the emerging minority presence of Islam, inspired from Arabia, gradually became conspicuous. Eventually, it may have reached the point where local converts, as well as the children of Arab and other Muslim (often short time) residents, perhaps even constituted a neighborhood or port enclave of their own. If local pilots had a strategic professional interest in the maintenance and development of long-distance trade, then their general position as cultural brokers must have persuaded some of them (together with local merchants and other residents) to transform that interest into embracing the new religion at an early stage.

CONCLUSION

The present chapter set out to inquire into the methodological and conceptual contributions that historical anthropology might make to Indian Ocean studies. In a nutshell, the results delivered by this inquiry include, first, three main methodological aspects that have been outlined. By means of a qualitative approach in historical network analysis, the relevance of *partially disconnected maritime movements and processes* was pointed out. This led to a focus on distinguishing, for given historical circumstances, between navigational connections that could be avoided more or less easily if necessary, and almost *unavoidable maritime passages of the “eye of a needle”* (or “cut vertex”) type. The latter then could be further differentiated into three main versions: *Risky straits* and *unique stopovers* could include small islands as part of the picture, whereas some of the maritime networks’ mainland destinations and outlets could only be reached from the sea by passing through the *ocean mouths of certain rivers*.

In addition to this methodological outcome, secondly, the present analysis also suggested three groups of theoretical concepts, to be considered primarily (though not exclusively) for precolonial times. The term *cosmopolitans* integrates key historical agents in long-distance maritime activities, such as captains and other leading members of ships’ crew, interpreters, as well as long-distance traders and merchants with corresponding trans- and intercultural expertise and interests. The term *local cultural brokers* includes experienced pilots and their middlemen and apprentices, whose specializations combine their frequent intercultural experiences with maritime visitors from distant regions, and the local and regional knowledge they can provide for them. The term *small island constellations*, finally, delineates the structural positionings of small islands in historical and regional contexts. This was further differentiated into five loose and intersecting forms, namely zero, isolated, binary, cluster, and buffer constellations. It was shown that, for a given small island (group), several of these forms could combine under given historical contexts, while under changing historical circumstances, the prevalence of one form could fade out while another form could begin to dominate.

NOTES

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2. This chapter uses the term *longue durée* primarily in this specific sense of dominant navigational skills, that is, without wider implications for political history.
3. Giving such a priority for qualitative and historical network analysis does not include any basic rejection of Actor Network Theory (ANT). It merely takes into account the much more limited record of ANT in historical analyses, as well as appreciating somewhat wider fields of intersections between historical network analysis and environmental studies.
4. For the purposes of this chapter, "Arab" navigational hegemony is used as a shorthand reference to the fact that many of the relevant sources are available in Arabic and that a substantial number of the actors involved were seemingly fluent in Arabic as their first or second language. Having said that, it has to be emphasized that "Arab" navigational hegemony also included a substantial element of Christians and Jews, as well as Iran-based actors among those interacting out of the Middle East, while on the other hand, the South Asian dimensions in their maritime interactions contributed many actors from various parts of India and Sri Lanka (Chakravarti 2000).
5. Margariti (2008, 557 and 558) discusses several indications in medieval Arabic sources for such experts in local maritime knowledge, primarily for Kish (see also this chapter's third section and its discussion of "binary" constellations). Many among the classical works of early social anthropology were carried out on small islands in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, such as Malinowski's Trobriand studies or Radcliffe-Brown's work on the

Andaman Islands, including references to maritime piloting for the early decades of the twentieth century (Margariti 2008).

6. In several northern and western parts of the Indian Ocean, fairly independent port city polities seem to have prevailed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, such as Kish, Dahlak and to an extent Male', where power was concentrated, contrary to the Polanyi "port-of-trade" model (see Sect. 3 of this chapter). In some of these cases (Kish is mentioned as a case in point by Margariti; personal communication May 13, 2016), previously independent port cities then became integrated into larger entities by the early to mid-thirteenth century, thereby moving from an "atypical" to a somewhat more "standard" port of trade situation.

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Displaced Passengers: States, Movements, and Disappearances in the Indian Ocean

Godfrey Baldacchino

INTRODUCTION

The four island states of the Indian Ocean have been in the news for their campaigns against the impacts of global warming and sea level rise. Mauritius has taken major strides in its renewable energy sector (Insights Success 2017). The Comoros is one of the three least developed countries among the six African Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and climate change is being mainstreamed into its strategy, policy, and planning decisions (UN-ECA 2014, MWH-Stantec 2016). The underwater cabinet meeting held in the Maldives in October 2009 was a sensational media coup (BBC News 2009). The Maldives, along with the Seychelles, are significant and vocal players within the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), a coalition of forty three small island and coastal states (The Commonwealth 2014) which negotiated very hard for limits to carbon dioxide emissions at the Climate Change Conference (COP) 15 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Copenhagen in December 2009 (Vidal 2009).

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The concern with the complete submergence and disappearance of small island states from the surface of the ocean is a gripping anxiety, but other types of disappearances are going on in the Indian Ocean that are not related to climate change, as shown in this paper. The protagonists here are not so much the four small archipelagic states but the subnational island jurisdictions (SNIJs) of the Indian Ocean region: territories that maintain some local capacity for autonomy and self-governance, which, however, they must exercise in relation to a larger, more powerful, supervisory authority—typically, a sovereign state.

This chapter deploys the concept of disappearance on islands in relation to “passengers,” a term describing a motley group of people transitioning *on* islands but also *from* and *to* islands. The movements and stays of such people, as well as the “hubbing” function performed by islands with respect to them, take us back to the long, historical disposition of offshore island spaces as supremely suitable locations for quarantine stations, a practice dating back to at least 1423, when Venice—itself an archipelago—set up a *lazaretto* on the nearby islet of Santa Maria di Nazareth (Sehdev 2002; Valsecchi 2007). The offshoring nature of remote islands, plus the self-evident geophysicality of their bounded space, renders islanders “passengers” who are suspected of carrying pathogens virtual prisoners for the duration of their island stay, typically forty days (hence the word “quarantine”). Thus, Changuu Island, to the southwest of Zanzibar Town, served as a quarantine station for suspected cases of yellow fever, while Flat Island (Île Plate), in Mauritius, was another quarantine station in use in the nineteenth century. It does not take much to extend this securitizing function—protecting others from the dangers parked on island spaces—to a penal function. Island prisons in the Indian Ocean have included Mauritius, where explorer Matthew Flinders and his crew were held (1803–1810) while Britain was at war with France (Anderson 2008), as was Ratsitanana, nephew of King Radama I of Madagascar, who was exiled there in 1821 (Larson 2008). Sultan Khalid bin Barghash of Zanzibar was briefly exiled to the Seychelles in 1921–1922 (Frankl 2006), and Cypriot Archbishop Makarios III was a high profile prisoner-in-exile, also in the Seychelles, in 1956–1957 (Mayes 1981). More recently, this archipelago has become the location of a UN-funded prison for captured Somali pirates (Denselow 2013). Suggestions have also been made to move some of the remaining detainees from Guantánamo Bay—most of whom are Yemeni nationals—to Socotra, a SNIJ of Yemen (The Economist 2014).

SNIJs offer particular assumptions about the experience of place. They equip us to maintain perspectives on islands as currently ongoing

and commonly contested processes of creation and becoming, with largely indeterminate futures. This indeterminacy is captured in the actual, intended, facilitated, or thwarted movements of passengers. These ideas will be fleshed out in relation to the two SNIJs of Réunion and the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), both in the Indian Ocean, connected via the unlikely story of a disappeared airplane.

THE DISAPPEARANCE

Oceanic Airlines Flight 815 was a scheduled flight from Sydney, Australia, to Los Angeles, USA, on a Boeing 777-200ER. On September 22, 2004 at 4:16 p.m., the airliner, carrying 324 passengers and crew, deviated from its original course and disappeared over the Pacific Ocean. This is the central moment in the US blockbuster TV drama series *Lost* and the chronological beginning of the main characters' exploits on "the Island," where many of the series episodes then unfold.

This fictional plot has an eerie similarity to Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, a scheduled flight from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to Beijing, China, on a Boeing 777-200. On March 8, 2014, the airliner, carrying 239 passengers and crew, cut off all contact with the ground and took a sharp westerly turn, flying, investigators believe, for about seven hours until it apparently ended up in the waters of the Indian Ocean.

Military exercises, terrorist attacks, pilot suicide, hijackings, and technical faults such as oxygen depletion have been blamed for the plane's disappearance, along with, inevitably, alien abductions. But some observers have hinted that the plane may have landed, and safely too. To which island location might these passengers have been taken and landed, if at all? It could very well prove to be the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), the United Kingdom's most recently redesignated colony, cobbled together from the Chagos Archipelago (separated from Mauritius) along with the islands of Aldabra, Farquhar, and Desroches (separated from the Seychelles), and formally established as a UK Overseas Territory (UKOT) in November 1965. However, with effect from June 1976, Aldabra, Farquhar, and Desroches were returned to the Seychelles, the latter having attained independence. No such reversion was made for the Chagos, on the grounds that the island group was required for defence purposes.

The BIOT is now also the site of one of the world's most heavily equipped offshore military bases, operated on a long-term lease by the United States. This is Diego Garcia, to which the MH370 passengers may have been whisked away, for some as yet unknown reason (Steiber

2014). This idea was given some credence when it was discovered that the island's landing strip was programmed into the home flight simulator of MH370's pilot, Captain Zaharie Shah (News.com.au 2014). Such was the strength of belief in this theory that the US government was forced to issue an official denial (Dearden and Whitnall 2014). The US military base, clouded in secrecy, has even been suggested as having shot down the ill-fated Air Malaysia plane (Martinez 2014). Meanwhile, it is Réunion, the French overseas department and another Indian Ocean island, that is the location of the only confirmed debris from the aircraft (which remains unfound at the time of publication, over three years later).

STATES, MOVEMENTS, AND VANISHINGS

Movements and disappearances share an uneasy relationship. People and objects typically disappear while they are pilots or passengers, in motion, in transit. They are expected to arrive somewhere, sometime, but—like Amelia Earhart—they may fail to do so, for reasons that are not always known or understood (Ware 1994).

Moreover, movements and disappearances both challenge the absolutist discourse of state power, which continues to derive legitimacy from a rigid territorialization of space and, since the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), even of huge “terraqueous” swathes of ocean (DeLoughrey 2007, 2; Palan 2006). *States* are, by definition, *static*, although the exercise of their governmentality can reach beyond the borders of their physical jurisdiction (Baldacchino 2012). Their strongest grip is on citizen-residents, whom they readily tax and survey. They practice rendition, ordinary and extraordinary, on prison inmates and other sociopolitical undesirables, a process that involves fixity in, as well as mobility to and from, suitable holding sites (Baldacchino 2015a). Wealth and power are also expressed contemporarily in the possibility of movement, especially across borders, leading to the conceptualization of “kinetic elites” (Hannam et al. 2006). States, however, find themselves at a serious loss over how to deal with mass international immigration, which is by definition a transnational movement of large numbers of people and includes people-smuggling and slave-trading. At the time of writing, hundreds of thousands of immigrants are pouring into Europe, having been dislodged by conflict and uncertainty in the Middle East, especially Syria (e.g., BBC News 2015). Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump had pledged to repatriate some eleven million illegal

migrants living in the USA during his election campaign (McCarthy 2015).

If the movement of some is a challenge to states, so too may be the forced immobility, through eviction, of others. The saga of the inhabitants of the Chagos Archipelago within the BIOT exudes various expressions of the deployment of movement by or against state power, involving both disappearances and reappearances. It was the statist resolve of London, under pressure from Washington DC, which drove the native inhabitants of the BIOT out of their homeland and forced their resettlement after gassing their dogs to death (Vine 2011). Further statist intrigue secured a Marine Protected Area (MPA) around the islands in April 2010—one of the last acts of Gordon Brown as United Kingdom (UK) Prime Minister—presumably reducing further any potential opportunity for human relocation: The MPA bans commercial fishing and limits other human activity in the archipelago, thus undermining the viability of any resettlement efforts (Sidaway 2010; Vine 2015). Wikileaks (2009) confirmed this intent: “The MPA is the ‘most effective long-term way to prevent any of the Chagos Islands’ former inhabitants or their descendants from resettling,” according to official correspondence. The islanders have fought back, not just legally—a saga that continues mainly in London, The Hague and Brussels—but even kinetically. Thus, for example, the first “communal journey [to] ancestor graveyards” by around one hundred Chagossians was arranged, following protracted negotiations, in 2006 (Johannessen 2011, 183; also Johannessen 2010); the USA has also been allowing fifteen Chagossian elders to visit their homeland briefly once a year, at the expense of the UK government (Lablache and Amla 2015). And a recent report commissioned by the UK government offers specific proposals as to how the Chagossians could return to their islands (KPMG 2015).

Elsewhere in the Indian Ocean, the island beaches of Réunion have become, fleetingly, the location for a piece of debris confirmed as belonging to the missing aircraft in the MH 370 mystery. The flap-eron (a wing stabilizer) was washed ashore 515 days after the airline disappeared (Yuhas 2015). Finding itself thrust into the focus of the international press, Réunion has sought to capitalize swiftly on this discovery, offering itself as an alluring tourist destination in spite of its shark-infested waters, US\$400-a-night hotel rooms and poor air connectivity (Gay 2009; Santora 2015). This attempt was intended to

encourage another, presumably more benign type of human displacement from that which led to the “going missing” of the airline passengers.

Ironically in these narratives, it is the island that emerges as a fixed anchor in a churn of instability and unknown qualities. This is very different from situations where it is the island itself that commits the act of displacement. Islands, small ones in particular, are already vanishing easily, sometimes embarrassingly, from political as much as from topographical projects (Allahar 2005; Amoamo 2013; Ward 1989). Unlike mainlands, fictitious islands may be deemed to exist: Sandy Island, off Australia, had been appearing on maps, including Google Earth maps, for decades before it was confirmed not to exist and has therefore been officially “undiscovered” (BBC News 2012; Mogg 2012). Ferdinanda or Graham Island, off Sicily in the Mediterranean Sea, alluringly ventured above the surface of the waves, only to subside back out of sight in the course of 6 months in 1831 (The Basement Geographer 2011a). Royal Navy surveyor Frederick Evans zealously deleted 123 islands from Pacific Ocean Chart 2683 in 1875, some of which later turned out to exist after all (Marsden 2015). Unlike mainlands, islands suffer real threats of comprehensive and wholesale depopulation (Connell 1988; Marsden 2015; Steel 2011). And also unlike mainlands, islands can and do disappear, whether violently (as in the throes of volcanic eruptions, like that of Krakatoa in 1883) or gradually (as with the effects of contemporary sea level rise and the example of the Carteret islands off Papua New Guinea) (Edwards 2013). Sovereign archipelago atoll states, such as Tuvalu, the Marshall Islands, and Kiribati in the Pacific and the Maldives in the Indian Ocean, face comprehensive drowning with even a modest rise in sea level. Islands at risk of vanishing like this are the target of a morbid tourism that feeds on their imminent demise (Farbotko 2010; Huffington Post 2014). In their various guises, elision or deletion may provide the final stage in the act of islanding (Baldacchino 2015a; Teiawa 2007).

CONTRASTING SPACES OF INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION

This fixity is itself impacted by the contrasting legal status of the BIOT and Réunion. In the case of the French island, departmentalization ensured its full incorporation into the French state from as early as 1946. The island had been uninhabited when it was “discovered” by

the Portuguese in 1507 and was eventually settled by France after 1638. With over 800,000 residents, the island sends seven deputies to the French National Assembly and three senators to the French Senate. In spite of its unlikely location, Réunion is an undisputed and integral part of France and the European Union. France's presence in each and every major ocean of the globe by means of islands (with just one mainland exception, French Guiana) assures it of one of the world's largest exclusive economic zones (EEZ), second only to that of the United States (The Basement Geographer 2011b).

In contrast, London obliged—or possibly blackmailed—the incoming prime minister of newly independent Mauritius to exclude the Chagos Archipelago from the sovereign territory of Mauritius as a condition for securing the country's independence (Evers and Kooy 2011, 64). This move is reminiscent of the transfer of the Sovereign Military Bases of Akrotiri and Dhekelia from Cyprus to the United Kingdom as part of the arrangement for securing the independence of Cyprus in 1960 (Constantinou and Richmond 2005). They have recently been in the news for refusing to process claims for asylum by recently arrived undocumented immigrants (Tran 2015). While for several years indifferent to the archipelago and its displaced inhabitants, Mauritius now claims that the Chagos Archipelago, including Diego Garcia, forms an integral part of its sovereign territory under both Mauritian and international law; its creation is alleged to be a violation of United Nations Resolution 2625 of 1970, banning the dismemberment of colonial territories before their independence (UN 1970). In March 2015, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague unanimously declared that the Marine Protected Area which the UK Prime Minister had declared around the Chagos Archipelago in 2010 had been created in violation of international law.

In fact, those who were probably the original settlers of the Chagos Archipelago were unwilling passengers: A boatload of twenty-two slaves, mainly from coastal southeast Africa and Madagascar, were brought to the island in or around 1783 to set up and run a Franco-Mauritian plantation turning coconuts into coconut oil (Vine and Jeffery 2009, 184). Much more recent unwilling passengers to the Chagos are alleged terrorists: Diego Garcia has probably been used twice to detain, and possibly interrogate and torture, suspects in the post-9/11 CIA rendition program, even though such “nefarious activities” have yet to be acknowledged by either the British or US governments (Cobain 2015).

When the descendants of the original settlers, after almost two centuries, were rounded up and forced into exile, they were deemed to be “not a permanent or semipermanent population,” but just “transient contract workers” (Gifford and Dunne 2014). Workers who are shorn of residence rights become vulnerable passengers, without right of abode, permanently subject to relocation: A similar situation is unfolding on Ascension Island, in the south Atlantic, another UKOT, where residents have long argued unsuccessfully for the right of abode, which has been refused for uncannily similar “security” reasons involving a US military facility (Pearce 2013).

The irony is that various personnel have nevertheless been required to offer their services in the running of Camp Justice, the US base on Diego Garcia (Global Security.org 2015). In 2006, about forty British personnel (performing such tasks as enforcing the rule of law, policing, customs, and excise) and some 1,000 US military personnel were stationed there, along with some 2,400 support workers of various nationalities, primarily of Filipino and Sri Lankan citizenship (Brunner 2015); the base operation services contractor (BOSC) staff numbered 1,800 in 2015 (Naval Technology.com 2015). Indeed, although clamoring for the right to return home, Chagossians are *not* calling for the removal of the US military base: At least some would prefer jobs on the base to lives of potential poverty and unemployment in exile (Vine 2015).

SUBNATIONAL ISLAND JURISDICTIONS

Réunion and the BIOT offer two examples of late colonialism in subnational island jurisdictions (Darwin 1999). Thus, with Réunion’s full and complete integration into France, the Réunionnais are French to all intents and purposes. This principle is best expressed in the freedom of movement between the SNIJ and the “metropole.” In 2005, the number of Réunionnais residing in metropolitan France stood at 104,000, which is 14 percent of the island-born population (INSEE 2006). In the Indian Ocean, one other island, Mayotte, has now secured a similar status, although not without serious protest from the Government of the Union des Comores, which alleges that the island is part of its sovereign territory and is thus the victim of another act of excision (Muller 2013). Meanwhile, the Comoros is one of the world’s poorest countries, while Mayotte, a tantalizing seventy kilometers away,

is part of France and the European Union (EU) and is much richer. With the yawning economic disparity between the two neighbouring jurisdictions, an increasing number of Comorans are braving a perilous ocean journey, often on rickety boats, in search of a better life (IRIN Africa 2015). Perversely enough, the Chagossians have, since 2002, the right to settle in the UK—an option exercised by around 1,800—but not in their own home territory (Jack 2015).

Meanwhile, there is another subnational island jurisdiction in the Indian Ocean with mobility challenges of its own. This is Rodrigues, part of the Republic of Mauritius, but with its own elected regional assembly. It lies 650 km east of Mauritius, meaning that, for its 38,000 inhabitants, “the mainland” is too far away to travel to other than by cargo vessel or plane. The daily flight (with Air Mauritius on an ATR-72 twin-engine turboprop aircraft) takes ninety minutes and now costs around US\$100 each way. Otherwise, cargo ships ply the route three times a month; the journey can take up to forty eight hours. In 2009, a broad political tent of Rodriguans successfully lobbied the Mauritian Government to reduce the cost of the inter-island airfare, both to reduce the mobility challenges of residents and to incentivize tourism to Rodrigues, a key industry which had taken a hard knock after the 2008 global financial crisis (Wergin 2012).

ISLAND HUBS: MOBILITIES AND IMMOBILITIES

Island borders are political, tense, and tightly regulated, but also porous, in spite of being presented and intended otherwise. Island regimes continue to offer dynamic examples of how their self-defining geophysicality suggests *border* properties, but actually resembles more a stage for *boundary* properties, which are natural, always fluid, rich, and dynamic (Gillis 2004). Geographical remoteness—as in the case of Diego Garcia—makes it very difficult, although not impossible, for anyone without authorization to visit the archipelago (e.g., Winchester 2003), while those who govern and control the limited points and means of access to a small island can determine who comes in (workers, personnel, presumed terrorists) and who goes out (residents, workers, and presumed terrorists), often privileged by discourses of securitization and/or economic cost. Various island jurisdictions are now, willy-nilly, members of an “enforcement archipelago” (Mountz 2011) embodying examples of how people are managed by virtue of

their (im)mobility on island spaces, with or without necessarily being locked in a prison cell. The resulting (im)mobilities are more easily enforceable through the island condition, which conceptually takes on the guise, trope, and feel of a carceral environment to those left either inside or outside. “Disappearances” take the form of “ex-isle” (Bongie 1998), of transfers offshore to and from spaces where exclusion is a complex discursive engagement between physical prison regimes, island geophysical separation and jurisdictional territoriality, and the shifts and passages across time that occur within and betwixt these parameters (Baldacchino 2015a).

Yet, the tight and taut “border control” of states is also fictional: A narrow enough stretch of water can energize the desperate to migrate and cash in on their hopes for a better future. Sensitive ethical cards can be played to urge and sway politicians toward reducing the mobility tax of specific island residents. Other island borderlands—as with the Italian island of Lampedusa, or the Greek islands of Lesbos or Chios—bear witness to the unstoppable urge to migrate at other edges of the European Union (Dines et al. 2015; Trubeta 2015). The whims of ocean currents, faulty technology, political lobbying, and/or human piloting errors can wreak havoc with the permeability of both domestic and international borders, washing up material debris and conjuring up conspiracy theories.

CONCLUSION

Islands are storied “taskscape” of multilevel activity and relationships, unfolding, and unraveling (Ingold 2000). For all their enticing self-evident geographies, islands “become,” arising as much out of the geophysical actions of volcanos, coral growth and tectonic plate shifts as the symbolic activities, tropes, and functions that are thrust upon them. Islandness, in this vein, weaves in and out, is produced, alluded to, appealed to, dismissed, accentuated, or diluted, in a churn of actions. This churn is captured and expressed in the multiple ways in which mobilities and immobilities, as well as disappearances on, to and from island spaces, are performed. In this way, islands become the hubs and nodes of placements and displacements, an unlikely patchwork archipelago (Baldacchino 2015b, 85) of migrations, forced renditions, ex-isles, and serendipitous landings.

Passengers, willing or otherwise, hopeful or despondent, strident or invisible, become performative expressions of such island junctures. Movements to and from islands, punctured by episodes of rest, constitute navigations of hope and despair, of volition or extradition, of employment or pilgrimage, journeys that collectively draw out and give life to the churn that is (in this case) the Indian Ocean. The relevant transport technology for doing so changes with time—the airplane is the latest example of this—but the theme of connectivity in motion is an enduring preoccupation.

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PART II

Case Studies: Swahili Coast, Zanzibar
and the Comoros

The Role of Kilwa in the Trade of the Western Indian Ocean

Gwyn Campbell

This article surveys the role of Kilwa, or Kilwa Kisiwani, a small island lying three miles off the coast of present-day Tanzania, in the Indian Ocean world economy, from early times to the mid-nineteenth century. From an examination of both primary and secondary sources, it examines the basis for its rise to commercial significance, the impact upon it of the coming of the Europeans, and its transformation from the mid-eighteenth century into a major center for human trafficking. In terms of the themes of this volume, Kilwa constitutes a prime example of a small island hub, a commercial entrepôt lying close to the African continent, with which it developed an early and enduring, albeit fluctuating relationship of mutual dependency. The African coast and hinterland provided it with many of the provisions, labor, and staple commodities its

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merchant community needed, in turn channeling to African merchants the coastal and wider Indian Ocean World (IOW) commodities they valued. As a major port city on the Swahili coast, Kilwa also performed a sometimes critical role in the regional western Indian Ocean economy, forming an operating base and transit center linking southeast Africa and the Swahili coastal civilization to islands further distant in the western Indian Ocean, notably the Comoros, Madagascar, and Mascarenes. Finally, Kilwa was one of a number of strategically significant commercial island hubs in the wider IOW global economy, one in which the environment played a critical role. As such, it was highly valued and contested by indigenous and western commercial groups alike.

Situated at 8.96° S, 39.51° E, Kilwa lies near the southern limit (12° S) of the monsoon system. Therein lay its initial significance for the wider IOW, whose merchants were dependent upon monsoon sail for transoceanic exchange, and were also obliged, when trading with areas of the southwestern Indian Ocean south of that limit (including Mozambique and most of Madagascar), to establish resident agents at locations close to the limit, such as Zanzibar or Kilwa, as storage and distribution centers. Maritime connections between Kilwa and the wider IOW were seasonal. The monsoon system ensured that each year, during the northeast monsoon from September to April, merchant vessels from the Red Sea, Arabia, Persian Gulf, or northwestern India would arrive on the East African coast, where they remained in one or more of a limited number of ports for four to six months until the monsoon changed. These monsoon-based trading centers created significant seasonal linkages. Visiting ships with their crews, traders, retinues, and human and live animal commodities, required provisioning. Vessels could only sail from East Africa back to its major northern export markets in April to early May or in September, before and after the stormiest period (mid-May to mid-August) of the southwest monsoon. Should contrary currents prevent dhows from sailing north in the first period, they were obliged to “winter” in East Africa (Agius 2005, 126; Dato 1970, 1–2, 5).

Kilwa also developed a more regional maritime exchange network with the East African coast to its south, as well as the Comoros and Madagascar. Off the East African coast, a trade current whereby a vessel could travel 64.4 km in 24 hours during the northeast monsoon ran past Cape Amber and divided at Cape Delgado. A perennial southern current attaining a velocity of 96.6 km miles in 24 hours during the southwest monsoon affected the Mozambique coast. The northeast monsoon

affected northwest Madagascar from October to April, while for the rest of the year, winds varied from south to west between noon and night-fall, after which they varied between south and east. However, monsoons generally determined traffic between East Africa and Madagascar, with boats traveling from the Kilwa region to ports in western Madagascar on the northeast monsoon, and from the Angoche and Quissanga regions on the southwest monsoon.¹

Felix Chami claims that Africans were the first to settle and subsequently utilize Kilwa. He asserts that by 3000 BCE, non-Bantu-speaking sub-Saharan Africans had settled the present-day Swahili coast and offshore islands of Zanzibar and Kilwa, and from possibly 2400 BCE started to engage in oceanic sail. He further claims that from 1000 BCE Bantu-speakers started to settle the coast, where their iron-working and inland water techniques, including baskets, dugouts, and possibly “sewn boats,” facilitated a rapid transition to a maritime lifestyle. Constructing outrigger canoes and prototypes of the modern-day dhow, they reached offshore islands and engaged in transoceanic sail.² However, the majority academic view is that Kilwa first emerged as an “international” IOW port from the ninth century, at the start of the second major upsurge in the IOW global economy, in which Indian Ocean Africa (IOA) played an integral part. This formed part of the rapidly emerging Swahili commercial network in East African waters that incorporated the East African coast as far south as Sofala, the Comoros, and northwest Madagascar. By ca. 1000 CE, these latter regions were closely tied to Kilwa, which had emerged as the entrepôt for the southern section of the Swahili network (Grandidier and Grandidier 1908, 114, fn.3).

During the Baghdad-based Abbasid Dynasty (750–1258), Persians were the dominant foreign traders along the East African coast. They expanded their commercial frontier south to a lengthy littoral area they called *Bilad as-Sufala* (“low-lying land”), with a capital, “Sofala,” near Beira in Mozambique, adjoining Hwfl/Waq-waq (possibly Madagascar, the Comoros, or part of the African mainland then inhabited by Khoisan-speakers), which reputedly possessed the most valuable export commodities. East African commerce was as important to Siraf as its trade with the Far East. Al-Mas’ūdī (d. 956), who visited East Africa at least twice, the last occasion being in 916/17, noted that ships regularly sailed from the Persian Gulf (Oman and Siraf) directly to the main East African port of Qanbalu (probably Unguja, Zanzibar Island). From the eleventh century, trade between East Africa and Egypt also flourished,

as reflected in the influx of Fatimid coins and, by the thirteenth century, keen *Karimi* merchant interest in East Africa. Similarly, from the late twelfth century, commerce between East Africa and India grew dramatically, as did mostly indirect trade with China (Ricks 1970, 339–57).

This late first to early second millennium upswing in East African maritime trade stimulated Swahili shipbuilding, notably of lateen-rigged dhows with cotton sails and square-rigged, *mtepe*-style vessels with sewn planks and huge coconut matting sails—which stimulated sail-making from locally produced coir (coconut fiber) and cotton (grown, e.g., on Kilwa). Most Swahili boats were used for the coastal and western Indian Ocean trade, although Arab and Indian merchant vessels dominated the Arabian and Red Seas. Swahili merchants used chiefly non-Swahili ships to travel to the eastern Indian Ocean. Thus, in about 1512, even after trade in the western IOW dipped in the mid-thirteenth century and entered a longer-term decline from the fourteenth century, Tomé Pires noted that traders from Kilwa, Malindi, Mogadishu, and Mombasa, as well as from Egypt and Ethiopia, were traveling on Gujarati ships to Southeast Asia and establishing agencies in Malacca.³

Imports into East Africa included beads of Middle Eastern origin; Persian perfumes, kitchenware, precious stones, and wine; Indian rice, spices, cotton cloth, copper, ironware, beads, and pottery; and Chinese porcelain. These stimulated the local manufacture of coarser varieties of pottery, the adoption of cotton cultivation and cotton-making technology (the loom and spindle whorl), and the production of coinage (found in large quantities at Mafia and Kilwa), first in silver and later in copper.⁴ The most valuable exports were ivory, rhinoceros horn, tortoiseshell, ambergris, and gold. Ivory was in demand in Egypt, the Mediterranean, and especially China, where regional sources were inferior and declining. By Tang times (618–907), Chinese sources of rhinoceros horn, valued for its alleged curative and aphrodisiacal properties, had sharply diminished due chiefly to deforestation. Tortoiseshell and ambergris were much in demand in China for ornamental and pharmaceutical uses, as well as for perfumery. “Sofala” gold was shipped down the Zambesi from the highland interior. East African staples in demand in India and China were initially transported via Oman, but from about 900 were increasingly sent to India for transshipment to markets in the eastern IOW. Other export staples included yellow sandalwood; leopard skins used to manufacture saddles and rugs in Muslim countries and China; other types of leather used, for example, in the

Middle East, to make sandals; wood that in Siraf, for instance, went into boat and house construction; aromatic woods; small (oyster) sea pearls from the Bazaruto Islands; rock crystal (quartz) manufactured into beads on the coast (e.g., Lamu) or exported to Egypt and Persia to be manufactured into jewelry and mosque lamps. Millet, rice, and meat were also exported chiefly for the coastal trade.⁵ Malagasy exports to the IOW, notably via Kilwa, included the following: to East Africa, rice, livestock (from the twelfth century), soapstone, gum copal resin, and coral stone; to the Persian Gulf and Arabia, mangrove poles, rice, tortoiseshell, crystal quartz, and possibly gold, silk, and spices such as ginger; and to India, iron. Imports included Cambay beads, cotton and silk cloth, Middle Eastern pottery, glass vessels, silver, gold, and probably pearls, Chinese ceramics (from the 1300s), silver coins and jewelry, and spices possibly of Indonesian origin.⁶ Some scholars place major emphasis on the early development of an export trade in slaves. Thus, Ibouri Ali Tabibou, following Mark Horton, claims that from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, the slave trade constituted the major Muslim-controlled trade from the East African coast, and that Kilwa formed the base for their slave raids into the interior (Tabibou 2014, 78). Such claims are greatly exaggerated, although East African slaves were exported to the Middle East and Indonesia (Campbell 2017). Furthermore, Alfonso de Albuquerque reported that Tristan da Cunha found in Sada, in Anorontsangana Bay, a population of refugee African slaves from Kilwa, Malindi, Mombasa, and Mogadishu (Grandidier and Gandidier 1908, 171).

Coastal entrepôts such as Kilwa, while largely viewed as enclaves connected to the wider maritime zones of the IOW, were also deeply connected to their African hinterlands. Visiting vessels required maintenance that in bigger centers involved tree-felling, carpentry, and rope and sail manufacture. Other seasonal needs included the provision of linguistic and religious services. Further, ships' merchants and crews, exclusively male, who would remain in a center for up to 6 months, established a demand for entertainment and sexual services that, at the right price, locals proved only too willing to supply. In some regions, in a pattern noted in many later European reports of Madagascar (see, e.g., Campbell 2009, Ch. 2), women hired themselves out to foreign merchants for the trading season as wives and commercial agents, their linguistic expertise, knowledge of customs and local connections often proving invaluable. Permanent trading posts required a far greater

infrastructure, comprising houses and stores, unskilled laborers such as porters, packers, and guards, skilled artisans, translators, guides, supervisors, and people including “wives,” prostitutes, entertainers, and servants, who performed more than seasonal “personal” services for agents and mariners.

Demand for certain staples stimulated coastal–interior linkages even further. Links were forged with hinterland Bantu-speaking groups, with Cushites who supplied cattle, and (possibly via Cushites) with Khoisan hunter-gatherers, who supplied the most valuable export staples, notably ivory, rhinoceros horn, and tortoiseshell (Campbell 2017). Such linkages became stronger and more durable as the Great Zimbabwe complex developed in hinterland southeastern Africa. By the late thirteenth century, Kilwa was serving as the main distribution center for all IOA trading posts south of Cape Delgado, and hence well beyond the reach of the monsoons, such as Chibuene (just to the north of the Bazaruto Archipelago), Sofala, Angoche, Quelimane, the Kerimbas and, from the mid- to late-fourteenth century, Mozambique Island. From these ports, trade routes ran deep into the plateau interior, where the centralized polities of the Great Zimbabwe complex emerged at the head of the Zambezi, which, from the mid-thirteenth century, developed specialist mining and metal-working sectors. A concomitant demographic expansion (fourteenth-century Great Zimbabwe may have boasted a population of 10,000) took place, accompanied by the growth of interregional trade based on the exchange of metals (notably copper and iron in raw and manufactured forms) and salt for cereals and cattle and hunting products. Such internal networks might have existed independently: The Portuguese claimed that the Congo possessed a well-established, sophisticated system of long-distance exchange, with standardized units and a currency system, that was unconnected to overseas trade. However, connections between the East African coast and the interior were also of longstanding, and rising overseas demand for IOA products strengthened links between Great Zimbabwe and the coast via the Limpopo, Zambezi, and Mazoe (or Luenha) rivers (Huffman 2009).

In Kilwa, as elsewhere along the East African coast, the first local converts to Islam were members of the political and merchant elite. Islamicization accelerated between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries but was chiefly confined to the Swahili, those who inhabited the port cities and their immediate hinterlands. Most of the Swahili elite in turn

mastered at least basic Arabic, which they used when traveling overseas for business and when performing the *hajj*, which, because of the ease of maritime travel, they indulged in more than, for example, African Muslims from sub-Saharan West Africa (Hunwick 1996, 232–33). Of Kilwa, Barbosa commented:

... the Moors of Sofala, Zuama [Cuama, the north mouth of the Zambezi], Anguox [Angoche], and Mozambique were all under obedience to the King of Quiloa [Kilwa], who was a great king amongst them ... These people are Moors, of a dusky colour, and some of them are black and some white ... The speech of these people is Arabic. (Barbosa 1866, 11)

The elite built houses of coral and established gardens and cotton fields, while local artisans produced cloth made by unraveling imported colored cloth dyed in colors not available there, the threads being worked into locally produced cloth. In the fourteenth century, Islam and Swahili architectural styles reached Madagascar, where a number of trading settlements emerged, all connected to Kilwa, Malindi, and Mombasa, and forming hierarchical societies with Swahili (called “Antalaoatra” in Madagascar) political and commercial elites. Mahilaka, in Ampasindava Bay, on the northwest coast, developed into a 70-hectare walled town with 5,000 to 10,000 inhabitants, stone buildings, and at least one mosque. By 1500 major settlements existed on the lower Manambolo (of 9,000–10,000 inhabitants) and along the rivers Morondava, Mangoky and Kitombo in Menabe, Boeny and Mazalagem (6,000–7,000 inhabitants) in Boina Bay, Nosy Langany/Doany Manja (Mahajamba Bay), and along the river Betsiboka on the northwest coast.⁷

EUROPEAN IMPACT, 1500–C.1820

The conventional view is that, from the time of the European “Voyages of Discovery,” Europeans quickly established military and commercial dominance in the IOW and eliminated local Muslim competitors. Kilwa was one of their first targets. From the early 1500s, Portuguese fleets attacked the main Swahili bases in East Africa and northwest Madagascar and founded forts at Kilwa (1505), Mozambique Island (1507), and Mombasa (1593), from where they attempted to impose a monopoly over all high-value trade. However, the Portuguese, and later other Europeans, encountered great difficulties in attempting

to found settlements or advance into the hinterlands of either East Africa or Madagascar. Of major significance were tropical diseases. Thus, the Portuguese in Mozambique suffered such high mortality that there were often insufficient soldiers to maintain the garrison. When the Dutch attacked Mozambique in 1604 and 1607, they found only sixty soldiers defending the fort (Newitt 2004). Again, in 1632, the Captain of Mozambique reported that he was so short of men and supplies that he was entertaining thoughts of entering into an alliance with Madagascar (Shirodkar 1988, 40). In addition, indigenous merchant groups remained vibrant. A major goal of the Portuguese was to establish a monopoly over “Sofala” gold, to which end they established coastal forts (at Sofala and Mozambique Island) and launched armed expeditions up the Zambezi, on which they established forts at Sena and Tete. However, to access interior trade routes, the Portuguese had to accept existing protocol whereby the *mussambazes*, a professional group of traders, conducted regional commerce and local chiefs supervised the markets. Moreover, as the Portuguese naval presence was too limited to effectively control the coastline, indigenous traders moved gold and other staple exports such as ivory along routes that bypassed the Portuguese (Elkiss 1981, 35; Axelson 1973, 83–84). Indeed, it was the vibrancy of indigenous East African trade that in the 1660s caused the Omani to launch maritime attacks on Portuguese posts along the East African coast that culminated in the 1699 expulsion of the Portuguese from Mombasa (Axelson 1969, 155–73; Elkiss 1981, 51; Barendse 2002, 16–17).

From 1700, the Portuguese presence in East Africa was largely restricted to Mozambique Island and Sofala, where in 1722, there were only twenty-six “Portuguese,” almost all Creoles and *degredados* (criminals exiled to unhealthy parts of the Empire) (Elkiss 1981, 54–55). They consolidated localized power by forging local alliances, often cemented through marriage to African women, some of whom also acted as their translators and commercial agents. These alliances led to the emergence of the *prazo* system, which came to dominate the Zambezi valley, whereby large fiefs originally held by descendants of Portuguese became progressively more African over generations (ibid., 49, 56). The *prazo* forged trading and raiding networks that channeled some commodities such as slaves to Mozambique Island for export. However, African traders bypassed the Portuguese and dealt directly with Swahili-governed ports.

During the seventeenth century, Omanis extended their domination over much of the Swahili coast and its staple exports of ivory and slaves. By that time, it appears that Kilwa was effectively independent. In 1663, Carpeau du Saussay claimed that Africans fleeing the “tyranny” of the ruler of Kilwa had settled in Anosy, in the southeast of Madagascar (Grandidier and Grandidier 1908, 633, fn. 4). From the mid-eighteenth century, demand for slaves from the burgeoning plantations of the Mascarenes (Mauritius and Réunion) supplemented the traditional demand for slaves from the Middle East. Africa was a major source of slaves shipped to the French islands and western Madagascar, from where they were distributed either to the markets of the interior or to the sugar islands. British anti-slavery measures following the 1807 ban on the slave trade concentrated on the Atlantic coast, and British naval patrols in the western Indian Ocean were too few and intermittent to have a major effect, so that the slave trade from East Africa continued to be vigorous into the last decades of the nineteenth century and the imposition of colonial rule in much of the region.

The East African supply network for slaves centered on Portuguese Mozambique. Ibo was practically a French reserve from 1820 to 1829, in which year the number of French slave-traders visiting the port was described as “fantastic” (Alpers 1975, 217). Angoche, ruled by a Sultan practically independently of both Omani and Portuguese rule, also became a major supplier of slaves to the French islands and Madagascar; by the mid-1840s, it surpassed Mozambique Island, Quelimane and Ibo. Sancul, Sangaye, and Quitangonha, similarly independent sultanates, also supplied slaves to the western Indian Ocean islands. Edward Alpers considers that from mid-century, Quitangonha and Angoche were the chief centers of slave exports to Madagascar. By the late 1830s, Réunionnais merchants were visiting Angoche over which, in 1846, a combined British–Portuguese expedition imposed nominal Portuguese sovereignty. Nevertheless, Swahili traders dominated foreign commerce in the sultanates, including Angoche, which remained largely independent and maintained its slave network into the second half of the nineteenth century. Inhambane was also frequented by French slavers from the 1820s.⁸

However, Kilwa developed as the major East African supplier of slaves to the Mascarenes, to which it channeled possibly twenty percent of its slave exports. This may have been one of the reasons it was attacked by the Betsimisarakana and Sakalava of Madagascar, who every

five years in the last decades of the eighteenth and first two decades of the nineteenth century launched war flotillas, allegedly of 400–500 canoes each 8–10 meters long and 2–2.5 meters wide, and carrying between thirty and fifty men (totaling 12,000–25,000), with, in the intervening years, less significant annual expeditions. They attacked chiefly the Comoros, but if winds carried them further, they attacked Kilwa, Ibo, and Mafia Island, in all cases taking many prisoners.⁹ The attackers included Timboulo, chief of Antongil Bay, with whom the British from Mauritius sought an alliance in 1816. They reported that

Timboulo can man one hundred canoes of forty-five feet long by ten or twelve broad, each with twenty or thirty men, armed with Musquets. With a force of this nature he nearly depopulated the islands of Cormor[Grande Comore], Mohilla, and Mayota in 1807 and 1808, and in 1809, crossed the channel and devastated one of the Islands of Querimbo and even threatened Mozambique. Nothing can exceed the ferocity of their attack, which is like that of the Malays; the necessity of continual vigilance is therefore apparent.¹⁰

That same year, 1816, an expedition of 250 canoes was hit by a storm, and only 68 reached the Kerimba Islands of East Africa. There, they were attacked by the Portuguese, who killed many of them, but went on to attack Kilwa and Mafia, where they took 3,000 prisoners captive, before being attacked and almost destroyed by an Arab fleet from Zanzibar; in total, some 6,250 Malagasy warriors lost their lives (Grandidier and Grandidier 1908, 655).

The commercial importance of Kilwa as a slave entrepôt inevitably also attracted the attention of the Omanis, who in the first half of the nineteenth century incorporated it into their East African empire. At the same time, planters from the French islands sought slaves from both Madagascar and East Africa, including Kilwa. A turning point came in 1820, after Robert Farquhar, Governor of Mauritius, persuaded Radama I of Madagascar to impose a ban on Malagasy slave exports. Recognizing the need to appease both British anti-slave trade sentiment and the demand of their colonists for cheap labor, the government of Réunion promoted the idea of obtaining indentured laborers from Kilwa. Thus, Milius, Governor of Réunion, wrote to the Minister of the Marine and Colonies in late 1820:

The fraudsters [i.e., slave traders] still exploit the Mozambique coast, and the African islands located to the east of the continent. I have already informed your Excellence that Zanzibar is a center of the [slave] trade, and Kilwa a Depot. In truth, the price of a black there is higher than at Tamatave, but a Kaffir is worth two Malagasy, as much from the view-point of agriculture as strength and loyalty. The Kaffir is a species of man who prefers slavery in our colonies to liberty in his homeland. This is not so for the Malagasy who are by nature lazy, of a weak constitution, thus little [suitable] for hard work on the land, and very attached to their native soil.

The conduct of the English in such circumstances has given me an idea. If it is correct, as seems to be the case, that they draw from Madagascar, under the title of indentured workers, the workforce necessary for agriculture in their colonies situated to the east of the Cape of Good Hope, can we not follow their example and through a similar treaty with African kings also obtain, as a loan, the hands who are necessary for the prosperity of Bourbon [Réunion]? Supposing the answer to be in the affirmative, I thought that we could make overtures to the king of Kilwa, or the Iman of Muscat who is establishing Arab positions under his authority in the islands situated to the east of the African coast? Our generous and disinterested conduct towards the Iman, as to the dispossessed king of Kilwa, gives us some hope of success. It remains to be seen if the English, who appear to have declared a war to the end on all sugar colonies worked by enchained labourers, will act towards Kilwa and Zanzibar as they have just done with Madagascar.¹¹

In 1825, Captain Owen urged Governor Lowry Cole of Mauritius to establish an agent on the East African coast near Kilwa to stop the slave trade,¹² but twelve years later, in September 1837, Lieutenant Bosanquet of HMS *Leveret* reported that, "The Slave-trade still continues to be carried on, to a very great extent, on the Coast of Africa."¹³ He noted Brazil and Cuba as markets, but the French islands continued to be significant, and from the 1820s, a new market for East African slaves had also opened up in Madagascar (Campbell 1989).

THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY CLANDESTINE TRADE IN SLAVES

This forms the backdrop to the Le Mauff de Kedudal Affair. In 1842, two years after the last Sultan of Kilwa was deported to Oman, Charles Bazoche, Governor of Réunion, following the advice of de Rontaunay, a wealthy Réunionnais trader with major investments in Madagascar, sent a mission under Le Mauff de Kedudal to Kilwa to explore the possibilities of recruitment of *engagé* laborers. Bazoche gave de Kedudal a list of questions concerning Kilwa and labor recruitment,¹⁴ and the following January, de Kedudal submitted his report. It comprised three sections. The first contained responses to Bazoche's questionnaire, the second was an account of de Kedudal's visit following his arrival in Kilwa on November 27, 1842, and the third an account of the return voyage from Mayotte to Réunion. Of these, the first two provide major insights into Kilwa's role in regional commerce at that time.¹⁵ De Kedudal reported that until 1830, Kilwa had retained an important commercial role, but that it had since declined and most of its population had migrated to the mainland, leaving only a few hundred in Kilwa. Nevertheless, "Mazononni," installed by the Iman as governor of Kilwa, maintained close relations with a kingdom called "Morima" (*mrima* = the African mainland kingdom) governed by a sultan called "Assagni" (Hasan).¹⁶ Kilwa obtained slaves from Assagni, notably from the "Monillao, Mouguinedo, Moumuedi, Mougmasse, Moummounissa, Mombissa, Matoumebi, Macoua, Matchiuga, Oualloufigni, Ouguamouezo, and finally Ouamougoulon,"¹⁷ twelve "tribes" resident in the domains of Morima that have "from time immemorial, been reduced to slavery and are the property of free Arab castes."¹⁸ Of these, the Mondyouges, Mouchenzis, Suéllamos, and Camangas formed the majority.¹⁹ De Kedudal noted further:

The first-named, Mondyonges, the most numerous, most civilized and richest, live for the most part along the littoral between Cape Delgado and Zanzibar. They are under the direct authority of the Imam's lieutenants. They buy the products of the interior with other goods, and send them to the coast, notably to Zanzibar. Sultan Assagni, king of Morima, belongs to this caste.

The three others inhabit the interior the products of which they exchange with the Mondyonges.²⁰

Of slave tasks, De Kedudal commented:

Masters treat their slaves humanely, feeding them with rice, lentils, beans and manioc, and they employ them in agricultural work, hunting, fishing, and cutting wood. As there are some blacksmiths and carpenters amongst them, these workers are employed in manufacturing arrow heads and, I believe, a few other iron objects of which the masters have need, as well as the construction of boats, canoes, and huts etc. The women are employed in housework and working the land.²¹

While they were originally enslaved through warfare, de Kedudal commented, in terms used stereotypically by white colonists, that over the generations they had become habituated to enslavement, so that

The slaves, who in their homeland possess a natural gentleness, or more the lack of any desires, embrace passivity to the point that many hundreds let certain free men tie them by the hands and feet and deliver them to slave traders, without putting up any resistance even though the slaves generally carry bows. I have further been assured that they are devoted to work; It is a fact that I have seen them toiling on the soil at midday under an intense sun. Sobriety is for them possibly less a virtue than a necessity, for they cannot indulge in abuse of spirits which are forbidden in these countries.²²

He continued:

Until 1827 or 1828 the slave trade was openly practiced by all owners of slaves or captives in Kilwa and Morima; the sale of slaves was, it appears, then prohibited for individuals, but chiefs continued to engage in it nevertheless, supplying slaves to slaving ships to the degree that, I have been assured by several inhabitants of Kilwa, there arrived annually from thirty to forty ships, a quarter of which were under French, and rest under Spanish colors, to take slaves. These ships were generally large, taking an average of 300 slaves each, with the result that each year from 9,000 to 12,000 slaves from the kingdom of Morima were taken from Kilwa.²³

This implies a vibrant annual export trade to Brazil and Cuba of possibly 6,725–9,000 slaves, and to the French islands of 2,250–3,000 slaves. In mid-1842, a boat flying French colors had purchased at Kilwa 450 slaves originating from Morima.²⁴ Moreover, Mazononni secretly offered slaves to Kedudal without the authorization of the Iman.²⁵

De Kedudal indicated that it would be impossible to hire “free” labor, as the only free people in the vicinity were Swahili slave-owners.²⁶ He had difficulty explaining to the local Swahili that the French authorities required indentured rather than slave labor:

Supposing that the fear of slavery could be the motive for free people refusing to enter such engagements to serve us, I explained that slavery had been abolished in French possessions on the condition of redemption agreed with the masters, or adopted in a more general fashion, emphasizing the fact that once someone arrived on French soil the status of slave ceased and that the free individual, male or female, receiving lodging, clothes, food and even a monthly wage, would in return only have to dedicate his time to the work that would have redeemed and liberated him, without forgetting to underline that the only ones taken would be slaves agreeing to be liberated, and for hitherto unknown benefit to them. It was only with difficulty that I made them understand these last facts – which completely destroyed the ideas they held about the conditions of existence in a society which only knew a free caste which owned and collected and slaves who produced and are owned.²⁷

Réunion might annually purchase, with the permission of the Iman, 15,000–20,000 slaves aged between twenty and thirty, and “redeem” them into indentured contracts²⁸ for around 4 piasters each, although “Arabs obtain them in exchange for objects of very little value, such as mirrors, cotton cloth & c.” and “boats that sail from the African [coast] to the Comoro Archipelago, sell a male or female slave for two, three or four piasters.”²⁹

At the same time, Kilwa offered the French the opportunity to export from the African continent “raw” ivory, gum copal, rice, beans, lentils, millet, and ebony. De Kedudal estimated that they might obtain 2–3 tonnes of ivory a year at from 30 to 40 piasters per arrobe (about 40 lb); 1,000–2,000 tonnes of gum copal at very little price; 2–3 tonnes of rice; and 6–9 tonnes of beans, lentils, and millet.³⁰ However, such commodities could be obtained much more cheaply if exchanged for goods.³¹ The foreign commodities most in demand at Kilwa were blue

or red cotton goods, handkerchiefs, and arms, gunpowder, and lead shot, followed by fish hooks, beads, mirrors, needles, cutlery, soap, linen, sugar, copper, iron, and raw lead.”³² However, de Kedudal cautioned that

It would also be necessary, I believe, if we were to establish commercial relations with Kilwa and the surrounding area, that during the period of trade, from June to December, there would be a warship either at Kilwa or cruising along the coast or it could happen that the merchant ships might, on leaving find themselves robbed by slavers, all of which, according to what I have been told, have both the crew and artillery to engage in piracy when they wish to do so.³³

In January 1843, as a consequence of de Kedudal’s report, Bazoche proposed to Paris that redemption be employed a legitimate means of recruiting slaves from, respectively, the King of Kilwa and the Sultan of Zanzibar.³⁴ However, Paris responded that the redemption of slaves in order to transform them into indentured workers was unacceptable to the British and French governments because it contradicted the principle of “free at departure, free at arrival.”³⁵ Any acceptance of such operations would arouse immediate suspicions of disguised slave-trading:

It is difficult in the current state of French and English law, and of international law, not to view these operations as a disguised slave trade that it would be the obligation of both governments to unitedly oppose. One must recognize that amongst the peoples of the African coast, any purchase of captives, regardless of their ultimate destination, has the same effect and tends to bring the same results as the slave trade: the stimulation of internal warfare from which he can procure this object of commerce.³⁶

The Ministry of the Marine insisted that any vessel engaged in transporting redeemed slaves would be condemned as a slaver and reproved Bazoche for permitting such an extensive slave trade in the Mozambique Channel.³⁷ Stung, Bazoche responded:

How can one admit, in effect, the possibility that without being noticed thirty to forty European ships annually participate in the slave trade in the Mozambique Channel, which is frequently visited by English and French warships?

How can one admit for an instant that eight to ten French ships are engaged annually in this traffic? Where can they prepare such expeditions, and where in these seas can they carry the victims of their criminal activity? These are facts so contrary to all probability that we can reasonably stop to examine them.

It is true that the slave trade still exists on the African coast, that it is carried on by the Arabs who transport the slaves to Zanzibar, and the Arabian and Persian coasts. It is true that European ships have participated in recent years. The arrest of the *Pocha* and the *Maria Vunetta* provide us with the proof.

We are without the power to interfere in Arab activity, or to repress the operations of Portuguese and Spanish ships. The brig the *Pocha* was stopped on accusations of piracy.

According to the treaty of 30th November 1831, French cruisers only have the right to search foreign vessels east of the Cape of Good Hope in waters within 20 leagues of Madagascar. This right does not apply to the east coast of Africa.³⁸

The authorities on Mauritius, suspicious of the intent of their counterparts on Réunion, would inevitably have heard of such “redemption” plans and notified London, which in turn stepped up their anti-slave trade patrols in the region. By mid-century, these had obliged slavers to deconcentrate the trade, and the phenomenon of a few large slaving ports gave way to a multitude of small slave ports, which in turn further stimulated Swahili—and Arab-dominated slave networks.³⁹ In 1856, after the death of Sayyid Said bin Sultan, the authority of Sayyid Majid extended from Ras Hafun in northern Somalia to Kilwa, which was still an important slave entrepôt, with connections throughout the western Indian Ocean, including Madagascar (Sanchez 2015). There, the slave/*engagé* trade was vigorous along the entire west coast as far as St Augustine Bay, in the southwest of the island, where in 1843 “two stout youths may be purchased for a keg containing 50 lbs of powder, young females for about 9 or 10 dolls. each.”⁴⁰ Many of the slaves offered for sale were Africans, according to a British naval report in 1859:

The slaves are first taken to depots in St. Augustine’s Bay and Bojanna [Boina] bay on the west coast of Madagascar from all parts of the east coast of Africa, but principally from Quilwa [Kilwa] and Ibo during the northeast monsoon and from St. António [Angoche] and Quizungo [Quissanga] during the southwest monsoon.⁴¹

Inevitably, the profits made by the Sakalava elite and Antalaotra were reinvested in trade, often in the traffic in slaves.⁴²

At the same time, the French islands continued to recruit *engagés* from East Africa. The French explorer and naval captain Charles Guillain (1808–1875) noted that, between December and March each year, some forty vessels left Zanzibar and Lamu for ports to the south and to the Comoros, Nosy Be and Madagascar. Some thirty five–forty vessels alone sailed from Zanzibar for Kilwa in mid-August, many specializing in the slave trade, and in late August, they met in Kilwa some of the vessels that had left earlier for the Comoros and Madagascar.⁴³ De Rontaunay was heavily involved in the *engagé* trade together with Joseph-François Lambert (1824–1873), a wealthy Mauritian trader, and Menon, owner of the steamer *le Mascareignes*, which in 1859 took on board 343 *engagés* in Lindi and Kilwa, 48 of whom died on the way to Réunion of cholera, which subsequently broke out in epidemic form, killing 2,700 (863 alone in the capital, St. Denis).⁴⁴ The explorer Richard Burton, who visited Kilwa in February 1859, had found the island in the grip of cholera. He painted a picture of seedy poverty and general desolation: the town in ruins, and the bodies of dead slaves lying around.⁴⁵

As Edward Alpers and Matthew Hopper make clear, Kilwa continued to play a significant role in the export of slaves into the 1880s (Alpers and Hopper 2008). For the most part, the victims of the Kilwa slave traffic have remained anonymous. An exception was a young Yao slave exported via Kilwa to Zanzibar. In late 1859 or 1860, a British anti-slave trade patrol intercepted the slaver carrying him, and he was sent to the CMS school at Nassick, where he was baptized as “Jacob Wainwright” and in 1865 recruited by David Livingstone, alongside five other liberated slave boys, to serve in his Africa expedition.⁴⁶

In sum, Kilwa’s position close to the southern limits of the monsoon system ensured that from early times, it played a pivotal role linking the regions of the southwestern Indian Ocean, notably Mozambique, the Comoros, and Madagascar, to the wider IOW. It rose to preeminence in the second major boom in the IOW global economy, from the ninth to thirteenth centuries, when the major export commodities were East African ivory and gold. However, with the rise of the plantation economy on the Mascarenes from the mid-eighteenth century, the imperial Merina economy in Madagascar from the 1820s, and early nineteenth-century demand from Cuba and Brazil, the export of slaves assumed an increasingly important role, one that expanded in the mid-nineteenth century in the guise of an *engagé* trade to the French islands of the western Indian Ocean.

NOTES

1. Cape Commissioners (June, 1859), quoted in Duffy (1967, 46); see also Moorson to Commodore Christian, HMS Andromarche, May 24, 1825, in Theal (1964, 53), Lloyd (1850, 54).
2. Chami and Msemwa (1997, 675–6), Chami (2006, 136–37, 162–63), Chami (1999, 238).
3. *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*, vol. 2.
4. Barbosa (1918); Austen and Headrick (1983), Wood (2011), Chau *Ju-Kua* (1967, 127).
5. Chau *Ju-Kua* (1967, 127, 132), Heller (2011, 355, 358–59), Hornell (1934, 316), Elliot (1925), de Vere (1993), Horton and Mudida (1996, 378–93), Wood (2016), Ricks (1970, 342–43, 351).
6. Barbosa (1918), Grandidier (1902), Vérin (1986), Wright (1986, 53–87), Dewar (2008).
7. Vérin (1986), Wright (1986), Dewar (2008), Ekblom et al. (2017).
8. Barnard (1969, 258–59), Alpers (1975, 210–11, 214–15, 218, 236–38), Shepherd (1980, 76–79), Wolf (1833), Toussaint (1967, 133–34), Isaacman (1972, 93–94, 98–102), Newitt (1973, 222), Duffy (1967, 42, 46), Pélissier (1984, 37).
9. Grandidier and Grandidier (1908, 379, fn. 2, 655), Alpers (1977, 37–53), Martin (1983, Ch. 2).
10. G.A. Barry, Instructions to Lieutenant B. Lesage, Aide de Camp to His Excellency the Governor, Port Louis, April 20, 1816, “Secret and Confidential,” HB7, Mauritius National Archives (MNA).
11. Milius to Min Cols, Ste. Suzanne, September 26, 1820, Fonds ministériels (FM) Série géographique (SG) REU//515–5991, *Archives nationales d’outre-mer* (ANOM), *Aix-en-Provence*.
12. Extract of a letter from Captain IV. F.W. Owen to Sir O. Lowry Cole, H.M.S. Leven, Port Louis, August 4, 1825, enclosure in British and foreign state papers online: <http://www.ebooksread.com/authors-eng/great-britain-foreign-office-library/british-and-foreign-state-papers-goo/page-17-british-and-foreign-state-papers-goo.shtml> (accessed September 26, 2015).
13. Extract of a letter from Lieutenant Bosanquet to Rear-Admiral Sir P. Campbell, Simon’s Bay, September 29, 1837, Enclosure in No. 31, Correspondence with Foreign Powers, Class B—1837–8, Further Series, p. 25. in Accounts and Papers: Slavery, Vol. 15 1837–8, *Parliamentary Papers*, House of Commons and Command, Volume 50 (1838).
14. Le Mauff de Kedudal à Bazoche, Gov de Bourbon, St. Denis, January 10, 1843, FM, SG, REU//515, FR ANOM 320 1COL 515/6000, ANOM. Extracts from this report appeared in *Archives du Commerce* 32: 292–94 (1843).

15. Ibid.
16. Edward Alpers has kindly provided the translations some of the “African” terms used by de Keududal.
17. Edward Alpers comments that the first two of these could be the Yao and Ngindo and that the fifth to twelfth could be the Nyasa, Bisa, Matumbi, Makua, Machinga (a Yao offshoot), Rufiji, and Nyamwezi. Personal communication, June 24, 2016.
18. Le Mauff de Kedudal à Bazoche, Gov de Bourbon, St. Denis, January 10, 1843, 3.
19. Edward Alpers comments about these: “The first is probably Mujojo, a common coastal name for mixed Comorian-mainlanders; the second is simply Washenzi or “barbarians”; the third perhaps Swahili; the fourth, interestingly, Kamanga, which refers to a group on the western side of Lake Malawi/Nyasa.” Personal communication, June 24, 2016.
20. Le Mauff de Kedudal à Bazoche, Gov de Bourbon, St. Denis, January 10, 1843, 5.
21. Ibid., 4.
22. Ibid., 6.
23. Ibid., 4.
24. Ibid., 16–17.
25. Ibid., 17–18. For the Swahili slave trade, see Vernet (2013).
26. Ibid., 20.
27. Ibid., 15–16.
28. Ibid., 5.
29. Ibid., 6.
30. Ibid., 7–8.
31. Ibid., 9.
32. Ibid., 8.
33. Ibid., 10.
34. Ibid.; Bazoche à Ministre de la Marine, St Denis, January 25, 1843 and October 19, 1843, FM, SG, REU//515, FR 320 1COL 515/6000, ANOM; see also “Question des engagés libres.” *Feuille Hebdomadaire de l’Île Bourbon* no. 1279 (July 5, 1843), FM, SG, REU//515, FR 320 1COL 515/6000, ANOM; Fuma (1992).
35. M. de la Marine à M. Le Gouverneur de Bourbon, Paris May 30, 1843, FM, SG, REU//515, FR 320 1COL 515/6000, ANOM.
36. M. de la Marine à M. Le Gouverneur de Bourbon, Paris, May 30, 1843; see also Ministre de la Marine au Ministre des Affaires étrangères (Directeur Commerciale), Paris, May 30, 1843, FM, SG, REU//515, FR 320 1COL 515/6000, ANOM.
37. M. de la Marine à M. Le Gouverneur de Bourbon, Paris, May 30, 1843.
38. Bazoche to M. le Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies, St-Denis, October 19, 1843, FM, SG, REU//515, FR 320 1COL 515/6000, ANOM.

39. Barnard (1969, 258–59), Alpers (1975, 210–11, 214–15, 218, 236–38), Shepherd (1980, 76–79), Wolf (1833), Toussaint (1967, 133–34), Isaacman (1972, 93–94, 98–102), Newitt (1973, 222), Duffy (1967, 42, 46), Pélissier (1984, 37).
40. Report of Captain Sir John Marshall of the Voyage of Her Majesty's Ship Isis to the Comoro Islands, Mozambique Coast and Madagascar, March 24, 1843, HB 14, MNA; see also Schapera (1961, 294).
41. Cape Commissioners (June, 1859), quoted in Duffy (1967, 46); see also Moorson to Commodore Christian, HMS Andromarche, May 24, 1825, in Theal (1964, 53), Lloyd (1850, 54).
42. Samuel F. Sanchez, "Un mouvement antiabolitionniste et anticolonial: la révolte sakalava de 1849 dans le Nord-Ouest de Madagascar," in Médard et al. (2013, 425).
43. Guillaing, (1856, 371), Monnier (2006).
44. Role (1974).
45. "Kilwa Ruins History: Kilwa Kisiwani Part 2." <http://www.kilwa.co.tz/kilwa-ruins-history-kilwa-kisiwani-part-2/>, accessed May 05, 2015.
46. Bontinck (1977, 404–405). For the story of Swema, another such exception, see Alpers (1983).

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Zanzibar, the Indian Ocean, and Nineteenth-Century Global Interface

Jeremy Prestholdt

Nineteenth-century Zanzibar was situated at the interface of East African, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean, and Atlantic systems. As a result, Zanzibar Town acted as a condensed, integrative space through which goods, people, and ideas from very different societies circulated and East African socioeconomic trends articulated with transoceanic currents. This chapter outlines these articulations and related socioeconomic phenomena in urban Zanzibar from the mid-nineteenth century until the beginning of the twentieth century. During this period, Zanzibar Town dominated East Africa's interface with the maritime world, becoming what Burkhard Schnepel refers to in the introduction to this volume as a regional "hub." As such, Zanzibar was the primary conduit for diverse East African consumer demands and extra-African demands for regional products. Zanzibar Town channeled goods and ideas, amplified social frictions, broadcast shifting sociocultural trends across and beyond the Swahili coast, and displayed an unusual cultural vibrancy. Thus, Zanzibar

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was more than a commercial center; it was a nexus of global exchange, human mobility, exploitation, and changing social relations.

I have elsewhere addressed consumer culture and slavery in nineteenth-century Zanzibar Town, or how diverse residents domesticated transoceanic consumer trends and used both imported goods and people as instruments of social relations (Prestholdt 2008; Prestholdt forthcoming). This chapter takes a wider view in an attempt to highlight the mechanics and consequences of Zanzibar's position as a hub at the height of its prosperity and regional influence. Specifically, I consider manifestations of and struggles over material culture, social definition, language, and religious thought. I begin by tracing the broad socioeconomic contours of nineteenth-century Zanzibar and its rise as a regional hub. I then address several material and immaterial dimensions of Zanzibari social and economic life, including consumer culture, import and re-export markets, language use, and Muslim intellectual currents. In taking this tack, the chapter sketches a multifaceted image of the dynamics and regional influence of the island hub.

ZANZIBAR AND THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY WORLD

In late 1840, Sayyid Sa'īd bin Sultān Āl Busa'īdī (r. 1807–1856), Sultan of Oman and Zanzibar, arrived in Zanzibar Town from Muscat with his household.¹ Thereafter, he would make Zanzibar his *de facto* capital, ruling the transoceanic sultanate, including its Swahili tributaries, from the small East African island. This moment signaled a symbolic shift in the history of Zanzibar, East Africa, and the western Indian Ocean. Never had a southern Arabian state made its capital on the East African coast. Never had East Africa enjoyed direct commercial relations with so many world regions. And no subsequent colonial power would become as deeply integrated into or affected by the social landscape of the Swahili world as the Busa'īdis (Bhacker 1992; Gilbert 2007). For the following half century, the sultan's seat of power dominated East Africa's maritime interface, becoming the economic and political nucleus of the Swahili coast and an important cultural node in the western Indian Ocean region.

In the early nineteenth century, the Sultanate of Oman and Zanzibar conquered or gained the allegiance of most Swahili city-states. This process culminated in the fall of Mombasa in 1837. From that point until the end of the century, Zanzibaris exerted significant economic,

political, and cultural influence within and often beyond the Swahili world. Moreover, Zanzibar's position as a commercial hub and the rise of plantation agriculture on the island and neighboring Pemba contributed to a significant pooling of wealth. In 1871, Sultan Barghash bin Sa'īd's brother, Abdulaziz bin Sa'īd, spoke of Zanzibar as "the fountain of money," a reference to the fortunes made by the Busa'īdī family, financiers, business elites, and landowners.²

Much of the wealth accrued from trade, finance, and plantation agriculture was evident in Zanzibar Town by the middle of the century. In addition to Zanzibari sartorial trends, which I will address in greater detail in the next section, the architecture of the elite quarters, often referred to corporately as Stone Town, bore witness to both the fortunes of the elite and Zanzibar's emerging creole culture. This creole style was evident in elaborate western Indian-influenced carved doors, Omani-style crenellations, and other elements influenced by southern Arabian and western Indian aesthetics. Zanzibaris' interest in imported household goods like those consumed by urbanites in other Indian Ocean hubs offered additional material evidence of local engagement with a transoceanic symbolic system (Sheriff 1995; Meier 2009, 2016). As in Mandvi and Bombay, Zanzibari elites filled their receiving rooms with mirrors, American wall clocks, and European porcelain. This creole aesthetic in turn proved attractive in other Swahili cities and interior trade centers. In some instances, Zanzibari aesthetics even influenced fashion beyond the East African region. For instance, the Muscati cloth popular among Zanzibar's elite enjoyed brief popularity in Europe and North America after Sultan Barghash's visit to Paris in 1875. In the French capital, London, and New York, bonnets wrapped in a brocaded scarf that resembled the design of Barghash's turban cloth became a brief fad (Ballard and Halley 1875).³

At the confluence of regional and global economies, Zanzibar would function as both sieve and conduit, filtering consumer demands for regional and global partners, refining global intellectual currents for local audiences, and channeling wealth. As Edward A. Alpers has suggested, East African islands long functioned as key nodes connecting the East African region with the wider Indian Ocean world (Alpers 2000; Alpers, this volume). As Alpers notes in his contribution to this volume, nineteenth-century Zanzibar represented the extension of this longer history of East African islands as important nodes. For much of the century, Zanzibar Town was a central point of connection that reflected diverse

socioeconomic interests and broadcast shifting sociocultural trends (Prestholdt forthcoming). Relatively few ports in the world have commanded an unrivaled relationship with such a vast hinterland as Zanzibar in the nineteenth century. The island capital functioned as an intermediary between the greater East African region, stretching from Lake Malawi to the eastern Congo and southern Somalia, and ports as distant as Boston, Istanbul, Calcutta, and Canton. Much like Bombay and Singapore, Zanzibar acted as a hub of significant socioeconomic activity that shaped and was shaped by its regional environs and transoceanic linkages.⁴

Zanzibar's economic vitality attracted seasonal and permanent migrants from other Swahili cities, the Comoros Archipelago, Somalia, southern Arabia, Kachchh, Gujarat, Bombay, and further afield. New patterns of migration brought laborers from Madagascar, Yemen, Oman, and South Asia, most of whom were men. Other South Asians, primarily from Kachchh, Gujarat, and Bombay, were key to the organization of Zanzibar's economy. Vāniyā, Khoja, Bohra, and Parsi merchants and financiers managed Zanzibari exchange and offered lines of credit to landowners, shipowners, and caravan leaders. This infusion of capital fueled trading ventures to the interior and stimulated agricultural exports, notably cloves produced by slave labor (Mangat 1969; Sheriff 1987; Metcalf 2007; Bishara 2012; Machado 2014).

The East African region lacked navigable rivers to connect the coast with the interior, but caravans led by Yao, Nyamwezi, and Swahili merchants facilitated vast networks of exchange. Roads reached from Zanzibar's tributary coastal towns, such as Kilwa Kivinje, Bagamoyo, and Mombasa, to Lake Malawi, the eastern forest belt and the shores of Lake Victoria. Caravans with porters often numbering over a thousand became mobile markets trading imported items such as cloth, beads, and brass wire for ivory and other East African commodities (Alpers 1975; Rockel 1996, 2014). Thus, Indian, British, and American cloth delivered to Zanzibar reached markets more than one thousand kilometers inland. Southern Arabian demand for slaves and the rise of an East African plantation complex also contributed to a surge in the numbers of slaves brought to the coast and re-exported from Zanzibar. At mid-century, most enslaved people in Zanzibar had been taken from southeast Africa or the Bagamoyo hinterland. The wealthiest Zanzibaris also imported small numbers of slaves from further afield, including the Ethiopian

Highlands, South Asia, and southeast Europe (Alpers 1975; Cooper 1977; Sheriff 1987; Prestholdt 2008; Machado 2014; Hopper 2015).

As Zanzibar Town became a regional metropolis, it embodied the dividends and tensions of East Africa's nineteenth-century economic growth (Bennett 1978; Sheriff 1987; Gilbert 2013). New fashions and intellectual currents evidenced the reconceptualization of transoceanic relationships while migration and travel bolstered older transoceanic networks and facilitated new ones. As we shall see in the following sections, an unprecedented number of slaves of mainland origin integrated into coastal polities, and they, along with other recent arrivals at the coast, affected local social hierarchies, consumer culture, and the Swahili language. The Swahili dialect of Zanzibar, *Kiunguja*, would remain remarkably dynamic in the nineteenth century. This was partly a reflection of Zanzibar's position as a hub, and *Kiunguja* would influence the use of Swahili across the wider East African region into the colonial era. Finally, intellectual and spiritual impulses from the Hadramawt, Oman, and beyond impacted social relations and Islamic thought in Zanzibar. These new ideas would likewise radiate well beyond the island hub.

ZANZIBAR AND THE WORLD OF GOODS

Controlling commerce had long been a primary interest of regional powers, from medieval Swahili city-states to early-modern Portuguese colonists and later Omani governors (Vernet 2005). Yet, the focus of regional commercial activity at Zanzibar made it the region's unrivaled entrepôt and cemented Zanzibar Town's position as regional hub unlike any other since Kilwa's decline in the early sixteenth century. Global trade initiatives were central to Sultan Seyyid Sa'īd's vision for the sultanate, and his successors Majid bin Sa'īd and Barghash bin Sa'īd would extend these initiatives. For instance, Seyyid Sa'īd commissioned vessels in South Asia and the United States, dispatching them to ports around the world, including Bombay, Calcutta, the Mascarenes, Cape Town, London, New York, Marseilles, Hamburg, and Canton (Burton 1872, 268). As the American captain Sandwith Drinker recorded, these vessels "engaged in commercial voyages, mostly to Bombay and Calcutta from whence they import sugar, rice, cloths, cutlery & in exchange for spices, ivory and drugs."⁵

In 1840, Seyyid Sa'īd famously sent his Bombay-made flagship, the *Sultana*, on a trade and diplomatic mission to New York City laden

with Zanzibari cloves, East African ivory, Yemeni coffee, Omani dates, and Persian carpets. Much to the consternation of American merchants in Zanzibar, the *Sultana* returned with American cotton cloth (*mere-kani*) and several tons of beads—both of which had significant aesthetic and monetary value in East African societies—destined for the markets of the interior (Eilts 1962).⁶ Seyyid Saʿid's successor, Sultan Majid, similarly bought ships for use in trade, including the infamous former Confederate warship the *Shenandoah*, which he refitted and redubbed *El Majidi*. His brother Sultan Barghash later turned to steam technology to expand commercial linkages with Bombay, as we shall see.

More important than royal commercial ventures was the fact that Zanzibar became a regional emporium that attracted merchants from around the world as both temporary and permanent residents.⁷ By the mid-1860s, ships from most western Indian Ocean ports visited Zanzibar, as did vessels from Egypt, the United States, Argentina, Portugal, Denmark, France, Britain, and Germany (Gilbert 2005; Prestholdt 2008). In terms of value, cotton textiles imported from western India, China, southern Arabia, western Europe, and North America were the most important items of import at Zanzibar. As the *Sultana*'s return cargo suggests, Zanzibar was also critical to the regional distribution of imported beads as well as metals, guns, and many other goods.

Zanzibar Town was East Africa's premier emporium. The city boasted many open-air markets, and all of the city's major thoroughfares were lined with retail shops (Christie 1876, 356). In 1864, an American resident recorded that Zanzibar's "bazaars are always full of miscellaneous foreign articles."⁸ In Zanzibar, consumer goods were plentiful and often inexpensive. This ever-changing world of goods would define the public culture of the city, from social status to perceptions of belonging. Distinct Zanzibari creole styles of dress and speech, for instance, emerged in the nineteenth century largely as a consequence of Zanzibar's position as regional hub. Indeed, clothing and textiles offer key examples not only of Zanzibari creole consumer culture, but also Zanzibar's position as a conduit for material goods.

Zanzibaris of many socioeconomic backgrounds came to rely on imported clothing as a public means of communication. As the East African region became more completely integrated into expanding global markets, Zanzibaris purchased imported clothing in volumes that surpassed previous eras. Some migrants to the city held to the fashions of their places of birth, but a Zanzibari creole sartorial aesthetic emerged

over the course of the nineteenth century. Zanzibaris borrowed heavily from Omani and eastern Mediterranean styles. For instance, Omani aesthetics had a great impact on women's apparel. In the later nineteenth century, Arab and ex-slave women alike wore variants of blouses, leggings, and sandals imported from Muscat (Fair 2001, 2004). Likewise, Muscati turban cloths gained wide appeal among men of various ages, and toward the end of the nineteenth century, the red fez (*tarbush*) came into fashion among young Zanzibari men.⁹

Zanzibaris spent large sums on apparel. The increasing wealth of Zanzibar's elite encouraged the consumption of an array of prestige goods, including East Asian silks, European jackets, and American shoes. The clothing of plebeian and enslaved Zanzibaris was more modest, but imported apparel was an equally important vehicle for self-definition. Across lines of class and ethnicity, clothing functioned as a finely calibrated public means of identity negotiation in a rapidly changing urban environment. More precisely, consumer culture offered the trappings of a new social identity, and by engaging in forms of public presentation, Zanzibaris of various socioeconomic positions collectively altered the material codes of Zanzibari society.

For example, though Zanzibar's plebeian majority could not indulge in ostentatious forms of consumption, they rapidly appropriated many elite fashions, making them common elements of popular attire. Specifically, plebeian men and women sought items of apparel that reflected dignity, respectability, and adherence to Islamic material norms—and thus inclusion. Among poor ex-slaves, the primary symbols of transcending slavery were items of “Swahili” adornment, or clothing that signified distinction from mainland societies and integration into Zanzibari society. Such adornment included the long white men's shirt known in Swahili as *kanzu* and the men's *kizibao*, or embroidered, sleeveless waistcoat made from European broadcloth. The *kizibao* was a popular accoutrement among elites in the early nineteenth century, yet by the middle of that century, the *kizibao* was one of the greatest investments for men of lesser means, including former slaves (Prestholdt 2008).

Among plebeian Zanzibari women, the *ukaya* head-covering became an essential symbol of integration into Zanzibari society, largely as a result of its association with Muslim social norms. More importantly, by the 1890s, the *kanga*, or two-piece, colorful printed cloth that featured a Swahili phrase or aphorism, similarly attracted a cross section of consumers. As Laura Fair has shown, the *kanga* became a primary sign of

Zanzibari creole culture and, with the abolition of slavery at the end of the century, adherence to post-abolition social norms. In the ephemeral milieu of nineteenth-century Zanzibar Town, clothing thus offered a symbolic means to articulate social claims and desires, including honor and belonging (Fair 2001, 2004; McMahon 2013; Ryan 2013).

Zanzibari creole aesthetics also reverberated beyond the island. Demand for the *kizibao*, for instance, spread to trade fairs of the interior. A more remarkable example of the influence of Zanzibari aesthetics was the development of the *leso*, a precursor to the *kanga* and a popular item of Muslim women's fashion at the coast. The *leso* was first made in Zanzibar by stitching together colorful men's handkerchiefs exported from Manchester to Bombay and then re-exported to East Africa. Zanzibaris assembled the handkerchiefs to form large wrappers that produced a vivid display pattern and color. The style became popular along the coast and then quickly traveled along the caravan routes. The development of the *kanga* reveals a similar trajectory. Some of the earliest *kanga*, dating to the 1880s, were made of unbleached American sheeting (*merékani*) printed in Zanzibar. Though later *kanga* were imported from India, Holland, Switzerland, Britain, and Japan, the styles that gained favor in Zanzibar often found much wider audiences across the region (Linnebuhr 1992; Fair 2001; Ryan 2011, 2013; Parkin 2012).

As the histories of the *leso* and *kanga* suggest, Zanzibaris altered imported goods to appeal to regional markets and so assumed a critical role in articulating imports with regional consumer demands. More precisely, Zanzibar's artisans responded quickly to shifts in consumer demand and translated imported goods into objects of greater local significance. Thus, Zanzibar became a center of remanufacture in the nineteenth century. For example, in the 1850s, Zanzibaris recognized a market in Nyamwezi (northwestern Tanzania) for the *kitambi banyani*, a white Indian-made cloth that artisans in Zanzibar stamped with a narrow red border. Similarly, Zanzibaris gave Surati cotton loincloths broad border stripes of indigo and yellow, which increased their marketability in various interior markets (Prestholdt 2008). Precisely how information about niche markets and fashion trends traveled along East Africa's highways is not entirely clear. However, as Sarah Fee has argued, caravan leaders and porters (*pagazi*) likely played a central role in the diffusion and translation of aesthetics. Porters, for example, often purchased clothes at the coast and wore them to impress potential clients and their home communities (Fee forthcoming; Verne 2012).

The sultanate's economic policies would also play a critical role in defining Zanzibar's relationship with the wider East African region. Sultan Barghash (r. 1870–1888), like his father Seyyid Sa'īd and brother Sultan Majid, sought to expand Zanzibar's position as a regional hub. He carried forward many inherited commercial policies, but he also developed a more ambitious vision for Zanzibari regional and transoceanic engagement. Barghash continued Zanzibar's political alliance with Britain, while at the same time strengthening ties with Istanbul, Cairo, Paris, and Berlin.¹⁰ In 1875, he became the first East African head of state to visit Britain. While there, Barghash entreated his hosts to invest in Zanzibar. He explained to a crowded lecture hall in Manchester that Zanzibaris “look to [Britain] to provide the capital and to initiate the organization which shall develop the resources of the territories under our rule” (*Times of London* 1875). Barghash envisaged a railroad linking the east coast of Africa to Lake Tanganyika, and he published appeals for investors in several European papers (Stanley 1878, 43).

More importantly, Barghash used state funds to promote direct trade with Bombay, the western Indian Ocean's emerging industrial center. In the late 1870s, Barghash purchased six steamships from German and Scottish shipbuilders and inaugurated a shipping line that offered stiff competition to the British steamers that dominated the western Indian Ocean routes. He also offered cargo space at low rates (Ropes 1973, 34 note 113; Prestholdt 2004).¹¹ As a result, the Sultan's ships significantly increased trade and travel between Zanzibar and Bombay. Alongside British steamers, Barghash's fleet freed merchants from the rhythms of the monsoon, reduced travel time, and integrated Zanzibar more completely into a network of steamship services linking Indian Ocean ports from Aden to Singapore (Bang 2003, 58).

With a direct and reliable service to Zanzibar, Bombay firms increased their export of Indian and British products to East Africa. Everything from textiles and carriages to boots, shoes, stationary, rice, ghee, and fresh vegetables found a market in East Africa. This increase in trade even necessitated the expansion of Zanzibar's customs house (Ropes 1973, 20). The most important element in the expanding economic relationship between Bombay and Zanzibar, however, was cotton cloth, both British re-exports and unbleached Bombay-made sheeting. The latter bore a close resemblance to *merekani* and thus found buyers right across the East African region.¹² By 1881, the annual volume of Indian-manufactured unbleached cloth exported to Zanzibar had reached

five and a half million yards, far more than any other variety of cloth exported from Bombay to East Africa.¹³ By 1888, just two years before Sultan Ali bin Sa'īd agreed to accept British protectorate status, Zanzibar imported (and then re-exported) over fifteen million yards of unbleached Indian cloth and English cottons from Bombay.¹⁴ Yet, Zanzibar's share of India's trade would plateau after the turn of the century. With the construction of new ports in Dar es Salaam, German East Africa and Mombasa in Britain's East African Protectorate, Zanzibar Town would begin to lose its once unrivaled position as the gateway to East Africa.

ZANZIBAR'S IMMATERIAL WORLD

Zanzibar's position as a regional hub also affected language, religious learning, and other immaterial dimensions of social life. In the nineteenth century, Zanzibar was a polyglot metropolis. For instance, in the 1860s, many regional languages were spoken in Zanzibar Town, including Makua, Yao, Zaramo, Oromo, Amharic, Malagasy, and multiple Comorian dialects.¹⁵ Likewise, several Arabic dialects were spoken in the city, as were Turkish, Farsi, and many South Asian and European languages, notably Gujarati and English. But Swahili would act as the island's lingua franca. Much like Zanzibar's sartorial culture, *Kiunguja* was dynamic, shaped by Zanzibar's diverse and mobile population. According to the missionary Edward Steere, in the 1860s, various quarters (*mitaa*) of Zanzibar spoke different dialects of Swahili (Steere 1870, 496). Bishop William George Tozer described the linguistic situation in more colorful terms. He explained that forms of Swahili in Zanzibar were so differentiated that "scarcely two persons" agreed on the pronunciation of Swahili words (Ward 1902, 92).

Although Tozer's characterization was hyperbolic, the Swahili spoken at Zanzibar was remarkably variegated. For example, Mombasans and Lamuans who lived in Kokoni district spoke "very good Swahili," according to Steere. People living outside of Stone Town in Ng'ambo, many of whom were of mainland ancestry, spoke what Steere deemed "a dialect peculiar to themselves." Steere recorded that residents of Baghani district, which historically was home to a large Harthi Arab population, "spoke a very corrupt Arabized dialect" (Steere 1870, x). The influence of Arabic on Swahili was significant well beyond Baghani. The missionary and linguist Johann Ludwig Krapf wrote that there was such a "large infusion of Arabic and other foreign words" in nineteenth-century

Swahili that one could, as he put it, “adopt at will an Arabic word when in difficulty for a proper expression ...” (Krapf 1882, xi–xii).¹⁶

Zanzibari Swahili was diverging so markedly from the Swahili spoken on the northern coast that by mid-century Mombasans dismissively referred to *Kiunguja* as “foolish words” (*maneno ya kijingajinga*), an allusion to the linguistic influence of newcomers (Krapf 1882, xi, 143). This emergent Zanzibari Swahili would also have distant reverberations. While in earlier centuries Swahili was rarely spoken beyond the coast and the lower Zambezi Valley, the rapid expansion of caravan highways between the lakes and coastal polities intimately tied to Zanzibar would make Swahili, and many elements of the Zanzibar dialect, an important language of regional exchange in the nineteenth century.¹⁷

In addition to the Swahili language, the social concept of “Swahili” was in flux as a result of Zanzibar’s position as a hub. Zanzibar was a highly stratified society that became more stratified as the demand for slaves increased and free laborers as well as foreign merchants continued to arrive. In this context, the word “Swahili” came into common use as a social reference, not simply a linguistic term or geographical reference to the coast region.¹⁸ By the 1860s, over half of urban Zanzibaris were enslaved, recently freed or had been born on the mainland. In rural areas, the percentage was often higher (Cooper 1977). As Jonathon Glassman has shown, new residents at the coast, including slaves, “engaged in popular struggles for citizenship.” Social terminology, including the word “Swahili,” became an important site of such struggles (Glassman 1995, 25). Claiming inclusion in Zanzibari social hierarchies, ex-slaves, slaves, and migrants from the mainland frequently identified as “Swahili.”

Much like the appropriation of coastal clothing, using the term “Swahili” as an identity marker asserted affiliation with Zanzibari society and cultural mores, albeit without membership in a local lineage. This liberal use of the term “Swahili”—to the extent that Christian converts also identified as “Swahili”—drew on the term’s malleability to broaden its definition. Specifically, “Swahili” was valuable for its relative ambiguity. As an imprecise reference to residence at the coast, it could be used to evoke a social position between the freeborn elite who boasted local genealogies (*waungwana*) and recent arrivals. Specifically, the identity marker “Swahili” allowed Zanzibaris of mainland birth or slave ancestry to make a crucial distinction between themselves and so-called *washenzi* or *wajinga*, derisive Swahili terms for cultural foreigners, usually those from the mainland (Thomson 1881, 91).

This revised notion of “Swahili” as a social group became attractive for diverse plebeian coastal residents, but Zanzibari elites also sought to change the lexicon of social identity.¹⁹ For instance, the Omani elite of Zanzibar marginalized their predecessors, including the hereditary ruler of Zanzibar Island, the Mwinyi Mkuu, and used their immediate relation to Arabia to claim sociocultural superiority over other coastal residents.²⁰ The Swahili neologism *ustaarabu*, or possessing “Arabness,” became a social prestige claim that linked status and notions of civility to immediate Arab ancestry.²¹

Zanzibar’s position as a regional hub also attracted people of diverse faiths. The Busa’īdīs instituted significant religious freedoms at Zanzibar, which had positive repercussions for Hindus, Shias, and the island’s small community of European and African Christians. For instance, multiple European denominations made Zanzibar a center for the propagation of Christianity in East Africa. Mission schools and the conversion of freed slaves contributed to a rapidly growing East African Christian community, particularly in the later nineteenth century (Hoffman 2005a). A more immediate consequence of religious freedom was the fact that Zanzibar Town became a center of both Sunni and Ibadi scholarship. As a result, in the late nineteenth century, multiple reformist movements took root in Zanzibar.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Zanzibar was a hub of religious learning, drawing Shafi’i scholars from as far away as South Africa, Yemen, and Egypt. Additionally, most Sunni Zanzibari intellectuals traveled widely in an effort to disseminate their ideas to broad audiences (Farsy 1989; Bang 2003, 2014). Many enjoyed close scholarly links to the Hadramawt, as a result of both familial connections and circuits of religious education (Reese 2008).²² Shaykh Ahmad ibn Sumayt exemplified Zanzibar’s nineteenth-century Shafi’i globalism. Ibn Sumayt was a prominent scholar of the ‘Alawiyya, a Sufi order associated with the Hadrami Ba ‘Alawi family. Born in the Comoros of Hadrami descent, Ibn Sumayt studied in the Hadramawt before traveling to Zanzibar to take up an appointment as a magistrate (*qadi*) during Sultan Barghash’s reign. However, friction between the young Ibn Sumayt and Barghash made the cleric a *persona non grata* in the sultan’s domains, and he had little choice but to leave Zanzibar. Thereafter, Ibn Sumayt traveled to Java, India, Mecca, Cairo, and Istanbul, points both within and beyond the circles of the ‘Alawiyya. After Barghash’s death in 1888, Ibn Sumayt returned to Zanzibar to take up the *qadi*-ship once again (Bang 2003).

The trajectories of Ibn Sumayt and many of his ‘Alawi contemporaries highlight what Anne K. Bang referred to as an ‘Alawi-Hadrami resurgence in nineteenth-century East Africa. After studying in the Hadramawt and Java, these learned men became agents of ‘Alawiyya reform, which, as Bang demonstrated, placed great emphasis on scripturalism. Religious elites such as Ibn Sumayt established spiritual centers (*ribat*) in Zanzibar and Lamu that conformed to the teachings of scholars in the Hadramawt (Bang 2003, 151; Pouwels 1981). Though Ibn Sumayt did not ascribe to Salafi reformist ideas, his experiences in the eastern Mediterranean also exposed him to Salafi intellectual currents. As a result, he adopted certain modernist attitudes, remained open to ideas that did not challenge the basic tenets of ‘Alawiyya thought, and developed links with prominent pan-Islamists (Pouwels 1987, 206; Bang 2003, 137). Ibn Sumayt and like-minded scholars in Zanzibar thus augmented core ‘Alawiyya practices with reformist ideas drawn from multiple strains of contemporary thought (Bang 2003, 152).²³

Ibadi reformism also shaped public discourse in Zanzibar. With the assistance of the sultan, reformism influenced the wider Ibadi world as well. As Amal Ghazal has demonstrated, in the late nineteenth century, many Zanzibari Ibadis both embraced and contributed to a global Ibadi “awakening” that intellectually linked Zanzibar with Oman and Algeria in significant ways (Ghazal 2014). Sultan Barghash was a strong proponent of the global Ibadi renaissance, in no small part because of the challenges Ibadism faced in religiously plural Zanzibar. The number and prestige of Shafi‘i *‘ulama* at Zanzibar, in contrast to the relatively small number of Ibadis, encouraged many Ibadis to embrace Sunni Islam in the late nineteenth century (Ghazal 2005a; Hoffman 2005b). Barghash sought to reverse this trend, in some cases by resorting to extreme measures. For instance, he imprisoned one of the most prominent Shafi‘i *‘alim* of the late nineteenth century, Shaykh Ali bin Abdallah (Pouwels 1987, 117–20). Intimidation, however, paid few dividends. Instead, Barghash’s investments in print technology would ultimately do more to contribute to communal identity among Ibadis and position Zanzibar as a key site of the global Ibadi “awakening.”

In the 1880s, Sultan Barghash established the Sultanate Press (al-Matba‘a al-Sultaniyya). Zanzibar thereby joined the ranks of only a

handful of cities, including Cairo, Tunis, and Algiers, where Ibadi religious texts were published. As Philip Sadgrove has shown, Barghash believed that the press could stimulate Ibadi scholarship. Therefore, the Sultanate Press's first publication was seventeen volumes of Ibadi law and theology, the *Kitab Qamus al-Sharia* (Sadgrove 2004). Through the *Kitab Qamus al-Sharia* and other scholarly texts, the Sultanate Press helped energize scholarly links among Ibadis in Oman, Zanzibar, and Algeria. European imperialism also offered a catalyst for the transformation of a broad reformist program, referred to as the *nahda*, into a political force. As Ghazal suggests, the Ibadi awakening gave form and direction to anticolonial rhetoric. Using state resources and the press, successive Zanzibari sultans funded and published the work of Algerian Ibadi scholars such as Muhammad Atfiyyash, who was a staunch critic of colonialism (Ghazal 2005b, 2010a, 2010b).

Nineteenth-century Zanzibar produced other groundbreaking literature as well. Perhaps the most remarkable was a secular work that would reach a wide audience: *Memoiren einer arabischen Prinzessin* (*Memoirs of an Arabian Princess*), written by Sayyida Salme binti Sa'īd, later Emily Ruete, the daughter of Sayyid Sa'īd and sister of Sultans Majid and Barghash. Printed in 1886, it was the first published memoir of an Arab woman, and it enjoyed great success in Western literary circles. While Ruete's story was in no way typical of nineteenth-century Zanzibar, it captured elements of Zanzibar's unique position as a regional hub.

Ruete was the child of the sultan and an enslaved Georgian concubine. Literate and fluent in both Arabic and Swahili, Ruete led a life of privilege in the royal household. However, she eloped with a Hamburg merchant based in Zanzibar and converted to Christianity. Thereafter, she lived in Germany, Beirut, and Jaffa. Her memoirs recalled her childhood in Zanzibar and offered a window on elite Zanzibari culture, including life in the sultan's household. At the same time, the book took aim at European imperialism and Western misconceptions of Muslim societies. Though published in German, *Memoirs* was translated into several other languages. As a measure of the book's success, the Parisian newspaper *Le Figaro* dubbed Ruete "Author of the World" (Salme/Ruete 1993; Prestholdt 2014).

Memoirs was not written in Zanzibar, but Emily Ruete's life exemplified the strands of opulence, exchange, inequality, and exploitation that defined social life in nineteenth-century Zanzibar. In her reflections on Zanzibari society we see Zanzibar as an integrative space, a nexus in

which material culture, language, and intellectual currents evidenced multifaceted engagements with a great many other world regions.

CONCLUSION

Exchanges defined nineteenth-century Zanzibar. The concentration of economic and intellectual activity there reoriented the Swahili world, facilitating or strengthening ties with the East African interior, southern Arabia, South Asia, Europe, and the Americas. The movement of goods, ideas, and people through Zanzibar Town evidenced and affected the ties that bound the entrepôt to numerous global networks. More precisely, Zanzibar acted as a conduit for regional and global consumer demand, radiated new cultural phenomena, and translated transoceanic intellectual trends. Zanzibar's position as a conduit meant that East Africa and the wider Indian Ocean region defined Zanzibar, while its residents interpreted and recombined aesthetic motifs from southern Arabia, the Mediterranean, and the West in ways that addressed local social and political interests. Zanzibaris also engaged in extreme forms of exploitation, modified the Swahili language, appropriated or developed new social terminology, and embraced spiritual movements of the wider Sunni, Ibadi, and Christian spheres. Zanzibar's social universe was thus both mirror and translation of world historical change.

Yet, Zanzibar's economic and political preeminence began to wane at the end of the nineteenth century. In the late 1880s, Germany seized the Tanzanian mainland and the British East African Company gained control of the Kenyan coast. The new ports of Dar es Salaam and Mombasa (Kilindini) ultimately attracted trade away from Zanzibar. But even as Zanzibar lost control of East Africa's continental-oceanic interface, it continued to integrate diverse global currents and broadcast cultural trends. Long after Zanzibar's economic importance diminished, its cultural influence remained significant. In part as a consequence of its nineteenth-century preeminence, in the twentieth century, Zanzibari fashions and music influenced wider aesthetics within the East African region. Zanzibar also remained a hub of religious learning (Fair 2001, 2004; Bang 2014). After the 1964 Zanzibar Revolution, however, the island entered a period of relative isolation during which its regional influence declined further.

While Zanzibar is no longer an entrepôt, since the 1990s, its cultural importance and influence have increased once again. The island is now

perceived both within and beyond East Africa as a bastion of Swahili culture and history. In the age of tourism, Zanzibari culture has gained economic value. Interest in Zanzibar's culture and historical ambience, along with the island's beaches, attracts hundreds of thousands of tourists every year. Stone Town's designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2000, largely in recognition of its creole architecture, heightened the city's appeal. Cultural festivals have also helped to attract international interest. The Zanzibar International Film Festival/Festival of the Dhow Countries and Sauti ya Busara (Voice of Wisdom) have drawn substantial international audiences. Through these festivals Zanzibar once again acts as a sieve, now drawing on cultural production from across Africa and the Indian Ocean region and presenting it to diverse audiences (Bissell 2011, 2012).

The cultural economy of Zanzibar has changed dramatically since the nineteenth century, but the legacies of Zanzibar's position at the continental–oceanic interface are significant. Zanzibar's histories of wealth, social diversity, inequality, and exploitation have been recurring topics of political debate, from the era of decolonization to contemporary separatism. Indeed, Zanzibaris and others have incessantly reimagined and rearticulated the island's past within contexts of economic transformation, shifting political imagination, and changing social mores (Glassman 2011, 2014; Ivanov 2012; Verne 2012). Popular celebration and criticism of Zanzibar's past have both illuminated and obscured the exchanges that defined the nineteenth-century nexus, yet the island's former position as a regional hub has remained remarkably relevant (Bissell 2007; Ivanov 2014). Thus, one of the most important legacies of Zanzibar's nineteenth-century apogee is that the memory of the island hub continues to affect popular understandings of Zanzibari society and visions of its future.

NOTES

1. Historical Society of Philadelphia, Henry Drinker Papers, Sandwith Drinker, "A Private Journal of Events and Scenes at Sea, at the Cape and in Zanzibar by Sandwith Drinker, Commencing August 9, 1840. Sultanee, New York to Zanzibar." My thanks to Jacob S. Dorman for locating this manuscript.
2. British Library, India Office Records (hereafter IOR), L/P&S/9/49 Abdul Azeez bin Saeed to Burghash bin Saeed (n.d., ca. 1871), Muscat.
3. On Muscat cloth, see Fee (forthcoming).

4. On Bombay, see, for instance, Green (2011).
5. Drinker, "A Private Journal," p. 88.
6. On continued American concerns about the sultan's commercial ventures see, for instance, Zanzibar National Archives, AA1/3 Peters and Pollock to Sultan Sayyid Said, February 20, 1847.
7. On regional trade and Zanzibari commerce in the 1840s, see Guillain (1856, 299–403).
8. US Consulate, Zanzibar, Roll 2, Vol. 4–5, Hines to Secretary of State, October 25, 1864.
9. On the wider sociocultural uses of the fez in sub-Saharan Africa, see Kramer (1993).
10. On Zanzibari relations with the Ottoman Empire, see Babavatan (2003).
11. SOAS Library, University of London, MacKinnon Papers PPMS1/Corr 1, Box 22/Fol. 88, Holmans to MacKinnon, June 1, 1879.
12. United States Consulate, Zanzibar, Roll 3, Vols. 6–7 Cheney, "Trade in Zanzibar for the year 1883–4."
13. IOR V/17/311 "Annual Statement of Trade and Navigation for the Bombay Presidency for the year 1881–82."
14. IOR V/17/317 "Annual Statement of Trade and Navigation for the Bombay Presidency for the year 1887–1888."
15. On the Comorian community in Zanzibar, see Saleh (1936), Walker (2014).
16. Krapf (1882, 162) also noted the telling phrase, *kiswahili bakina kituo*, or "Swahili has no place": In other words, Swahili is constantly changing.
17. On the complex history of Swahili usage beyond the coast and its intersections with colonial rule, see Fabian (1991).
18. According to Edward Steere (1884, 82), in the second half of the nineteenth century Zanzibaris only used the term *Kiswahili* to refer to the dialects spoken north of Mombasa.
19. "Swahili" seems to have been an identity marker for slaves in southern Yemen as well. In the early 1840s, Charles Pickering met slaves of East African descent in Mocha who identified as "Soahili," though the precise social meaning of the term is not evident from Pickering's account.
20. On Arab identity and Omani–Zanzibari relations more broadly, see McDow (2005) and Gilbert (2007).
21. For a more complete discussion of the term *ustaarabu*, see Pouwels (1979, 1987). Tellingly, neither Steere's (1884) nor Krapf's (1882) dictionaries, which were compiled between the 1830s and 1860s, reference the term *ustaarabu*.
22. Even among Zanzibari scholars who were not well traveled, most studied with foreign-born teachers (Pouwels 1987, 149–51). On the expanding membership of *tariqas* in late-nineteenth-century eastern and southern Africa, see Bang (2014).

23. Others would likewise use travel as a means for reflection. See, for example, Reese (2004).

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Ali Mfaume: A Comorian Hub in the Western Indian Ocean

Iain Walker

Ali Mfaume was a prominent member of the Comorian community of Zanzibar in the early twentieth century, one of the leaders of the customary associations, and president of the Comorian Association Liberal Party. Drawing upon archival documents, and particularly on the documents dealing with his estate, I propose to explore Ali Mfaume's relationships with Comorians in Zanzibar, on his native island of Ngazidja, and elsewhere in eastern Africa. Many of these links were articulated about customary marriage practices—the accumulation of resources in order to perform a marriage, the acquisition of material items required for the marriage itself, or the movement of participants. Ali Mfaume's role as a broker or intermediary accorded him a certain status, particularly among those less mobile than he. In analyzing Ali Mfaume's movements and activities, I consider a variety of frameworks and concepts, and would like to suggest that Ali Mfaume acted as a “hub”: an individual who served as a focal point in Comorian networks, who mediated between individuals in different places, and who, himself, moved

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through these different places. I begin with a brief overview of network theory—which, although largely marginal to contemporary anthropology, has nevertheless provided some basic parameters—before moving on to consider how we might usefully analyze Ali Mfaume’s activities.

INTRODUCTION

Social networks, and network theory, are not particularly fashionable in anthropology these days, perhaps because social anthropology is all about networks, and to single out the study of networks as something different from other forms of human relationships would be a rather pointless exercise. Certainly, there is a whole discipline of social network analysis, but this tends to be too quantitative for most anthropologists’ liking, and while it evolved from what we might call mainstream anthropology, it has long since parted company with social anthropology *sensu stricto*. Perhaps more importantly, for most anthropologists, network analysis more or less explicitly considers the social context to be irrelevant. The relationships between individuals are reduced to mathematical relationships, which, while it may be useful for analyses from some perspectives, remove precisely what interests us here: the cultural context and social practices that both motivate our subjects and are a product of their activities. For the purposes of the sort of analysis, I wish to undertake here, Ali Mfaume’s cultural attributes and social practices are not “spuriously significant attributes” (Burt 1986, cited in Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994, 1415): Quite the contrary, Ali Mfaume would not be a hub at all were it not for the sociocultural context.

Nevertheless, it is worth briefly surveying the work and ideas of those anthropologists who did grapple with networks in the early years of network theory, since the idea of the network itself can contribute to an understanding of relationships and practices; networks are not without relevance for the case study at hand. Although all individuals who do not live in isolation form, belong to and participate in networks, some do so more than others, and their network-centered activities are important both in shaping social practice and in contributing to their own identities as social actors. Durkheim is often cited as having laid the foundations for network analysis by emphasizing the importance of the ties that bind people together, particularly in organic societies; these ties are strengthened when rituals produce “collective effervescence”: Society becomes a unit, and networks become denser.

J.A. Barnes's classic text on networks in a Norwegian town (1954) was followed by a rapid expansion of the field—see conspectuses by Clyde Mitchell (1974) and Whitten and Wolf (1973)—particularly in the context of a shift in anthropology from the “customary” small-scale society to larger, more complex societies for which the theoretical frameworks of the time, generally structural in character, were inadequate tools for analysis. Mitchell's (1974) article is optimistic, but it foresaw the development of a quantitative approach, beyond which network theory parted company with mainstream anthropology, for whom network analysis was not so much a theory but a way of approaching relationships. Twenty years later, Jeffrey Johnson's (1994) review explicitly turned away from the metaphorical uses of the term “social networks,” and thenceforth, the field was largely the domain of theorists armed with what are (to anthropologists such as myself) impressive graphics and incomprehensible formulae (see, e.g., Marin and Wellman 2011 for a contemporary overview of the field). But if Mitchell and Johnson were right—there is no such thing as “network theory,” it is simply a paradigm, leaving the metaphorical use of the term with little analytical purchase—we can retain two key features. First, societies are characterized by multiple networks, overlapping but not fully interwoven. Secondly, if an individual serves as a key node in a network, this is likely to increase his role within it. The more important a node in a network is, the more important it becomes, since an individual's reputation for his or her networking capacities, and his or her skills at performing them, leads to the development of further links. Thus, in our particular case, there are several networks that link the Comoros, Zanzibar, and other parts of East Africa (and elsewhere). There are religious networks, maintained by the scholars of the region; there are commercial networks, maintained by business people (and specific subnetworks, such as the Gujarati and Hadrami networks); and there are—and this is what concerns us here—the customary networks. Ali Mfaume was neither a religious scholar nor a businessman, and did not participate in these networks. His networks were linked to custom, to ritual practice: He was, perhaps, a custom-man. If these networks were distinct, they nevertheless display a certain amount of overlap, even if in a somewhat practical sense: The commercial networks that linked the islands provided the means of transport that allowed Ali Mfaume to move.

Networks, of course, have no center: No society lives in isolation, and one man's (or woman's) center is another man's periphery. Nevertheless,

there are focal points, certain nodes, that are centers of a kind, individuals who are better connected or connected to more people than others. These people can be characterized in a number of ways—they might be “big men” (Sahlins 1963), “middlemen,” or “cultural brokers”—“wheelers and dealers,” perhaps. In keeping with the theme of this volume (and the conference from which it emerged) it is useful to look at the activities of and relationships maintained by Ali Mfaume, and the ways he was embedded in certain networks, through the lens of the hub.

This notion raises the question of what exactly a hub is (or might be). The concept of the hub is strikingly absent from the social sciences, and bibliographical searching generally produces results from computational science that are either obscure (to the anthropologist, involving “thresholds” and “sets”) or somehow intuitive—“a hub is a node with a high number of neighbours” (Berlingerio et al. 2011, 227)—although the latter did confirm that there is a difference between a node and a hub. A node is simply a junction, whereas a hub would appear to be a significant junction. One of the few texts in anthropology to invoke the hub is Renya Ramirez’s ethnography of Native Americans in the USA. She seizes upon activist Laverne Roberts’s notion of the hub as a “geographical concept” invoking the idea of spokes radiating out from a wheel. “Hubs can represent actual places,” she says, but she also suggests that “urban hubs are also portable ... some of these hubs are therefore not based in space but include virtual activities” (Ramirez 2007, 3). Although Ramirez’s theorization of hubs does not quite seem adequate for my purposes, her suggestion that hubs are portable seems to be a crucial one: Hubs move.

The *Oxford English Dictionary*’s definition of a hub includes the following: “This word ... has recently become generally known in connection with bicycles. Forby gives under hob, hub ... the alleged meaning ‘the hilt or guard of a weapon,’ with which he connects up to the hub, ‘as far as possible’; this phrase is in American use associated with the hub of a wheel, as implying ‘deeply, to a great extent, inextricably involved’” (OED 1899). Being deeply and inextricably involved would appear to be an indication of hubbiness (without a hub, the network falls apart, and the bicycle wheel seems like a useful analogy upon which to draw). Using it as a point of departure, I would like to suggest five characteristics of a hub:

A hub is the center of something. Part of a network, it is not necessarily the center of the entire network, but it would certainly be the center of a subnetwork, however this might be constituted.

A hub is connected to (many) spokes. A hub has multiple connections, unlike nodes, which are simply links in a network.

A hub rotates: It turns upon itself; that is, it is orientated in multiple directions and has multiple interests which are linked, but not always in straightforward ways.

A hub translates, in the mechanical sense of the word: A hub not only turns upon itself, but, as we will see, it moves from place to place independently of the fact that it rotates.

The spokes of a hub move about it: Everything moves. Nodes that are connected to hubs also move. Sometimes they are inextricably linked to hubs, and sometimes they break off and link themselves to other hubs.

Although a hub can be a place—and the fact that hubs change, links are forged, and broken does not prevent this—items four and five in my (now metaphorical) definition encourage me to rethink a hub as a person rather than a place.

ALI MFAUME

Armed with the proposition that a hub may be a person, let us look at the activities of Ali Mfaume, a Comorian who died in Zanzibar in October 1926. Ali Mfaume's status as a hub is dependent not only upon the relationships that he maintained with others, but also upon the social context that produced and sustained these relationships. It also, and crucially for the concept of the hub, depends on the transnational character of these relationships, itself a product of the specific historically and geographically contingent Comorian cultural practice. After tracing Ali Mfaume's activities and relationships, I will return to the idea of the hub and consider how useful it is to an analysis of the strategies and roles of key individuals within networks.

The four islands of the Comoro archipelago lie between the southeast African coast and Madagascar. The largest island, Ngazidja, some 600 kilometers southeast of Zanzibar and also known as Grande Comore, was divided into a number of independent sovereignties, known as *ntsi*

("lands") or sultanates, in the precolonial period. Although these divisions disappeared following the late-nineteenth-century French annexation of the island, they remain important locally both socially and spatially. The Comoros have long been incorporated into the trading networks of the Indian Ocean. At the very southern limit of the monsoon wind system, Comorian integration into these circuits was based on relationships with places further north on the Swahili coast—Lamu, Mombasa, and, particularly, Zanzibar. These other places were particularly important in Comorian trading networks since dhows from the Arabian Peninsula or India were generally unable to reach the Comoros and return on a single monsoon. Zanzibar was often the final port on the Swahili coast. Travel and trade between the Comoros and Zanzibar was therefore part of a local transport system that also included northern Madagascar and Portuguese East Africa. In addition to the dhows—which, dependent upon the winds, were only seasonal—there was a monthly Messageries Maritimes steamer linking Zanzibar and Madagascar that passed by the Comoros. However, these were not only more expensive than the dhows but frequently stopped only at Mayotte, seat of the provincial administration, and not at Ngazidja.

As a result of these connections, a small Comorian community, mostly from Ngazidja, was present in Zanzibar from at least the early nineteenth century and attained a certain influence during the British protectorate (1890–1963), by which time, and by virtue of their homeland having become a French possession, they were French subjects. They were particularly well represented in the civil service (Saleh 1936, 1995; Walker 2014), as well as providing a number of religious leaders. The chief *qadi* in Zanzibar in the early twentieth century, Ahmed Bin Sumait, was from Ngazidja, as were many of the protectorate's scholars, and Ngazidja itself was a center of religious learning that attracted students and scholars from eastern Africa (Alpers 2001; Bang 2003). There was therefore a constant movement of people between Ngazidja and Zanzibar based on religious and kin ties, as well as for trading purposes.

Kin ties between the two islands were strong, and were given a particular cast by the existence in Ngazidja of a spatially grounded ritual marriage which encouraged the maintenance of links between islanders elsewhere and their homeland (Walker 2010, 2012). This marriage, part of a sequence of life-cycle events in an age system and known as *âda*, required a return to the island and the performance of a number of rituals, including exchanges of various kinds between the two families and

the provision of a series of meals in the village of origin. Uxorilocal residence patterns accompanied by hypogamous marriage strategies led to a constant movement of marriageable women from Ngazidja to Zanzibar, who would then return to Ngazidja with their husbands to accomplish their ritual obligations. Having thereby assured themselves of a place, both social and physical, in the home village, they would then either remain in Ngazidja or return to Zanzibar safe in the knowledge that they could subsequently choose to retire to the home island if they so wished.

The exchanges required in the *âda* were significant, particularly if the families concerned were of high status. In addition to the provision of food, there were exchanges of a variety of gifts, including cash and jewelry, and the purchase of appropriate clothing. Furthermore, the collective nature of the rituals, which were aimed at incorporating all members of the community, called for donations from both kin and coevals aimed at defraying the expenses incurred by the couple. These cash donations were carefully noted and were part of a systematic indebtedness that bound the community together and maintained the continuity of the *âda* from one generation to the next. Many of these gifts were imported, and many of those undertaking the *âda* either themselves emigrated in order to earn the required sums or depended upon the assistance of kin abroad. In the early twentieth century, this generally meant Zanzibar.

Adherence to this ritual complex was the subject of both discussion and discord within the Comorian community in Zanzibar, and there emerged two factions, one in favor of maintaining both the links with the homeland and certain aspects of these ritual practices in diaspora, the other opposed to doing so, since they held that such practices were archaic and had no place in modern Zanzibar (Walker 2014). While the latter eschewed customary forms of organization, the former were organized into *midji* (“towns,” known in English as “counties”), based on their place of origin in Ngazidja. These counties were the basis for social organization during ritual events held in Zanzibar. Both factions were organized as formal associations from an early date, and Ali Mfaume, the subject of our inquiry, was for the last couple of years of his life the president of the pro-custom Comorian Association (Liberal Party).

Ali Mfaume appears to have been the son of the sultan of Mitsamihuli, the eponymous chief town of which was an important port at the northern end of the island, and was therefore almost certainly born in Ngazidja.¹ He is mentioned as the purchaser of a *shamba*² in Zanzibar in a letter to the French Consul dated December 23, 1916,³ in which

it is mentioned that he neither read nor wrote Arabic. It is likely that, although well involved in affairs in Zanzibar, Ali Mfaume continued to spend time in Ngazidja. However, most of what we know about him is drawn from a fairly substantial file dealing with the administration of his estate, held in the archives of the French Consulate in Zanzibar.⁴ The estate was initially administered by a man named Said Saleh, or Said Swalih, who appears to have had business of some sort in northwestern Tanganyika, but the French Consul, Lucien Caumeau, took over the estate when it became clear that Said Saleh had certain interests in it that were not conducive to its correct management. It took almost two years to deal with all the claims and counterclaims, including legal action by Ali Mfaume's widow over ownership of a house. The paperwork involved a large number of people in Zanzibar and the Comoros, as well as in Madagascar, Portuguese East Africa, South Africa, and Tanganyika.

Ali Mfaume's estate was substantial, at least on paper. It had a nominal value of Rs. 13,229.90, and although it was so complicated that the various figures do not always agree, this was one of the largest estates left by a Comorian in Zanzibar in the prewar period.⁵ Nevertheless, Ali Mfaume had so many debts that his heirs finally received nothing, and his creditors were only paid at 25 percent. His house and his *shamba* were mortgaged, there were substantial administration and court costs, and, as we shall see, he held property that did not belong to him and that had to be returned in full. This rendered the management of the estate particularly complicated, as Caumeau was required to establish which of the items found in Ali Mfaume's possession actually belonged to him and which did not and would therefore need to be returned to their rightful owners before the estate was liquidated. Through the various claims on his estate, we can map out Ali Mfaume's activities, which, while they might appear at first glance to be commercially motivated, are in fact linked to the ritual cycles of the *âda* and most effectively show the extent of his role as a hub.

CLAIMS ON ALI MFAUME'S ESTATE

One of the principal claims on the estate came from Salimata binti Mzee Bwana Mjasiri, known as Mwana Mkaa, of Mitsamihuli.⁶ She was the sister of Ali Mfaume's widow, Mwanakheri binti Mzee Bwana, and charged her mother's brother, Mzee Mohamed b. Hamad, an employee at the Post Office in Zanzibar, to act for her regarding property that she had

inherited from her father and that was being managed by Ali Mfaume. In a letter to Caumeau dated July 7, 1928, Mzee Mohamed stated that when Mwana Mkaa's father, Mzee Bwana Mjasiri, died in 1917, Ali Mfaume had administered the estate. We do not know where Mzee Bwana Mjasiri died, but the property that concerns us here is land he owned in Zanzibar, and it is likely that Ali Mfaume only managed that part of the estate located in Zanzibar. Among Bwana Mjasiri's heirs were his widow (whose name is unknown) and his daughter Mwana Mkaa, both of whom lived in Mitsamihuli. Mwana Mkaa's niece inherited a *shamba* planted with coconuts and cloves.

Ali Mfaume managed the *shamba* from August 27, 1917, to March 25, 1926, during which time the income amounted to Rs. 1,642.50, of which the deceased had sent Rs. 300 to Mwana Mkaa's mother in 1925. However, before he died, he entrusted the *shamba* to Mzee Mohamed, telling him that the rest of the income had been loaned, with interest, to some people in South Africa. Among these was Mohamed Wazir, who was visiting Zanzibar at the time. This latter borrowed Rs. 325 against a mortgage on his house in Mitsamihuli, and Mzee Mohamed claimed this sum on behalf of his niece on the grounds that it was not part of Ali Mfaume's estate but that the deceased had lent it to Mohamed Wazir on her behalf and on her account. "The fact of Ali Mfaume's advancing my niece's money in his own name is a well-known fact amongst his relatives and friends," he wrote; but unfortunately, matters were complicated by the fact that the deceased had instructed the deed to be written in his own name. In order to recover the deeds of the property mortgaged by Mohamed Wazir, Mzee Mohamed had to pay the Rs. 325 in question to the consulate. A further Rs. 530, also income from the *shamba*, had been entrusted by the deceased to another prominent Comorian, Sheriff Mansab, who had likewise submitted it to the consul. In the end, Mzee Mohamed was required to engage the services of a firm of solicitors, Wiggins and Stephens, who wrote to Caumeau on June 8, 1927, applying for the return of Rs. 575 (Rs. 530 and interest of Rs. 45), "the property of Mwana Mka [*sic*] binti Mzee and ... deposited with Sheriff Mansab by the deceased on her behalf." A receipt was attached, and Wiggins and Stephens requested that the sum be paid "at an early date as our client is shortly leaving for Moroni."

Mzee Mohamed also had a power of attorney from Halima binti Mjasiri of Mitsamihuli, dated 7 Muharram 1346 (July 7, 1927), to deal with any inheritance from the estate of her late brother, Bwana bin

Mjasiri, which was in the hands of the late Ali Mfaume. The archives contain no further details of what this might have been, but she appears as a creditor in the paperwork, and in several documents, her name appears together with that of her sister, Maryam binti Mjasiri, so presumably Ali Mfaume was “managing” her inheritance too. Halima and Maryam were jointly awarded 35 rupees (322 francs) from the estate. Both women were sisters of Ali’s father-in-law, and although I have no details of the kin links between the two families, it is likely that they would have been of Ali Mfaume’s own matrilineage, his classificatory mother’s sisters.

Here, we see a first example of Ali Mfaume’s hubbiness, and of the translocal character of Comorian activities. First, he is managing the properties of Ngazidja residents in Zanzibar. It was fairly standard practice for residents of Ngazidja to entrust the management of their property in Zanzibar to a Comorian resident there, and while some of these properties would appear to have been purchased, others were inherited by Comorians in Ngazidja following the death of a family member. It is indicative of the enduring nature of the links between the islands that those who inherited property did not seek to liquidate their assets and repatriate the funds, but instead maintained ownership. It would appear also to have been common for the Comorians of Zanzibar who were entrusted with the task of managing these estates (Ali Mfaume, of course, but the above-mentioned Sheriff Mansab was another) to use the revenues derived from the property of one member of the community to fund the activities of others. This reinvestment was also translocal: Not only were revenues reinvested in Zanzibar, but at home in Ngazidja, as well as in South Africa.

Said Saleh, of Vikokotoni, Zanzibar, later of Kibondo, Kigoma, Tanganyika, who was initially the administrator of the estate, and his sister, Miradji binti Saleh, also of Zanzibar, claimed a debt of Rs. 550 against the estate. According to his statement to the consul, in 1916, Said Saleh was engaged in the Zanzibar Agriculture Department as an assistant clerk earning Rs. 325 per month, and every month for about two years, he gave his salary to his cousin, the deceased. In 1919, he then inherited Rs. 150 from the estate of his late nephew, Adam bin Ali, which the deceased also took in order to keep for him, since Said Saleh was young at the time. However, rather than investing the money, the deceased apparently spent it. In compensation, therefore, the deceased agreed to give him a small house in Vuga.⁷ Said Saleh and his sister (who

was probably the mother of Adam, hence her interest) went to the court with Ali Mfaume, where they drew up a deed confirming that he had sold them the house for Rs. 550. However, Ali Mfaume kept the deed and eventually sold the house himself, keeping the proceeds. On his deathbed, he called Said Saleh and his sister, gave them the deed, which he appeared to have kept, and instructed them to claim possession of the house from his estate.

What I want to draw attention to here is not so much Ali Mfaume's mismanagement of Said Saleh's property, but the fact that he was managing it at all: A young member of the community entrusted both his income and a small capital sum to a man who was at the time a respected member of the community and president of one of the community associations. This, too, was common practice within the community.

RITUAL HUBBING

There were also claims by the estate on debtors, although on closer inspection, several revealed themselves to be false. According to an undated list of the estate's assets drawn up by Caumeau, Issulahi Soilihi of Moroni owed Ali Mfaume Rs. 150. Issulahi replied that he owed nothing—quite the opposite. On June 2, 1928, he wrote to the consul with a long list of payments made on behalf of Ali Mfaume (with figures in pounds, francs, and rupees), later supported by sworn testimony from witnesses. Thus, for example, on their last voyage to Ngazidja together (sometime in 1926), Ali Mfaume gave Issulahi Rs. 100 to be changed into francs for him; this he apparently did, and they went shopping with the sum, as follows: First, "I had made for him a piece of gold jewelry, called a '*mbo*,' of a weight of three and a half pounds sterling in English gold."⁸ Then, together with Ali Mfaume, and on his behalf, he bought a silk cloth, a jute cloth, a white cotton cloth, and lace from Dadaboy's shop for 85 francs; he paid Ali Mfaume's boy 30 francs; bought 15 francs worth of lemonade; paid the *bourjanes* (porters) 25 francs; paid the dhow charges, 50 francs; and, as Ali Mfaume finally embarked for Zanzibar, he gave him 60 francs in cash. It is likely that the piece of jewelry would have been for use in an *âda* ritual: Few Comorian women would have worn gold on a daily basis. It is interesting that the piece seems to have been made in Ngazidja, since the usual practice was for jewelry to be made in Zanzibar, whose Indian jewelers were generally

more skilled. The items of cloth may also have been intended to make ritual clothing.

However, in addition to these purchases, Issulahi provides details of a series of ritual payments made both by and to Ali Mfaume. Thus, Ahmed ben Mohamed ben Sultan Djoumoimba in Moroni testified that Issulahi ben Soilihi of Moroni placed on his marriage plate the sum of 65 francs on behalf of Ali Mfaume of Mitsamihuli. Conversely, Issulahi himself gave Ali Mfaume 64 piastres⁹ in Moroni prior to his marriage, and another 10 piastres during the marriage, at Mitsamihuli, witnessed by Soilihi ben Ahmed and Soilihi ben Mkufoundzi of Moroni. Similarly, Al Hamidi ben Boina Mkou stated that in 1919 he placed in Ali Mfaume's marriage plate 10 piastres, and that on the day of his own marriage, Issulahi placed in his plate 10 piastres on behalf of Ali Mfaume. Between the two payments, there was an interval of 8 days. Finally, Issulahi stated that when he went to Lourenço Marques, the capital of Portuguese East Africa, Ali Mfaume gave him Rs. 65 to purchase textiles, viz.: two (silk) *mikoumi*, £3½; two *kanga*, £2½; three *kaplana* ("*lambas sitinette*"), £2/8; two meters of *serge kaki*, £2. He also gave Ali Mfaume £2, a ring of half a sovereign with Rs. 3 costs, and a sovereign with which he made another ring. In a later declaration, two witnesses, Ahmada ben Mfaume and Boina Mfaume, stated that Ali Mfaume had confirmed that these goods were the property of Issulahi.

These transactions illustrate quite clearly both the reciprocity involved in many of these customary exchanges and the multi-sitedness of these links. Not all the dates of the various events are given, and the contribution to Ahmed ben Mohamed by Issulahi on behalf of Ali Mfaume could have been prior to Ali's own marriage (thus creating a debt in favor of Ali), or subsequent to it, thus discharging a debt established at Ali's marriage. The purchase of textiles in Lourenço Marques is unusual, particularly since several of them have Swahili names and would therefore presumably have been available in Zanzibar.

In early 1928, Mohammed bin Sultan traveled from Lourenço Marques to Zanzibar, from where he wrote a letter to the French Consul dated February 25, 1928. In this letter, Mohammed bin Sultan states that he sent £70 to Ali Mfaume to make "ornaments." Before he died, Ali Mfaume had written to Mohammed bin Sultan informing him that he had ordered the requested jewelry, and providing a list of the items and their prices. When he died, Mohammed bin Sultan asked after his goods and was told by Abderehmane Mfaume, Ali's brother,

that they were in the hands of the consul. Mohammed bin Sultan sent Abderehmane with a power of attorney to recover them, but Caumeau refused to release them. As he was planning to go to Ngazidja by the next boat and wanted to take them with him, Mohamed requested them again, since an *âda* was being prepared. He engaged the services of a solicitor, Ahmed Ayub, who on March 13th also wrote to Caumeau, restating the claim and requesting that the consul (assuming he accepted the claim) return the items to his client as he intended to sail for Comoro the following week.

The items in question were held in a safe at the consulate and are listed in a certificate, dated May 10, 1928. They were a large gold necklace of 54 links; a large engraved pendant; and four other large pendants; a gold necklace with ten large links and two terminal pendants; a lozenge pendant decorated with colored stones; two large gold bracelets; two oval gold pendant earrings; two square gold pendant earrings; twelve gold earrings; two ear ornaments, gold; and six large ankle bracelets, silver. The entire collection comprised 17 English ounces of gold and 24½ ounces of silver. There is no indication as to the type of stones used.¹⁰ In the same file, there is a note listing all the cash and jewelry held by Ali Mfaume at the moment of his death: The items claimed by Mohamed bin Sultan are marked “*restitués*.” Presumably, he then sailed to Ngazidja and either he himself married or he participated in the marriage of someone close to him.

It is not irrelevant that Mohammed bin Sultan was living in Lourenço Marques, known to Comorians as “Dargobey.”¹¹ There was a small but well-organized Comorian community in the Portuguese colonial capital, with its own association, largely as a result of the town’s position as a staging post for Comorians looking for work in the Rand gold fields. Although the number of Comorians in South Africa itself appears to have been small, this would have been the source for much of the gold used in Comorian rituals: Gold from the Rand found its way to Zanzibar, where it was made into jewelry, and from there to Ngazidja.¹² Ali Mfaume was one of the hubs in this process.

Ratiba binti Said Abderemane Ben Cheikh is another who had recourse to Ali Mfaume as an intermediary. In a letter dated June 1, 1928, she too made a claim on the estate. During his last visit to Ngazidja, she claimed to have commissioned Ali Mfaume to have gold bracelets made for her, having given him the necessary gold of a weight of seven and a half pounds in English gold coin.¹³ It was agreed that,

once made, she would send him the jeweler's costs. It seems that Ali Mfaume indeed commissioned the bracelets and that they were made before his death; not only were they recorded in his registers, there were numerous witnesses, including the family of the deceased, to the fact of Ratiba's ownership. Ratiba therefore asked her father, who apparently lived in Zanzibar, to pick up the bracelets from the consulate, but despite the evidence that they belonged to her, he was told that they would only be returned when the estate was settled. She then gave power of attorney to her husband, Said Idarousse ben Said Abdallah, resident in Moroni but leaving for Zanzibar, to pursue by all legal means the recovery of the property in the hands of the French Consul. He would, of course, pay any costs due for the making of the bracelets. The claim was finally settled on October 8, 1928, when Said Idarousse received the bracelets in question from Caumeau on behalf of his wife.

One individual whose name on the list of Ali Mfaume's creditors caught the eye of the consul was Henri Humblot of the Société Anonyme de la Grande Comore, the colonial plantation company established by his uncle Léon.¹⁴ In a letter to Caumeau dated June 28, 1927, Humblot stated that during one of Ali Mfaume's visits to Ngazidja, his daughters had given him £17 sterling to have bracelets made¹⁵; furthermore, he himself had loaned Ali Mfaume 3000 francs, 1000 francs on the day of his wedding, 1000 francs that he had sent to Ali Mfaume's brother-in-law Boina Bafoumou in Madagascar, and another 1000 francs when he returned to Zanzibar to pay the cost of his passage. Since then he had heard nothing, and he would be grateful if the consul could give this his attention. The family in Mitsamihuli were aware of these debts.

A year later (August 29, 1928), he again wrote to Caumeau to confirm that he would be happy to pay any costs associated with making the bracelets, but it was not until October 19, 1928, that the consul finally replied to Humblot, telling him that he had given twelve gold bracelets to the representative of the French trading company L. Besson to pass on. In return, Humblot had paid Rs. 34.50 owed to the jeweler for the work. However, Caumeau also advised him that the estate was in deficit and that since the money was not outside the estate, he would only receive 25 percent, Rs. 78.75. Some of the correspondence between Caumeau and Humblot was through the intermediary of the Chef du District in Ngazidja, and the Consul took the opportunity of drawing his attention to the fact that Comorians should be warned against loans to and orders placed with these Comorians of Zanzibar. Caumeau said he

was surprised that they continued to do so and particularly that Humblot fell for it. "Ali Mfaume was not a man of integrity," he wrote, "and I could have warned you of this." Although Humblot is described as the owner of the SAGC, and Caumeau undoubtedly assumed him to be a French *colon*, Henri was the son of a woman from Mitsamihuli, where he lived, and the Humblot family were very much Comorian and thoroughly embedded in the customary marriage system. The daughters in particular would have been expected to participate in *âda* rituals.

Nevertheless, Caumeau's comments to the *Chef du District* (District Head) indicate that Ali Mfaume was not alone in serving as an intermediary between the people of Ngazidja, the community outside the island, and the traders and artisans of Zanzibar. Note here that the networks extended into Madagascar, where Humblot had sent money on his behalf to Ali Mfaume's brother-in-law.

Two more examples will suffice to confirm the extent of Ali Mfaume's networks. Caumeau claimed that Bwana Mborea of Ntsudjini owed Ali Mfaume Rs. 62. In a letter to the Chef du District of Ngazidja dated June 6, 1928, Bwana Mborea responded that Ali Mfaume was his regular representative in Zanzibar and that they had an agreement. When Bwana Mborea returned to Zanzibar from Lourenço Marques, he gave Ali Mfaume Rs. 200. Ali Mfaume first repaid Rs. 100, then later another Rs. 50, but still owed Bwana Mborea Rs. 50. At the same time, Bwana Mborea gave him £10, but when he asked for repayment, Ali Mfaume only gave him £8, telling him he had taken £2 for his own uses, but that he would pay it back. Bwana Mborea also had a gold chain at the jewelers and had asked Ali Mfaume to pay the costs of making it: He paid on Bwana Mborea's behalf Rs. 62. "That is the situation as it stood at Ali Mfaume's death," Bwana Mborea wrote; "We need to do the accounts, but it seems he might even owe me money." On September 26, 1928, the Chef du District of Ngazidja wrote to Caumeau to say that Bwana Mborea would travel to Zanzibar by the steamer of November 22 to sort out his part in the affair, but at the end of November, the Chef du District wrote again to Zanzibar to say that Bwana Mborea had died. By this time, the estate had been wound up and the debt presumably written off.

Finally, Mbaye Hussein of Shezani owed Ali Mfaume Rs. 100, but had repaid the sum to Ali's brother, Mlamali Mfaume. However, at the time of Ali Mfaume's death, Mbaye Hussein said that Ali Mfaume owed him 150 francs in cash and 50 francs more, being the price of a goat. In

proof that the first debt had been discharged, Mbaye Hussein presented an undated note written to him from Ali Mfaume instructing him to give his brother Mlamali bin Mfaume Rs. 100 or 820 francs, and asking about the prices of clothes in Ngazidja and specifically whether *sahare* or *subaya* were in demand,¹⁶ and confirmation by Mlamali that this payment was indeed made. This letter is interesting because, although it was from one Comorian to another, it is in Swahili. This may be Ali Mfaume being erudite, since Swahili was a more prestigious language than Shingazidja, or it may have been because Ali Mfaume was illiterate, and the scribe in Zanzibar who wrote it would not have been familiar with Shingazidja. However, there are some errors in the Swahili, suggesting that the scribe was not familiar with Swahili either, or at least, not in the Arabic script.¹⁷

On August 15, 1928, before the *qadi* of Mitsamihuli, Mbaye Hussein acknowledged having received from Mlamali Mfaume the sum of 40 piastres in respect of a debt owed by Ali Mfaume. In fact, this document lists the discharge of a number of debts owed by Ali Mfaume, including two masons who worked on his house in Mitsamihuli. There is no indication of when the debts were raised, but there are a number of other references to work on a house in the correspondence, that of Ali's sister, and it is likely that the work on the house was in preparation for her marriage.

Note that the last two mentioned individuals, Bwana Mborea and Mbaye Hussein, were neither from Mitsamihuli nor from Moroni, the island's administrative center, but from Ntsudjini and Shezani, respectively, located in different *ntsi* or sultanates, indicating that Ali's networks extend beyond the immediate confines of his own territory. And this, of course, is only a selection of the more interesting examples of the various individuals with whom Ali Mfaume maintained relationships.

ALI MFAUME'S "HUBBINESS"

So, what can we draw from all this? First, this is just a snapshot, from the perspective of one individual. Although there are indications (both in this particular file and in others in the archives) of how others in Ali Mfaume's entourage are linked, we do not have the details that, for example, fieldwork would provide. A "network" implies that people are linked in all sorts of different ways, and there are certainly multistranded relationships that are only hinted at in the documents available to us. As

a result, the analysis here is not of a network, only of one person's place in one. Can we nevertheless be certain of Ali's central role? I suspect so: Ali Mfaume certainly appears to be different. His estate was one of the largest and most complicated that fell within the purview of the French consulate in Zanzibar. There may have been other hubs like Ali, but if there were, they left their affairs in order before dying; given the character of Comorian reciprocal and chronic indebtedness, this seems unlikely.

How can we characterize Ali Mfaume? He does not seem to have been particularly skilled, as, for example, a cultural broker might be. Although he appears to speak Swahili (as one might expect of a Comorian who had been living in Zanzibar for at least ten years), most—indeed I am tempted to say all—of his social contacts appear to have been Comorian. His interactions with other Zanzibaris and the French consul are purely professional. His activities as an intermediary are all based on his relationships with Comorians in various parts of the region: in Ngazidja and Zanzibar, of course, but also in South Africa, Madagascar, and Portuguese East Africa. He is the president of the more conservative of the two Comorian associations, with an explicit agenda of maintaining links with the homeland and, perhaps implicitly, rejecting integration in Zanzibar. He is a Comorian broker *par excellence*, but he is not a cultural broker.

Was Ali Mfaume a “Big Man”? Like many senior Comorians, he managed the affairs in Zanzibar of members of his community at home, as well as younger members of his entourage in Zanzibar itself, and although these affairs were not always successfully managed, there is no suggestion of dishonesty in his activities. It seems more likely that, over-extending the credit he granted to himself, he found himself indebted at the moment of his death: His various activities were, perhaps, “pending” when death intervened. Is he thus a candidate for bigmanness? His status was acquired and apparently not inherited, despite his identity as the son of a sultan. Ali Mfaume as Big Man is perhaps more likely than Ali Mfaume the cultural broker, since it requires only a mastery of one's own cultural practices; but I would suggest that the concept of the Big Man does not allow for an appreciation of the mobility displayed by Ali Mfaume. Indeed, quite the contrary, the image of the Big Man is of the influential power-holder who remains largely immobile, while his clients come to him. Ali Mfaume exhibits neither the power (nor, indeed, the influence) of the Big Man, nor, crucially for our argument, the immobility. Ali Mfaume's defining characteristic as a hub is that he moves.

Although we have no indications that he visited Lourenço Marques or Madagascar, he certainly moved regularly and freely between Zanzibar and Ngazidja,¹⁸ developing and maintaining his networks, obtaining commissions from various individuals, and contributing to *âda* rituals in his homeland and, through his active involvement in the pro-custom Comorian Association (Liberal Party), to their continued importance within the community in the diaspora. This was particularly evident in the payment (by his brother, on his behalf) of the costs of the *sadaka*, a funerary meal provided by the family of the deceased to the various counties in Zanzibar. Documents in the file note *sadaka* payments of Rs. 800 and give details of three, of Rs. 100 each, made to the counties of Mitsamihuli, Moroni, and Baraste (Bangwa Kuuni). Presumably, the remaining Rs. 500 were distributed among the other counties.

Why, then, is Ali Mfaume a hub, and what can the concept of the hub contribute to the analysis of his activities? I have suggested above that the defining characteristic of the hub is its mobility, and it is this that marks Ali Mfaume out as being different. Ali Mfaume was highly mobile, moving to and fro between Ngazidja and Zanzibar on a regular basis, not only maintaining and developing his network, but drawing on the fact that he was able to offer what others were unable to offer: contact with partners on the other island with a single intermediary. If we return to the five characteristics of the hub distinguished above, we see that Ali Mfaume fulfils them all: He was the center of a (sub)network; he was connected (to many spokes); he “turned”; that is, he had multiple orientations and multiple interests, some of which were linked, particularly through the *âda* in Ngazidja. Many of these people about him moved, too, between Ngazidja and Zanzibar, but also to southern Africa and to Madagascar. Those who moved nevertheless required Ali’s mediation in order to be able to manage their activities in the different places through which they moved. And of course Ali Mfaume moved, too, carrying these various connections, the network, with him.

The network within which Ali Mfaume was embedded was one of several interrelated networks that bound the Comorian community together, at home and in the diaspora. Ali’s activities were restricted to a particular sphere, that of customary relationships based largely on adherence to ritual practice. He was not a religious leader and did not maintain a network of relationships within scholarly circles in eastern Africa, nor was he a businessman in the strict sense of the word. He did not ship textiles to Moroni or coir to Zanzibar; he did not trade in commodities

or in consumer goods beyond the immediate context of provisions in a ritual context. There were certainly other hubs: It is tempting, for example, to think of some of the religious scholars of the region as hubs, moving from place to place, preaching, teaching, learning; or of the colonial plantation owners, or the trading houses, either locally based or dependent upon the large European companies, who moved about the region cultivating their own networks. Ali's networks were based on the specificities of Comorian ritual practice. This latter observation also raises the question of agency: Did Ali Mfaume choose his role as a hub, was it thrust upon him, and could he have renounced it by, for example, joining the competing Comorian Association and rejecting customary practice? It is likely that Ali's choices were restricted: Bound into the ritual networks in the homeland, once he engaged in his hubbing, he would have found strong incentives to remain engaged and, presumably, been sanctioned had he attempted to withdraw.

What has all this to do with islands? Hubs and nodes can be anywhere, but my suggestion is that the physical characteristics of islands are particularly propitious to the development of hubs. It requires resources, both economic and social, to maintain relationships over the distances that separate islands, and so hubs are that much less common and that much more significant on islands than on mainlands. The fact that Ali Mfaume was based on an island makes his behavior more likely to be that of a hub. Individuals can move relatively freely and easily between different places on either island, but it requires resources, both financial and temporal, to move between islands. Steamers between the two places could be infrequent and were costly; dhows were cheaper, but only sailed at certain seasons, and took longer. Not everyone had the time or the money to engage in these activities, but Ali Mfaume apparently did. Through his networks, his activities, and his movements, he was able to serve as a hub for a group of clients in Ngazidja, in Zanzibar, in Lourenço Marques, and probably elsewhere. Ali Mfaume's "hubbiness" was a product of the specificities of his roles on two islands. He was connected, and he was in motion.

NOTES

1. Note that matrilineal principles of descent mean that he was not necessarily of the royal family himself. He would have been a member of his mother's clan.

2. A plot of land, generally agricultural, from the French *champ*, field.
3. Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Centre des archives diplomatiques de Nantes. Archives repatriées du consulat de France à Zanzibar. Fonds A (1870–1923), 748PO/A/5, *Colonie française*.
4. Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent references to archival documents are from Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Centre des archives diplomatiques de Nantes. Archives repatriées du consulat de France à Zanzibar. Fonds A (1870–1923), 748PO/A/192. *Successions 1926–1929; Affaire Mwanakheri*.
5. One set of accounts shows only Rs. 11,684.62. Although there were some wealthy individuals within the Comorian community of Zanzibar, most estates only amounted to a few hundred rupees, if that.
6. Ali Mfaume appears to have had no children: Certainly none appear to have survived him to make claims on the estate, either in Zanzibar or in Ngazidja.
7. A quarter of Zanzibar town.
8. The weight of “three and a half pounds” refers to three and a half sovereigns (“pounds”), i.e., a total of about 28 g (an ounce), not 1.5 kg. Rs. 100 would have been the equivalent of 920 francs.
9. A piastre was a silver coin nominally equal to five francs. It is not clear, however, whether five franc coins were actually in circulation—the last ones were minted in 1878, although Said Ali, the Sultan of Bambao, had had 2,050 silver five franc coins struck in 1889 (Gadoury and Cousinié 1979). It is more likely that the piastre was a Maria Theresa dollar, in wide circulation throughout the western Indian Ocean well into the twentieth century and which contained slightly less than a gram more silver than a French five-franc coin, but would have been accepted as equal to one for ritual purposes.
10. This was a significant collection of jewelry and, assuming that the price paid was £70 in sovereigns, would have been worth the equivalent of over US\$20,000 today.
11. A deformation of Delagoa Bay.
12. See MacDonald (2016) on the movement of gold from South Africa to the East African coast and beyond.
13. “Un poids de sept livres et demi en monnaie d’or anglais,” i.e., 7½ sovereigns, or about 60 g of gold.
14. See Martin (1983, 31–33, 116–21) for the story of Léon Humblot, the “white sultan” of Ngazidja.
15. Again, probably 17 sovereigns, so about 135 g or 4.35 troy ounces of gold, worth about \$6,000 at today’s prices.
16. Two types of women’s dress often worn at weddings.
17. The documents in the file, as in the Zanzibar consulate archive generally, are in a variety of languages and scripts depending on the nature of

the document. Official correspondence with the Zanzibar administration was generally in English; with the Comoros in French; and local legal documents in Arabic. Some letters from Indian merchants were in Gujarati, while correspondence with and between French subjects—i.e., Comorians—could be in French, English, Arabic, Swahili in Latin script, or Swahili in Arabic script. Rarely was Shingazidja used.

18. There were no restrictions on the entry of Comorians (as French subjects) into Zanzibar, and although in theory exit permits were required for them to leave Ngazidja, in practice there was much clandestine movement. See Walker (2014).

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Multifaceted Identities, Multiple Dwellings: Connectivity and Flexible Household Configurations in Zanzibar Town

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This chapter approaches connectivity in motion within the Indian Ocean world of islands by examining how people live in and experience their daily lives. It is basically an ethnographic contribution to the topic of this collective book, emphasizing the relationships and sociocultural as well as mental propensities that have arisen out of movement and translation. Intrigued by local genres and styles of memorization and memory production regarding cultural diversity and processes of inclusion and exclusion, I shall mainly focus here on historical interinsular relations southward from Zanzibar, toward the Comoro Islands and Madagascar. While historical interconnections between Zanzibar, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Indian subcontinent are well known, numerous historical accounts also document connections between Zanzibar, the Comoro Islands, and Madagascar (Ballarin 2000; Alpers 2000; Gilbert 2002; Bang 2003; Campbell 2005; Beaujard 2007; Sheriff 2014).

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Archaeological and written sources tell us that from as early as the ninth century, Swahili traders visited the Comoros and Madagascar, with trading posts being established on the northwest and northeast coasts of Madagascar from the eleventh century (Sheriff 2010, 208). In addition to indispensable historical accounts, an exploration of local modes of memorization may provide insight into how present-day society incorporates notions of movement and connectedness from the past, for instance, in their understanding of cultural diversity and of the politics of inclusion and exclusion. Nonetheless, local narratives about the past should not be seen as frozen remnants of memory, but as “modes of remembering” (Lambek 1996, 241). Recollections of the past that are voiced in various contexts of daily life imply that both social and individual memories evoked are often fragmentary, indistinct, and at times selective (see Moran 2010), as well as fashioned by what Makris (1996, 175) has described as “the ‘lived in’ political conditions of everyday life.”

Attentive to the ways in which daily-life practices and experiences may relativize and even negate more formal and fractional opinion and rhetoric, I shall decenter politically inspired discourses of exclusion. Instead, I will emphasize what I see as a shared form of sociality and cultural identity among people in Zanzibar Town, which allows societal arrangements incorporating recognized identitary, social, and aesthetic differences. This approach challenges political science arguments in the sense that it significantly relativizes the official level of policies of segregation, interruption, or disengagement. The main reason for choosing this approach is to discuss to what extent and in what manner cultural diversity is lived, recognized, perpetuated, and, at times, neutralized in this particular island society. This position does not ignore the fact that society is occasionally saturated by struggles and contestations regarding access to natural, economic, and social resources, as well as local politics of belonging and estrangement. As a society which accommodates difference from within, there exists just as much an ever present potential to invoke social disruption and separation. For instance, during fieldwork in 2015, many adult women and men in my surroundings expressed apprehension regarding how recently religion had become an obstacle in daily life. Using more or less the same words, they would say:

This is not how it used to be. Currently, even among us Muslims, some would claim that they can only be together with those who practice their faith in the same way as they themselves do. These behave “as if”

(*kama*) they were *mashehe* (religious leaders). Whether people are Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Bohora, this never used to be a problem among the family (*watu wa nyumbani*), within neighborhoods or in social life. We would be close as family, neighbors and friends, eat together, attend each other's weddings and funerals, and some would even intermarry. But now, everybody first asks about religion and says, "She/he is Christian, she/he is Muslim, they are Hindus and so on."¹ Before this was never a problem.

Having conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Zanzibar Town, including both Stone Town or Old Town (*Mji Mkongwe*) and its suburbs (*ng'ambo*), since 1984, what really surprised me about the resentment expressed above was that it was religious and not "tribal" or "ancestral" identity that was called upon. Usually, and especially when election periods are approaching, daily interactions easily become unsettled due to a political reactivation of essentialist representations of what people of Arab, African, Indian, or Comorian descent are like (Cameron 2009; Glassman 2011). In my experience, whenever religion has previously been mentioned in day-to-day conversations by ordinary Zanzibari women and men of different religious convictions, it has been in more allusive terms, and often in contexts where people need to decode the ongoing tension regarding the union of Tanzania and the political relationship between the mainland and the island society. Generally in such situations, the dominant attitude conveyed by both women and men in different age-groups has been that the political tension proceeds from what is then vaguely referred to as a "dominant Christian mainland lobby" (*wale wakristo ya Serikali ya bara*) intolerant of a strong Muslim society. However, during this period, it struck me that many people in my surroundings, not particularly politicians, seemed puzzled by notions of religious difference. To substantiate my ethnography, I should specify that the people I have worked with distinguish among themselves with reference to different *makabila* ("tribes"; singular *kabila*). Moreover, they belong to different social milieus and economic categories, as well as age-groups. The majority are Sunni Muslims, though some are Shia, and others are Christians (Catholics and Anglicans). In general, for those I have come to know, religion and religious teachings are incorporated into their everyday and ritual lives together with an awareness of where their ancestors disembarked on Zanzibar. Women and men, young and old, with whom I am acquainted participate in a wide spectrum of activities that they do not necessarily consider to be commendable according to

scriptural Islam or Christianity, such as spirit possession and local healing practices. However, they would not consider participation in such activities to be contrary to their religious faith (Larsen 1998, 2001, 2008).

Inspired by this recent experience mentioned above, I shall explore “connectivity” by focusing on what I have come to see as the structural and ideological flexibility inherent in household configurations in Zanzibar Town. As an extension, I shall consider how social relationships and the appreciation of difference in faith, ideas, and habits have been experienced and lived by islanders. The aim is to discuss how relationships, and in their turn households and “homes,” become dwellings made or formatted against the background of culturally shared ideological, aesthetic, and emotional configurations. In order to grasp the emotional and practical process through which a shared cultural identity may be realized in a society marked by social differentiation, I include ethnography of ritual events. The majority of the participants in these events are Muslim, yet some are Christian. The episodes I examine form part of a ritual phenomenon, *ngoma ya sheitani*, often referred to as spirit possession. Fundamental to the very rationale of this phenomenon is certainly knowledge about culture- and prestige-related differentiation, especially regarding religious conviction, ancestry, and rank. Interestingly, despite the emphases on distinction incorporated into these rituals, differences are bypassed and connectivity and interaction pursued throughout the ritual enactment. The relevance of approaching motion, integration, and identity through an ethnography of homes and ritual events accentuating cultural identity is that it allows me to investigate how movement within the western Indian Ocean materializes through relationships and modes of social organization. To what extent could there be a particular “poiesis of dwelling”² that accommodates ideological and moral diversity? By way of “poiesis,”³ I try to grasp how households, as well as certain notions of “home,” are constituted and worked out through daily practice. This suggestion also implies how the relationships are lived and enacted. Furthermore, attention will be paid to the degree to which sociopolitical and ideological changes may impact on the potential viability of existing household configurations and perceptions of “home.” Thus, through ethnographic material, my aim is to convey what I see as a shared form of sociality and cultural identity among people in Zanzibar Town, which in turn encourages rather than discourages engagement with the “other” and the “otherwise.” What I am referring to above is, in principle, an understanding of culture “as

collective forms of social consciousness arising in the context of historical social processes” (Turner 1993, 417). I have already mentioned that the women and men I have worked with consider themselves as belonging to different *makabila*, and although the majority of them are Muslim, several women as well as men are Christian. Equally, they all see themselves as Zanzibaris, and most of them emphasize their origins from identified places outside Zanzibar, and then as citizens of Tanzania (see also Sheriff forthcoming 2017).

A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY FACING MULTICULTURAL DISCOURSES

The historical and cultural complexity of Zanzibar Town has been widely discussed in terms that describe it as cosmopolitan, multiethnic, or multicultural. As Turner (1993, 412) has pointed out, multiculturalism can help us to explore how various formations become “comprised of a multitude of identities and social groups” that have emerged under specific historical, political, and economic conditions and that form part of the response of its producers. I approach Zanzibar as a complex society, socially and economically differentiated, yet culturally unified and imbued by expected as well as actualized forms of rank and stratification. Intrinsic to its complexity is also the fact that people claim their origin or ancestry from different places beyond Zanzibar itself. Doing so, they mark out what they perceive as their originality and that of others. While problems of multiculturalism and identity have often been approached through the concept of ethnicity, I have always preferred the vernacular term *kabila* (tribe) rather than “ethnic group” or “ethnicity.” The concept of ethnicity can all too easily reify certain patterns of differentiation between groups of people, which would be misleading, at least in the context of this specific society. And it is precisely in political and politicized contexts that questions of identity and belonging come to be reconstructed along essentialist lines. Ethnic categorization has become the main focus of a discourse drawing its inspiration from the history and social memory of the period prior to, during, and after the violent 1964 revolution, having been ignited by racial and class political rhetoric (Lofchie 1970; Bennett 1978; Babu 1991; Sheriff 2001).

Descriptively, the notion of *kabila* implies here an understanding of origins elsewhere from the place where one actually lives. It contains an aesthetic dimension which especially relates to habits (*tabia*), customs

(*desturi*), and, more generally, morals (*maadili*), in the sense of how to relate to life and other people. Regarding religious orientation, what most Zanzibaris do share is their Muslim faith, although some are Ismaili and Shia, some Bohora, while others are Anglican, Catholic, or Hindu.⁴ People live in mixed neighborhoods, where, to varying degrees, they interrelate and interact in daily and ritual life. Although society is multifaceted with regard to “ways of life,” places of origin, and religion, women and men simultaneously emphasize a common Zanzibariness or shared cultural identity (see also Sheriff forthcoming). They refer to what they perceive as their particular common ethos: hospitality, friendliness, etiquette, aesthetics, and language (Swahili). The experience or idea of a shared cultural identity also allows intermarriages to take place across group or community boundaries and, at times, across religious affiliation. This reality further implies that, over time, households as well as persons have come to be composed of multiple and multifaceted relationships and identities.⁵

COMPLEX ITINERARIES, MULTIFACETED IDENTITIES, AND ASSIMILATED DIFFERENCES

Halima is a fifty-year-old Muslim woman of Comorian descent. The majority of her relatives are Muslims, but some are Christians. Halima explained the complexity of her kin by referring to her maternal grandfather, Saidi Mzee:

When still a young man he left the Comoros for South Africa, where he met and married a Christian woman, although he himself was Muslim. They had four children together. When his wife suddenly died, Saidi Mzee traveled to Zanzibar by boat with his four young children. Only one of the children, a girl called Maria, survived the crossing. In Zanzibar Saidi Mzee met and married Bi Zawadi, who like him was a Muslim of Comorian descent. Maria, the young daughter whose deceased mother was a Christian, was brought up by Bi Zawadi as a Muslim. Yet her name was never changed; she kept her Christian name of Maria.⁶

Years ago, when I first came to know Bi Maria, I was puzzled by the fact that, despite dressing and conducting herself exactly like most Muslim Zanzibari women, her name was Maria. She simply said that this was the

name given to her by her mother who gave birth to her (*mama mzaazi*) and who was a Christian, and not by Bi Zawadi, the one who brought her up (*mama mlezi*). Still, to me it never became quite clear, and I never explicitly asked her, whether in terms of religious identity she considered herself Muslim, Christian, or both.⁷

Over the years, I have heard about and observed several manifestations of the inclusion of Christians and Muslims in the same kin group. Although the majority of Zanzibaris of Comorian descent (locally called *Wangazija*) are Muslim, some are Christians of the Anglican Diocese.⁸ I have been intrigued by the ideological and practical flexibility that characterizes households and families composed of persons of both religions and what I learned about the practical arrangements and moral suppleness that were typical of their coexistence. As already mentioned, in general, when referring to Christians—whether relatives, acquaintances, or even people whom they do not know in person—women and men would make a point of distinguishing the ideas, attitudes, and practices of Zanzibaris who are Christians from those of Christians from the mainland living in Zanzibar. This is a distinction focusing on cultural identity. For example, once, as a response to one of my questions, Ma Aisha, a woman of Comorian descent (*Mngazija*) now in her mid-seventies, wanted to explain how, based on her personal experience, the interconnections between Muslims and Christians had come about⁹:

In the past, young unmarried women were not allowed to go out, especially not in the evening. The young men of our age could and did attend, among other places, dance halls. At such places they would meet Christian girls from the mainland who lived here, of whom several were from the Anglican mission. Among “our” men (*wanaume wetu*), several would enter into love relations with these women. At that time, it was unthinkable for Zanzibari girls of Arabian and Comorian descent to go with a man before marriage. Some of the Comorian men had children with the Anglican women, and some married them. Despite having married, the women would remain Anglican, and in such homes (*nyumbani*) the children became “in between” (*katikati*): in these homes there would be a mixture (*mchanganiko*) of religions. Some of the children would later on follow the religion of their father, others that of their mother.¹⁰ According to the family law (*sharia*), of course, children should follow the religion of their father, but after all, it is the mother who takes care of the children. This means that they would feel closer to their mother and wish to follow her religion. Still today one finds many homes with two religions. Some

children from these homes switch between the one and the other religion according to the various situations they have to face during their lifetime, while some remain throughout either Muslim or Christian.¹¹

Among some Zanzibaris of Comorian descent (*Wangazija*), there has been an acceptance not only that marriages between persons and families of different religious faiths are possible, but also that their children could and potentially did alternate between being Christian and Muslim. From my observations, whether Muslim or Christian, the individuals have been equally accepted within the extended family, as well as by the wider community. In certain situations and for particular events, practical arrangements have been designed to prevent potential social incompatibilities, especially during Ramadan. In this period, Abdallah, whose wife Mary is a Christian, would usually break the fast in the household of either a neighbor or in his older sister's home. Asking Abdallah's sister about these arrangements, she explained that it was slightly problematic, but in practical terms easy to accommodate:

Mary, who is Christian, does not fast, and therefore she cannot prepare the *futari* meal (the meal breaking the fast at sunset) for her husband Abdallah. If she did so, the meal would not be satisfactory (*halali*). Thus, during Ramadan Abdallah will pay his share of the *futari* meal partly to the neighbor and partly to me, his sister, and we can easily accommodate him to break the fast in our house. You know, this problem would never occur if the husband were Christian and the wife Muslim. Whether Ramadan or not, it is always the wife who prepares the meal, and a Christian husband would equally be invited to share the meal with his wife and other Muslims who fast.

Apart from reaffirming the cohabitation of persons of different faiths, this case also reveals the significance of gender as an essential organizational dimension. What this case shows is how locally conceived notions of gender make it possible to accommodate difference in a certain context, while in other contexts, specific organizational arrangements would have to be adopted so as to avoid confrontations over moral and religious incompatibilities. In general, when sharing the *futari* meal, there would be no explicit focus on who actually fasted or not, regardless of religious affiliation. Furthermore, within this specific period, Zanzibari Christians, Hindus, and non-fasting Muslims would not eat in public

or in front of other people from sunrise until sunset; when eating or drinking, they would do so out of sight of those fasting (Larsen 2011). Despite differences in faith and ceremonial or social practices, there is therefore a shared, public mode of sociality. It seems that, as inhabitants of this island and city, they not only tolerate, but rather expect a public space encompassing people as well as material matter representing a range of sociocultural differences. Interestingly, households and homes also incorporate members who practice a variety of habits, customs, and ideas about how to live as “good Muslims,” as well as conventions intrinsic to different religions. The incorporation of diversity in social life corresponds to their perceptions of a viable household configuration.

COMPLEX HOUSEHOLDS AND NEGOTIATIONS OF RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION: FAMILY, HOMES, AND HOUSES

In Swahili, the term *nyumbani*, from the noun “house” (*nyumba*), refers to a place as well as to social relationships in the sense of home and to whom you belong—you are a person of or from somebody and somewhere: *mtu ya watu*. A home is ideally organized around a married couple, their children, grandchildren, and other relatives, whether by descent or socially defined. All these relationships compose “people belonging to home” (*watu wa nyumbani*). A person who has moved out because of marriage or who is living in another relative’s home would still be considered a person of her/his grandparents’ or parents’ home. In this sense, the fact of belonging to a house or home denotes emplacement, relationship, and emotional attachment. In the case of polygamous marriages, home comprises several houses. Moreover, when sons or daughters establish their separate houses after marriage, they still consider their parents’ house as “home.”¹² Some homes are composed of persons of different religious orientations, as well as from different *kabila*, but they all belong to the same home (*watu wa nyumbani*). In what follows, I would like to draw attention to a home consisting of a polygamous family unit in which everyone is of Comorian descent (*Wangazija*). While Mzee Abdullah’s first wife, Bi Nuru, is a Muslim like himself, his second wife, Bi Safia, is a Christian. Together, the children of the same father and different mothers (*watoto wa baba moja na mama mbalimbali*) would equally consider that they have two “mothers”—one being Muslim and the other Christian. Here are the details of this case:

A Polygamous Interfaith Household Within a Muslim Configuration

The first wife, Bi Nuru, like her husband Abdullah, is a Muslim and of Comorian descent. During their marriage, they have had six children together, and all of their children are also Muslims. According to Bi Nuru, during their marriage, her husband has always been a womanizer, and he has children outside wedlock. Mzee Abdullah also has five children with Bi Safia, his second wife, a Christian woman also of Comorian descent. Among these latter children, some have followed their father and become Muslim, while others have become Christian like their mother. In the wider family, the fact that Bi Nuru's husband had children with a Christian woman, who became his second wife, was never perceived as a problem. The problem was rather that her husband was what they call a *muhuni*, a philanderer. Bi Safia, the second wife, was appreciated, and the children were all included not only in Bi Nuru's home, but also in the wider family. However, a problem occurred when one of the children born to Bi Safia died in Greece, and the coffin was returned to Zanzibar. The Anglican and thus the boy's mother's side of the family insisted that he was Christian and had to be buried as a Christian, like his mother, and thus in the Christian graveyard. The father, Mzee Abdullah, contested this and was eventually able to present certain letters from his son which were said to confirm that the latter had decided to follow his fathers' faith and therefore perceived himself to be a Muslim. Bi Nuru's husband was then able to bury his son as a Muslim in the Muslim graveyard.

This incident shows the extent to which children belonging to families or homes where members are of different religious convictions actually may be left in-between. They may negotiate their own religious faith, but in situations of death or loss, parents and families tend to enter into severe disputes over what the faith of the deceased actually was. It seems that, while in everyday life, practical arrangements are made to assimilate and adjust to differences in what they refer to as "habits" and "modes of life," this becomes highly challenging in situations of death and inheritance—events and decisions that are irretrievable. Below I shall present a second case which further suggests the manner in which the contextual and nuanced practice of one kind of "poiesis of dwelling" may accommodate diversity at the levels of both society and personhood. Furthermore, it indicates the way death and inheritance might produce, if not unexpected, at least unintended, yet socially and relationally manageable rearrangements for those involved.

Muslim Prevalence and Social and Moral Flexibility

Ibrahim, an unmarried man in his early thirties, has followed the religion of his Christian mother of Comorian descent. Like her, he is Christian, although his father is a Muslim now living in Oman. Expressing my curiosity regarding his family relations, Ibrahim told me that the mixture of Christianity and Islam in his family went back to the time of his grandfather, Mzee Juma, who came to Zanzibar from Oman. During his life in Zanzibar, he became a Christian and married a Christian woman of Comorian descent, with whom he had one son. After some years, they divorced, and Mzee Juma returned to Oman, where he again decided to become Muslim, married a Muslim woman and had other children. As an old man, just before he died, Mzee Juma revealed to his children in Oman that he also had a son in Zanzibar, their brother, whom he wanted to see once more before he died. The son he referred to was Ibrahim's father, who at the time was a Christian, like both his own mother and his wife. Mzee Juma had further pronounced that he wanted his Zanzibari son (i.e., Ibrahim's father), like them, to inherit from his estate according to Islamic law. Traveling to Zanzibar, they met their brother and convinced him to go with them to Oman to see his father, Mzee Juma. Upon meeting Mzee Juma, Ibrahim's father agreed to change his religion and become Muslim. Thus, when he returned to Zanzibar, he divorced his Christian wife, that is, Ibrahim's mother, before he again went back to Oman, leaving his Christian children including Ibrahim, with their mother in Zanzibar. Like his father, Mzee Juma, before him, as he got older Ibrahim's father also wanted to arrange the inheritance of all his children, including those he had left behind in Zanzibar. In order to inherit, however, the Zanzibari children were told that they had to change religion because only then would they be allowed to bury him. Among Ibrahim and his siblings in Zanzibar only one, called Issa, agreed to become a Muslim; it was he who later on buried his father and thus inherited him. The other children, including Ibrahim, decided to continue to follow their mother's religion and thus remained Christian. However, they still have a close relationship with their brother Issa, who became Muslim and currently lives in Oman, where he had inherited from his father's estate. Every now and then, Issa provides his Christian mother and siblings in Zanzibar with money, food, and clothes, especially when Ramadan is approaching.

These two cases clearly demonstrate how members of some Zanzibari families or homes, especially when composed of people of Comorian descent (*Wangazija*), may shift between being Muslim and Christian and the ways in which this has been made possible due to a particular form of flexible household configuration, together with a corresponding understanding of a multilayered identity. Still, the cases also show that, while intermarriage does not necessarily create any form of tension, situations involving death, burial, and inheritance are potentially conflictual.

How, then, are we to understand the social and ideological flexibility that characterizes day-to-day interactions between Christians and Muslims, particularly in the contemporary period, when Islam and Muslim societies often appear, at least to the Western public, as irreducible, uncompromising, and inflexible? What are the specific contexts which mediate the plausibility of interrelatedness across ideologically recognized differences? How should we explain an imaginary that allows for the inclusion of the other, of otherness? I shall pursue these questions by examining the meaning of certain ritual contexts that precisely accentuate distinctions with respect to gender, “tribe,” aesthetics, and religion.

A SHARED IMAGINARY WHICH INCORPORATES PLURALITY AND OTHERNESS: THE PHENOMENON OF SPIRIT POSSESSION

Ritual and performative contexts constitute significant domains to study in order to gain access to people’s reflections and enactments on what may be considered to represent moral inconsistencies and divergent ideals and practices in society. These are arenas—not disconnected from daily life, and yet somehow extraordinary—where social division, moral and experiential contradiction, and paradoxes can either be challenged and reproduced, or resolved and expressed.¹³ As I have argued elsewhere, *ngoma ya sheitani*, a certain form of possession ritual, constitutes one among these arenas in which people’s small-scale displacements, replacements, moral paradoxes, and creativity in daily life may or may not be resolved. The manifold spirit possession phenomenon clearly reflects this society’s complexity in its perceptions of identity, diversity, and inclusion, rather than demonstrating any form of exclusion. The spirit possession phenomenon underscores this society’s ceaseless interconnectedness with the outside world, as well as its capacity to accommodate difference and otherness from within (Giles 1987; Larsen 1998, 2001, 2004, 2008, 2014a, 2014b). Spirits, like

humans, belong to different tribes, are gendered, and—important for this discussion—differ with respect to religion. Yet, they are all perceived as beings of the same kind.¹⁴ It should be noted that the presence of spirits in the human world persists even when the spirits do not manifest themselves by taking possession of human bodies. Regarding the discussion above on relationships between Muslims and Christians and their common familiarity, below I shall pay attention to the presence of Christian spirits from Madagascar, or *masheitani ya kibuki*. According to local discourse, these spirits initially arrived in Zanzibar together with people from the Comoros. Whenever I have raised questions regarding this particular interconnection, the explanation provided has been that, “since a long time ago there has been interaction between people from the two places,” that is, Madagascar and the Comoro Islands. This comment indicates one manner in which the historical interinsular connection between Zanzibar, the Comoros, and Madagascar is currently memorized.

The reason why I wish to focus here on this kind of spirits, which are predominantly known to be Christians, is to explore how interfaith relationships are understood and practiced in a ritual context. At this point, it should be considered that some among the Malagasy spirits are known to have converted to Islam, and a minority among the participating women and men are themselves Christian. Like other “tribes” of spirits, this particular kind is well known to people in Zanzibar Town, including those who do not themselves directly participate in the rituals, those who make an explicit point of not wanting to be involved, and those who claim that spirits and their rituals only represent a form of popular belief (*itikadi*). Still, from childhood, most Zanzibaris will have observed and interacted with spirits, for instance, when rituals were arranged in the neighborhood, whenever someone at home has been embodied by a spirit, or if once they themselves have been inhabited by spirits. I shall briefly describe an event from a ritual I took part in during fieldwork in 2015. The description of the ritual event will mainly be focused around a woman called Latifa and her two *wabuki* spirits, one Christian, the other Muslim.¹⁵ As already mentioned, the majority of *masheitani ya kibuki* are Christians. And, according to the people I worked with, only a few of this kind of spirit are known to have converted to Islam. Latifa is one of the people I have worked with who has (*kuwa na*) both Christian and Muslim spirits, a condition that is apprehended and resolved in a certain way.

Resilient Identities and the Embodiment of Difference

Latifa is a Muslim woman in her mid-forties with a Muslim husband and three children. In addition to having (*kuwa na*) one Muslim spirit from Arabia (*sheitani ya ruhani*), she has two *mashetani ya kibuki*. Peculiar to the *wabuki* spirits is that they always operate as married couples. Thus, if a person gets a spirit of this kind, she or he will be embodied by both the husband and wife spirits, although only one at a time. Furthermore, the same spirits may attach themselves to several persons. In practical terms, during rituals, this means that, when one person is inhabited by a wife spirit, another could be inhabited by a husband spirit and vice versa. In the case of Latifa, her *wabuki* spirits are known by their first names as Mwanabei and Dezu. The wife spirit, or as they would say woman (*mwanamke*), Mwanabei, is a Muslim, and her husband spirit or man (*mwanamume*), or Dezu, is known to be a Christian. While Mwanabei only wants to drink grape juice (*sharbat*), Dezu drinks brandy (Gold Napoleon, French distilled spirits); he also likes to smoke marijuana (*banghi*). Here, I describe certain incidents from this ritual as arranged by the leader of the ritual group (*kilinge*) to which Latifa belongs, and where the spirits were called upon in order to perform a healing session (*dawa*) for the daughter of one of the members of the group. As usual, the event took place in one area of the ritual leader's home, while the children of the house, together with their friends, other family members and neighbors passed through, occasionally observing and communicating with the various participants, including the spirits.

As a rule, the ritual starts by fumigation of the ritual space and of everybody present using the sort of incense preferred by this kind of spirit—in this case, a mixture of *udi* and *sandarusi*.¹⁶ This time, before this opening part was performed, Latifa made a point of exposing herself to incense from a jar that was not to be used later during the ritual. This meant that she wanted incense burnt from a “pure jar” (*chetezo safi*) that had been in contact with neither alcohol nor marijuana, as would be the case with the jars used for and by the *wabuki* spirits. She explained that she needed “pure incense” (*ubani safi*) for her Muslim *ruhani* spirit before exposing herself to the *wabuki* incense. She explained, “I want to provide incense to my *ruhani*. It is not good always to put the *wabuki* first.” In this situation, Latifa, herself a Muslim, wanted to show equal respect not only to her two *wabuki* spirits—one Christian, the other Muslim—but also to make sure not to insult (*dharau*) her Muslim spirit

from Arabia, *sheitani ya ruhani*.¹⁷ Having accomplished this, she next exposed herself to the incense preferred by the *wabuki*, as did also the other persons present. One after the other, the Christian spirits materialized by inhabiting persons present and, having appeared, the spirits all wanted to wear their special clothes and paraphernalia, such as spear, cane, and brandy to drink or put on top of their heads. After some time, Latifa was inhabited by Mwanabei, the Muslim spirit, who wanted to wear her white and red cloth (*khanga*) and, moreover, demanded her perfume and her grape juice to drink. As the spirit entered her, Latifa did not remove the golden ring with a turquoise which she was wearing on behalf of her Muslim *ruhani* spirit from Arabia. There are no contradictions between the moral and aesthetic behavior of the Muslim spirit from Arabia and the Muslim spirit from Madagascar, although they are each recognized as different by “tribe” or ancestry (*kabila*). While Latifa was inhabited by Mwanabei, the ritual leader was inhabited by Dezu, Mwanabei’s Christian husband. As expected, Dezu was drinking his brandy, yet he and Mwanabei would from time to time hug each other and through gestures and words express their shared affection for each other. Later on, Dezu left the body of the ritual leader. At this point, Mwanabei had already left Latifa’s body, and Dezu now took possession of her body instead. When Latifa felt his presence she immediately started to remove the gold ring with the turquoise, the one she commonly wears on behalf of her Muslim, Arabian spirit. After being removed with some difficulty, the ring was taken care of by another woman present, who was not possessed by any spirit. Upon arrival, Dezu wanted his brandy. Dezu, now manifesting himself in Latifa’s body, enjoyed his brandy and danced and communicated convivially with the other spirits and persons present until it was time for the ritual leader to prepare and perform the “medicine” for the sick child.

In this ritual context, the moral complexity of potentially incompatible relationships and multifaceted identities are both played out and negotiated to the extent of becoming part of the everyday. The diversity in cultural, religious, and gender variants displayed by the spirits seems to provide people with the capacity to recognize familiarity in what could otherwise have appeared foreign or exotic, that is, untypical clothing styles, surprising tastes, and unfamiliar faiths, as well as manners and desires associated with the other gender. This familiarity could be experienced corporally as embodied knowledge or perceptively by being continuously confronted with the presence of spirits. The presence of

the “other” or of “something otherwise” provides an imaginative capacity that in turn facilitates the ability to adjust and incorporate beings that might not immediately form part of human biological and physical existence. Spirits are understood to possess the ability to inhabit human bodies at will: They materialize in the world by individually taking possession of human bodies for a period of time in both ritual contexts and daily-life situations.¹⁸ For periods of time spirits inhabit human bodies, and when they do not, people would relate and communicate with them through incense smoke. As such, spirits are personalities that interact with and impregnate social life. To that extent, spirits assume the role of social players. When spirits manifest themselves, they recognize the people present, while the latter always know the spirits by name because of their attitudes, gestures, styles, and aesthetic tastes and dislikes. Although from different places, of different religious affiliations and gender, in a ritual context they all—spirits and humans alike—interact and engage with each other, yet pay attention to recognized differences so as not to offend each other. This understanding is itself revealed in the situation in which Latifa insisted on the necessity of burning incense from a “pure” jar for her Muslim, Arabian spirit in addition to the one she would burn for her *wabuki*. Moreover, she also made a point of wearing and removing the golden ring with a turquoise that was associated with Islam and Muslim aesthetics, in accordance with the religious conviction and moral sentiment of the spirit inhabiting her body.

THE ROLE OF RITUAL AND PERFORMATIVE GENRES IN THE CONFIGURATION OF THE IMAGINARY

By experiencing the spirits and observing them acting and interacting with humans and with other spirits present in this world, people gain perspectives not only on their lives, but also on their position in society. The spirit phenomenon produces an atmosphere that promotes reflexivity on the relevant presence of multiple identities, moralities, and lifestyles. In situations of possession, the persons embodied become transformed—they are “moved” and in the process become positioned according to social, cultural, religious, and sexual identities commonly associated with an “other” (Larsen 2008). The experience of being inhabited by spirits should be analyzed through the concept of “embodiment,” which encompasses critical reflection (Kramer 1993; Taussig 1993) and consequently a form of reflexivity.¹⁹ The social and ideological

inclusion of spirits, as well as the relationships between humans and spirits, should thus be understood in terms of interactions and identification, not exactly objectified and not fully fantasized.

By being embodied by spirits and accordingly becoming an other for a period of time, individuals gain knowledge of what for them, in other contexts, is considered foreign. Observing relatives and friends going through a bodily transformation, becoming an other, Zanzibari women and men develop an awareness of an identity that makes identification with otherness possible, while at the same time attentively distinguishing between Self and Other or Us and Them. This sense of delineation between self and other is maintained because of the acute distinction made between humans and spirits that is never transgressed—they each remain distinguished as separate personalities. With regard to the phenomenon of spirit possession, there is a strict divide between body and mind, or rather the self. In situations of possession, it is a person's body that becomes inhabited, not her or his own self. The spirits are considered to have their specific, individual selves. Thus, when a person is inhabited by a spirit, it is the spirit-self who is acting and interacting. From what people say and from how they relate to spirits, there seems to be no obscurity involved concerning who they actually interact with, that is, whether it is a spirit or the person herself or himself (see also Boddy 1989).

Through the presence of spirits, notions of difference and compatibility as reflected in relationships between humans and spirits should be considered in terms of interactions and identification. Engagement with spirits can be approached as an elaborate way of handling sameness and difference within a basically multicultural yet almost mono-religious society which nevertheless recognizes and allows religious variation. In being attentive to the narratives which surround the spirits, it becomes clear that these recall previous and contemporary interactions between individuals and societies in the wider region of the Indian Ocean (Larsen 1998). Spirit possession embodies difference as a highly valued expression of sociality. From a phenomenological perspective, the interrelatedness and mutual recognition between Zanzibaris discussed above, whether they are Muslim or Christian, reveals the significance of their shared cultural identity in contradistinction to an exclusive religious identity.

The manifestation of how people experience a shared cultural identity that predominantly accommodates religious variation is further shown by the current locally claimed distinction between Zanzibaris who are

Christians and Christians from the mainland. Whereas the former are first of all considered to be Zanzibaris, the latter are clearly not. Today in Zanzibar Town and in certain coastal areas, the impact of Christianity is apparent and manifests itself through the number of new churches that have been built and of choirs performing in both public and private arenas. These recent transformations in people's local surroundings are often commented upon together with the opening of new restaurants and shops which actually advertise the fact that they sell pork. In the period of Ramadan, what locally are labeled as foreign habits, lifestyles, and values associated with recently in-migrated Christian laborers from the mainland create heated debates among Zanzibaris, whether they are Muslim or Christian by faith. The majority of migrant laborers from the mainland are Christians employed within the tourist sector. As they settle more or less permanently on the island, its residents express their worries concerning what they perceive as a transformation of their habitual environment, for instance, the number of churches recently being built. During more recent stays in Zanzibar Town (2013, 2014, 2015, 2016), I have also noted recurrent discussions where women and men mention that "there are now too many Christian choirs," that these are "everywhere" and, from what people argue, are considered to "create too much noise (*kelele*) during night hours, preventing people from sleeping—especially the Pentecostals."²⁰ In this context, the implications revealed by the narratives referred to in the beginning of this chapter should be recalled. First, I referred to Halima's explanation of how Saidi Mzee, now considered a Zanzibari, reached Unguja from the Comoros via South Africa with his daughter Maria. Thereafter, I mentioned how Ma Asha recollected that the women local men used to meet at the dancehalls and whom some later married were Christian women from the mainland. Still, she also conveyed that their children are perceived to be Zanzibari—whether they are Christian or Muslim. From these accounts, it appears that, by progressively adjusting themselves to commonly shared attitudes and practices, the migrants and their children have become Zanzibaris—in terms not only of nationality, but also of cultural identity. The process of integration into the dominant form of sociality does not, however, require a retreat to sameness. Rather, constitutive of this society is precisely peoples' engagement in a shared sociality in which social interaction and relationships should rather be perceived as mutually compatible, yet adjusted to the dominant values and fabric of society—even when difference in religious faith and place of

origin is involved. At present, the locally formulated distinction between Zanzibaris who are Christian by faith and those denoted as Christians from the mainland reiterates Ma Asha's recollection of the past and how at that time she labeled the Anglican women at the dancehalls as being "from the mainland." Her reference to the mainland does indicate a similar kind of cultural contrariness, which in her case is expressed in terms of mainland women not exhibiting what was then considered respectable conduct for Zanzibari unmarried women. Thus, there seems to be a fragile balance between being with and being against "the other." In times of crises, an identification of "the other" as becoming the cause of everything problematic has shown to be a winning political strategy for factions propagating the politics of exclusion in this society—at least since the late 1950s—with the political upswing of nationalist ideologies and their consequent enactment.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Daily-life practices sharply contrast with the images presented in political rhetoric. In this rhetoric, recurrent themes include the recent influx of Christians from the mainland, discourses reverberating political tensions linked to national elections, the union issue, and the rewriting of the 1977 Constitution of the Union of Tanzania. Furthermore, often during the periods in which I have conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Zanzibar Town, the women and men I have worked with have conveyed apprehensions about what, for them, appear as unexpected attitudes regarding questions of identity and what they refer to as a "Zanzibari Muslim way of life." Women and men belonging to different age-groups (*rika*) hold that "the mainland" wishes to destroy their Muslim mode of life, their customs, and values.

Alongside a multicultural society where flexibility tends to characterize social relationships and arrangements absorbing ideational, habitual, and material variations, there are official political structures that are hardly characterized by tolerance or inducements to realize compatibility across recognized differences. The political rhetoric communicates no motivation to accommodate, for instance, difference regarding cultural identity and religious affiliation. This is shown time and again in relation to election procedures and outcomes where religious faith and places of origin are turned into political issues of exclusion and inclusion.²¹ Despite this political undercurrent, society has continued to

accommodate multifaceted relationships. Abdul Sheriff argues that, when studying societies and various modes of connectivity within the Indian Ocean region, identity should be approached as multilayered and syncretic, not as monolithic (Sheriff 2014, 6). Whenever the perspective of “ethnic groups” (Barth 1969) has been applied to the analysis of multicultural societies, it has tended to reify a certain pattern of delineation between categories or groups of people and failed to recognize that people may actually embody multiple identities. Notwithstanding, the concept of ethnicity still seems to be applied in terms of a primal designation, that is, as an essentialist identification. This notion is, perhaps, contrary to Barth’s analytical emphasis on the flexible, negotiable, and relative meaning of the concept of ethnic boundaries. As Marshall Sahlins (1999) has argued, the epitomizing signs used to mark boundaries are conditions of ethnic-cum-cultural differences, or, as De Heusch (1997) has discussed, distinctions through which people mark out what they perceive as their originality. People in Zanzibar Town are explicit in their own use of the term *kabila* and of the various criteria used as signs of differentiation, such as religion, aesthetics, and habits. Nonetheless, in day-to-day encounters the distinctions marked by *kabila* still retain nuanced and context-dependent connotations.

In many ways, Zanzibar is a place constituted by mobile people and migrating spirits. The movement and interconnection of both humans and spirits within the Indian Ocean world has produced various forms of difference and sameness in which inclusion characterizes daily life, while exclusion is the main message of the currently dominant political ideologies. What I have referred to above as an everyday-life communitarian philosophy and tolerant awareness of other religious faiths and ancestral origins reveals what has been an implicit acceptance of difference inherent in Zanzibari society and an expression of a certain “translated” experience of connectedness. Perceived and lived as a philosophy of everyday life, it reveals the viability of sharing space with and accommodating humans and spirits of different modes of being and living, whether as guests or hosts, the same or other. When incorporated from within, difference becomes a highly valued expression of social attitude. At one level, it incorporates recognized social, religious, and aesthetic difference; at another level, it emphasizes a shared cultural identity.

NOTES

1. In Swahili, nouns, including personal pronouns, have no gender. Thus, the personal pronoun *a* denotes both *she* and *he*.
2. In referring to dwelling, I am inspired by Keith Basso's reference to Martin Heidegger. Basso writes (1996, 106): "The concept of dwelling assigns importance to the forms of consciousness with which individuals perceive and apprehend geographical space. ..., dwelling is said to consist of the multiple 'lived relationships' that people maintain with places, for it is only by virtue of these relationships that spaces acquire meaning."
3. My understanding of poiesis is based on Hannah Arendt's discussion (1998, 12–17) of the distinction between praxis and poiesis.
4. The United Republic of Tanzania and thus Zanzibar is a secular state, and the constitution provides for freedom of religion. In general, current statistics on religion in Tanzania are unavailable. Religious surveys have been eliminated from government census since 1967. However, Zanzibar's population is almost entirely Muslim, approximately 95 percent. The majority is Sunni Muslim. According to a survey conducted in Zanzibar 2001, verified in 2004, among the Zanzibari population, there are also about 1300 Shia Muslims and 500 Shia Bohora, as well as about 400 Hindus, 100 Goan Christians (Keshodkar 2010, 226–27), and about 2500 Anglicans. Muslim, Christian, and Hindu festivals are all recognized.
5. That said, women and men of different age-groups, in moments of fear, anger, or irritation, would also express their feelings toward somebody by referring to a certain *kabila* identity, so as to blame certain social or political problems on specific communities (Larsen 2004).
6. A conversation in which this particular family history was recollected first took place in 1985. Since then and until 2015, it has been repeated and retold on several occasions. Women and men I have worked with often talked about their ancestors, family members, and family history. This interest relates to how they live with past and present relatives and kin. Family and personal histories are also evoked in order to explain events and relationships in the present.
7. Bi Maria passed away in 2004. Right up to her death, I never explicitly discussed religious faith with her. Until recently, when it has become a general topic of discussion in everyday contexts, personal religious faith has not been commonly discussed.
8. In Zanzibar, more generally, as well as among the people I have worked with in Zanzibar Town, the generic term denoting people of Comorian descent is *Wangazija*, that is, literary: people from the island of Ngazija (in Swahili Ngazidja is written without a "d"). Thus, the appellation

Wangazija includes people whose ancestors' place of origin is actually the island of Ngazidja (Grand Comore), as well as those who come from one of the other islands of the Comoros.

9. This theme first came up in a conversation we had in 2011. Since then, the theme and the narration I refer to here have been retold as part of dialogues taking place during fieldwork in 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015.
10. In families where the husband and wife practice different religions, there seems to be no systematic gender dimensions to whether sons or daughters will or not follow the religion practiced by either the mother or the father. However, at times of death, and when the issue of inheritance from Muslim fathers has come to the fore, Christian sons have, to my knowledge, agreed to convert to the religion of their father, that is, to Islam.
11. According to Islamic family law, interfaith marriages may take place. A Muslim man may marry a non-Muslim woman, especially, one from the "People of the Book," which includes Judaism and Christianity. Conversion is then optional for the woman. Muslim women have generally not been allowed to marry non-Muslims. However, I am aware of a few cases in Zanzibar Town where Muslim women have married European or American Christian men, that is, *Wazungu*, as well as Christians from Zanzibar or the mainland. However, in these cases, it has been the women's second marriage,—which means that upon entering their second marriage, they were already divorced from their first husbands.
12. The terms house, home, and family need to be explored further in relation to the concept of "household." To enter into discussion of this here, however, would mean going beyond the bounds of the present chapter.
13. This understanding is in line with a body of literature which has discussed the role of performative contexts, such as rituals and speech genres, in mediating experienced contradictions and paradoxes, encoding affect, voicing dissent, and ordering community and tradition (Abu-Lughod 1986; Kapchan 1996; Larsen 2004, 2008, 2014a; Meeker 1979).
14. Like humans, angels, and animals, they are all said to have been created and sent to earth (*dunia ardhini*) by God.
15. The term *wabuki* (sing. *mbuki*) is an abbreviation of *masheitani ya kibuki*, which people tend to use.
16. The incense *wabuki* like consists of a mixture of aromatic aloe wood (*udi*) and resin (*sandarusi*) from the gum-gopal tree.
17. Further elaboration on the different kind of spirits, their particularities and the narratives attached to them, can be found in Giles (1987 and 1989) as well as in Larsen (1998, 2008).

18. The rituals performed on behalf of the spirits are understood as “healing rituals” through which a positive relationship can be established or reestablished between a human host and a spirit and their immediate surroundings.
19. Their self-awareness does not necessarily happen at the moment of spirit inhabitation, but can occur afterward, in remembering, and discussing their experiences with the spirits. Moreover, by observing others being embodied by spirits, women and men have the possibility of contextualizing themselves in opposition to the spirits, and recognizing themselves in the spirits.
20. According to my observations since the late 1990s, tourism has played an important political and economic role in Zanzibar (Larsen 2000). However, while tourism has provided good employment opportunities for women and men from mainland Tanzania and Kenya, relatively few Zanzibaris have been engaged in this sector (see also Gössling et al. 2006, 421–22). Rather they tend to complain that tourism has produced steady inflation, thus reducing their purchasing power and making the Zanzibari land and housing market increasingly expensive. In short, it has made life increasingly difficult to manage.
21. Significant at the level of society—a discussion I cannot fully engage in this chapter—is how more recent and serpentine “identity politics,” where matters of “identity” and “culture” are turned into means for the empowerment of certain designated groups at the expense of others, may actually enter into and remold what so far I have discussed in terms of a shared sociality and cultural identity.

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PART III

Case Studies: Mid-Ocean Archipelagos

A Hub of “Local Cosmopolitans”: Migration and Settlement in Early Eighteenth to Nineteenth-Century Port Louis

Vijayalakshmi Teelock

Abbreviations

ANOM Archives Nationales D’Outremer, Aix-en-Provence, France

MNA Mauritius National Archives, Coromandel, Mauritius

This chapter sets out the framework for a longer-term study of the historical development of Port Louis, Mauritius. Understanding why and how Port Louis came to be a hub of “local cosmopolitans” in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and how and why this “hub” remains both a contested space and space of contestation and competition today is the underlying aim of this research. The term “local cosmopolitans” has been borrowed from Engseng Ho’s definition of the term (Ho 2006). He defines a local cosmopolitan as someone who, “while embedded in local relations also maintain[s] connections in distant places.” Official cultural “policy” promotes the concept of the “rain-bow nation” and of peoples of diverse origins living in cultural harmony.

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Quatre Bornes, Mauritius

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Although this view of Mauritius is contested,¹ the methodological approach is problematic: The aim is partly to counter the tendency to view the history of this city as an amorphous blending and movement of peoples and cultures set in an ahistorical and chronologically challenged context or to study its history by simply mapping the geographies of the different migratory strands. It seeks to root the study of migration, settlement, and remigration in the profound economic and social processes that colonized urban spaces such as these underwent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Of all the possible reasons why colonial powers would veer away from their well-traveled shipping routes to settle in Mauritius, the most probable, in hindsight, was the harbor of Port Louis. The small but protected bay of Trou Fanfaron attracted colonial powers to Mauritius from very early on in the colonization process in the southwest Indian Ocean, from the French in 1731 up to the British in 1810. Despite its small size, this harbor proved to be the safest and best in the southwest Indian Ocean islands. Furthermore, to this day, the city of Port Louis and the island have retained this strategic importance. The port and harbor of Port Louis have remained the center of commercial and maritime activity from the eighteenth century until today, the most important conduit in and out of the island for imports and exports. In the eighteenth century, and from 1735 in particular, it fulfilled another role for the French: that of headquarters of the French administration of the two islands of Mauritius and Réunion, and from the 1770s as a naval base and the headquarters of French possessions east of the Cape of Good Hope. The capital, Port Louis, therefore, became not only the primary residence of colonial officials, but also of the labor that was brought into service the various commercial and port activities that, from a very early date, gave the town of Port Louis what could be described as one of the most heterogeneous communities in the southwest Indian Ocean. It became also the temporary residence of merchants and traders, whose connections across the Indian Ocean have led to use of the term “local cosmopolitans”: owning a house in Port Louis, but also in Réunion, at the Cape, Zanzibar, Mozambique, Kilwa, or Pondicherry.

CONCEPTUAL PARAMETERS

This study does not adopt a “cultural studies” approach,² but is rather part of an attempt to understand how the multiple and overlapping layers of cultures, economic power, competition for territorial space, and assertions of cultural identity have interacted with each other. It is also set in the context of “island studies,” as there are particular characteristics of this evolution that have much to do with Mauritius being an island or “literal island” (see Schnepel, Chap. 1, this volume). Despite this characterization of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Mauritius as having typical island characteristics like its small size, remoteness, and insularity,³ as with most islands, there are certain subtle differences which distinguish it from being labeled a typical colonial island. First, compared to other islands, part of Mauritius’ space was a very *urbanized* space, with at least one quarter of the population living in the town of Port Louis at any one time. Thus, although one tends to categorize islands as “green” and “rural,” many are far from being so. In the eighteenth century, the town of Port Louis was, for its size and remoteness, quite heavily built up and densely populated. If one examines its topography, one understands why a range of mountains encircles the town. This precludes the city from spreading and acquiring the sprawling settlements that characterize so many port cities today. However, it also caused the city to become densely populated, as communications were poor between Port Louis and the rest of the island. Up until today, it also suffers the classic syndrome of being jam-packed during the working day with thousands of commuters coming in, but emptying itself at night. Out of a total area of 200 hectares, about 100 hectares consist of the critical business area. Today, despite becoming a thriving port city, as Jauze has remarked, as well as numerous informed observers, there is still a correlation between ethno-religious belonging, economic activity, and socioprofessional category. It is how these multiple layers compete to occupy space in Port Louis that makes the city a fascinating subject of study (Jauze 2004). It is still today, as it was in earlier centuries, a hotly contested “hub” and space.

Port Louis and the island can also be studied by using them as a “heuristic” (King 2009) device: How did this remote and tiny island attract so many groups from so many countries, and how did these groups, despite the island’s small size and the fact that there was “nowhere else to go,” become even more fragmented, with its peoples wishing to

remain distinct from each other. Small islands and their even smaller port towns are thus rich laboratories for studying these cultural and commercial interactions.⁴

The “migration” model approach, which has tended to look at islands and their ports as “closed” spaces, has not been used for this study. Indeed, Port Louis is very far from being closed: Those who migrated into Mauritius remigrated several times over, traveling extensively or being moved and maintaining multiple connections with families and businesses all around the Indian Ocean. Port Louis was therefore not a “closed” space, and it would be difficult to study it as such. Of considerable interest is the geographer’s perspective, and one can build on contemporary research on the use and organization of space by colleagues on Réunion Island, for example, to start this study.⁵ They have studied the transformations in economic and social structure that occurred in twentieth-century Mauritius, such as mobility and migration, urbanization, the emergence of new elites, and social groupings combined with detailed local studies. They have challenged the traditional view of ethno-spatial segregation in the islands and examined the “multiculturality” of these new spaces. However, missing in their analysis are the historical roots of this settlement. The power game that existed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and that still continues today is not discussed in the writings of geographers. In other words, the political economy approach is missing.

MAURITIAN “EXCEPTIONALISM”?

It was thus in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that Port Louis became one of the most diverse port cities in the southwest Indian Ocean, and while one may not wish to engage in the “Mauritian exceptionalism” debate,⁶ there do exist some features that still defy comparative perspectives.⁷ Thus, using King’s typology of islands borrowed from Warrington and Milne (King 2009, 65), Mauritius falls into at least three of the categories mentioned, depending on which period of history one is referring to. The typology consists of seven categories, which include, for example, islands of civilization (Madagascar), strategic islands and entrepôt islands (Warrington and Milne 2007). Mauritius is unique in the variety of people it has attracted from all corners of the Indian Ocean and beyond. Slave labor came principally from Mozambique and Madagascar, but unlike the Atlantic, was also brought from India and

Southeast Asia. Indian indentured labor from northeast and south India, with which Mauritius is most closely associated, was not the only form of Indian migration, as a large number of traders and merchants and other free Indian immigrants arrived from western India from the eighteenth century onward. Finally, there is no other island in the Indian Ocean, apart from Réunion and Sumatra, that brought in West African slaves in relatively large numbers for a specific purpose. However, the West African contingent in Mauritius was far greater in numbers and contributed significantly to French anti-British campaigns in India, as well as in the island port's infrastructural works. This demonstrates the very heterogeneous demographic mixture that emerged in the eighteenth century, a mixture one is less familiar with. Added to this was the European mixture of colonial administrators, artisans, sailors and traders, and travelers we are more familiar with through the academic literature. My ongoing research thus aims to bring together various historical, ethnographic, and geospatial analyses to map out the different layers of settlement, class, and ethnicity, as well as the politico-economic competition which was played out as competition for space and which is still being played out today in contemporary Port Louis.

BECOMING A HUB OF “LOCAL COSMOPOLITANS” IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

It was during the period of French settlement (1731–1810) in Port Louis that the emergence of the port city took place. Port Louis was favored by French governors from 1731 when their headquarters were moved from Vieux Grand Port in the southeast of the island to Port Louis, which is located on the west side of the island.⁸ As with most colonial port cities, it has gradually grown from the sea front, the space to be first settled, inland. The land was originally marshy, but was gradually filled up, a process of land reclamation that has continued up until the present.

Eighteenth-century settlement consisted mainly of French settlers and slaves. The French slave trade was the most important in the Indian Ocean, comparable to the Atlantic slave trade, where the British were dominant. Wedged in between these two main groups of French settlers and African and Malagasy slaves were several other small groups also

Table 9.1 Number of slaves of different ethnic groups 1758

	<i>Noirs</i>	<i>Négresses</i>
Guinées	220	310
Mozambiques	173	72
Malgaches	259	181
Indiens	103	39
Créols	25	44
Macaos	5	1
Total	785	647

Source ANOM: Col C4, Pain, Chef du bureau des travaux, Etat général des esclaves de la Compagnie, Port Louis, September 1, 1758

migrating from around the Indian Ocean. Official correspondence shows the diversity of slaves (Table 9.1) in Mauritius.

Among these small but significant groups were the West Africans. They were not introduced in great numbers because of the high mortality at sea due to the long voyage, but they were nevertheless very highly sought after in the Mascarene Islands. Despite the generic title given today of “West African,” they came from three different groups described in the literature as Guinea, Yolloff, and Bambara, and as being extremely “robust.”⁹ At that time, despite their small numbers, they were recruited to form part of a crucial section in the naval squadrons being assembled to fight the British. They also supplemented the existing crew on board, which was also made up of people of diverse origins. On October 31, 1753, in a *mémoire*, the Captain of *La Glorieuse* reported to the Governor: “It is important to obtain slaves from Senegal for the Navy of both islands as they can supplement the European sailors and calfats as well as the carpenters and lascars from India.” According to him, they could not be replaced by other slaves.¹⁰ From Mauritius, they traveled with these squadrons to India and other parts of the Indian Ocean, and many never came back. They continued to be sought after long after the decision was taken to cease West African slave imports. In the 1750s, the Governor insisted on the use of Senegalese slaves for the French East India Company’s Navy.¹¹ And again, when the French government took over the island in 1767, the five to six hundred West African slaves in Mauritius were not sufficient: An additional hundred had to be brought in annually. Other slaves, such as the Malagasy slaves, could not be put to work in the port, as they had a “tendency to

maroon”: Indeed, with the boats so close, many were tempted to steal boats with which they sailed back to Madagascar.¹²

By the early nineteenth century, West Africans were still visible and distinct as a group, as maps show the ethno-spatial residential division between the Bambara and Wolof in the town of Port Louis. The fact that these two camps existed at the town’s two extremities is also rather intriguing. Up until today, the locality of the latter’s settlement in Mauritius is still remembered by its retention of the name “Camp Yloff.” The Wolof presence in other parts of the island is revealed mainly through baptism registers, which are quite revealing of the extent of *metissage* that occurred in the French period through intermarriage. However, others married within their own group. Marie, for example, was baptized by the priest in Port Louis mission. She was the daughter of two “Yloff” slaves, Christine, belonging to Antoine d’Eslyes also known as Sr Hilaire from Pamplemousses and Leveillé, Companny slave.¹³ Also unique to Indian Ocean slavery, and especially to the Mascarenes, are Indian slaves brought from the French possessions in India, namely Pondicherry, Chandernagore, and Madras. Baptism registers also highlight the Indian origins of these slaves and the extent of *metissage*. For example, “In 1730, Angelique was baptized. She was the daughter of two slaves belonging to the parish of Port Louis, Gabriel, a Malagasy slave and Laurence, Indian slave.”

In 1761, the slave population also included Chinese slaves: M. d’Estaing is reported to have brought “89 Chinese, 33 Sepoys, 33 Topaz and a few Malay and other slaves;[...] the Malay and other slaves were sold at auction for the Company.”¹⁴ The Malays were sold off to private owners and do not reappear in the historical record so far in our research.

In the early nineteenth century, at another extremity of the town of Port Louis, in the area known as Grand River North West, resided another group, quite distinct from everybody else: these were the Indian Sepoys brought by the British to aid the takeover of the island. A few years later in the same location, from 1815 onward, were housed Indian convicts brought by the British to build and repair roads and bridges.¹⁵ They even built a mosque nearby. But it has been difficult to trace any descendants, as few wish to acknowledge their “convict” ancestry. Nearer the port resided another group of free Indians: the “lascars” or sailors of the French period. This term has been retained up until today in the Creole language and is a derogatory term used by Mauritians of other

faiths to describe Muslims.¹⁶ The lascars were employed in the port, as well as on board slave ships going to the east coast of Africa to trade.

Thus, on board French ships and in port activities, Indian lascars and Wolof and Bambara slaves worked next to each other, but in the town of Port Louis, their residences remained segregated. The groups were also treated differently by others, whether on board ship or on shore. The Indian sailors were given a separate living space and even a separate space in hospital because of their dietary restrictions and cooking habits: The Intendant stated that “a room for the Lascars with a separate kitchen given their dietary restrictions, as they do not eat other food except that prepared by their people belonging to the same caste and religion.”¹⁷

Separate spaces for different religious groups were also introduced. Thus for Indians, one part of the camp was for the Muslim population and appropriately called *Camp des Lascars*, while another part of the camp, for Hindu South Indians, both slaves and free, was known as *Camp de Malabards*, or Indians from the Malabar coast.

In this economic and cultural hub that Port Louis was fast becoming were also the French *engagés* or Mauritius’ first “indentured” workers. They had a fixed wage, determined before their departure, for a limited number of years which was non-negotiable, except in a few rare cases.¹⁸ Little research has been carried out on them to date, but together with sailors and artisans, they too were allocated a section of the town of Port Louis. This was located not in the business district, reserved for wealthier Frenchmen, but close to it. Many of them moved freely within Port Louis’ non-white suburbs of the *Camp des Malabards et Lascars* and the *Camp des Noirs* and cohabited with non-white women. During the period of the Revolutionary fervor that gripped Mauritius in the 1790s, this group of French *engagés* was among those who were deported at the urging of wealthier French merchants and slave-owners who controlled the Directoire, mostly for having supported the move to abolish slavery in the French colonies.¹⁹

By the end of the eighteenth century, the bulk of the population of Port Louis consisted of slaves from East Africa and Mozambique. Their residential pattern depended on the type of work they were assigned to do and their status. Among slaves and manumitted slaves, the division was quite complex: There was the *Camp des Noirs Libres*, made up of Free People of Color and located between Ruisseau des Creoles and Montagne de la Decouverte; the *Camp des Noirs du Genie*, who were government slaves employed in public works; and the *Camp des Noirs*

Affranchis, made up of freed slaves, in the north of Port Louis near Lataniers river and near Camp Yloff. There were also the *Camp des noirs de detachment* or Maroon hunters' camp, and further up, near Lataniers river, lived African slaves.

The best way to understand this is by close examination of the maps of this period. This formal and official allocation of space, depending on socio-ethnic-religious background, was the work of Capitaine-Général Decaen (1803–1810), who was attempting to stem the "vice and immorality" he saw as rampant in Port Louis, which was due, according to him, to the intermixing of races. But the desire to separate ethnic groups had started long before, during the period of French royal government from 1767 to 1803. In the 1770s, the then Governor Desroches prided himself in having "separated the colors, as black slaves and whites were living in the same area. In separating them he felt he had succeeded in combating vice, disorder and criminal activity." For him, the center of the town was meant to be lived in by whites, while the eastern suburb was for Indians and the western suburbs for freed slaves: "The town was built for the white inhabitants, the Eastern suburb for the Indians and the Western side for the freed slaves ... the freed slaves and white people were being mixed. I have consequently separated the colours and have fought against vice and crimes and I have ended scandalous behavior and disorderly conduct."²⁰ Decaen echoed similar sentiments years later in his various decrees reintroducing separate civil status registers and residential spaces for "White," "Colored," and "Slaves" on the Ile de France during his governorship.²¹

The most important criteria used, however, remained color, that is, whites and non-whites. The next criterion was class, followed by status, depending on one's color. So, poor and lower-class whites, who included artisans, soldiers, and poorer settlers, were to live in the eastern side of the white area, that is, in Corderie and l'Eglise streets in Petite Montagne, while the wealthier officials lived in the western part of the white area, known as Les Remparts.

As *metisage* increasingly occurred during the course of the eighteenth century, another group emerged, namely that of the group labeled "Gens de Couleur" or "Colored" population, depending on which census one reads. These were free persons, but among them too there were a hierarchy and subtle divisions based on color and social status: whether one was freeborn or slave-born mattered. Those who had not been born into slavery considered themselves superior to those who had

or who had slave parents who had been subsequently manumitted. I have chosen to differentiate and term them the “Free” and the “Freed,” rather than use the term “Colored.”²² The “Free” lived in the western suburb of Port Louis, close to the whites, while the Freed lived closer to Indians, poor whites, and slaves. Economic status and power were another important factor in determining residence. Laws prevented economic mobility, even for those of “Free” and “Freed” status.²³ Those living in Port Louis could only obtain the pettiest jobs in the civil service as clerks. Freed slaves could not obtain licenses to run canteens—this was reserved for whites—nor could they obtain licenses as hawkers. Further laws, such as special property-related clauses in the Napoleonic Civil Code, were enacted and applied only to French colonies such as Mauritius and Réunion. These clauses ensured that property did not go to the non-white progeny of white fathers.²⁴ British rule from 1810 onward changed little of this imbalance between economic and ethnic power in Port Louis, despite the elimination of all discrimination against people of color in the laws of 1826.

EXPANDING THE HUB OF “LOCAL COSMOPOLITANS”: THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The nineteenth century coincided with the colonial takeover of Mauritius by the British after a short battle with the French in 1809–1810. A new wave of migration ensued of forced and free migrants who added to and upset the existing eighteenth-century spatial and demographic distribution of Port Louis. From 1815, and especially after 1825, Mauritius witnessed a massive expansion in sugarcane cultivation and the emergence of secondary industries, with over half a million or more Asian and other immigrants entering the island, many of whom lived in Port Louis. Added to this, with the abolition of slavery in 1835 and of apprenticeship in 1839, there was an influx of ex-slaves and their families into Port Louis. There were also a number of Africans, Comorians, and Malagasies, who had been brought in as contract labor after the abolition of slavery and who were recruited on the same terms as Indian indentured laborers.²⁵

The town witnessed severe competition for space in this period. The competition was not only over residential space, but also involved intense rivalries to secure commercial space and competition for markets.

Cultural conflicts and rivalries also occurred, crystallized in some critical moments and events, not yet studied in depth, between Asians and the traditional white and Colored bourgeoisies.

While Indian indentured laborers lived mostly in rural areas on sugar estates, the Asian bourgeoisie who migrated to Mauritius resided mainly in the town of Port Louis, which began to develop a distinctly Asian character from the 1850s: Over half of the population of Port Louis was Indian. This Asian bourgeoisie, of which Indians numbered about 1430 by 1870, was made up of mainly Indian and Chinese merchants and traders, who, though engaged in distinct spheres of economic activity, nevertheless shared some common characteristics. They did not always develop an affinity with those of their fellow countrymen who lived in the rural areas and were part of the working population. As the years passed, in Port Louis, their experiences diverged even further: The more some integrated into Mauritian–European culture, the greater were their prospects in economic social and political mobility. Those who chose to remain and retain their cultural habits were less visible in politics and the administration.

These Asian strata of the Mauritian population added to this community of “local cosmopolitans” that had emerged in the eighteenth century: Many were South Indian Hindus, and they were later joined by Gujarati traders, who were mainly Muslim. They formed a transient community because, as they had numerous contacts, they traveled widely within the Indian Ocean, particularly to East Africa, Réunion, Madagascar, and South Africa. South Indian traders settled in the Farquhar and Queen Street areas, selling brass utensils, jewelry, rice, et cetera. Most were retail traders, and others occupied stalls in the Central Market. Gujarati traders engaged in the importation of clothing, spices, and rice, and even shipped in labor immigrants. They imported goods from Calcutta, Chittagong, and Madras, and exported sugar to Bombay. Wood was imported from Burma and cattle from Aden. Most left their families in India (Kalla 2010a). By the 1890s, these merchants had diversified their import–export activities to the other Indian Ocean islands, such as Réunion, the Seychelles, and Madagascar, as well as South Africa. To take just one example, Goolam Hossen sold *dholl*, haberdashery, and *ghee* to Natal traders. By 1890, there were forty-seven Gujarati merchants, nine of whom were Hindus.²⁶

This new bourgeoisie began to occupy the space that had been known as the eastern Suburb, or the former *Camp des Malabards et Lascars* of

the French eighteenth century. The question often asked by local historians is what happened to the original eighteenth-century Indian population? Most believe that by the nineteenth century, they had been assimilated into the Creole population in Port Louis and were no longer easily discernible as Indian. However, we found some Muslim families who can trace their ancestry back to the eighteenth century: They still practice the traditional Ghoon ceremony, even though this is frowned upon by other Muslims who arrived later.²⁷ They thus retain some of their original culture and have not been entirely absorbed by later nineteenth-century Indian Muslim arrivals. Even today, the prevalence of ethno-religious concentration in the eastern suburb is exemplified through street names and historic landmarks symbolizing the power and presence of these groups.

Juxtaposed to the 'Indian' area was Chinatown, which also emerged at this period. The integration of the Chinese into Mauritian society was not as smooth as it was for Indians, as the Chinese were considered "aliens" and not British citizens and were not given licenses as shopkeepers. Although generally considered to represent a very small and closed group, many of the first Chinese who came to Mauritius entered into liaisons with manumitted slaves and other Free and Freed non-white women who allowed their names to be used to apply for business licenses. It is more than likely that many intended to return to China one day, but the advent of the communist movement in China prompted many to implant themselves in Mauritius. On the whole, they have been upwardly mobile since the nineteenth century. However, even they had divisions between the Cantonese-speaking and the Hakka-speaking communities, which have survived up until today. These groups were also "local cosmopolitans" par excellence, as they had, like Indians, kept up contact with their families in the homeland and Mauritius, as well as in other parts of the Indian Ocean.²⁸

For some, Port Louis was a refuge. From the 1830s, African and Malagasy slaves marooned and merged with the free population and ex-slaves in Port Louis, which had a freer atmosphere than the rural plantations that dominated Mauritius. As Pier Larson has shown,²⁹ apart from the French and Creoles, 30 percent of the population of Port Louis also spoke Malagasy until well into the 1840s. They occupied areas where the slaves had lived in the eighteenth century: the *Camp des Noirs Libres* or the *Camp des Noirs du Génie* in the north and west of Port Louis. These place names have remained to the present.

From the mid- to late-nineteenth century, there emerged a new configuration of clearly defined spaces of ethno-religious and commercial-class concentrations. In some respects, it was not that much different from the eighteenth century. Competition for cultural and economic space occurred between the traditional white and Colored bourgeoisies on the one hand and the emerging Asian bourgeoisies on the other. This situation was reflected in the portrayal of Asians in the press and in debates in the Council of Government as “dangers” who would soon overtake the cultural and economic life of the country. Sometimes, incidents caused a flurry of xenophobic sentiments such as those caused by the daring bank robbery of 1846 by Chinese criminals (Carter and Ng 1997, 50) and the gradual loss of businesses to Chinese and Asian traders.

Moreover, given their status as aliens, Chinese immigrants could not purchase land and so concentrated their investments in trading and in expanding within the Indian Ocean: A network of links was thus created with Réunion, South Africa, and Madagascar. Port Louis served as a springboard for new investments in southwest Indian Ocean (Yap 1996, 37). Because of restrictive immigration laws against “Asiatics” and polygamous marriages in South Africa, some Chinese came to Mauritius simply to register their marriages in order to be allowed into South Africa (*ibid.*, 176–79).

While the Chinese community was restricted in its activities, the Indian commercial class was unhampered. Not only did they own businesses in Port Louis, they also began to occupy the cultural space once reserved for the white and Colored elites: The first mosque in the French empire was built in Mauritius in 1805. They also entered into the political and administrative life of the colony, as many were educated and became westernized. But the ethno-spatial class configuration remained tenacious and did not change.

Three major events have taken place in the last 150 years which have altered this ethno-social-religio-spatial distribution in the town to some extent. First, in the 1860s, Mauritius witnessed a series of devastating malaria and cholera epidemics. This added to the generally insalubrious nature of the town and led to mass mortality and the gradual departure of the well-to-do classes, particularly the European and Colored segments, to the higher plateaus, where new towns emerged. The suburbs they left behind in Port Louis were taken over by the Indian bourgeoisie, Hindu, and Muslim, from South India and Gujarat. Only a few of the

iconic buildings signifying the prior presence of Colored and white families still remain. A hundred years later, in 1967, ethnic riots sparked off by an incident caused by sailors and gang wars led to the further depopulation of Hindu and Creole Christian populations from the areas previously identified.³⁰ These spaces were taken over by Muslim families. In 1999, further riots sparked by the death of a very popular seggae musician, Kaya, led to further depopulation.³¹

Since then, there has been a steady decline in the actual number of residents in Port Louis, with movement out of the city center into the suburbs, largely for ethno-economic reasons. The city center is increasingly the preserve of the wealthy businessmen, mainly of European, Chinese, and Muslim backgrounds. The ex-slave population of African descent, most of whom are landless, has nowhere to go (Fig. 9.1).

Those of Afro-Malagasy descent still live in the northern suburbs of Port Louis, such as Roche Bois and adjoining areas, and have recently been joined by the exiled Chagossian community, as well as Rodriguan and Agaleans who have settled in Mauritius in search of employment. They are also to be found in the west, in the areas known as Cassis, Bell Village, and Pailles, which in the eighteenth century housed the *Camp des Noirs de Genie* and *Camp des Noirs Libres*. The more prosperous have moved away to the wealthier suburbs of Beau Bassin, Rose Hill, Quatre Bornes, and Curepipe. They are the “antithesis” of the “local cosmopolitans,” who have a wide choice of locations to settle in because of their retention of family and cultural links within Mauritius, in the region and even with their countries of origin: England, France, China, South Africa, and India. According to Yap (1996, 57), 1,200 Chinese left Mauritius between 1888 and 1898 for Port Elizabeth.

Although today the population of Port Louis is declining, the space of the commercial city center is still a hotly contested territory between European, Muslim, and Chinese populations. Today, one’s ownership of space is visibly demonstrated by patronyms and structures asserting one’s identity. Port Louis is still a hub of “local cosmopolitans,” but one where ethnicity, religion, and economic power remain the determining factors in the spatial distribution of the population. The occupation of space is affirmed by the occupation, construction, and preservation of imposing heritage structures and modern edifices: statues of governors, imposing mosques and churches, iconic and appropriately named buildings and place names. To symbolize the European presence not only in Mauritius but also in the Indian Ocean, could there be a more appropriately named



Fig. 9.1 Plan of Port Louis Mauritius, adapted from J. G. Milbert (1812) *Voyage pittoresque à l'Île-de-France, au cap de Bonne-Espérance et à l'Île de Ténériffe*. Paris: A. Nepveu. Source Gallica ark:/12148/bpt6k105222m, public domain. Bibliothèque nationale de France, placed online October 15, 2007

entrance to the harbor than the “Diaz Pier”? One more monument was erected in 2015 to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the landing of the French at the Caudan, and there is also the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site, which memorializes the arrival of indentured immigrants, mainly from India, but there are no such spaces or monumental edifices to bear testimony to the African or Malagasy presence in Port Louis. At the time of writing in 2016, our decade-long campaign to memorialize the history of the African or Malagasy presence in Port Louis and in Mauritius through the creation of an Intercontinental Slavery Museum was finally approved by the government. It is to be hoped that this will not take as long to materialize.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Deewoo (2013) and Bunwaree (2002).
2. By cultural studies of islands, I mean that these studies consist of the attempt to understand island societies through the study of the “nature, dynamics, and diversities of islands and islanders (and their relation to non-island entities)” (The Shima Editorial Board 2007, 1). For examples of the cultural approach, see the series of articles in *Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures*, www.shimajournal.org. See also Baldacchino (2006).
3. Small island developing states: challenges in transport and trade logistics, http://unctad.org/meetings/en/SessionalDocuments/cimem7d8_en.pdf. Accessed August 3, 2016.
4. Since Toussaint’s *Histoire de Port Louis* (1936), there have been a number of studies on Port Louis, but to date none that integrate all these different chronological, economic, or cultural moments, that is a *longue durée* type of study. See, for example, Jahangeer-Chojoo (2001), Ng Foong Kwong and Carter (2009), Chan Low (2011), Gopauloo (2001), and Jauze (2001, 2004).
5. See, for example, Jauze (2001, 2004) and Combeau (2010), see also Agathe (2006).
6. This has been evoked in several conferences and publications, for example: “Abolition of Apprenticeship Conference,” Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI), Moka, Mauritius, June 1999; Freund (2001), Deborah Brautigam with Tania Diolle (2009), Peerthum (2014).
7. King (2009, 64).
8. Despite the spectacular landscape that the southeast harbor offered, the most important reason for the move was that the southeast trade winds blew sailing ships in but would not easily allow them to leave. Obviously,

- this is no longer an issue for modern-day ships, but there is no real attempt to transfer any port operation there.
9. ANOM: Col C4, 4 1740–1745. 1740 Mahé de la Bourdonnais, Correspondances generals, M. de la Bourdonnais, gouverneur, Etat des esclaves de la Compagnie.
 10. ANOM: Col C4, 7–2, 1751–1753, Correspondances générales David, de Lozier Bouvet, gouverneurs: “ils ne peuvent être supplésés par aucun autre noir.”
 11. ANOM: Col C4, 86, pièce 1755/1, f. 1–9. 1753 Lozier Bouvet, gouverneur des Mascareignes, à la Compagnie, sans lieu, 25.11.1755; M. De Lozier Bouvet, gouverneur general: “il faut toujours des Noirs de Sénégal pour la marine de la Compagnie dans les deux Isles.”
 12. ANOM: Col C4 17, 1767, Copie du Réquisitoire de M. le Procureur Général à Messieurs du Conseil Supérieur de l’Île de France, 22 Octobre Correspondance Générale, M. Dumas, Commandant general: “Nous avons 5 à 600 noirs guinées—il serait facile de s’en pourvoir si on ordonnait au commandant de Gorée d’en avoir toujours 100 à prêts à embarquer—sans cela obligation de traiter à Mozambique; traite coureuse et toujours incertaine selon la disposition du gouverneur portugais—on ne peut employer les noirs de Madagascar dans le port à cause de la proximité avec leur patrie et danger qu’il y a à ce qu’ils enlèvent les embarcations—on peut les confier aux Mozambique mais ceux de Guinée valent infiniment mieux et couteront bien moins au Roi.” See also Allen (2005), Nagapen (1999), and Teelock (2009), containing a series of articles on maroonage in Mauritius.
 13. Source: MNA: KA 2 P (a) Baptism registers, Folio 34 recto.
 14. ANOM: Col C4, 13, 1761. Correspondances générales, M. Desforges Boucher, gouverneur, Lettre du 4 septembre 1761.
 15. See Anderson (2007).
 16. See in particular, Jumeer (1984).
 17. ANOM: Col C4, 56–1, Correspondance Générale, M. Foucault et Chevreau, intendant, 1781 Hôpital Royal du Port-Louis, Extrait des registres des procès verbaux, 1er Aout 1781.
 18. Debien (1952), “Les engagés pour les Antilles (1634–1715),” quoted in André (2004).
 19. For more on poor whites in Ile de France, see Wanquet (1984, 1989, 1991) and Jumeer (1984).
 20. ANOM: Col C4, 28, 26 novembre 1771, Reproche de l’Intendant.
 21. See Prentout (1901) which remains to date the most important analysis of the Napoleonic regime in Mauritius.
 22. Teelock (2008), in particular Chapter 8 “Slavery and Abolition: The Rise of the Freed population,” where the choice of this term is explained.

23. The consequences of this for the economic and social mobility of descendants in the context of claims for reparations for the legacy of slavery have yet to be studied.
24. See Sermet's (2011) seminal piece on the "racist" nature of property laws introduced in the Code Civil of 1803, enacted especially for French colonies.
25. See Satyendra Peerthum (2014).
26. Information compiled from Kalla (1984, 2010a, b, 2013), Emrith (1994), Jahangeer-Chojoo (1999, 2001), Annasamy (1999).
27. The Ghoon ceremony used to be practiced with much pomp and festivity in the first month of the Islamic calendar to commemorate the death of the first grandson of the Prophet. In Mauritius, the Lataniers River in Port Louis and the Plaine Verte region in Port Louis (formerly known as Camp des Lascards) are still the main sites of the processions and ceremonies, but it is considered un-Islamic by orthodox Muslims. See Hollup (1996), "Islamic Revivalism and Political Opposition among Minority Muslims in Mauritius," <http://sunnirazvi.net/society/mauritius.htm>, accessed November 3, 2016.
28. For more on Chinese settlement, see Ng Foong Kwong and Carter (2009), Ly Tio Fane (1981), Ly Tio Fane and Lim Fat (2008).
29. For the Malagasy diaspora in Mauritius, see Larson (2000, 2009).
30. See the changes in the spatial distribution of Muslims and Creoles as a result of the 1967 riots in one area in Karimullah (2011).
31. See Karimullah (2011). There are few if any academic studies of the impact of the 1999 riots on Port Louis' spatial distribution of population, but the official statistics confirm the downward trend: "Port Louis district registered the highest net loss of population (2.6 percent) by 2011," Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (2014), <http://statsmauritius.govmu.org/English/Documents/census%20report/Migration%20Report2014.pdf>. Accessed August 3, 2016.

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The Making of a Hub Society: Mauritius’ Path from Port of Call to Cyber Island

Burkhard Schnepel

INTRODUCTION

This article is a contribution to the ethnohistory of hubs, especially island hubs, using the port city of Port Louis on the island of Mauritius in the southwest of the Indian Ocean as a case and paradigm. Geostrategically, this island belongs to the category of what could be called “useful-islands-in-the-middle-of-nowhere.” Lying roughly halfway between the Cape of Good Hope and India, Mauritius (i.e., place and people) provided a welcome intermediate anchoring point and shelter in the vastness of the sea during the age of sail. The following discussion is based on the hypothesis that it has been and will be the *raison d’être*, that is, the primary function and most basic characteristic of this island to be a hub. Mauritius, to put it bluntly, was born to be a hub. Furthermore, originally starting as a *maritime* hub, the expertise and functions which were acquired and developed by Mauritius in this capacity were gradually transferred to several non-maritime domains, where they sooner or later began to lead an independent life.

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Hubs, to briefly repeat (and expand) my statements made in the Introduction to this volume, are agentive knots in a network of transportation systems. They are significant nodes and actors of convergence, entanglement, and divergence in the global streams of human beings, animals, finances, ideas, and pieces of knowledge. However, hubs are to be understood as more than being simple knots or nodes in networks and in the processes of networking; they are “*highly* connected nodes” (Collar 2013, 19, my emphasis). “A node,” as Collar elaborates this point, “attracts new links largely on the basis of already having links: part of the reason hubs exist is because they attract more frequent connections” (ibid.).

This quality of hubs as being “highly connected” needs to be complemented by another observation regarding the qualities which hubs exhibit: Hubs are charged with an extraordinary energy that affects their own inner life and that also and most importantly changes those beings and things that partake in it, if only temporarily when passing by. Hubs have agency and a certain dynamic vitality with regard to more than just putting things and beings in motion and making them circulate and flow. Hubs, as actants, are also and significantly agentive with regard to translating the meaning, functions, usages, forms, and (material as well as ideational) values of all things and beings that pass through them and that invariably stay for a while *within* them. More often than not, these changes add value, part of which remains in the (island)hub and thus makes it profit from being a hub. Hubs, then, have a salient inner life and develop significant interior dynamics, which must not be lost out of sight when concentrating on all the coming and going. In order to pinpoint the (internal as well as external) transformative agency of hubs, I suggest using the term of “hubbing.” By hubbing I mean the activities and movements that a given hub sets in motion, organizes and keeps going, as well as the inner translations it effects. By “the art of hubbing,” I mean the special expertise and capacity to be a hub and to hub successfully. Mauritius has become an expert or master in the art of hubbing. In this chapter, I shall seek to demonstrate this point by looking at Mauritius’ history as a hub and at the changes that have taken place within this history, starting from the island’s early phase as a naval base up to its present roles as tourist destination, offshore banking place and cyber island. When discussing contemporary manifestations of the global role as successful hub, I shall also demonstrate that the etic term of hub, with the theoretical and methodological implications elaborated

here and in other contributions to this volume, in Mauritius itself finds a particular emic correspondence. Mauritians themselves use the term of hub frequently, though of course not all Mauritians and in the same way as social theorists do. I shall then look at the transformative, value enhancing processes which take place within the Mauritian hub, before I finally argue that for an understanding of Mauritian society and culture, it is no longer viable to look at it, as has been done in the majority of studies, as a plantation society, but as a hub society as well.

NAVAL HUB

It is obvious that the kind of hubbing one is faced with in the Mauritian case is, in essence, what could be called maritime hubbing. It is hubbing across an ocean, with all the particularities in terms of technology, transport, and translation which this maritime dimension, including the maritime middle passage and maritime liminality, brings with it. These oceanic elements in the art of hubbing—the special kinds of vessels, modes of traveling and cargos, the physical characteristics of the ocean and its coasts and islands, the currents and winds, the patterns of the monsoons, the vastness of an ocean seemingly endless, the “blue economy” riches within the ocean, but also its fluid and terrestrial boundaries—all need to be taken into account. This is the case even for those both modern and contemporary periods in which it has become possible, at least to a certain extent, to ignore and transcend this watery element of the Indian Ocean, whether by using steamships, flying over the sea, transmitting messages via cables beneath it, or by satellite.

While the Dutch tried, in the end unsuccessfully, to establish a small settlement and port of call on the island during the seventeenth century, the more serious attempts of the French to do so from the 1730s onward led Mauritius to begin to exhibit its capacity of circulating persons, things, and ideas across the ocean in all directions.¹ The first and most basic form of maritime hubbing could be called naval hubbing. The island and those who stayed there built, ran, and defended a port of call for the French navy with their ships, captains, sailors, officers, soldiers, administrators, and traders traversing the Indian Ocean to and from India. Originally, for the directors of the *Compagnie des Indes* in Paris, Mauritius was meant to be no more than an intermediate military base and a port of call for the repair, renewal, and re-invigoration of ships and men, as well as to equip them with food and water for the

long and arduous journeys (and battles) that lay ahead.² In this early phase, some cargoes that were landed on Mauritius were intended for the needs of the settlers and soldiers, while conversely other provisions like ebony wood or turtles, were loaded on to the ships from the island. Nonetheless, these embarkations and disembarkations were nothing but a means to an end, being intended merely to enable the ships to reach their final and main destinations to the east or west. Mauritius, as such, had nothing much to offer in these early days except timber, water, seafood, and its strategic location. This dimension in the art of maritime hubbing, this naval hubbing, consisted in just the hubbing of ships and their crews.

This passive role of Port Louis and the island of Mauritius as a whole is manifested in the fact that throughout its history Mauritius hardly ever had a significant maritime force itself. There were, however, plans to provide it with one. The island's first governor, the pragmatic but also at times visionary Mahé de Labourdonnais (1735–1746), had serious plans to equip Mauritius with a significant mercantile flotilla of its own. He wanted to found “une marine des îles,” as he called it. In a memorandum to the French East India Company back home in Paris, he considered the following stock of merchant ships necessary and desirable for Mauritius: one boat of 500–600 tons for procuring rice and bullocks from Madagascar; another of 150–200 tons for slaves from Madagascar; a third of 400–500 tons for slaves from Mozambique; two boats of eighty to 100 tons for trafficking regularly between Mauritius and Réunion (then called Île Bourbon); two boats of up to 100 tons for collecting sea turtles from Rodrigues; and finally two larger for the trade with India. These plans for a Mauritian flotilla were not welcomed in Paris and were never realized. Even under British rule things did not change, so that from their beginnings until today Mauritian governments and the island's mercantile class could never boast a substantial indigenous or “creole” mercantile flotilla. Where Mauritius, whether as a nation or in the form of Mauritian-based merchants or corporate groups, conducted trade, this was done less with ships of its own than by chartering foreign ships or using ships that were passing by anyway (Toussaint 1966, 9–16).

Even without achieving the status of a maritime force, French endeavors in Mauritius to build and safeguard the port and to be able to provide the services and provisions needed for passing ships sooner or later required the establishment of a small permanent settlement and garrison

around the port. The Company had to build up an incipient island community that became able not only to feed itself, but also to accommodate the ever-increasing demands of ships and crews passing by. It also needed the ability to fend off the occasional British flotilla that cast its eye on the island. The very existence of this settlement was continuously threatened by hunger, cyclones, and epidemic diseases, by runaway slaves hiding in the island's wilder parts, and by pirates somewhere out there on the sea, but occasionally also in a bay just around the corner.

Sooner or later, and almost against the express will of the directors of the *Compagnie*, Mauritius gradually developed into more than just a port of call. For many of those who arrived on the island, more often than not hailing from St. Malo and other parts of Brittany, Mauritius eventually became an island on which to start a new life. It became a place, which *in itself* promised a decent living, and even riches. Consequently, the port and its settlement, in its early years tellingly known as "Le Camp," grew into the port city of Port Louis, which later grew and spread out into the interior. In addition, sugar plantations and new settlements were founded across the rest of the island. Mauritius thus developed into a colony with its very own needs, but also its own potentialities, which emerged in addition to and sometimes independently of its function as a naval hub. Having started as a naval hub of merely "passing" significance, Mauritius, with its natural bay at Port Louis, developed into a fragile but thriving colony in the mid-eighteenth century. It eventually became the French East India Company's and later the Crown's *chef-lieu* in the Indian Ocean world outstripping first its rival Mascarene sister of Bourbon (after 1848 La Réunion) and then even Pondicherry on the southeastern Indian coast. As a consequence of this functional extension and differentiation, the prime dimension in the art of maritime hubbing, the kind here labeled "naval hubbing," was refined and extended into other spheres of economic, sociocultural, technological, and political life.

EARLY EXTENSIONS AND REFINEMENTS

a) Necessities

One of the first extensions and refinements of the status of being a naval hub arose out of the necessity to provide the island and its inhabitants with food, construction material, and tools.³ The need to import basic necessities, as well as some luxuries such as wine and tea from

France, soon developed into another kind of hubbing activity. Slowly but surely, Mauritius developed into a hub for merchandise and trade. Consequently, some of the foodstuffs and other goods that were brought on to the island and taken off it were somewhat mysteriously transformed into commodities, which allowed Franco-Mauritian merchants to realize a profit by buying, storing, and selling them. Thus, the island stopped being *just* a port of call. Closely connected with this capacity, Mauritius developed expertise in mercantile hubbing.

For a long time, instead of producing food for passing sailors and soldiers, the islanders on Mauritius found themselves in dire need of importing staple foods such as rice, meat, and grain just to satisfy their own needs. By the time the French took it over from the Dutch, all the dodos had been killed and eaten, and giant turtles, too, were on the verge of extinction.⁴ It took some time to establish agriculture and horticulture on the “island of rats,” as it was then known, ready to cope with the increasing demands of the settlers and ships passing by. The scarcity in food was aggravated at times when, for strategic and military reasons, sailors and soldiers were not just briefly stopping over but staying for extended periods. Thus, during the Seven Years War between the major European powers from 1756 to 1763 and the American War of Independence of 1775–1783, Mauritius was an important naval base for the French in their struggle with the British for hegemony in India and beyond. Hundreds and at times as many as 15,000 soldiers and sailors were stationed on Mauritius and had to be accommodated and fed while they were waiting for their marching orders and their ships were being overhauled. This task brought the island, with a population then of hardly more than 50,000 (almost two-thirds of them slaves), to the brink of ruin and starvation (Allen 1999, 17–19, 128).

In its function as a regional hub for necessities and other goods, there were four main destinations for Mauritian merchants and sailors, namely Madagascar, Réunion, Rodrigues, and the Seychelles. From its early days, Mauritius was much involved in trade with local Malagasy chiefs and “mixed” *Zana Malata*⁵ traders from the *Grande Île* some 800 kilometers to the west, importing mainly rice, beef, and slaves. Apart from this Madagascar was the main place from which slaves were imported to the Mascarenes. In the early days, this trade took the form of barter between independent entrepreneurs and local chiefs, but friction and even skirmishes often broke out, leading to several periods in which Malagasy chiefs closed their harbors to Mauritian ships. With regard to the

present volume's emphasis on *small* islands, it is significant to note that a substantial part of the business was conducted via small islands, such as Nosy Boraha (Île Sainte-Marie), lying immediately in front of the Malagasy mainland.

As far as Réunion is concerned, during French colonial dominance of this part of the Indian Ocean, the volcanic Mascarene Islands of Mauritius and Réunion, lying at a distance of roughly 160 kilometers from each other, were treated as "sister islands." Réunion was settled first, from the mid-seventeenth century onward, with people arriving directly from France or fleeing from massacres in Madagascar, or else exchanging the existential mode of a pirate with that of a settler. Thus, for several decades, Île Bourbon was the main base of the French East India Company in this part of the Indian Ocean. By the mid-eighteenth century, however, Mauritius, at that time the Île de France, gained the upper hand, basically on account of its better natural harbor at Port Louis. From then on, movements between Mauritius and Réunion took the form of trade between two colonial dependencies, the former being more important and administering the latter. The goods and personnel that eventually landed in Réunion reached this destination via Mauritius. As a result, the political and mercantile class of Île de France gained the upper hand and could dictate prices, customs, and taxes to Île Bourbon.⁶ Communication between Mauritius and its dependency of Rodrigues, lying approximately 650 kilometers east of Mauritius and populated since the 1750s, was bad for a long time. There were times during the eighteenth century when no ship from Mauritius had visited Rodrigues for several years (Toussaint 1966, 11). The goods that were brought to this small island, inhabited by French planters with their proportionally much more numerous Malagasy and African slaves, were similar to those brought to Bourbon, though overall consisting even more of basic produce. Rodrigues had nothing much to offer except products of the sea such as turtles and fish. Plans to turn the island into a provider of beef cattle never worked out.

The Seychelles Archipelago was settled from Mauritius from the 1770s onward. First under Franco-Mauritian, then under Anglo-Mauritian rule, the archipelago was treated as a dependency of the colony of Mauritius and administered from there. Only from the early twentieth century onward did the Seychelles start to be administered separately, which brought some advantages to its inhabitants. Consequently, for a long time, the Seychellois had the same

concerns and complaints with regard to Mauritius that the other two dependencies had. Communication was irregular or even nonexistent until very late, and commercial and other exchanges were unequal, if not exploitative, favoring Mauritius and its merchant class over the dependencies. The Seychelles were mainly used as providers of timber and turtles, which on and around Mauritius had become sparse, and of coconut oil, plantations of which were established.⁷

b) Sugar and “Prizes”

From the mid- to late-eighteenth century onward, sugar became the main export and source of income for Mauritius under French rule. It continued to be so under British colonial rule until independence in 1968 and still is today under various global trade regimes. This is not the place to retrace the economic or even sociocultural history of sugar on Mauritius (see Allen 1999; Storey 1997; Teelock 1998). However, given the present article’s focus on the hubbing qualities of this island and its inhabitants, one needs to emphasize the obvious: Sugar is not native to Mauritius. Different varieties were brought to the island, often under secretive and dangerous conditions, from India and Southeast Asia and then tested out in the island’s botanical garden or sugar plantations, until the most profitable and hardiest species for cultivation under Mauritian conditions were identified. Sugar and its subsidiary products were then produced and exported by the island’s planters and merchants. Sugar is therefore a prime example of an item which was brought to the island and transformed prior to exportation.⁸

Another, rather special kind of trade that was instrumental in turning Mauritius into a mercantile hub of some consequence arose out of acts of piracy. During the decades before the British takeover of the island in 1810, Port Louis provided a safe haven for several dozens of French corsairs, who captured substantial wealth on their commercial raids against English, Dutch, Moghul, and Marathi ships. The notorious *Surcouf* alone is said to have entered and captured forty-seven English “Indiamen,” among them the formidable *Kent* (Piat 2010, 168–79). English historical sources report that between 1807 and 1809—that is, at the very end of French rule on the island—eighteen mercantile ships fell into the hands of corsairs on their way to or from India (Carter 2009; Schnepel 2014). Returning from their raids, the pirates unloaded their prizes and divided their spoils between captain, crew,

and an obligatory share for the government according to fixed rates. Instead of burying their treasure underground or hiding it in caves, as common pirate folklore has it, the privateers sold or traded their quite substantial booty to merchants operating in or from Port Louis. Only a small proportion of the newly acquired wealth in gold, diamonds, pepper, fine cloth, spices, or porcelain remained on the island in the coffers of the white Franco-Mauritian elites; the greater part of it entered into international commercial and financial circuits. In particular, with merchants and whalers hailing from the newly independent United States of America and from Denmark, the booty was exchanged for money, naval supplies, and even ships built in shipyards in Maine and Massachusetts (Toussaint 1966, 17–23; Allen 1999, 11–12). In order to understand the mechanism of this globalization of pirate loot, one must realize that Port Louis had already become a well-frequented free port several years after the French East India Company had ceded the island to the French Crown in 1767 (Allen 1999, 12–13, 179). Through this opening up of the port to worldwide commerce, trade with Mauritius increased so steadily that in 1803 alone 350 boats from Europe, Asia, and America dropped anchor in Port Louis. Apart from dealing in “prizes,” then, Mauritius also acted as an entrepôt and distribution center for the products of regular trading activities in goods such as spices from Indonesia, textiles from India, traditional medicines from Sri Lanka, porcelain from China, and slaves from Africa. Mauritius had become a fully fledged mercantile hub.

c) Communication, Information, Knowledge

One of the basic skills needed for naval and mercantile hubbing is the steady and speedy reception, processing, and dissemination of fresh news, information, and knowledge about incoming boats, their cargoes, and the prices of these goods on other markets; about captains, crews, and passengers; and about the state of peace or war out in the world across the ocean. Given the island's important role as a stopover in the Indian Ocean, it may not be solely by chance that the world's most famous stamp hails from this island. Admittedly, “Blue Pennies” were created mainly for intra-insular postal communication, but in the Blue Penny Museum on the Caudan Waterfront of Port Louis one also encounters (as seen in 2014) another artifact which exemplifies Mauritius' role as an information and/or communicative hub even

more impressively: an artificial banyan tree, made of paper maché, with a number of jugs fastened to its “twigs.” The text on the wall reads:

The first recorded letters from Mauritius were those from the Dutch Moluccan fleet and date back to June 1601. They were found by Willem von West-Zanen, the Enkhuizen’s captain, when his vessel called at the island in June 1602. In the remote days of first stopovers in this uninhabited country, it was usual for ships’ captains to leave messages in sealed jugs, hung upside down, on trees in Kuipers Eyland ... at the entrance to Noord Western Haven, present day Port Louis Harbour.

With colonization, not only spreading messages and circulating news, but also receiving, digesting, enhancing, and disseminating knowledge increased to become a crucial aspect of the island’s role as an expert in the art of hubbing. We have already mentioned the significance of Mauritius in determining the most advantageous species and technologies in the production of sugar on the basis of plant subspecies brought to the island from South and Southeast Asia. Other species of flora and fauna, such as nutmeg, cloves, indigo, cotton, pepper, fruit and palm trees, vegetables, or animals such as Malagasy cattle or Javanese deer were also brought to the island to be tried out for their survivability and agricultural utility (Piat 2010, 64–65, 92–97).

A crucial role in these attempts to settle new species on the island was assumed by the Botanical Gardens of Pamplemousse, which was headed and visited by some of the internationally most reputed botanists and agricultural scientists, to mention only Pierre Poivre.⁹ In addition, in the Age of Enlightenment, Port Louis was made the seat of a number of learned societies pursuing philosophical, nautical, astronomical, geographical, botanical, arboricultural, cartographical, and other kinds of research. These societies hosted a number of outstanding scientists, lay and professional, who sooner or later disseminated their insights back to the colonial centers of Paris and London and who, in return, were keen to learn about the latest scientific discoveries from the metropolitan centers. Individual scholars or scientific group expeditions, like that led by the famous Louis Antoine de Bougainville, who arrived on Mauritius in 1768 (Piat 2010, 141–48) or the less lucky explorer Jean-Francois de La Pérouse, who stayed on the island for six years in the 1770s and thereafter got lost in the Pacific in 1789 (ibid., 148–52), also regularly passed

through from east or west, taking the opportunity of a visit to undertake some research on the island itself.

THE PRESENT-DAY “SERVICE HUB”: MAURITIAN VOICES

Let us now make an admittedly abrupt jump from the founding and stabilizing phase of the colony to the present day,¹⁰ showing that in contemporary postcolonial Mauritius the social, institutional, and mental foundations of this island's status as an expert in the art of hubbing have experienced further extensions and refinements, namely into spheres in which the maritime dimension is virtually absent. Independent Mauritius has developed into a “service hub,” acquiring amazing economic success by offering the services that are required in the global markets of today. In order to show what I mean by this, it is time to let Mauritians speak for themselves. Let us therefore look at some Mauritian print and Internet media in order to get an idea of how the issue of being or wanting to become a hub is represented and conceived in Mauritian society today.

In one newspaper (*L'Express*, February 20, 2012), one finds an article entitled “*Maurice se positionne comme hub financier entre l'Inde et l'Afrique.*” This piece informs the reader about a scheme of the Mauritian Standard Chartered Bank to use its services as a gateway to Africa. The CEO of that Bank argues that, like Singapore and Hong Kong in their regions, Mauritius is ideally situated between Africa and Asia.¹¹ The country offers investors, so it is further argued (this time by “Le Ministre de l'Industrie, du Commerce et de la Protection des Consommateurs”), a stable economic and political environment, a solid legal system, and a qualified and dynamic workforce, which can be used as a “*portail pour investir en Afrique.*” In a similar statement, namely an Internet announcement by the Deutsche Bank, Mauritian Branch, one reads: “Mauritius started to offer financial services in 1992 and has since built a solid reputation as a world class international centre, providing operational security and commercial flexibility to investors. As an independent sovereign nation strategically located in the Indian Ocean, Mauritius offers political and economic stability, highly respected regulatory frameworks with common law structures and a tax neutral environment. It benefits from a well-educated, multilingual workforce and its convenient time-zone for Asia, the Middle East and Africa.”¹² And finally, with regard to the role of Mauritius as a “financial hub,” in a

brochure entitled *Guide to Global Investment*, the Mauritian Board of Investment asks why foreigners should invest in Mauritius, only to give the answer immediately: “A business friendly environment with a long history of hospitality; a safe country with enduring social and political stability; a culturally diverse, multilingual and highly educated workforce; strategically located between Asia and Africa; a convenient time zone; well-developed air and sea links to the rest of the world.”

Some services of this kind are known globally these days, quite tellingly, as “offshore banking.” And indeed, most of the Mauritian institutions that work in this branch of providing “tax havens” are actually located directly on the Caudan Waterfront in Port Louis, the new gateway to the world. The port itself, however, has not completely lost its original role, as the following statements referring to the present “Free Port” of Port Louis make clear. During the last decade, the Annual Reports of the Mauritius Port Authority have reported sharp increases in almost all aspects of performance, from cargoes arriving and departing to profits earned. In various newspapers, one reads of the construction of a substantial “*prolongement du quai*” (*L’Express*, February 13, 2014), or of plans to continue extending the docking capacities of the free port even further, or envisaging the dedicated “*renouvellement des équipements portuaires*” (*Le Mauricien*, July 29, 2013; *L’Express*, February 20, 2014), especially of the cranes in the port’s ever more important container section. Furthermore, one repeatedly reads in newspapers about the free port’s economically important function as a “Seafood Hub” or “*Plateform de fruits de mer*” (*Le Mauricien*, January 1, 2006; February 11 and 22, 2006; March 2, 2006).¹³ This label refers to the port’s role in offering substantial capacities in cold storage warehouses to keep the catches of the numerous Taiwanese junks that arrive in Port Louis daily, their hulks full of tuna. This endangered pelagic species, incidentally, is not eaten or even processed in Port Louis. Rather, after some time in storage, the tuna fish are collected by larger transport vessels, which bring their cargo to the factories of Heinz and others on the Seychelles, or even as far away as Puerto Rico, from where they enter United States or European stores. But it is not only fish that are hubbed in Port Louis: Increasingly cruise passengers are as well. Having recently completed a new terminal for cruise ships of all sizes, Mauritius was awarded the title of “The Indian Ocean’s Best Cruise Port 2012.” From this cruise terminal, one major Italian company regularly starts luxury cruises stopping at major scenic ports in the southwestern part of the Indian Ocean up to

Zanzibar in the north and Cape Town in the South. Other cruise ships pass by on longer routes, using Mauritius also as an entry and exit point for those tourists who only wish to make part of the journey and arrive or depart by plane.

Apart from being a “seafood hub” and international cruise destination, Mauritius and foreign investors have undertaken major investments to turn the port into a regional hub for liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). In 2010, Petredec Investments Ltd was commissioned by the Government of Mauritius to construct a 15,000-metric-ton-storage terminal in the western corner of Port Louis’ container port. This terminal, which costs 24.8 million Euros to construct, was completed and became operational in March 2014. It consists of three large tanks built in Italy, a concrete mound over these tanks for security, and import and export pipelines leading some hundred meters out into the sea for the tank vessels anchoring there, as well as a modern control and administration building next to the tanks. On the one hand, this terminal was meant to cover the island’s own needs and hence to supply approximately 65,000–67,000 metric tons per annum to the State Trading Corporation of Mauritius. But it was also built at this size so that “the terminal will also act as a trading hub allowing the re-export of LPG in excess of 100,000 metric tons per annum to regional markets located in the Indian Ocean region.”¹⁴ As the *Indian Ocean Times* writes: “This project is designed to transform the port-franc in a vast gas-hub serving the entire region of the Indian Ocean.”¹⁵

The airport of Mauritius has also been extended in an attempt to become a regional “airport hub” comparable to those found in the Middle East, like Dubai. The CEO of Airports of Mauritius Co. Ltd, which had just finalized the building of a new grand airport terminal (including a runway fit for the landing of A 380 planes), assessed the impact of these new developments on tourism as follows: “Owing to this economic [world] crisis, a gap has been noted in the projections made so far. However, I am confident Mauritius will be welcoming two million tourists in the years to come. This new terminal will be an additional marketing asset that will help in better selling our destination as a regional hub” (*Le Mauricien*, April 5, 2012).¹⁶

In the field of communications, which represents one of Mauritius’ first and most basic hub functions from the period even before its settlement, in April 2012, *Le Mauricien* (April 5, 2012) reported the installation of “Lion 2.” LION stands for “Lower Indian Ocean Network” and

refers to a high-quality fiber-optic cable connecting the island underwater with Réunion, Madagascar, Mayotte, and Kenya, eventually stretching over a distance of 3000 kilometers. This cable, the reader is informed, will also be connected to three other underwater cables: (1) the EASSy, which runs for approximately 10,000 kilometers between South Africa and Ethiopia, also connecting the Comoros, Tanzania, and the Sudan; (2) a cable known as The East African Marine System (TEAMS); and, of course, (3) with “Lion 1,” which was inaugurated by the prime minister of Mauritius in 2009. In the same newspaper, two days later, the reader is informed that in the *Global Information Technology Report* of the World Economic Forum, Mauritius is globally ranked 53rd in terms of Network Readiness. This “*bonne performance*,” it is recognized, puts the country at the head of all the countries of sub-Saharan Africa, including even South Africa and Nigeria. The report states: “Therefore, continued and sustained efforts to bring down the costs of international connectivity, to improve the quality of the workforce, and to promote a business-friendly environment will further ensure that Mauritius becomes a preferred platform and solutions provider in the global ICT / BPO realm.” In the past decade, Mauritius has underlined its aspiration to position itself as a major “Hub 2.0” by inaugurating a constantly growing “Cyber City” near the inland area of Ébene and the University of Mauritius on the site of former sugar fields.¹⁷

The distribution of information and knowledge go hand in hand. In this respect, it is not surprising to find attempts to make Mauritius into a hub in this latter field as well. In 2005, the Mauritian Ministry of Education and Scientific Research launched a fifty-page government agenda and policy outline entitled *Developing Mauritius into a Knowledge Hub and a Centre for Higher Learning*.¹⁸ These policy guidelines, which were devised by a high-ranking committee of ministers, state secretaries, and personalities from industry and the public, state: “The Government has decided that, henceforth, knowledge-based industries will be an increasing source of value added for the economy and a significant component of the new economic model. To that end, it is promoting a Knowledge Hub agenda ...” (ibid., 4). In this agenda the government commits itself to further strengthening the country’s university and other places of higher learning, especially in the priority areas of “information and communication technologies”; “medicine and allied health sciences,” and “business, finance and financial services.” Elsewhere one reads: “A feature of globally competitive

knowledge-based economies is that governments, institutions of higher learning and industries work together in those economies to create knowledge hubs. A knowledge hub is concerned with the process of building up a country's capacity to better integrate with the world's increasing knowledge-based economy" (ibid., 3). These statements in the report are followed by two pages which deal with "the Singaporean Model," Singapore being "a country similar to Mauritius in terms of small land mass and lack of natural resources" (ibid.).

Finally, Mauritius is positioning itself in central roles in various international organizations that strive to enhance cooperation and development within the Indian Ocean region. In 1997, Mauritius was among the founders of this macroregion's only all-encompassing association, namely the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) (Sellström 2015, 45–46; Wagner 2013). Since then, it has been the seat of this organization's secretariat, and for a long time its Director General was a Mauritian. Furthermore, there is the Commission de l'Océan Indien (COI), which, launched in 1984 and with its headquarters on Mauritius, strives to increase cooperation within the Francophone island world of the southwest Indian Ocean, that is, between Mauritius, Réunion, Madagascar, the Seychelles, French Mayotte, and the Comoros.¹⁹

Without going into greater depth or even exploring the credibility of the claims made here, these extracts from print and Internet media should suffice to show that discourses of being or wanting to become a hub are a vital part of Mauritian public discourse. Different kinds or dimensions of hubs are identified: The "seafood hub" is perhaps the most genuine type of a hub for a small island society. But the very same island wishes to become or claims to be a "financial hub," an "LPG hub," a "tourist hub," and a "knowledge hub." Nothing material or ideational, it seems, is incapable of being hubbed. This capacity has become known worldwide, as a laudatory one-page article in the *International Herald Tribune* (March 26, 2012) with the headline "Mauritius: The Glittering New Gateway to Africa and Asia" and featuring a large color photograph of the splendidly illuminated Caudan Waterfront at night and praising Mauritius's economic success in the domains of tourism, banking and as an "ICT hub," clearly illustrates.

These claims and visions are clearly being made by those who have influence in political and economic matters. They are reiterated in international political contexts, as when, during an Indian Ocean

Conference at the German Foreign Office in Berlin on June 9, 2015, Jean-Claude de l'Estrac, the Mauritian Secrétaire Générale de la COI, proclaimed Mauritius to be "at the cross-roads, at the heart of the globalized world." More modestly, it transpires from the statements and facts assembled in this section that Mauritius wants to be or become a *regional* hub, that is, a hub catering especially for the southwest Indian Ocean and in particular its island world of Madagascar, the Mascarenes, the Comoros, and the Seychelles, as well as for littoral countries like Mozambique, Tanzania, and even as far south or north as South Africa and Kenya, respectively.

Furthermore, in many statements as to why Mauritius is or could be an ideal hub, its geostrategic position (i.e., the island's position in space and time) is combined with the claim that it possesses a relatively crisis-free and well-diversified economy, as well as a stable and reliable politico-jural framework for investors and clients. One also finds repeated hints regarding the island's advantageous sociocultural situation and thus its history. Mauritius is said to have a long history of hospitality; the diversity of its population, with ancestral languages such as Hindi, Chinese, Arabic, or French, is praised; and all these languages, to top it all, are spoken against the background of English as the national language and language of higher education. Mauritius's work force, in a nutshell, has "globality"; it is cosmopolitan. This human factor is presented as a decisive asset that allows the island to be an important player in the world of global streams of finance, information, knowledge, men, plants, animals, ideas, and things.

PRESENT-DAY "PILLARS" OF THE MAURITIAN HUB ECONOMY

These Mauritian voices, advocating and even celebrating the island's capacity to act as a modern-day service hub, do, of course, reflect the diversified nature of the Mauritian economy today, highlighting its areas of greatest success and assumed potential. Apart from the long-lasting profits of the sugar industry, two of the major "pillars" of the island's extraordinary "economic miracle"²⁰ since the 1970s have been the textile and tourism industries. Since the advent of the new millennium, Mauritius has also made headway in International Financial Services (IFS) and International Communication Technology (ICT). All of these branches of the economy have important hub dimensions of various kinds.

Textiles

Since the establishment of an export processing zone in the 1970s, textiles have become the prime export item of the island. This continues today, despite a serious crisis in the early years of this millennium, and even though the level of wages has risen so continuously that for investors Mauritius no longer represents an attractive low-wage economy.²¹ As Mauritius does not raise sheep or grow cotton, the materials for producing designer clothing and fine textiles have to be brought to the island from elsewhere, namely from Asia and Australia. But it is not only the cloth that is imported: The designs are European or American in origin, while large amounts of the capital and of managerial and technical expertise have come from the East Asian “tigers.” In particular, businessmen from the British crown colony of Hong Kong were looking for safe havens in which to invest their capital and relocate their companies after the return of Hong Kong to China in 1997.²² It goes without saying, for an industry producing in *export* processing zones, that the Mauritian “textile hub” produces goods not for its own market, but for foreign ones, especially the luxury sectors of European and American consumers. Hence, in both its material and manufacturing dimensions, textiles are not endemic to Mauritius. The material may start in Australia, it is then processed into cloth in Hong Kong or Calcutta before being finished in Mauritius, and the finished products go to the West. For the inner working of that hub, the Mauritian state provides the political and legal framework that offers tax and customs advantages and relatively favorable manufacturing conditions in the EPZ; the Sino-Mauritian community plays a vital role in establishing this business link across the Indian Ocean into the South China Sea; Franco-Mauritians use sugar fields and their own investments to make this hub workable and profitable; while the Indo-Mauritian and Creoles provide the qualified, but relatively low-cost workforce that transforms cloth into valuable designer clothes.²³

Tourism

Tourism was initially introduced to Mauritius quite literally “by the way.” In the early pre-jet age of commercial air traffic, planes could not travel the long distances that an A 380 or Boeing 747 can cover today. In its search for intermediate stops on the long journey between Europe and South Africa, on the one hand, and Australia, on the other, Qantas

Airways discovered Mauritius as a convenient stopover, strategically well located and politically safe, turning flights to and from “Down Under” into one- or two-stop flights only.²⁴ On September 1, 1953, regular plane services were started, with Mauritius as an airport hub. While this date could be seen as the beginning of the Mauritian tourism industry, in those days passengers did not come to enjoy the beauties of the island and relax on its beaches, but stopped over for a day or two only in hotels at Curepipe, a predominantly white Franco-Mauritian city in the cooler upland plateau of the island, to wait for an ongoing connection.

Nowadays, tourists stay longer, ten days on the average. And they certainly do not come to Mauritius as travelers merely passing through. Mauritius has become a major tourist attraction and destination in itself, attracting more than one million tourists a year. These tourists arrive pale and stressed, though after a time enjoying the three great tourist attractions of sun, sand, and sea, they usually depart from this “paradise island” tanned (or sunburned), and in better shape. From the mid-1980s onward, therefore, tourism has provided a substantial income for the island’s hotels and associated enterprises, such as catering or tour operators. With its over one hundred hotels and 27,000 employees (in 2010), it has developed into a major taxpayer for the state and a large job provider for the Mauritian population, at times even surpassing the sugar and textile industries in these two regards. This potential seems not yet to have been exhausted, as the oft-mentioned target figure of two million tourists a year makes clear.²⁵

International Financial Services (IFS) and International Communication Technology (ICT)

From 2000 onward, the Mauritian economy was furthered diversified, and strengthened, by the great success of services in the offshore banking and communication technologies sectors. These “pillars” four and five of the Mauritian economy (see Sellström 2015, 249–50) have catapulted Mauritius right into the center of the present-day global economy. As far as international financial services are concerned, it is especially Indian capital going to and coming from Africa that is routed through and administered in the Mauritian financial hub, which employs roughly 15,000 people. As mentioned above, services in international communication technology have only become possible relatively recently, since Mauritius connected itself to the optical fiber cables of LION 1 and 2.

As Mauritius has managed to become a node in these lines of communication, it has been an explicit target for the island's politicians and the over 300 ICT companies with their more than 12,000 employees, to become a "cyber island," "data hub," or "Hub 2.0." Indeed, this branch of the economy is growing faster than the rest.

EXTENSIONS AND INNER HUB TRANSLATIONS

So far I have argued that Mauritius was "born to be a hub" and that its hubbing activities were maritime in origin and essence. Furthermore, I have shown that the island's first and most basic function as a hub was as a naval hub, aiding ships and their crews *en route* to move on. This function soon required a more permanent population on the island and in its port, with a small settlement of soldiers, administrators, and free as well as enslaved laborers in and near the latter. When this settlement stabilized, growing in size and functions, it gradually acquired other hubbing functions as well. These were still maritime in character, but they entailed a number of extensions of and refinements to the original status and function of a *naval* hub. Not only were passing ships and their crews hubbed, but ships arriving at and departing from Port Louis also brought and took away with them commodities which in different ways realized some surplus for the inhabitants and merchants of the island, turning it into a mercantile and information hub. However, no matter whether these commodities were basic or luxury, whether they consisted of sugar, pirate prizes, or merchandise from Europe, China, or India, they were not of Mauritian origin and also not meant to stay there. They were in transit.²⁶

This fact was noted already in 1981 by Jean Houbert (1981, 77), when he wrote: "Mauritius as an entity then, through its very genesis, was doubly dependent on the outside world: for all its export, and almost all its imports." However, what to Houbert and others writing before the "economic miracle" looks like "dependence," and hence like a deficiency, seen from the perspective of a hub theory can be regarded as an asset. Maybe initially, the island's situation was indeed characterized by its dependence on outside forces, but since then, Mauritius has made the best of this seemingly negative factor and even turned it to its advantage by realizing and enforcing its hub potential in all domains. Perhaps, in fact, the situation was never one of dependence but from the start a quality. What is certain, however, is that, if we want to understand

fully the development of this small island, we have to question received theories of dependency, which so often find application when it comes to analyzing the economic plight of African and other colonial and postcolonial countries. Instead, in the case of Mauritius and, arguably, of other small islands in the Indian Ocean, one has to look more closely at the internal dynamics of connectivity in motion and at how hubbing exactly works. It will then transpire that Mauritius's success in the economic domain does not lie in it having an abundance of natural resources, nor is it based on its productive capacities (not even in the cases of sugar and textiles, both industries with their very own cut-and-trim activities). Instead, Mauritius is successful because from the start until the present day it realized and developed its qualities in distributing and circulating things. In short, the Mauritian "miracle" is based on its expertise in providing the varying and historically changing qualities and services of a hub.

Now, while the original hubbing functions of the island (addressed in the first sections of this paper) were gradually extended into non-maritime spheres, the island's maritime hubbing activity and expertise continued to provide the basis and rationale for these new, non-maritime activities. These maritime foundations and logics live on, albeit in new guises. One of the most striking illustrations of this can be seen in the Mauritian expertise in helping people recuperate on the island. This service was first developed when a 500-bed hospital was built as one of the earliest permanent buildings on the French island, allowing sick sailors or travelers to recover (Toussaint 2013, 48–49; Piat 2010, 109). This kind of service lives on today in the hospital(ity) industry of tourism. In a similar transformed continuation of services first offered to ships, sailors, and commodities, the island is now offering services in areas such as finance, textiles, and communication technology. What has changed in these instances is the fact that things and ideas are no longer arriving on the ocean's surface alone, but also underwater in cables at the ocean's bottom, as well as over the water in planes or as information traveling in cyber space.

In stressing the transport and transit function of the island, we must inevitably acknowledge that during stopover periods, whether long, medium, or short, certain transmutations and translations occur. No matter whether old and maritime or new and cyber in character, all these human, material, and ideational goods that were and are serviced on the island do not merely stop over before being transported further on. They

are also acted upon and thereby transformed and translated into different kinds of a thing, more often than not with added or enhanced value, part of which stays on the island and makes it relatively prosperous.

In the realm of material things, these “translations” include the following:

- from run-down ships to repaired ones;
- from goods with a use value only to commodities with an exchange value added;
- from commodities in the storehouse to commodities sold with a surplus value;
- from sugarcane to refined sugar and its derivatives (like rum and, these days, even bioenergy);
- from fish to frozen seafood, waiting to be canned;
- from cotton, wool, and rough cloth to designer clothes;
- from information and communication to knowledge and financial transactions;
- from basic knowledge to botanical, agricultural, horticultural, nautical, geographical, engineering, and other sciences;
- from investment to profit.

In the realm of human beings, these “translations” include the following:

- from sick and exhausted sailors/soldiers/travelers to (hopefully) healthy and strong ones;
- from pale and overworked tourists to tanned, relaxed, and recuperated ones;
- from pirates, adventurers, or explorers to settlers;
- from French *pauvres* to Mauritian *petits blancs*;
- from individual businessman to plantocratic family head;
- from slave to free citizen;
- from indentured laborer to “Computer Indian”;

CONCLUSIONS: PLANTATION SOCIETY OR HUB SOCIETY?

So far I have treated the small island of Mauritius and the port city of Port Louis as actants per se. While this concept draws on Actor Network Theory (ANT), one should not stop here. Human actors, with their intentionality, creativity, and unpredictability, have to be considered as

part of the picture. By including common French settlers, pirates, sugar barons, African and Malagasy slaves, and Indian immigrants in the second list above, I signal that any discussion of Mauritius as a hub and any attempt to develop a more subtle theory of hubs and hub societies will sooner or later have to include not only the human beings who passed by, but also those who stayed. The line distinguishing the two is certainly fluid. Some initially wanted to move along, but stayed and even founded families; others wanted to stay but soon passed (away). Notwithstanding this fuzziness, studying hubs cannot proceed without taking account of the human beings living and working on the island, and dying there.²⁷ In this context, it is necessary to look more closely not only at how these people actually did the work of hubbing, but also how hubbing activities formed and changed the small islander's mentalities. Did these activities turn them into persons who were more cosmopolitan and even "fluid" in their identities than people in other parts of the world, including metropolitan cities?²⁸ And did this happen not *although* they were living on a small island, but exactly *because* they were? Some such focus would certainly add an awareness of, and insight into, the specific social, cultural, linguistic, and religious aspects of a hub society to the politico-economic perspective which has been to the fore in the analysis presented here. In addition, it would add a new perspective to diaspora and migration studies, which have often pointed out that certain diasporas and migrants, in forming "middlemen economies," are winners in the global economy on account of their greater mobility, flexibility, and better networks across long distances (Cohen 1997; Srebrink 1999).

This plea to include human actors in any investigation of the Mauritian hub is not meant to imply that valuable studies in this field do not already exist. On the contrary, students wishing to enter the field of Mauritian studies will quickly find themselves confronted with a great number of excellent works by scholars from Mauritius and overseas. It certainly is one of the best-studied small islands worldwide.²⁹ However, while these studies provide an abundance of excellent information on the sociocultural, political, and religious history and present of the island, they do so mostly against the background of the rather unquestioned assumption, held implicitly or explicitly, that Mauritius is—or at least was—in essence a "plantation society." While this claim is certainly not totally unfounded, what is suggested here is that it needs to be relativized and even critiqued. What is necessary for a new perspective on the abundant data already known (and for the discovery of new data) is to acknowledge the fact that Mauritius in essence was, is, and will be a "hub society."

NOTES

1. The most insightful studies into the maritime history of Mauritius are those of Toussaint (1966, 1973, and 2013), to whom I am greatly indebted in the early sections of this chapter.
2. Before Mauritius, the *Compagnie* had already founded trading posts in Pondicherry and Chandernagor on India's east coast in 1674 and 1690, respectively.
3. This is not to forget the much-needed manpower, most of it "unfree," whether as slaves or "coolies," until World War I.
4. In addition, timber, especially the valuable ebony, had been severely depleted by the Dutch, at least at those places on the island where it could still be reached without too much effort and danger. See Toussaint (1966) and Richon (2008).
5. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, numerous European and American pirates settled on Madagascar's northeast coast and produced creole offspring who became capable of mediating between Malagasy chiefs and European traders or became "little kings" themselves. See Schnepel (2014) and Alpers (2009, 27–28).
6. On Mauritius' relation to La Réunion during these early years of Mascarene colonization, see also Toussaint (1966, 21–22).
7. On these points, see especially Toussaint (1966). In addition to these islands, French ships from the Mascarenes also traded with several islands along the Swahili coast such as Kilwa, Mozambique, or Zanzibar.
8. This is not to ignore the important role, stressed especially by Allen (1999), of local money, not only Franco-Mauritian, but, after the *grand-morcellement* period in the 1870s, also Indo-Mauritian in origin.
9. Poivre first stayed on the island in 1746 and 1750, each time for a few months only, then again from 1753 to 1756, as botanist in Pamplemousse trying to acclimatize the valuable spices which he himself had "stolen" from the Dutch Moluccas, and then finally for five years from 1767 onward, having been sent there by the King as "Intendant" in order to effect the island's administrative transition from company rule to the crown's possession. On Poivre, especially, see Grove (1995: 168–263), Osterhammel (1997), Piat (2010: 81–97), and Poivre (1997). The important scientific and economic role of botanical gardens in the era of colonialism and imperialism is exemplarily studied by Grove (1995).
10. This is not to neglect the importance of the British colonial period on the island, starting in 1810 and ending in 1968, with the demographically transformative immigration of Indian contract laborers and thereby with the intensification of exchanges with India.
11. "*Comme Singapour ou Hong Kong qui sont des centres financiers pour l'Asie du Sud-Est, Maurice est idéalement située pour devenir la ported'entrée pour atteindre l'Afrique et l'Asie.*"

12. See <http://www.dboffshore.com> (last accessed March 18, 2013).
13. On Mauritian ambitions to extend its role as a “seafood hub,” see also Sellström (2015, 252).
14. <http://www.petredec.com/storage.shtml> (last accessed March 18, 2014).
15. <http://en.indian-ocean-times.com/Mauritius-wants-to-export-liquefied-petroleum-gas> (last accessed July 26, 2013).
16. See *Le Mauricien*, December 20, 2012, p. 19; see also *Le Mauricien*, July 12, 2012.
17. For the “prehistory” of modern forms of communication and of Mauritius’ role in them, the history of submarine telegraph cables is important. In 1893, Mauritius and the Seychelles were linked to each other and to Zanzibar by telegraph. These links were extended to South Africa and Rodrigues in 1901, and between Mauritius and Réunion in 1906. See Sellström (2015, 18).
18. <http://ministry-education.gov.mu/English/Documents/knowledgehub.pdf>.
19. For the program of the COI since 1994, see *Le Mauricien* July 1, 2015, p. 15.
20. The Mauritian economy is often regarded as a “miracle,” not only on account of positive figures in all financial and economic fields, but also against the background of the pessimistic prognosis of a Nobel prize-winning economist made in 1961. See Meade et al. (1961). On the “economic miracle,” see among others Houbert (1981, 88–95) and Sellström (2015, 241–245).
21. Capital in this branch is slowly but surely transferred to places like Madagascar or back to locations in South and Southeast Asia where labor is cheap and control of working conditions less strict or even nonexistent.
22. Unlike most export processing zones elsewhere in the world, Mauritian textile factories are not located in one especially cordoned-off enclave, but scattered all over the island in up to 600 locations.
23. Up to 90,000 jobs were created by this industry, leading in the 1990s to an unemployment rate in Mauritius of just under 3 percent. Significantly in many respects, around 70 percent of the workers are women. On the Mauritian textile industry, see Meisenhelder (1997, 287–92) and, with more recent figures and assessments, Sellström (2015, 246–47, 251).
24. The second intermediate stop was provided by the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, an Australian archipelago midway between Sri Lanka and Australia.
25. Quite a number of critical voices have been raised by those who fear the “Costa Bravaization” of the island, whose tourism industry so far has, by and large, been operating mainly in the luxury sector of five-star hotels.

- On Mauritian tourism, see Schnepel and Schnepel (2008, 2009) and Sellström (2015, 248, 252).
26. One may add here that in the early age of steam, the quantities of coal needed for these vessels were immense. Mauritius, like other islands and port cities in the Indian Ocean, therefore came to serve as an important coaling station, a function which offered important new opportunities for employment and profit. The coal came, not from the island itself, but from Wales and northern England. On this point, see also Sellström (2015, 17–18).
 27. As one Mauritian scholar put it during a discussion at the University of Mauritius in February 2016 after a paper of mine: the “human Dodos of Mauritius.”
 28. In this context, one remembers how often, in statements discussed above, the population of Mauritius itself was praised to potential international investors as a highly qualified, linguistically varied, and hardworking cornerstone of the Mauritian hub.
 29. See, among numerous others, Boswell (2006), Carter (1995, 1996), Eisenlohr (2006), Eriksen (1998), Hookoomsing, Ludwig and Schnepel (eds. 2009), and Vaughan (2005).

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Dis/Entangled Hubs: Connectivity and Disconnections in the Chagos Archipelago

Steffen F. Johannessen

Around the center of the Indian Ocean, about 500 kilometers south of the southernmost Maldivian islands, some sixty-five tropical islets are spread out like necklaces across the Great Chagos Bank. This is the Chagos Archipelago, an area that covers some 544,000 square kilometers, out of which, however, no more than sixty-three square kilometers consist of dry land. These low-lying coral atolls qualify as being among the most remote places on earth. However, historical connections with Mauritius, located some 2200 kilometers to the southwest, place them well within the western Indian Ocean region and also qualify them as the easternmost outpost of the African continent. Due to significant changes in the global economy, along with the development of new time-space-compressing communication technologies, their solitude has become increasingly relative since the sixteenth century, since when a variety of people and

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objects of different kinds have circulated to and from these remote islands at increasing speed and intensity. Highly controversial political changes, planned and carried out by the world's dominant powers during the Cold War, have led to a significant shift with regard to the kinds of circulation being organized from, and directed through, this archipelago. As a result, a growing number of people within and beyond the region have also become aware of, and very concerned about, the archipelago's condition, history, and future, as well as its place in the wider political economy.

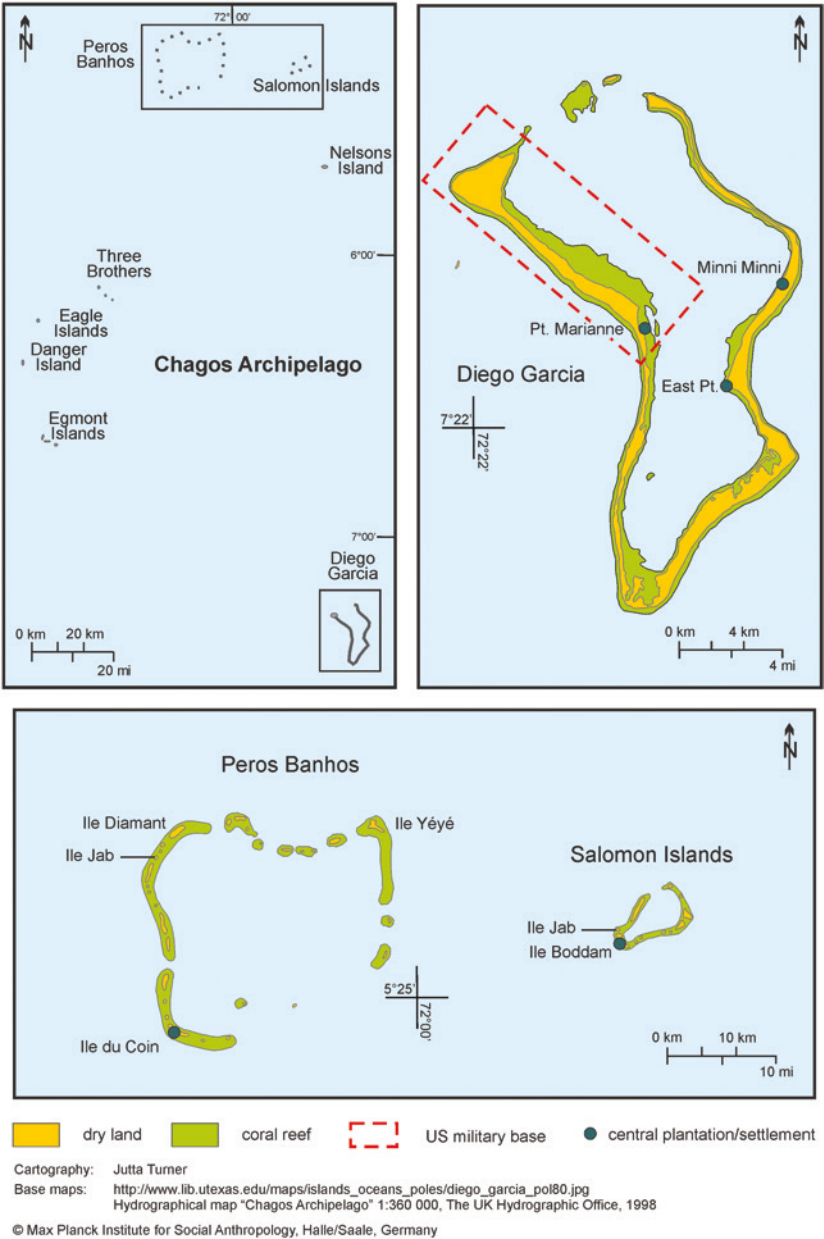
Focusing on the Chagos Archipelago, the purpose of this chapter is to examine different forms of circulation, connectivity, and disconnection, and to discuss from this angle, the transformation of the Chagos Archipelago into a small island hub, or a hub of small islands, with powerful impacts on the Indian Ocean region as a whole. For changing reasons and purposes, the Chagos Archipelago has been connected with different ports, peoples, and places over the last few centuries. Accordingly, circulation to and from these islands has varied in kind, but also in intensity. Following a discussion of these historical connections, I will consider the Chagos Archipelago as a hub in three different ways. First, it is a military hub now hosting one of the United States' most important overseas military bases. Secondly, it is a social hub in the sense that it forms an important historical homeland for a highly politicized and well-connected Chagossian diaspora fighting for the right to repatriation, that is, the archipelago's former inhabitants, who were expelled to other Indian Ocean islands to make way for the military. Thirdly, it has emerged as a significant environmental hub, a place of central importance for marine life, including big fish migrating to the rest of the Indian Ocean. The case of the Chagos Archipelago shows that very different and apparently disentangled forms of circulation may be intimately connected politically. As we shall see, controlling access, and thus limiting what may circulate to and from these islands, has long been of great concern to powerful parties who wish to uphold and protect this archipelago as a particular kind of hub. Based on the example of these islands, I suggest that, in coming to terms with small island hubs, one must also take into account the political efforts and activities by which different actors seek to establish, uphold, and protect a delimited area, such as an island, as a particular kind of hub. This may involve welcoming and supporting new forms of circulation, at times only to exclude unwanted ones.

ISLANDS TO AVOID, ISLANDS TO EXPLOIT, ISLANDS TO GRAB

In the late seventeenth century, according to Maldivian oral tradition, sixteen southern Maldivian traders in a twelve-oared boat (*dōni*) were caught in a storm. When, 5 days later, a group of small uninhabited islands similar to the coral atolls back home appeared in view, they realized that the wind and currents had carried them to the place that local fishermen referred to as Hol̥lavai.¹ In a bold attempt to cross the surrounding reef, their boat was smashed against the coral heads, leaving them stranded on a small desolate island near Ile Yéyé, the northernmost island of the Chagos Archipelago (see Map 11.1), which later Kreol-speaking inhabitants named after the innumerable frigate birds nesting there. Knowing that these large seabirds would soon migrate north, some of them regularly ending their journey on dinner tables on the Maldivian island of FuaMulaku, the castaways decided to catch some of them. They then attached pieces of palm leaf to these birds, on to which they had inscribed their own names. Within days, the FuaMulaku island chief was informed, and before long, three boats came to their rescue (Romero-Frías 2012, 190–94).

Before the sixteenth century, the Chagos Archipelago appears to have been known only to the people of the Maldives. By the time of this allegedly true landing, however, dots of ink marking the position of these islands had already been added to European Indian Ocean maps. In 1512, the islands were sighted by Pedro Mascarenhas. The Portuguese pilot then named the largest island Dom Garcia (later known as Diego Garcia) after the commander of the Portuguese armada from which he was dispatched to seek a quicker route to India by sailing south of Madagascar when news arrived in Mozambique that the Estado da Índia's position in Goa was under threat (Romero-Frías 2003, 19; Scott 1961, 34; Forsberg 2005, 4–5).

It was not only Maldivian traders who ended up as castaways in this area; the Chagos Archipelago remained off-route for more than two centuries after Mascarenhas' "discovery." From time to time, however, the islands hosted unfortunate shipwrecked sailors, as well as European navigators desperately attempting to avoid the same outcome after being trapped within the dangerous reefs, shoals, and shallow waters of the Great Chagos Bank, the world's largest coral atoll. Such critical incidents contributed to giving the area a bad reputation as a hazard to colonial shipping (Forsberg 2005, 5–6; Scott 1961, 40–41; Selvon 2012, 397).



Map 11.1 Map of islands in the Chagos Archipelago (reproduced with kind permission of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle (Saale))

Hence, over the next two centuries, the archipelago developed into what may well be described as an “anti-hub,” that is, the occasional end point of ongoing maritime circulation through shipwreck, which effectively turned the archipelago into an ill-reputed island world best avoided.

The archipelago started to acquire strategic value in the eyes of competing colonial powers from the mid-eighteenth century onward. The role that such small, uninhabited islands could play in the colonial economy then emerged as a subject of disagreement among French politicians and officials. Personifying the French maritime policy, Mahé de Labourdonnais, the governor of Île de France (earlier and later Mauritius), argued that claiming and populating such islands (along with other strategic port cities) would lead to French command of the Indian Ocean, thus serving as an important stepping-stone for French control in India. In the 1740s, he accordingly sent expeditions to explore the archipelagic waters of the Seychelles, the Admirantes, the St. Brandon Group, and the Chagos Archipelago. The French governor in Pondicherry, on the other hand, regarded such settlements as unnecessary commitments. Representing the continental policy, Joseph F. Dupleix argued instead that a focus on French control in India would inevitably turn France into the masters of the Indian Ocean. Two decades later, the British also started mapping the Chagos Archipelago. They then considered turning Diego Garcia into a supply station on the India route, a project that was abandoned for defense reasons soon after inspection (Scott 1961, 20, 53–54; Stoddart 1971, 210; Edis 1993, 24–27).

Before the end of the eighteenth century, Île de France had emerged as a strategic Indian Ocean center from where French corsairs attacked British ships bound for the Cape (see Schnepel 2014). When the island was subjected to a British blockade in 1793, a peculiar wartime market developed that was to have pivotal impacts on the Chagos Archipelago. The French island was then left flooded with luxury goods, but had very few basic products to sustain everyday life. This led to a steep rise in local prices for oil used in cooking and as fuel for lamps, a development from which neutral American merchants greatly profited. This provoked the governor to encourage local sugar barons to ship slaves to the Chagos Archipelago and Agalega to provide Île de France with steady supplies of copra and coconut oil. The vegetable oil business proved profitable enough to lay the foundations of permanent settlements on Agalega as well as on the atolls of Diego Garcia, Peros Banhos, Salomon, Eagle Island, Egmont Atoll (Six Islands), and Three Brothers in the Chagos

Archipelago. As a result of these developments, the Chagos Archipelago and Agalega became known as the “Oil Islands” (Scott 1961, 96–97; Edis 1993, 32).

Before long, Britain started attacking the French western Indian Ocean island colonies, adding substance to the expression of the Indian Ocean as a British lake (see Alpers 2013). French colonialists in the Seychelles had already surrendered to the British in 1794. In 1810, soon after the British seizure of Rodrigues and Île Bourbon (later Réunion Island), the French administration on Île de France also laid down their arms. The 1814 Treaty of Paris officially ceded Mauritius to Britain and returned Île Bourbon to France. The Chagos Archipelago thus became a dependency of British Mauritius.

French colonizers were offered generous conditions for their surrender, which meant that changes at the local level were not extensive, at least until slavery was abolished in 1835. In the Chagos Archipelago, indentured laborers were henceforward imported from British India to keep production up to strength, much like on Mauritius. In contrast to the latter island, however, where freed slaves fled the local sugar plantations in great numbers, the newcomers to the Oil Islands appear to have been integrated into the local plantation economy along with the freed slaves. This was, at least in part, due to the fact that the extent to which local workers could be exploited on these very small and remote islands, even under the harshest of labor regimes, had to be weighed against a very tangible balance of power because the laborers far outnumbered the local management, while both state and other authorities were largely absent (see Bourne 1886, 389–90).

On November 8, 1965, a little more than 2 years before Mauritius was granted independence, the British government created the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). By Order in Council, the Chagos Archipelago was effectively separated from what would later become the Republic of Mauritius (then meaning the islands of Mauritius, Rodrigues, Agalega, St. Brandon, and possibly Tromelin Island)² to make way for a joint UK–US military base on its largest island, Diego Garcia. Originally, also the Farquhar Islands, Desroches, and the Aldabra Group, which all belonged to the Seychelles, were reconfigured into this new British colony, but these islands were all released when the Seychelles was granted independence in 1976 to boost the reputation of a Seychellois presidential candidate, James Mancham, whom the British favored (Houbert 1981, 84). With wide international support, since 1980, successive Mauritian governments have claimed that the

Chagos Archipelago belongs to Mauritius. They point out that this historical excision violated UN Declaration 1514 (XV) on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples of 1960, as well as a number of UN resolutions. In 1992, the Chagos Archipelago was also explicitly included as Mauritian territory in the amended constitution of the Mauritian state. In fact, no state other than Britain and the United States recognizes the BIOT, but few other states, if any, have the will and power to do much about it—certainly not Mauritius, whose export economy has long depended on securing preferential access to European and US markets (Johannessen 2014, 70–74, 128–32).

Few examples would fit the concept of land-grabbing much better than this case, although the term “island-grabbing” (including the power to keep and to give back islands) would be more precise. Between 1965 and 1973, the British expelled and deported all inhabitants to Mauritius and the Seychelles. New Orders in Council were issued to criminalize their return. By that time, the coconut industries in the Oil Islands had been operational for almost two centuries.

CONNECTIVITY AND DISCONNECTIONS: AN EMERGING HUB

Whether the Chagos Archipelago can be described as a hub during the period of its settlement is questionable. Before the arrival of the US military, the total population of the Chagos Archipelago never seems to have exceeded 1500 (see Johannessen 2014, 58). Until the mid-1930s, ships would arrive with supplies and return to Mauritius with copra, coconut oil, and a few other products only two to three times a year. From then onward, steam vessels started arriving on a quarterly basis. It was also not common for local people to travel between the different island groups, except when companies relocated workers to other islands, as when production on the archipelago’s westernmost islands of Three Brothers, Eagle Island, and Egmont Atoll was terminated in the mid-1930s. From Diego Garcia in the south to the northernmost atolls of Peros Banhos and Salomon, there are over 200 kilometers of open, but also shallow, sea. Even the fifty-kilometer stretch between the latter two island groups would prove a dangerous adventure in a small *pirog* (local boat) used for sailing within the different atolls. Hence, the companies’ vessels were also the primary means of communication between the archipelago’s different island groups, or their main island settlements, which served as small entrepôts in the coconut trade (Bourne 1886, 387–89; Scott 1961, 26; Vine 2009, 33–34).

In the literature and on various Web sites, three further examples are often put forward to highlight the islands' remarkable isolation. First, the islands' seclusion, along with the popular belief that turtle meat (abundant in the area) could cure leprosy, led the French to turn some of them into leper colonies, a practice that continued until the 1830s. Secondly, the so-called coaling station interlude has become the exception that confirms the rule. Following the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the invention of steamships that could navigate independently of wind and currents, the Chagos Archipelago suddenly found itself in the middle of a new shipping route for European migrants headed for Australia. When two coaling stations were therefore installed on Diego Garcia in the 1880s, the archipelago reportedly saw an unparalleled "intrusion of the outside world" (Edis 1993, 47). However, they closed down within a decade, after a "shortlived brush with the developing modern world" (ibid., 51), after which the islands then returned to their normal state of isolation (see ibid., 47–52; also Bourne 1886; Scott 1961, 169–78; Forsberg 2005, 24–26). Thirdly, on May 25, 1920, a visiting correspondent reported to the *Times* that in the Chagos Archipelago "there are no cares or troubles of the outer world." He substantiated his observation by referring to an incident that had taken place there six years earlier: In 1914, the German warship "Emden" had been welcomed, repaired, and supplied on the islands, since news about the outbreak of the First World War had not yet reached this very remote outpost of the British empire (see also Edis 1993, 52–55; Stoddart 1971, 214). These examples typically serve to underscore one point: The Chagos islands and their inhabitants were far from being well-connected; indeed, they were remarkably isolated from the outside world.

Despite such restricted connectivity, and how it has been emphasized in many reports, these very same islands were still to large extent defined by their global connections. Already in the 1780s, shiploads of soil, including, of course, a variety of alien species, were sent from Bombay in an early British attempt to establish a refueling station on Diego Garcia. In 1837, Captain Fairfax Morseby introduced Malabar yam and the breadfruit tree from Ceylon. He also mapped the local reefs, which enabled the renowned biologist Charles Darwin to discuss them extensively in his work on coral reef formations (Sheppard 2013, 224). The islands were populated as a result of colonial wars extending far beyond the ocean and were settled by people from a variety of places, including slaves from Madagascar, Mozambique, Tanzania, Kenya, and

Senegal, and later Indian indentured laborers. Lepers brought disease from elsewhere. Plantation architecture resembled that of other French colonies, and resident French managers succeeded, with the help of visiting missionaries, to convert the inhabitants to the Catholic faith. Moreover, the local industry was integrated into a vast imperial economy, securing key supplies such as oil and guano (fertilizer) from this external archipelagic hinterland³ of the fast-growing Mauritian sugar economy—in fact, the largest sugar producer of the British Empire by 1865. Since some coconut produce was exported to Europe and elsewhere, changes to the world market for copra also impacted these remote islands. After an import tax on processed oil was introduced in Europe, for example, copra replaced coconut oil as the islands' main export product. Considerable local restructuring also followed the collapse of the world market for copra in 1920, which was caused by intense speculation in the copra trade due to the very high demands for glycerin and margarine during World War I (see Hanning 1931; Heersink 1999, 184–91). Hence, even before we reach the major transformations of the Chagos Archipelago in the mid-twentieth century, it is clear that these islands were largely shaped by their global connections. The popular examples of leper colonies, which were instrumental in bringing both people and disease from overseas, of encounters with visiting warships, which even made newspaper headlines at the colonial center, and the coaling stations—run by Somali and Mauritian workers, and visited by both European migrants to Australia and Javanese pilgrims bound for Mecca—are in fact good examples of historical connectivity, and not isolation or disconnection, in this remote area.

Sources also suggest that, after sovereignty shifted from French to British hands, the Chagos Archipelago may ironically have developed into some sort of hub in the Indian Ocean slave trade. To prevent the disease from spreading to other slaves at a time when parliament had promised to compensate slave-owners for the abolition of slavery, Franco-Mauritians dumped their leprous slaves in this area. Here, in violation of the Anti-Slave Trade Act of 1807, which should have come into force with the British takeover, new slaves were apparently also shipped in from the east. Since Britain had divided the Indian Ocean into different areas of command, slave-traders could operate more peacefully east of longitude 60 E, just east of Mauritius, which did not fall under the Royal Navy command based at the Cape of Good Hope, but their command in India. In particular, from the late 1810s, when the Cape

squadron intensified interceptions of illegal slave-traders off the African coast, slave prices increased, and slavers turned to slave markets in the east, such as the island of Pulo Nyas off the northwest coast of Sumatra. The Chagos Archipelago was then used as a stopover or a staging post for slavers bringing Malay slaves westward. What contributed to ease shipping from here was that transporting slaves between different parts of the colony was still permitted. And in those days, the Chagos Archipelago, the Seychelles, and Mauritius were not separate colonies. However, the role and extent of this activity within the Chagos Archipelago is unclear. Some cases are documented, but for reasons that surely have to do with the shady nature of the activity, as well as the distance between these islands and the official administration, original sources are few (Great Britain Foreign Office 1829, 445; Taylor 2000; Allen 2014, 158, 180; Campbell 2004, 41).

Before the establishment of the British Indian Ocean Territory, then, the Indian Ocean connected the Chagos islands and Mauritius on a regular, albeit infrequent, basis. At the same time, the ocean also separated them and kept their inhabitants rather isolated, even within different island groups, for most of the year. Nonetheless, the islands were very much defined by their global connections and were, as Houbert wrote with regard to Mauritius as a whole, “entirely created by colonialism” (Houbert 1981, 104). During this period, the Chagos Islands were transformed into small centers for different kinds of circulation, minor, perhaps, and some of them short-lived, but not insignificant and very much a result of developments in the global economy. With the closure of the plantations and the expulsion of all of their inhabitants in the early 1970s, the islands were clearly being prepared for the establishment of a particular kind of hub—one that reportedly owes its extensive regional impact to the absence of other kinds of hubs within the same archipelago.

THE MILITARY HUB

Strategic geopolitical interest in the Chagos Archipelago can be traced back to the 1780s, when the British office in Bombay received orders from London to fortify Diego Garcia. They abandoned the plans, however, after finding the island devoid of suitable construction materials and concluded that the very flat island could easily be controlled by a single warship sailing around it (Forsberg 2005, 12–13). Although

German and also British warships visited the islands during the First World War, this period primarily affected the islands in socio-economic ways. In response to Japan's aggressive military expansionism, the RAF Coastal Command established a small base for armed flying boats on Diego Garcia, some 700 kilometers south of their base on the Maldivian island of Gan in the Addu Atoll, during the Second World War.⁴ This decision was in all likelihood also inspired by the very first aircraft crossing of the Indian Ocean in 1939 (or "island hopping" from Port Hedland in Australia to Mombasa via Cocos Island, Diego Garcia, and the Seychelles in American oil-millionaire Richard Archbold's flying boat *Guba*), which also investigated the potential for a reserve Empire air route that could connect Australia with Africa in 4 days outside the airspace of potential enemy territories (Loader and Donaldson 2006; *The Straits Times* April 9, 1939; July 16, 1939; July 14, 1940). However, compared to the transformations the Chagos Archipelago were to endure in the latter half of the century, this military development was minor.

In 1964, the United States Government decided to establish a base on Diego Garcia, for which purpose the island was in many respects ideally suited. The V-shaped atoll provided a perfect maritime harbor right in the middle of the Indian Ocean. It was strategically located between East Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Indonesia, and its position was, of course, of considerable strategic value with regard to oil supplies from the Middle East. This decision was also taken in a Cold War context influenced by the Truman Doctrine and the so-called domino theory, when US military attention and intervention had shifted to countries where authorities and revolutionary groups were espousing communism, such as the Soviet Union, China, Korea, Vietnam, and Indonesia. The decision was accordingly based on more than the islands' local characteristics. In fact, it was part of a much wider, indeed global, US military strategy. In the 1950s, the US authorities also worried that their military presence overseas—and hence the protection of vital economic interests—would be threatened by waves of nationalism and unpredictable governments of newly independent states when allied European powers withdrew from their colonies. In response, the Pentagon developed what became known as "the strategic island concept," that is, a worldwide network of interconnected US military bases stationed on small strategic islands beyond any local political control (see Vine 2009). British authorities, now already discussing withdrawal of their forces East of Suez, were

amenable. In exchange for a secret \$14 million discount on a nuclear weapons program, they made the island available by creating the BIOT in 1965—the crumbling empire’s last colony, comprised of small atolls scattered across the Indian Ocean world of islands.

Millions of dollars have since been invested in extending facilities on this joint UK–US island base. Diego Garcia now ranks among the United States’ most important overseas military bases. It has played a key role as a satellite-tracking station and a naval support facility for military units operating in the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Gulf. It provides the US military with a harbor that can accommodate an aircraft carrier force of thirty ships and nuclear submarines, as well as a 3.7-kilometer airfield from where heavy long-range bomber aircraft headed for the Middle East have taken off and returned. According to a secret letter signed in 2000 by the United States Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs, the island’s peculiar isolation offers it protection from surveillance, monitoring, and electronic jamming devices, and the base now forms an “all but indispensable platform” whose centrality “for ensuring US and British security interests will only increase” (Newsom 2000).⁵ This not only refers to enemy networks affiliated with organizations such as al-Qaeda or ISIS/ISIL, or to developments in countries such as Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan, but also to the highly important Indian Ocean sea-lanes along which more than two-thirds of the world’s oil shipments (almost seventy-five percent of Asia’s oil needs are supplied from the Gulf), half of all containerized cargo, and one-third of the world’s bulk cargo travel (Ladwig III et al. 2014).

The Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia can indeed be understood as a military hub. Ladwig III et al. (2014, 141) describe it as “a hub to project power into the region,” a formulation that captures its functions well, albeit not directly capturing what constitutes it as a hub. Here, some 1700 United States military personnel, about fifty British troops, plus some 1500 civilian contract workers from the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Mauritius commute back and forth. The atoll has been used for rendition flights, hosting captured suspects subject to CIA’s post-9/11 kidnap and torture program (*The Guardian* December 13, 2014, January 30, 2015). The accommodation of visiting allied vessels carrying nuclear warheads is, according to Sand (2009, 39), considered a “normal use” of the facility. In addition to the flow of information through the local satellite-tracking station, numerous aircraft, warships, submarines, and other kinds of military equipment circulate to and from

this seemingly isolated island—not to forget the countless explosives that have been imported and later dropped over a variety of targets in the Middle East by long-range bombers such as the B-1 and B-52 (the latter being the USA's largest bomber aircraft) capable of undertaking round trips to northern Afghanistan in twelve to fifteen hours. To put this in perspective, throughout Operation Desert Storm in 1991, Diego Garcia was the only United States naval base that launched offensive air strikes. Moreover, during the subsequent War on Terror, "aircraft at Diego Garcia dropped more ordnance on Taliban and Al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan than any other unit."⁶

For the USA, then, Diego Garcia is an important military hub supplying vessels and projecting air power well into Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. As a forward operations' station, it provides information and critical supplies to prepositioned vessels deployed closer to areas of conflict. These ships, however, are not just means of communication. Aircraft carriers operating out of Diego Garcia should be understood as mobile and highly flexible extensions of the base itself. Diego Garcia, which can arguably be described as an unsinkable aircraft carrier in the midst of the ocean, is of course immobile, but also too remote for contemporary jetfighters that would burn more fuel than they are able to carry if they were to carry out missions in, for example, the Middle East. As a forward operations' station supplying vessels like these, the military hub's projection of power in this region is dramatically extended.

While investments and extensions of the facilities on Diego Garcia have increased alongside western interpretations of political developments in the region, notably in the Middle East, the archipelago's other islands have been left completely abandoned. Since the last coconut plantations were run down in the early 1970s, these islands have been transformed into an archipelagic *cordon sanitaire*, an area best described as a military buffer zone within which no person has the right of abode.

CHAGOSSIAN CONNECTIONS

The arrival of the United States military also led to a transformation of the Chagos Archipelago into a longed for homeland and an important place of belonging to an emergent Chagossian diaspora, whose evicted members now were forced to start completely new lives on other Indian Ocean islands. To them, the right of abode would soon develop into a central concern.

By the time they were expelled, up to 2000 people had a considerable history of living and working in the Chagos Archipelago. Many could trace their local family histories back many generations. While the majority were shipped to Mauritius, around 500 people ended up in the Seychelles. Today, their transnational community consists of more than 8000 people. A large number of them have moved on to Europe and elsewhere, above all to the UK after they were granted full British citizenship in 2002 (Jeffery 2011). Largely due to a tireless and increasingly well-organized political struggle for compensation and the right to repatriation, a Chagossian diaspora characterized by a very strong sense of origin and belonging to the Chagos Archipelago has developed.

Members of this community trace that struggle right back to their point of arrival in Port Louis harbor in 1973. Where a monument now stands in commemoration of their evictions, they staged their first protest by refusing to disembark from the vessel after being informed that no arrangements had been made for them. People found themselves dumped on the quay, left to fend for themselves without food, jobs, housing, or relevant work skills in a newly independent state marked by high unemployment and considerable communal agitation. In the years that followed, people lived on the streets, families went hungry and starved, and many accumulated debts at high interest rates set by local moneylenders. Some turned to drugs, alcohol, or petty theft, and a number of women were forced into prostitution. According to a local survey, by 1975, at least forty-four Chagos islanders had died of poverty, eleven had committed suicide, and some sixteen had been admitted to psychiatric treatment. Only after a series of protests, petitions and hunger strikes were two UK compensation packages amounting respectively to £650,000 and £4,000,000 disbursed among 1344 identified Chagos islanders and children in Mauritius in 1978 and 1982. These processes were in no small part supported by members of a fast-growing Marxist opposition movement in Mauritius, who also objected to the UK–US activities in the Chagos Archipelago. Besides orchestrating demonstrations and accusing the Mauritian authorities for their compliance—including accepting £3,000,000 for dismembering the Chagos Archipelago prior to Mauritius’ independence—central members of the Mauritian Militant Movement (MMM) also assisted the evicted islanders in their negotiations with the Mauritian and British authorities. Families evicted to the Seychelles never received any compensation

at all (Botte 1980; Sylva 1981; Madley 1985; Walker 1986, 20–37; Dræbel 1997; Harvey et al. 2009; Vine 2009, 126–64; Johannessen 2010; Jeffery and Vine 2011; Jeffery 2011, 23–36). Most Chagossians in Mauritius still inhabit the poorest section of Mauritian society. Many remain indebted. During my first stint of fieldwork in Mauritius in 2004, no less than forty percent of people born in the Chagos Archipelago were still unable to write their own names (Johannessen 2005, 119). Given also that un- and underemployment, abuse of alcohol and other substances, and a number of other poverty-related difficulties remain pressing problems, their hard-won compensation did clearly not suffice to lift them out of poverty.

Closely connected to this situation, to many Chagossians, the Chagos Archipelago has come to be imagined as a paradise. This relates, in part, to their Catholic faith, as important aspects of their lives are communicated and made intelligible through popular biblical allegories, including that of the Garden (read: Chagos before the evictions) and the story of Moses (read: Chagossians' political leader), who led his people out of exile across the sea to the Promised Land. These are important sources of imagined insularity (see Schnepel, Chap. 1, this volume), which has assumed great importance in their political struggles. However, their cultural imagery of Chagos as paradise is mostly related to Mauritius's main island. To a large extent, the Chagos Archipelago can be understood as a mirror image of the latter island (Johannessen 2014, 166–77), that is, a mirror image of how life on this island is experienced, as well as of an island as such, which in that capacity contributes to coalescing the scattered Chagos islands into a single place. Chagossians typically remember their homeland as an exceedingly bountiful place of peace and affluence. While describing the homeland, however, colorful portrayals of home are quickly followed up by comments and stories about how life in Mauritius is different. Also, the reverse order of narration is very characteristic, something that contributes to explaining how the Chagos Archipelago has emerged, and is maintained, as a paradise: Homeland memories appear to be triggered when Chagossians encounter problems and difficulties in Mauritius. The Chagos Archipelago is thus routinely remembered as a place where the problem at hand did not exist, or where the opposite was the case. Accordingly, Chagossians who are poor, are unemployed, are ethnically stigmatized, are ill, or have friends or family who have run into trouble remember these islands as a place where “we did not need money,” “there were

thirty-two different kinds of work,” “all were like one big family,” “nobody got sick,” “there were no drugs,” “there was plenty of fresh food that was easy to catch,” and so on. The two places are relational and thus highly interconnected. “Chagos is different,” Chagossians routinely point out. In their memory, the islands have become a place constituted by a limited selection of issues and themes that are experienced as problems in Mauritius, only inverted—hence, Chagos as a paradise. In this way, their Edenic homeland, together with feelings of longing and belonging to this ultramarine island world, is produced and reproduced in everyday practice. This is the view from (and of) an island that is widely described as the opposite of a paradise by members of an evicted community living, protesting, and remembering their own past in the Chagos Archipelago from the margins of Mauritian society.

These links between Mauritius and the Chagos Archipelago are analytical and go beyond how Chagossians themselves conceptualize connections between these islands. Instead, Chagossians make use of an elaborate emic vocabulary of belonging and exile that centers on botanical metaphors of roots and motherland. A related metaphor often invoked is that of the umbilical cord. During my fieldwork in Mauritius in 2004 and 2006, many informants explained that in the Chagos islands, after a woman had given birth, the umbilical cord was always buried in the ground somewhere close to her house. Why, exactly, this was done now appeared unimportant and, if it ever was culturally significant, the reasons for it seemed largely forgotten. In Mauritius, however, this long discontinued practice had taken on new meanings and acquired great importance. Many now described this ambiguous body part (a highly symbolic item physically connecting mother and child, and, by extension, generations of real and fictive kin and family) as a “small root” buried over there in the “soil” of the “motherland.” In Mauritius in 2004, while undertaking participant observation in the home of a Chagossian man whose mother had planted his umbilical cord in the Peros Banhos atoll some forty years earlier, he explained, “Chagos is the mother—it is the motherland.” However, “because of the deportations, the Chagossian people have now been separated from the mother.” With what he regarded as a strong parallel to the lasting special relationship between a mother and her child after the umbilical cord is cut, he added, “But the connection is still there!”

Nonetheless, a profound sense of disconnectedness is strongly reflected in Chagossians’ related, and frequently used, concepts of

derasine (uprootedness) and *sagren* (sadness), whose emic meanings primarily revolve around issues of separation from the homeland and the ancestors buried over there, as well as the absence of family members separated after the evictions (see Johannessen 2014, 177–89). When it came to coping with absence and disconnection, I found that some of my informants had come up with very creative solutions to staying connected with friends and family across the Indian Ocean. For example, in the middle of one of my interviews, an elder Chagossian woman named Anne, who was living on the outskirts of Port Louis, all of a sudden exclaimed “Aaahhh Bernadette!” Bernadette, a Chagossian living in the Seychelles, had during a trip to Bombay bought three identical alarm clocks, giving one to Anne and one to their political leader in Mauritius, and keeping the last for herself. “We are timed together,” Anne explained; “When it rings, I think of her. It rings in all the three houses at the same time.” As Bernadette and Anne were living on different islands, their contact had long since been restricted. Through such creative use of technology, however, connections across the ocean were maintained, not by inhabiting the same island space, but the same moments in time. Of course, new and more affordable communication technologies now facilitate increasing contact between Chagossian relatives and friends living on different Indian Ocean islands and beyond—now even on Diego Garcia. In 2006, after years of objecting to apparently systematic employment discrimination (see Emileien 2003), three Chagossians had been able to obtain work on the US military base for the first time. Anne, whose son was one of the lucky few, regretted that the same stretch of ocean would again separate her from her family for months at a time. It reminded her of being separated from her family for eight years after traveling alone to Mauritius in 1965 in order to give birth in a proper hospital, after which she was told at the ticket office that “Your island has been sold, you have no right to return.” She then missed the funeral of her younger sister, who “died of sadness” over there, as she refused to eat while waiting for Anne to come back. To fully appreciate her son’s new job was therefore difficult. Memories of separation return, she explained, and such memories are *sagren*. But unlike back then, she explained, her son was now able to contact her from the militarized homeland by telephone at certain restricted and irregular hours.

Due to such connections and the endurance of their political activities, Chagossians have come to form an increasingly interconnected

transnational diaspora with a clear ethnic identity and strong attachments to an original homeland center. Interestingly, such a self-understanding was not dominant earlier. In fact, the term “Chagossian” came to designate people from the Chagos islands only after they took their political struggles to an international level in the 1990s. In 1982, the same year the Chagos islanders’ were granted the second tranche of compensation, the Mauritian Militant Movement, which had supported and worked to integrate the protesting Chagos islanders into a wider anti-ethnic movement, was elected to power. However, the party split within a year in office, paving the way for a new era of successive neoliberal coalition governments. As local support for their case now declined, the evicted islanders took their struggles abroad, starting by claiming status as autochthonous at the United Nations before moving on to British and United States courts in pursuit of further compensation and the right to repatriation. Struggles now assumed an ethno-political turn, and it was in this process that the evicted islanders, with the assistance of a Mauritian barrister, articulated the concept of the Chagossians (see Johannessen 2010). Previously, they were referred to as *Ilois*, meaning simply islanders, a highly pejorative designation (connoting backward, uncivilized, savage, etc.) that distinguished them from Mauritians—despite Mauritius itself being an island, or in fact also an archipelago (see Collen 2002). With their new designation, a bounded ethnic community became conceptually connected with the scattered small islands that had fallen within the boundaries of the BIOT, effectively fusing these different island groups and excluding other *Ilois* such as those from the oil island of Agalega. While Mauritius’s governor, Sir Robert Scott, who visited the Chagos Islands in the 1950 s, observed that Chagos islanders felt a sense of belonging to particular atolls rather than the archipelago as a whole (Scott 1961, 23, 26), Chagossians now refer to them as one single place, at times even a single island. On different occasions during my fieldwork in Mauritius in 2006, for example, many Chagossians were wearing T-shirts distributed by their political organization with a large imprinted text reading “The Chagos Archipelago: one people, one island, one struggle.” Out of this political struggle, then, a new archipelagic/island identity was created for their transnational community. And in the process, different atolls within the vast Chagos Archipelago were coalesced into one single place.

From the inter-island connections presented thus far, one may still question the idea of calling the Chagos Archipelago a center for the

Chagossians, and particularly a hub, since all its people have been evicted and, with a few exceptions, are still prevented from returning there. Yet it is very much an imagined center, this very imagination being very central to their political endeavors to turn the archipelago into a de facto homeland. It is a potential center, at least, and perhaps even a future hub of the imagination whose contemporary meanings contribute to connecting and integrating some thousands of people across the Indian Ocean and beyond. This future hub of the imagination, it should be stressed, is also instrumental in developing connections between members of the Chagossian diaspora and supporting political parties, lawyers, academics, and INGOs, not to forget their political opponents represented both within and outside the homeland.

Lately, Chagossians have actually also managed to establish some kind of autonomous presence on the islands through the performance of pilgrimage. In March 2006, for the first time, the British and Mauritian authorities organized what they called a humanitarian visit to the Chagos Archipelago for one hundred members of the diaspora. Chagossians then seized the opportunity to object to the British version of history, which, in order to circumvent international law, described the local inhabitants as migrant contract workers who would then not be evicted, but simply returned to their postulated origins in Mauritius and the Seychelles. Chagossians therefore redefined and performed the journey, not as a visit (which would be in line with their opponents' historical argument), but as a pilgrimage to the most potent symbol of territorial origin: the cemeteries and graves of their own ancestors. In this way, they reversed the direction of movement between these islands, and could claim to qualify under UN resolutions that the British government had sought to circumvent. Before their departure, the BIOT Commissioner must have had Chagossians' history of militancy in mind when he called for "a sober and dignified visit" and announced that future visits would depend on how this journey would turn out (*Le Mauricien*, March 29, 2006). He was not disappointed. Since then, a new kind of tradition has been established whereby new groups of Chagossians are allowed to undertake short journeys to tend these graves, assisted by the powers that once expelled them and that continue to occupy the islands they call home (Johannessen 2011; 2014, 290–323).

THE ECO-HOTSPOT

In 1971, the British government issued a BIOT Immigration Ordinance that criminalized any person entering or residing in the territory without special permission. Since the 1990s, Chagossian litigants have, with some temporary success, contested the legality of BIOT immigration laws in the British courts, but in 2008, the House of Lords ruled against all previous judgments and upheld the British government's position. These islands have accordingly been off limits for quite some time—except to certain elites, such as environmental scientists.

Apparently as a precautionary measure, before the Law Lords' final judgment, the British authorities issued feasibility studies concluding against Chagossian resettlement: Global warming could cause dangerous natural hazards to the low-lying atolls. Flooding, seismic activity, and a lack of freshwater could threaten life. It was even suggested that human settlement on the fragile atolls could contribute to accelerating global warming.⁷

These studies were soon met with heavy criticism. Consultants claimed that the government had manipulated the results. Others pointed to considerable paradoxes: These tropical islands are among the most humid places on earth. They have been inhabited for two centuries, and they now host up to three times the population that once lived there—all located on the western arm of Diego Garcia. Also the United States had no plans to relocate the base, which, of course, poses the greatest environmental risk. Beside the explosive nature of the devices that are stored in the area, thousands of trees were bulldozed to make way for the base. The basin was dredged and coral reefs blasted to turn the lagoon into an operational harbor. Lots of landfill with invasive alien plant species was imported from Malaysia, and local corals have been dynamited and extensively harvested to serve as construction material. Hundreds of tons of human sewage and watery waste have been poured into the lagoon, and, since the 1980s, registered fuel spills amount to no less than 4.5 million liters (Curtis 2003, 429; Sand 2009, 51–56; *The Times Online*, April 22, 2010; *The Independent*, March 18, 2014).

Environmental issues now moved into the foreground of the political discourse, but a more careful historical reading reveals that related “green” political argumentation had been around for quite some time already.⁸ In Sir Robert Scott's important book from 1961, *Limuria: The Lesser Dependencies of Mauritius*, the Mauritian governor writes in rich

detail about Chagos islanders' lives and labor. However, he also tends to confine these remote colonial Others to their local island environment, as when he emphasizes "the effects of the environment as a natural cause. The islands have shaped their own society ... roots have been struck and, as it is hoped will appear from the later chapters, a society peculiarly suited to the islands has been developed" (Scott 1961, 27). When all the inhabitants were due to be evicted a few years later, British officials were bent on doing the opposite, namely denying such colonial constructions of the rooted insular Other. This declassified 1966 exchange of notes from Foreign Office Permanent Under-Secretary Paul Gore-Both is right to the point: "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 (the Status of Women Committee does not cover the rights of Birds)." In the same document, his successor in office, the British diplomat Denis Greenhill, confirmed both strategy and metaphors by invoking fictional characters renowned for their ambivalent belonging to their 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" (cited from Pilger 2006, 30). Reiterating such declassified Foreign Office files has become a favorite preoccupation among Chagossian supporters, something that also serves to lend government authority to their own arguments that the islanders were indeed "natives." This, of course, goes hand in hand with Chagossians' own ethnic politics and their elaborate, and surely no less green, botanical metaphors of (up)rootedness described above.

Responding to the government's feasibility studies, Chagossian supporters in the UK launched a PR campaign appropriately entitled "*Let Them Return!*" (italics original) and issued their own resettlement report, which in 2008 concluded that no environmental or economic reasons stood in the way of resettling people on the outer islands of Perhos Banhos and Salomon. Beside controlled fishing, low-impact eco-tourism, and the manufacture of biodiesel, the islands' natives could be in the frontline of adaptation to climate change: If trained by environmentalist experts, they could sustain themselves as guardians of their own environment (Howell 2008).⁹

When the defeated Chagossian litigants moved on to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), this new green strategy backfired. On various official Web sites and in much literature, the pristine condition of the Chagos Archipelago is not only praised, but also credited to the

presence of the military. As announced on the Web sites of the Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT): “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.”¹⁰ Together with the Pew Environment Group, in 2009, the CCT mounted a campaign to establish a Marine Protected Area (MPA) around the Chagos Archipelago (see Stevenson 2010). Within a year, the British authorities launched an extensive open Internet consultation that invited the public to vote for or against such a nature reserve and the extent it should be protected. Before long, the area became known as Britain’s Great Barrier Reef—an eco-hotspot and a vital environmental hub of the utmost importance to Indian Ocean marine life, including big fish migrating to other more exposed, polluted, and overharvested areas in the region. As the initiative was very much welcomed online, the British government founded the world’s largest MPA in April 2010, a 544,000-square-kilometer absolute no-take zone where fishing, construction, tourism, and so on were now ruled out. If Chagossians should return to the archipelago, they could hardly sustain themselves without breaking the new regulations. Unsurprisingly perhaps, the military base was exempted.

In 2015, the establishment of the MPA was ruled illegal by the UN. Before that, however, the surreptitious agenda behind it was clearly exposed when in 2010 WikiLeaks released a secret US embassy cable documenting how the British Overseas Territories Director, Colin Roberts, had presented the marine park idea to US officials. Referring to the ECHR lawsuits, he admitted that the UK government was “under pressure” to permit resettlement, but explained that the “environmental lobby is far more powerful than the Chagossians’ advocates.” Therefore, “establishing a marine park would, in effect, put paid to resettlement claims of the archipelago’s former residents” (Tokola 2009; Zeijden 2011). This was not too far from what BIOT Conservation Advisor and former government representative on Diego Garcia, J. Topp, had stated already in 1996, four years after he founded the CCT: “conservation is about the only field of endeavor in which we can earn credit for being in the Indian Ocean where other countries do not want us” (cited in Sand 2009, 56).

CONNECTIVITY, DISCONNECTION, AND Dis/ENTANGLED HUBS

This chapter has presented and discussed different forms of connectivity and disconnection centered on the Chagos Archipelago. These small islands are to a large extent defined by what has circulated, and what circulates no longer, to and from them. However, for an island or an archipelago to qualify as a hub would require a certain level of intensity in respect of circulation. Until Diego Garcia was militarized, the Chagos Islands formed no such hub. From the mid-1960s, however, the archipelago went through its most dramatic transformations, starting with an exceptional case of island-grabbing whereby all of the islands' inhabitants were expelled and deported to Mauritius and the Seychelles.

In this chapter, I have inquired into three different domains that define the Chagos Archipelago today, all of which concern connectivity. The archipelago has certainly developed into a significant military hub for the United States government. It may also be regarded as a social hub, in the sense of a longed for homeland of great importance to a well-organized Chagossian diaspora whose members have long fought to reestablish a presence there. Finally, it has become recognized and celebrated as a vital environmental hub, an eco-hotspot of great importance to marine life and big fish migrating to other parts of the Indian Ocean. Whether the latter two qualify as hubs in the conventional sense is arguable. They are, at the very least, imagined hubs with very real impacts both beyond and within the Chagos Archipelago. The archipelago can accordingly be described as a hub that is quite active in various domains. It projects military power in the region and impacts political decisions on different levels. It also connects people, influences imaginations, and affects the lives and deaths of people far beyond its many shores.

On the face of it, these three different forms of (imagined) circulation appear to work, or hub, independently of one another. Politically, however, they are in fact very much entangled. In light of the strategic political backroom discussions about the interconnections between these different forms of (imagined and potential) circulation, they may well be described as dis/entangled. In order to maintain and protect the Chagos Archipelago as a military hub, government officials have deliberately both supported and welcomed—in a highly paradoxical way, many would add—environmentalists' call to protect the area as an indispensable environmental hub (or perhaps an “eco-hot spot”) that is crucial for marine

life in the Indian Ocean. Eventually, this developed into the illegal establishment of the world's largest Marine Protected Area around these islands in 2010. This puzzling "marriage" between a nuclear-powered military and environmental conservationists was then clearly arranged to prevent these small islands from also becoming an actual homeland for the repatriated members of a transnational Chagossian diaspora.

Efforts to protect the military hub were thus wrapped up in a green political discourse that can be traced back to colonial days (if that label makes sense in this case), when British officials rendered their colonial Others rooted and passive, while ascribing agency to the islands themselves, as in their supposed ability to shape their own societies. Matters of insularity have since become central to the neocolonial politics that concern these islands. Reacting to the British policy of dissociating the inhabitants from their island environment by redefining them as a floating population of contract workers and thus make the evictions appear legal, Chagossians and their supporters now invoke an elaborate botanical vocabulary of roots, motherland and umbilical cords. This is substantiated, among other things, by an identity that conceptually connects "Chagossians" to the Chagos as a whole, thus contributing to subsuming these scattered islands into one place—a homeland that at times is referred to as a single island. To evicted Chagossians, this homeland has emerged as a paradise, an image of home largely comprised of inverted mirror images of the problems experienced on Mauritius. Here, many Chagossians still wish to live and work. Some hope to be included in an environmental hub as guardians of their own environment, others as artisans or cleaners of the military hub. Some also dismiss the job opportunities these (imagined) hubs may offer, and, being less ready to compromise with the powers that have caused so much suffering, envisage an alternative island life among repatriated Chagossians in a demilitarized homeland, whether or not under British sovereignty.

The example of the Indian Ocean islands discussed in this chapter suggests that, in understanding small island hubs, it can be hugely important to consider the efforts and political activities by which different actors seek to establish, protect, or uphold an island or an area as a particular kind of hub. This surely involves power, and it may also include considerable compromise. It can even mean welcoming and supporting new and different, even contradictory, forms of circulation.

Apparently very different hubs, both real and imagined, may very well be interconnected politically. They can even be played off against one another in such a way that, to protect an island as a particular kind of hub, new forms of circulation can be welcomed and supported only to rule out unwanted ones. In such cases, it may also be important to consider that some parties have the power to define the direction of people and things that move between places, and to realize that this can make a huge difference to people who work to appropriate, or re-appropriate, particular territories such as islands.

NOTES

1. To southern Maldivians, Holġavai (or Fōlavahi in standard Maldivian) referred to the Chagos Archipelago as a whole. Maldivians did not name the different islands in the Chagos Archipelago (Romero-Frías 2012, 190).
2. Sovereignty over Tromelin is disputed with France. The Mauritian authorities argue that this eight-square-kilometer sandbank was not ceded back to France under the 1814 Treaty of Paris.
3. See Baldacchino (1989, 2010, 65–89), also Schnepel, this volume.
4. Flying boats, fixed-wing seaplanes with a hull that allows them to land on water, were used extensively for, among other things, anti-submarine patrol air-sea rescue during World War II. Due to their particular design, flying boats are still often used for inter-island transport in archipelagos.
5. The letter was written in the context of a legal action launched in the British courts by former inhabitants wishing to re-establish their right to repatriation.
6. Sources: GlobalSecurity.org: www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/diego-garcia.htm, accessed February 1, 2010. See also Military.com: http://benefits.military.com/misc/installations/Base_Content.jsp?id=930, accessed February 1, 2010, and the US official Web site at <http://www.cnmc.navy.mil/DiegoGarcia/index.htm>.
7. Online source: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmfaff/501/501we16.htm>, accessed March 10, 2009.
8. The United States military in fact first considered the Aldabra Atoll north of the Mozambique Channel, but it settled for Diego Garcia after conservationists and environmental scientists launched a substantial campaign to protect their local turtles (see Stoddart 1968).
9. Online source: www.letthemreturn.com, accessed November 2, 2009.
10. Online source: www.chagosconservationtrust.org, accessed September 5, 2009.

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Big Men Politics and Insularity in the Maldivian World of Islands

Boris Wille

PRELUDE: INTER-INSULAR IMMOBILITY

Ahmad, a souvenir salesman and father of two, is in his late forties and has resided for almost his entire life time on one of the local islands at some distance from the Maldivian capital, Male'.¹ He is one of those locals who are very proud of and attached to their home island and who are very engaged in the island's community life. It is fair to picture him as an ordinary man who tries to make the best of life for himself and his family. He does, however, stand out among the crowd of his fellow islanders in one respect: He has for decades occupied a critical position toward the Male' government—at first rather privately, and later more outspokenly, when he became one of the first to join the newly formed opposition movement in 2003. His critical stand toward the political establishment has been a decisive factor in his ability to lead his life, as he faced obstacles he would not have encountered under other circumstances.

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“What really made life difficult was that I could not travel,” said Ahmad, recalling the period after he had subscribed to the newly founded opposition party, the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), in 2005. “For three years I had no transportation,” he continued, “because my thinking did not match the officers.” The officers he was referring to were not solely security personnel, but more broadly any category of administrative staff in charge of the communal aspects of the island, and therefore local agents of the central state. Usually, such officials were either posted to the local islands from Male’ or were recruited from an island’s elite, which usually resulted in the same arrangement, namely of those attached to official posts being able not only to exercise greater control, but also to accumulate greater privileges and wealth. In any case, they were perceived and acted as representatives of the state who were usually well in tune with government policy.

As Ahmad had been marked out as a dissident for many years and had now officially joined the leading opposition party, he was in the sights of the local officials. Ahmad recalled one occasion when he was about to travel to Male’. He had already set one foot on to a privately operated fishing boat, a *dhoni*, ready to hop on board fully when he was stopped: “This *dhoni* owner said: ‘Who gave you permission?’—What could I say? So I came back home with my bags.” Although the boat he wanted to embark on was a privately owned commercial vessel, its proprietor effectively acted like a customs officer because he himself had close relations with the local officials. “And you have to remember,” Ahmad pointed out, “at that time there were no ferries.” And, indeed, before 2009, there was no public transport system that Ahmad could have used instead to commute to Male’, which always meant that he depended on a boat owner for inter-island travel. Particularly at times when political demonstrations were being held in Male’, he was prevented from leaving his island: “If I was going to go to a protest in Male’ no *dhoni* would take me, nobody would transport me,” he remembered.

INTRODUCTION

Ahmad’s story offers us a first glimpse into the core subject of this chapter: the entwining of insularity and bigmanity. Ahmad’s tale is one of several stories I present to show how a particular sociopolitical arrangement is linked to the insular preconditions of the archipelago environment of the Maldives. By beginning my discussion with a story from below, I aim

not only to account for the grassroots implications of politics that are articulated at the very top of Maldivian society, but also to demonstrate how societal and spatial structures condition each other on the ground, as well as above it. My discussion of the intersections of Big Men politics and insularity therefore focuses on elite practices as much as it engages with rather mundane everyday situations.

By “insularity,” I mean a set of properties related to the geographical condition of an island as a land mass surrounded by water. The metaphorical dimensions to insularity as problematized by, for example, Erikson (1993) are marginal to my discussion. Rather, I consider the physical features of islands as “finite geograph[ies]” (Baldacchino 2007, 4) and their implications for the organization of society. I use the notion of “bigmanity” here as has been applied by Utas (2012b) to capture those qualities and characteristics of leading figures, known in the anthropological literature as “Big Men.” Bigmanity thus captures the attributes and practices that make Big Men, such as the strategies they follow to raise themselves above others, their abilities to create a following, their dexterity in accumulating wealth and influence, and their skills in establishing and maintaining a variety of networks (see, for instance, Godelier 1986; Lindstrom 1981; Sahlins 1963; Utas 2012b, 8–9).

To investigate an insular elite in terms of Big Men has a tradition of its own in anthropology, since the debate on Big Men is closely related to the study of islands, the discussion being especially rich on Melanesia and Polynesia (see, for instance, Brown 1990a, 1990b; Godelier 1986; Lindstrom 1981; Martin 2013; Sahlins 1963). To now add the Maldivian Islands to the corpus of this debate is not to suggest that Big Men are in any sense peculiar to islands alone: That this is clearly not the case has forcefully been demonstrated by numerous studies (see, for instance, the contributions to Utas 2012a; van Bakel et al. 1986). Instead, I argue that insularity is likely to condition a particular variant of bigmanity and that the Maldivian Big Man is a prime example of this.

On the basis of my material, there appear to be three aspects crucial to the intersection between insularity and bigmanity. The first is related to the maritime environment of insular spaces. Here, the need for sea-bound transport and control over it is of the utmost importance, and it is Big Men who acquire a decisive position within the domain of maritime mobility. The second aspect is the multiplicity of relations that concentrate on finite and very densely populated terrestrial spaces. This is not only true for the capital island of Male’, which has one of the world’s

highest population densities of 65,201 inhabitants per square kilometer (National Bureau of Statistics 2015, 21), but also for the 425 occupied islands with a combined territory of approximately 190 square kilometers that accommodates the 407,660 residents.² This insular precondition eases Big Men's access and their ability to be part of various networks simultaneously, whether in commercial, political, kinship, or almost any other terms. The third aspect is that insularity enables Big Men to establish themselves as hubs in these various networks, a process whereby their ability to link one network with another and their skill in transforming one network's assets into those of others is decisive. To unpack these arguments, I will present a detailed ethnographic analysis, but before I begin, I will briefly sketch the circumstances within which my ethnographic observations are situated.

In 2008, Maldivians elected Mohamed Nasheed as president, the first time anyone has been voted into this office who, at the time of his election, did not belong to the elite of the island nation. These were the first multiparty elections the island nation had ever seen, and to the surprise of many, a party alliance led by Nasheed's Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) won a close victory.³ Given that political parties had only been legalized in 2005 and that the former president, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, had won all six previous referendums with phenomenal results of around 90 percent each time, a fundamental change was clearly looming on the political horizon. Against all the odds, Asia's longest serving president finally stepped down after thirty uninterrupted years of government. That it even came to fair and transparent elections was the outcome of multiple developments. On the one hand, a democratic reform movement had gradually established itself. On the other hand, there was increasing dissatisfaction with the long-existing Gayoom government, particularly since reconstruction after the devastating 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami had hardly made any progress. The time appeared to have come for a thorough change in the political circus. It is this post-Gayoom scenario that frames my ethnography.

The new MDP government led by Mohamed Nasheed was quick to draw up a manifesto (Maldivian Democratic Party—Alliance 2008) in which it outlined its policies and priorities for the next legislative period. At its core, they advocated more democracy, more liberty, and more development for the country's citizens. Although many interesting issues were addressed in this manifesto, I want to single out two sets of policies that are of particular relevance to the investigation being pursued here.

The first policy was the introduction of an extensive nationwide public transport system from 2009 onward. Until then, inter-insular mobility posed one of the greatest everyday challenges for the populations of the around 190 inhabited islands.⁴ Although prior to the introduction of the new system inter-atoll supply vessels connected many of the peripheral islands to the capital, the new system was the first attempt to organize regulated public transport in an all-encompassing manner. The second set of policies was framed under the banner of “decentralization.” From the moment it came to office, the MDP government pushed measures to benefit the peripheral islands at the cost of the center, the capital city of Male’. At first sight, it may not be clear how transport and decentralization policies might be related to bigmanity. However, my argument emphasizes that although these policies were camouflaged in developmental discourse, they were designed to challenge the prevalence of bigmanity.

I begin my discussion by investigating the prehistory of contemporary Maldivian Big Men. I argue that in many respects, contemporary Big Men resemble their aristocratic forefathers, who in the times of the sultans occupied comparable status in Maldivian society and followed similar patterns in accumulating influence. From there, I proceed to a discussion of a prototype of a contemporary Big Man. I show how one figure accumulated so much wealth, influence and standing that even his opponents had no other choice but to approach him from time to time. I argue that bigmanity feeds on both the Big Man’s ability to establish himself as a hub in a portfolio of networks and on his assets in insular spaces. I relate this latter aspect to how the insular topography is managed and distributed among various societal actors in the Maldives. I continue my discussion by elaborating on the principles of what I call archipelago zoning, where I show how the natural fragmentation of terrestrial spaces into island wholes is tied to administrative differentiations in how these spaces may be appropriated. This leads me back to my starting point, namely that reconfigurations of transport and center–periphery relations may be read as challenges to bigmanity. I conclude my discussion by observing that Big Men appear to enjoy an enduring relationship with small islands.

MALDIVIAN BIG MEN ANCESTRY

The Maldive Archipelago is not just a place of many small islands, but also of few Big Men.⁵ In a nation of roughly 340,000 citizens, only a very small number of people are considered to belong to elites, among whom

even fewer may be viewed as “Big Men.” Depending on the criteria laid down, their number varies from roughly a dozen very Big Men to a few hundred persons who comprise the inner circle of the elite stratum. It is, however, difficult to determine numbers accurately, not just because there are no studies that attempt to distinguish the various population strata, but also because there are different interpretations of what constitutes the Maldivian elite. Nevertheless, Colton estimated for the Maldives of the 1970s and 1980s that “the elite of Maldives comprised probably a maximum of one thousand people, including spouses and children, with the core being only about one hundred persons” (Colton 1995, 98). Without attempting to update such estimates to the Maldives of the 2010s, it should be emphasized that the Big Men investigated in this chapter are so few that Maldivians are easily capable of knowing most of them, quite often in person. It is safe to say that Maldivian Big Men have acquired such levels of fame that they are known throughout the island nation.

To speak of “Big Men” in the Maldives is not to transfer an etic anthropological concept to another setting, but to use a notion, Maldivians themselves apply to their elites. In Dhivehi, the Maldivian vernacular, there is the term *bodung*, which Reynolds in his Maldivian dictionary translates somewhat imprecisely as “important people” (Reynolds 2003, 270), but which is better translated as “big people.”⁶ Colton’s translation of *bodung* as “big ones, also meaning the big people, the nobles, the elite, those in power” (1995, 98) is more nuanced and shows the various connotations attached to the term. Yet to speak of *bodung* in the Maldives of the constitutional era (from 1932 onwards) is a wholly different matter to using the term in the time of the sultanate (which lasted almost without interruption from 1153 to 1932). This is because the elites to whom the term applies have significantly changed from a feudal nobility into what one may call a capitalist bourgeoisie. Yet for now, it is worthwhile scrutinizing the feudal notion first, because it will allow us to draw some lines of continuity to the present as far as relations between Big Men and the state and between Male’ and the islands are concerned.

In his paper “Maldives: a historical overview of traditional Dhivehi polity 1800–1900,” historian and former president (between 2008 and 2012) Mohamed Nasheed (2003) makes some interesting observations about this type of influential figure. Nasheed also translates the term *bodung* as “big people” (ibid., 3), which may equally be read as “big man” (ibid., 23) or “big men” (ibid., 27). The *bodung* of the nineteenth century, he says, were a group of intimates of the king, who “came from

the ruling clans” (ibid., 3) and thus stemmed from the Maldivian nobility. Consequently, in most cases, the status of *bodung* was either inherited or claimed through marriage ties with an elite clan. But there were abundant cases of “aspirants who grew up within the confines of the court; people personally intimate to the Raḍuṇ [king], such as playmates, servants and slaves [who] were at times known to have achieved this coveted position of Boduṇ” (ibid.). This suggests that there was some degree of flexibility built into the status system.⁷ One key characteristic of the *bodung* was also that, despite the inheritance system, they had to make their own bigmanity. Although “the Boduṇ were powerful in their own right” (ibid., 39), for all these Big Men, a key mechanism in increasing their influence was to maintain close ties with the sultan.

Nasheed’s analysis of the nineteenth-century Maldivian polity shows that among the most decisive factors in archipelago governance were the multiple relationships formed between the Big Men and the king. In fact, the king’s ability to rule the island kingdom rested on his skill in managing Big Man affiliations: “The Raḍuṇ [king] ruled within the limits of his support available through the Boduṇ” (ibid., 79). In other words, the king had constantly to ensure the Big Men’s support by gaining their trust and good will, else he would risk being challenged by them: “The all so common feuding pattern of the Boduṇ limited the rule of the Raḍuṇ” (ibid.). Maldivian history is full of examples where *bodung* attempted and at times succeeded in overthrowing the ruling king and governing in his stead. As a result, Nasheed argues that “[i]n fact the Raḍuṇ was one among the Boduṇ” (ibid.)—the king was the biggest among the Big Men.

The means through which the biggest of all Big Men managed to secure the *bodung*’s support were various and demonstrate how a group of Big Men could be instrumental in running the kingdom. Kin ties between the monarch and the *bodung* occupied a decisive role in the process of forming alliances. Many *bodung* were brothers, fathers, uncles, or in-laws of the king or of one another (ibid., 21–44). But kinship was not the only means of establishing ties between the king and the Big Men. In respect of status, it was in the capacity of the king to allocate government positions to individuals according to his will. He would, for example, direct some of the Big Men to manage the militia and finance its upkeep from their own funds (ibid., 37), and appoint others as judges (ibid., 47).

The rank of *bodung* also brought with it a number of entitlements and obligations, which enabled the titleholder to work on his own sphere

of influence and wealth: “The Boduṇ by virtue of their position were entitled to obtain taxes, duties and rent from entire atolls, uninhabited islands, mosques and various other endowments” (ibid., 23). In other words, the Big Men exercised functions that fall into the domain of what we would now call the state, using commons not for the benefit of the sultan’s exchequer, but for their own aggrandizement. The revenues generated through taxes, duties, and produce from the islands, like dried and salted fish, coir, and copra, were available in their entirety for the Big Men’s personal budget, but “[t]he financial benefits largely depended on the extent of status, power and respect the Boduṇ was able to command” (ibid., 23). These funds were then used to invest in the Big Men’s own businesses, which were “run along the lines of a family affair” (ibid., 25). Quite often Big Men invested in trading vessels in order to ship their produce to India and Ceylon, and hence were central in organizing the Maldives’ export trade. Indeed, “it was common to symbolize the prominence of a Boduṇ by the amount of foreign going vessels owned by him” (ibid., 25). So besides the *bodung*’s standing in the political domain through his affiliation with the king, his influence fed off his economic assets. Both presented the basis from which he could himself create a following and in turn negotiate his standing in the political realm. Thus, by acting as revenue collectors and trade entrepreneurs, the *bodung* occupied key roles between the Maldivian state and the country’s economy.

These entitlements also brought with them communal obligations, as becomes apparent in the example of the 1837 Male’ harbor construction project, which Nasheed discusses. The king and the Big Men had decided to dredge the inner harbor of the capital’s island:

The work of the extraction of coral stones for the construction of Male’ breakwater was conducted along time honoured traditional lines. When the construction is due, the ... Treasury House instructs the various Atoll Chiefs to build small vessels and send them to Male’. When the dhonies arrive in Male’ they are distributed among the Boduṇ, who have to bear all the costs involved in the work done by the people of his particular dhoni. These dhonies are distributed according to the rank of the Boduṇ. The most important Boduṇ would choose the dhoni that he so desires and the second in importance the next, and so on. (Nasheed 2003, 61–62)

This example illustrates two points. First, it shows that the Big Men were instrumental in financing and organizing larger construction projects, in this case, an infrastructure project that benefited the entire community.

Second, it reveals how a Big Man's status and rank played into the organization process through which the very same status and rank is reinforced. This means that a Big Man's standing both enabled and compelled him to become involved for the common good.

It becomes apparent from this that the *bodung* acted as brokers not only between the state and the economy, but also between the king and his subjects, as well as between the capital and the atolls and islands. They were the crucial agents who bound the periphery to the center and the center to its Indian Ocean neighbors. The Big Men's intermediary role thus rested first, on their ability to position themselves in relation to the king as head of state and their ability to exploit their official entitlements. Their standing, second, fed on their capacity to fuse their political with their economic capital to, third, create a following among their subordinates. Hence, for the *bodung*, it was equally important to act in both the political and economic realms.

The figure of the *bodung* is a combination of politician-tycoon or oligarch-official and strikingly parallels Big Men in the contemporary Maldives. In fact, most of the big businessmen double as politicians, or at least maintain close relations with the political elite. Both closely interweave the political with the economic. Yet, contemporary Big Men differ from their *bodung* ancestors in one central respect: Whereas the historical *bodung* largely represented a caste of nobles, the present-day Big Men are rather a class of capitalists. The pattern of the concentration of wealth and power, and thus influence, in the hands of very few individuals, however, remains intact. This means that there is a continuity in the principles of social organization that has survived the Maldives' transition from sultanate to nation-state. However, the composition of the elite itself has changed. The former nobles are not necessarily the present bourgeoisie; rather, other leading figures have entered the stage, a trend to which I now turn.

BIG MEN AS HUBS

Mr. Biya is a dollar-billionaire who has now passed retirement age.⁸ He made his fortune over the last forty years by establishing an enormous conglomerate of firms under the umbrella of Giant Enterprises, a multi-venture corporation that is active in almost every lucrative sector of the Maldivian economy. Surely, the most profitable of Mr. Biya's operations are in the tourism sector. He runs three luxurious tourism resort islands,

one as a joint venture with a large American hotel chain, and two on his own account. With the three resorts, he has one of the largest bed capacities in the country. Giant Enterprises is also involved in the transport sector, operating an airline and sea-bound transportation. These transportation capacities are not solely used for the purposes of tourism, but also to meet the demands of the local population. Mr. Biya's firm is also active in international trade, importing construction materials and staples. The business's media section includes Giant TV and Giant FM, as well as shares in an online news site. Quite recently, he established private education in his boarding school, and he has a number of smaller undertakings as well. In short, Mr. Biya is a business tycoon who not only has access to enormous funds, but employs a significant share of the Maldivian labor force.

Besides his vast economic assets, Mr. Biya has retained close ties with the political elite from the Nasir era (1957–1978), but even more intensely during Gayoom's presidency (1978–2008). It is safe to say that he has had a political career himself. He held a number of posts within the administration and government. For example, at one point, early in his administrative career, he served in the State Trading Organization, the state's primary import and export enterprise, and later, he held positions in various ministries. He was also member of various national boards like that of the Maldives Port Authority and the Bank of Maldives and was involved in many organizations that form important interstices between the state and the economy, such as the Maldives Association of Tourism Industry or the Maldives National Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Furthermore, after the legalization of political parties in 2005, he cofounded a party of which he became the chairperson and through which he acquired a mandate in the national parliament.

Hence, Mr. Biya is not only a wealthy businessman, but also an influential politician. His dual role has helped him to build on and push both aspects of his career. For instance, when he came up with plans to develop Giant Reef Resort in the 1970s, he and his coinvestors identified a suitable island for their venture. Ever since the advent of tourism from 1972 onward, Maldivian governments have officially maintained that resorts can only be constructed on uninhabited islands, to avoid conflicts with local populations and to protect local culture from foreign influences (Colton 1995, 94–96; Domrös 1985, 126; Domrös 2001, 123; Maloney 1976, 662, 664). One important aspect of this regulation is that all land, but particularly the uninhabited islands, is owned by the state, which leases such land for any economic purposes, such as

coconut plantations or resort development. But in the particular case of Giant Reef Resort, there was one obstacle to the project: The comparatively large island was settled. This was when Mr. Biya was able to capitalize on his political connections. He was among those who lobbied for the implementation of a resettlement law, which the Nasir government had only recently introduced in 1968. According to this law, island populations with fewer than fifty adult men (females and spouses were not taken into account) were to be resettled on other inhabited islands (Maniku 1990, 47). The population of this particular island was smaller, and consequently, the residents were transferred to three neighboring islands, and some to Male'. Since the island had become depopulated as a result, it was reclassified as "uninhabited" and could now be leased to Mr. Biya's enterprise for resort development. The fact that this law was soon repealed (in 1975) and that populations from other vacated islands were allowed to return to their original islands did not help the inhabitants in this case, because Giant Reef Resort had by now already started operations. For its former inhabitants, this meant that they could not live on their home island ever again, nor could they exploit its produce. This case illustrates well how Mr. Biya was able to mobilize his political relations not only to make his entrepreneurial operation work by lobbying for national legislation, but also to further his standing as a Big Man by creating additional economic assets.

It is striking that it is Mr. Biya, as the prototype of the contemporary Maldivian Big Man, rather than his ancestor the *bodung*, who matches Sahlins' now classic depiction of the Melanesian Big Man. This is because Sahlins emphasizes self-made bigmanity over inherited greatness, the latter rather being a characteristic of the *bodung*, as I have argued above. Sahlins writes: "The Melanesian big-man seems so thoroughly bourgeois, so reminiscent of the free enterprising rugged individual of our own heritage. He combines with an ostensible interest in the general welfare a more profound measure of self-interested cunning and economic calculation" (1963, 289). Sahlins continues:

the indicative quality of big-man authority is everywhere the same: it is *personal* power. Big-men do not come to office; they do not succeed to, nor are they installed in, existing positions of leadership over political groups. The attainment of big-man status is rather the outcome of a series of acts which elevate a person above the common herd and attract about him a coterie of loyal, lesser men. (Sahlins 1963, 289, his emphasis)

Sahlins' characterization of the Melanesian Big Man applies to the Maldivian Big Man astonishingly well, as the case of Mr. Biya so aptly illustrates. He has raised himself above the common herd not just through his venture into various domains of the economy, but also by aspiring to office through the vehicle of his own party as soon as the opportunity emerged. There are, however, further dimensions to Maldivian Big Men that I want to engage with by picking up on some more recent developments in the study of bigmanity.

In an interesting article, Abdou Maliq Simone (2004) has argued that people be viewed as infrastructure. Although infrastructure is commonly used to designate physical facilities, such as pipes, wires, or roads, there is certainly an organizational dimension to such systems that is just as crucial. Simone therefore suggests that we "extend the notion of infrastructure directly to people's activities" (Simone 2004, 407), whereby it is the people who "engage complex combinations of objects, spaces, persons, and practices" (*ibid.*, 408). Such assemblages "become an infrastructure—a platform providing for and reproducing life" (*ibid.*). He emphasizes that it is the "process of conjunction, which is capable of generating social compositions across a range of singular capacities and needs (both enacted and virtual) and which attempts to derive maximal outcomes from a minimal set of elements" (*ibid.*, 410–11) that is at the core of people as infrastructure.

Picking up on Simone's idea of people as infrastructure, Utas (2012b) has related it to the study of Big Men in African conflict settings. He argues that part of a Big Man's bigmanity stems from his ability to create, maintain, and manipulate networks at the center of which the Big Man establishes himself: "If networks are alternative modes of governance, then Big Men are alternative governors of *peopled infrastructures*" (*ibid.*, 6, his emphasis). As we have already seen, for the *bodung* and the contemporary Maldivian Big Man, bigmanity means being able to convert political into economic capital and vice versa—in other words, to occupy a position to link one network with another. The Big Man as infrastructure is therefore a switch, a point of passage who joins one domain to others. This is why, as Utas puts it, "we must also identify the *nodes/Big Men* and take into account their multiple roles in addition to the plethora of links they maintain" (*ibid.*, 11, my emphasis). This entails, Utas continues, that Big Men as nodes should be viewed "not as sociocultural features but rather as socio-structural ones, where certain structural features prescribe certain social outcomes" (*ibid.*, 4). Even if

structural features do not prescribe social outcomes, they most certainly condition or enable them.

Utas's discussion of Big Men as nodes strikingly resonates with one central notion of this edited volume—the hub. Schnepel writes that to consider islands as hubs means to recognize that certain infrastructural configurations, such as a natural harbor, navigable environmental conditions, and a favorable geopolitical location (Schnepel, this volume, Introduction), influence whether or not an island may be a hub. Those islands that are indeed hubs have successfully acquired and accumulated various hub functions, it being important not only that they have established themselves as nodal points in various networks, but also that they serve to mediate between them. For instance, in such a model, the Maldives' capital island of Male' may be seen as a hub because it is at the crossroads of various transportation networks. The network of inter-island travel intersects in Male', as do the international airborne links. So if people or commodities, for example, are to move from one local island to another, they need to pass through the capital. If locals seek to travel abroad, they need to switch from the national to international transport network in Male'. If coconut planters or fishermen wish to sell their produce, they need to do so in Male'. When patients seek medical treatment, they need to consult doctors at a hospital in Male'. If students seek higher education, they need to enroll in a Male' college. That Male' as hub appears as Male' as center is not coincidental, but deliberate, since it is the close knitting together of hub and center functions that is at the core of spatial and social networking, hence hub creation.

This remarkably parallels the mechanisms of Maldivian bigmanity, because Big Men seek to establish themselves as center men. I therefore suggest it is fruitful to apply the notion of the hub to Big Men as infrastructure and hence to consider their actions as essentially motivated by the need to establish themselves as the hubs of various networks. Such personified hubs present the link that unravels the relationship of insular hubs and bigmanity, at least in the context of the island nation of the Maldives.

Consider another story from Ahmad to illustrate how insularity is linked to the idea of Big Men as hubs. Recalling the opening vignette, Ahmad was widely seen as a politically problematic figure on his local island who had faced great difficulties in obtaining any form of transport whenever he wanted to leave his home island. There were, however, occasions when travel was unavoidable, as in the case of his son's medical

emergency. Ahmad's son suffers from a chronic disease that from time to time results in acute outbreaks that cannot be treated at his home island's rather basic health facility. Normally, Ahmad and his wife are sufficiently well equipped to reduce their son's distress with strong medication, but in this case, the drugs had no effect, which made it necessary to consult professional medical advice. Such was only available in Male', they thought, and hence they needed to devise some way to get their son to one of the two hospitals in the capital. Ahmad's son, however, was in such bad condition that he would not be able to be transported on a *dhoni*, since this would take far too long, and the ride would be far too shaky. In his emergency, Ahmad approached the management of Mr. Biya's Giant Reef Resort, which happens to be on one of the neighboring islands. He asked whether two seats could be provided on one of the seaplanes that normally take resort tourists to the international airport. Fortunately, he was able to convince the management of the urgency of his request and was allowed to take his son via this air link to Male'. However, the hospital in Male' failed to determine the causes of his son's outbreak, and there was no way either to cure or ease his son's suffering. For Ahmad, this meant that there was only one more option: He would have to take his son abroad for treatment. Accordingly, he took him to a Colombo hospital in Sri Lanka. After a few weeks of consultation, however, none of the Sri Lankan doctors' attempts did anything to improve his son's condition. The only alternative then appeared to be a special private clinic in Trivandrum, India. However, up to this point, his son's treatment had consumed almost all of Ahmad's savings, which meant that he would have to borrow money before he could take his son to India. Ahmad went back to Male', leaving his son in Colombo. In Male', he approached various people, particularly extended family and friends, whom he hoped could help him out, but all the funds he was able to collect would still not cover the costs. This is when Ahmad (through an intermediary) approached Mr. Biya, who agreed to grant him the loan he desperately needed. This enabled Ahmad to take his son to the Indian specialists, who after a few months were eventually able to ease his condition. After three months of medical odyssey and having spent a fortune, Ahmad and his relieved son finally returned to their home island.

Ahmad's story is not just an example of the entwining of medicine and mobility that is so common in the Maldives (Knoll 2014), it also highlights one central aspect of Maldivian bigmanity: That even if one takes a critical position toward Big Men, it is they whom one approaches

when in need. For Ahmad in this instance, Mr. Biya provided two essential means to relieve his son's condition: transport and finance. If it had not been for Mr. Biya's transport networks and his generous loan, Ahmad would not have been able to help his son in any meaningful way. Of course, Mr. Biya's crucial position also depended on a lack of alternatives: If there had been better infrastructure in terms of mobility and health care, as there is now (see Knoll, this volume), Ahmad might not have been forced to approach him. But as such alternatives were hardly available then, Mr. Biya's multiple provisions were the last resort. This thus supports Utas's observation that "Big Men appear in structural voids of the state, skillfully combining network governance, social control and economic activities" (Utas 2012b, 14). In other words, Big Men supply structures and services the state does not provide and thereby rework their Big Man statuses. Consequently, bigmanity depends as much on the absence of the state in certain domains as rests on its dominance in others, as we shall now see.

BIG MEN AND THE POLITICS OF ARCHIPELAGO ZONING

One important domain in which the state is particularly strong is the management of terrestrial spaces. In a country composed entirely of ocean and small coral islands, land is among the scarcest and most valuable of resources. For centuries "[a]ll land has traditionally been vested in the State" (Maloney 1976, 661), and this continues to be so. Out of the country's entire area (exclusive economic zone) of 859,000 square kilometers, only approximately 300 are land, which results in a figure of 0.03 percent of terrestrial space. This comparatively small amount of land mass is spread over 1,192 islands, scattered across twenty six natural atolls along two chains in an area of approximately 860 by 140 km (Government of Maldives 2008). The islands vary in size, all in the range between 0.1 and 5.0 square kilometers. These figures already give some indication of the fragmented nature of the Maldivian terrestrial area scattered across the ocean. They do not, however, grasp the dynamics of how land is classified and managed. It lies within the domain of the state to manufacture an order for the island world by identifying and regulating land masses. To realize this, one key principle is what I call archipelago zoning. Archipelago zoning is at the heart of the state's terrestrial regulation, as it fragments spaces into functional units and thereby creates an alternative administrative topography.

To a town planner, spatial zoning is everyday business: One takes a cartographic depiction of a space, investigates its features, delineates one spatial fragment from another, and then assigns potential uses to every spatial fragment. Each of these designated areas is then equipped with particular potentialities and regulations, which determine how such space might or might not be appropriated. In the Maldivian case, this zoning principle closely resonates with the insular topography, usually taking entire islands as the base unit. This means, in other words, that the principal entity in spatial planning is an island in its entirety, which is then given a designated status. Thus, the basic paradigm of archipelago zoning might best be captured by the phrase “one island, one activity.” According to this model, the state maps the archipelago, thus producing a particular spatial order that resonates with the insular archipelago geography, but is not congruent with it. In some respects, the state’s spatial order is detached from physical geography because an island might, but need not necessarily, afford how it may be used (like having a natural harbor, or freshwater supplies). Yet, decisive is that archipelago zoning is a political process of identification, differentiation, and declaration of spatial statuses.

The most fundamental administrative distinction is between inhabited and uninhabited islands, which only appears unequivocal at first sight. In the logic of archipelago zoning, the state officially designates 193 islands as inhabited (Government of Maldives 2008, 10), another 109 as resort islands (as of 2013) (Government of Maldives 2014), and a further fifty five islands as reserved for industrial, agricultural, or fish-processing activities (Government of Maldives 2008, 18).⁹ Furthermore, there are islands for special purposes, such as airports, fuel storage, and garbage disposal, not to forget picnic islands, prison islands, and the often neglected presidential holiday mansion island of Arah. The remaining approximately eight hundred islands are classified as uninhabited. Thus, from the perspective of a spatial planner, the archipelago no longer appears as an accumulation of tropical islands sharing equal physical features. Instead, the island world appears as a sorted, neatly delineated space in which individual insular units are each tied to a specific activity. In this ordered insular world, the uninhabited islands in particular become objects of bargaining, and this is where we encounter the Big Men again.

Since all land falls within the domain of the state, and since the classification of an island’s status is exclusively an affair of the central government, it is only reasonable for a Big Man to get himself involved in

the realm of politics. As I have argued above, already during the time of the sultans, the *bodung* made sure he was rewarded with exclusive exploitation rights for uninhabited islands. In the past, these islands mostly allowed the harvesting of coconut products or the manufacture of dried or salted fish to be sold locally or abroad. But to acquire such rights, a *bodung* had to maintain close relations with the sultan. Likewise, Mr. Biya, the contemporary incarnation of his ancestor, doubles as business tycoon and politician and involves himself in government. As we have seen most dramatically in the case of the development of Giant Reef Resort, it is only his ties with the political elite that enabled a formerly inhabited island to be reclassified as an uninhabited island, a prerequisite for establishing his resort business. Thus, both the historical *bodung* and the contemporary Big Men use their dual roles to secure their share of the island nation's estates. In both cases, these estates form an important foundation for their entrepreneurial activities, except that tourists have now taken over from coconuts when it comes to revenue generation. Consequently, it is in the Big Man's interest not only to be involved with the state's land tenure management, but also to support a rigid zoning system.

The state's clear-cut spatial order is not, however, as unambiguous as it seems. For example, Thilafushi, the industrial and garbage disposal island near Male', is permanently settled by a force of low-waged Bengali migrant workers, who live in rather crowded barracks. Also, some of the agricultural or fishing islands have more or less permanent populations who prefer to stay close to their work. But certainly, from a classificatory point of view, the most contradictory cases are the resort islands. Although the state does not mark them out as inhabited, they are nonetheless occupied without interruption throughout the year. Besides tourists, of course, there are usually a few hundred staff, at times even entire families, who live on these resort islands more or less permanently.¹⁰ In fact, most resorts have clearly demarcated areas, some of which are forbidden for off-duty employees, others which are taboo for tourists. In addition to technical areas such as kitchens, offices, power, and sewage facilities, this entails an almost complete communal infrastructure, usually including a café, a shop, staff quarters, and of course a mosque. So although the state's classification suggests that resorts are exclusively tourist spaces, they are in fact inhabited islands of a very special kind.

Here, the Big Men enter the scene again, because they are not merely the managers of hotels, but effectively the governors of island

communities. Like cruise-ship captains, Big Men steer the fate of their resort islands, keeping a close grip on anything that happens on board and leaving almost nothing to chance. There are dress codes, protocols, plans, and schedules for almost every occasion, as well as quite strict regulations as to when and where a member of staff may go and what he or she may do. A resort is an exceptional space not just because it allows tourists to enjoy otherwise forbidden amenities like bikini swimming and the consumption of pork and alcohol. It is exceptional because it is an all-encompassing arrangement, an entire island community run by a managing director instead of a mayor. It is tempting to call a resort a “total institution” in Goffman’s classic sense—“a social hybrid, part residential community, part formal organization” (Goffman 1961, 12)—since a resort, at least for its employees, is “a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life” (Goffman 1956, xiii). As total institutions depend on controlling not just the internal routines, but also relations with the outside world, a reef island (which is usually surrounded by difficult waters) presents a perfect arrangement in which to monitor the entry and exit of all things and people. This is how, for example, the former residents of the island that became Giant Reef Resort are prevented from picking coconuts from trees they still claim to own (coconut palms are private property), or how tourists are prevented from exploring other islands on their own. In any case, here is one instance where insularity and bigmanity clearly intersect because an island is a totality, a “finite geography” (Baldacchino 2007, 4), that enables a particular kind of social arrangement imbued with bigmanity.

BIGMANITY AND GRASSROOTS QUANDARIES

Parliamentary elections were approaching in May 2009, and people in the entire country were on their feet gathering at the many assemblies that preceded such events. Ahmad, too, was very much involved in the lead-up to the elections. He co-organized many events on his home island, as he was part of a very active group of the island’s Maldivian Democratic Party’s branch. Almost every night there would be meetings, usually in one of the island’s cafés. Some would be rather casual, where people would just sit and discuss politics over coffee and cigarettes. Others would be more formal, particularly at times when leading party

figures came to visit the island as part of their campaigns. In such cases, Ahmad would help put up a venue, decorate the place, arrange the seating, set up a sound system, and get his family to prepare snacks and soft drinks. He would go from door to door to advertise the event, inviting everyone to come and participate. In short, he was one of those who fill a political organization with life and make events run smoothly.

It might have been particularly his commitment to organizational matters that made him a target of what was to come, Ahmad assumed in retrospect. One day, a few weeks before election day, Ahmad was approached by a supporter of Mr. Biya's party—Ahmad called him Mr. Biya's agent. This man enquired if Ahmad was willing to resign from the MDP and join his party instead. For Ahmad, at first, this was an outrageous suggestion, since he had been among the first to join the MDP and was an outspoken supporter of its aims. The agent, however, was quite persistent. He approached Ahmad time and again, now specifying how Ahmad might profit from aligning himself with Mr. Biya and his party. Ahmad was offered a post on the local party's council, and the agent indicated that this would not be the only benefit he could look forward to. In fact, there was a package of advantages he could expect, including privileged access to transport facilities and employment opportunities, which Mr. Biya would happily provide, the agent indicated. Yet surely what caused Ahmad the greatest distress was an exorbitant financial offer of an amount exceeding two years' worth of wages for him. This placed Ahmad in a serious dilemma. The package he was being offered exceeded anything an ordinary islander like himself could ever hope for, and also, he felt some compulsion to show some gratitude toward Mr. Biya for having assisted him at the time of his son's emergency. He also thought about his children, how the money would help him send them to (Mr. Biya's) college in Male'; he thought of how much easier travel would be and how a privileged link with Mr. Biya's enterprises might promote his souvenir business. In short, Ahmad was deeply perplexed and struggled to make a final decision. In the end, however, he resisted the temptation to accept the offer, though through that experience he came to understand that what is at stake is not simply framed in terms of loyalty or bribery, but poses existential questions, way beyond mere politics.

Ahmad's quandary illustrates aptly the challenges "lesser men" (Sahlins 1963, 289) face when confronted with Big Men and their various infrastructures. It shows how Big Men link multiple networks and

domains to form a powerful nexus to realize their goals. When Ahmad was approached to join Mr. Biya's party, it was less a question of political ideologies or programs than of personal affiliation. Ahmad considered much less the aims and policies he would subscribe to if he switched parties, but instead pondered over the personal benefits and opportunities. It is telling that his considerations ran rather along the lines of economic, educational, and mobility factors, all of which, without a doubt, would enable him to lead a better life much more easily. That these considerations were at the forefront of Ahmad's mind reveals that he too was aware of the ease with which political affiliation could be transformed into personal wealth and that the key to such a switch was to be found in a Big Man.

Thus, Ahmad's dilemma highlights how effectively Big Men convert assets in one domain into assets in another. Although this case might normally be framed as one of attempted vote-buying, suggesting it was just about the flow of cash for political support, there was much more to it than that. Supporting or following a Big Man provides multiple opportunities simultaneously. So when voters consider what they "get" for their vote or support, they think in terms what a Big Man is capable of and is likely to provide. This in turn means that a Big Man's ability to create a following depends on the diversity of his portfolio. And since there are alternatives among the Big Men (although only very few), there is considerable competition over followership. In any case, a Big Man's bigmanity rests on his ability to muster various networks and his skill to transform one into another. This is at the heart of Big Men as hubs, a puissant nexus that the Maldivian Democratic Party sought to dismantle.

CHALLENGING BIGMANITY

Thus far, I have investigated the conditions and principles according to which Maldivian Big Men work and maintain their bigmanity. I have argued that bigmanity rests on a Big Man's ability to establish himself as a hub, a nodal point in a variety of networks, in which his ability to intersect and translate one network into another is instrumental. I have also contrasted my observations on Maldivian bigmanity with realizations at the grassroots level through my ethnography of various episodes in an islander's life. I have sketched how time and again this islander saw no alternative but to approach a Big Man, although he was an outspoken

critic of Maldivian bigmanity. This revealed how nested bigmanity is in the Maldivian context, as it provides infrastructures and opportunities that are otherwise unavailable. It is this situation that the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) attempted to take apart immediately after it won the presidential elections of 2008.

Since an open challenge to influential Maldivian Big Men is quite risky and has limited chances of success, their approach to dismantling the Big Man nexus was spelled out in the name of development. This is not to say that their policies regarding development were not genuine and well-designed—quite the contrary—but I suggest that these policies be read against the backdrop of the Big Men phenomenon. I will focus on two development policies that the MDP was quick to implement: first, the introduction of an inexpensive inter-insular public transport system; and second, various measures of decentralization, because both most clearly tackle crucial joints in the scaffolding of Maldivian bigmanity.

In the vignette opening this chapter, I have pointed out the challenges posed by inter-insular mobility in an island nation. This is the case for most people who do not own a boat capable of traveling between the atolls, especially those who have had some quarrel with boat owners, among which are many Big Men. Since boat owners, and nowadays one may also add airline operators, determine peoples' mobility, they occupy a decisive position in a maritime society, with impacts on almost any aspect of inter-island life. Maloney pointed out for the Maldives as far back as the 1970s that “a boat owner is in a position to affect peoples' movements to and from the island. Some men manage to acquire several boats and, with that, influence in Male so as to be able to become an official or to lease an uninhabited island” (Maloney 1976, 661). So, to tackle this key entwining of bigmanity with insularity by stripping boat owners of their privileges meant pushing for fundamental changes in Maldivian social arrangements.

In their manifesto (Maldivian Democratic Party—Alliance 2008), however, the MDP-led government did not frame the reorganization of transport as a challenge to bigmanity, but instead formulated it in developmental terms: “Due to the lack of an affordable transport network, residents are confined to their islands and unable to participate in the country's development or access necessary facilities at other locations” (ibid., 18). Consequently, for them “[a]n integrated transport network is a top priority of the government in order to foster regional development,” the hope being that the “[e]stablishment of a nation-wide

transport system will facilitate equitable distribution of wealth, encourage economic development, enable social and commercial networking as well as the transportation of goods and services" (ibid., 19). In other words, the policy was to implement an alternative maritime transport infrastructure parallel to the existing one. Yet importantly, the new mobility network was designed to undermine the various dependencies until then tied to Big Men transport infrastructures. Concealed in the language of development, this meant that the introduction of easy access transport was crafted to weaken one of the Big Men's core assets, because the MDP was well aware of the relationship between access to transport and the accumulation of wealth that it was seeking to break up.

The new maritime mobility policy was put into practice fairly quickly. Already in 2009, exclusive long-term contracts with commercial vessel operators were being advertised. The way this worked was that the government defined larger regions by lumping together various atolls, usually with a few dozen inhabited islands. Private transport companies were then invited to bid for an entire such region, being required to show how they would connect every inhabited island through a scheduled ferry network. The winner among the bidders would be given an exclusive fifty-year contract to operate public transport in that region. With this procedure, the MDP government achieved three things simultaneously. First, it was able to implement the policy fairly quickly, since within one and a half years, most atolls were equipped with such a network. Second, it allowed mid-range businesses a good chance of winning a bid against the big corporations, since the number of vessels required to cover an entire region would be manageable. Third, it diversified the transport market and avoided the creation of yet another (Big Man) monopoly.

Connected to the developmental dimension of transport is the issue of the dominance of Male' in the island nation. The MDP manifesto states: "Due to inter-island limited [sic] transportation facilities, development has been concentrated solely on the capital Male'" (2008: 18), which means that a fair share "of the country's population are forced to travel to Male' for basic needs" (ibid.). The absence of regional inter-insular transport, the manifesto maintains, also results in "island residents finding it easier to travel long distances to Male' than to neighbouring islands" (ibid.). As already noted above, before the introduction of the ferry system inter-insular travel in most cases went via Male', and therefore journeys to other, even close islands not only consumed more time

and money, they were also subject to the center's and the Big Men's transport policies. Consequently, enabling regional inter-insular travel is also a way of sidelining both Male' and Big Men.

It is striking that the MDP framed transport as an issue of centralization, which in the Maldivian context is essentially a question of hub functionality. In their view, Male's multivalent hub functionality is among the core obstacles to a better redistribution of wealth, access to services, political participation, et cetera, that particularly affects those residing on islands other than the capital. In other words, the establishment of a ferry network is an attempt to foster periphery-periphery connectivity to counter the dominance of center-periphery relations. That this is articulated not only in spatial terms, but also in social terms becomes apparent when we realize that Big Men prefer to concentrate their operations in the capital. Hence, to tackle Male's hub functionality is to challenge bigmanity.

A further set of policies anticipated in the MDP manifesto may also be interpreted as directed against bigmanity. Those policies are summarized under the umbrella of decentralization. Without going into too much detail, I will indicate how some of these policies aim at disassembling bigmanity. For instance, the MDP promoted the new concept of community-based tourism.¹¹ It argued that it would offer small entrepreneurs the opportunity to generate revenues on their islands without having to compete for uninhabited islands, which, as we have seen above, is elite business. To enable community-based tourism, the MDP had to break with the decades-old policy of keeping touristic and domestic islands separate. Although the introduction of this policy did not go unchallenged and was accompanied by worries over the "upmarket" touristic image of the islands, community holidaying provided local businessmen and middle-class tourists with a new option. Ahmad, too, together with a business partner, started his own small guesthouse on his island shortly after this policy was implemented by converting a shed into two mid-range guest rooms. Since the ferry system was now in operation, they had no difficulty in bringing tourists to their island's accommodation. Thus, the promotion of community-based tourism created jobs in the lucrative tourism sector, thus circumventing the Big Man-dominated resort industry.¹²

Another decentralization policy consisted in a reform of local governance structures. In 2011, the MDP government introduced councils to replace the system of delegates posted from Male'. These councils

on both island and atoll administrative levels were now composed of five members instead of a single titleholder known as the island or atoll chief, respectively.¹³ New to the local administrative system was also the fact that council members were now elected instead of appointed. Furthermore, the elected councils were equipped with responsibilities and authority over communal issues, and importantly were given budgets they could spend according to their own priorities. Here also the goal was not only to transfer state authority, responsibility, and accountability from Male' to the localities, but to distribute these powers from a few to many hands. As mentioned before, and as we saw with Ahmad, the island chiefs were small Big Men in their own right, who were usually well connected to the bigger Big Men in Male'. A reform of local governance structures like that pursued here consequently affected how Big Men were able to realize their influence in local communities, since they were deprived of their local agents.

Although the MDP-led government was careful not to attack the Big Men directly, they adopted measures to break apart the latter's concentrations of power by addressing various aspects of insularity. In my reading of the MDP's development policies, I suggest that we are able to infer from this the workings of bigmanity. It is no coincidence that many of the MDP's policies were well tuned to the conditions of bigmanity, whether through the introduction of an inexpensive, open-access transport system, the opening up of the tourism market, or the reconfiguration of local administrative structures. Taken individually, each one of these policies might have had only limited effects on Big Man dominance. In combination, however, all these minor changes presented a serious challenge to Maldivian bigmanity.

CONCLUSION

Despite all the efforts to challenge bigmanity, the small islands of the Maldives remain a place of few Big Men. The challenges posed to the Big Men, however, reveal various intersections of bigmanity and insularity. They highlight how spatiality in the archipelago relates to a particular social configuration whereby the former and the latter constantly inform and reinforce each other. In other words, the fragmented insular topography, now differentiated into distinctive insular zones, is as much integrated into the realm of Big Men politics as it is the outcome of political bargaining. The seizure of terrestrial spaces to build bigmanity is as

much exemplary of this intersection as is the case for maritime transport and centralization. Yet surely the most striking parallel between bigmanity and insularity consists in the overlapping of nodal and center functions. The hub may prove to be the concept that binds insularity and bigmanity together, provided it is taken as a structural metaphor in both spatial *and* social terms.

NOTES

1. My discussion is based on material gathered during anthropological fieldwork in the Maldives between October 2011 and September 2012. Throughout the chapter, I use pseudonyms. The likelihood that some characters in my chapter might resemble actual individuals is not coincidental but unavoidable, since I modeled them on the basis of ethnographic data. This means that, while the core of issues and instances is empirical, I have fused certain details of various informants into prototypes. I do this not just because there is no analytical benefit in exposing individuals, but because I want to highlight principles and practices over personalities.
2. Population figures vary considerably depending on the source material, an issue to which I return below. The figures quoted here have been taken from the most recent census, conducted in September 2014 (National Bureau of Statistics 2015). It was the first census that attempted to capture almost the entire foreign working population. According to the census, 63,637 residents are foreigners, mostly Bangladeshis, followed by Indians and Sri Lankans, while the remaining 338,434 are classified as Maldivians. Regarding the number of occupied islands, I have totaled all categories of islands that are not considered “uninhabited.” This includes “188 administrative islands, 109 resorts, and 128 industrial and other islands of the country” (National Bureau of Statistics 2015, 6). The territorial figures have been calculated from figures in the Official Atlas of the Maldives (2008, 13).
3. Nasheed won 54.21 percent of the votes in the runoff elections against Gayoom’s 45.79 percent (Elections Commission 2008) only after other presidential candidates, who had been defeated on the first ballot, had pledged their support to him, and encouraged their supporters to do likewise. Thus, the election results mirror the widespread perception that votes were cast less for Nasheed than against Gayoom.
4. As already mentioned, the number of inhabited islands varies not only in history, but also according to source. The latest census counts 188 islands

- (National Bureau of Statistics 2015, 6), whereas the Official Atlas of the Maldives accounts for 193 (2008, 10).
5. Although empirically most Big Men are indeed men, “Big Man” is not a gendered concept, but rather captures a social prototype. Women may equally be labeled “Big Men” despite the gendered connotation. Historically, particularly among Maldivian royals, there were also women to whom the concept could be applied. The Web site of the Maldivian royal family (<http://www.maldivesroyalfamily.com>; last accessed April 22, 2016) provides a rich resource for exploring further the role of influential women in the Maldives, a theme that goes beyond the scope of the chapter.
 6. I transliterate Dhivehi terms into plain Latin script instead of using diacritics.
 7. Nasheed argues that there was one more option to join the “Dhivehi power structure outside the framework of blood ties or personal familiarity” (2003, 3), and that was to take the path of religious scholarship. Particularly, the highest ranking Islamic scholar, the Fandiyaaru or Chief Qadi, occupied an important position within the Dhivehi Kingdom. Certainly such Islamic scholars were significant within the Dhivehi polity, but they represent another type of influential figure that cannot be subsumed into the category of *bodung*. This is because these scholars stood outside the status system of the Maldivian nobility out of which the *Bodung* chiefly emerged. Consequently, although I acknowledge the Islamic scholars’ impact on the Maldivian polity and the influence of related Muslim networks, my discussion focuses on the figures of the *bodung* and Big Men.
 8. Mr. Biya is a prototype, which has been modeled on the basis of ethnographic data of various Maldivian Big Men. I collected these data during my anthropological fieldwork in the Maldives in 2011 and 2012.
 9. The enumeration and clear-cut definition of island statuses vary over time and according to source. The most recent census, for example, now lists only 188 “administrative islands,” 109 resort islands, and 128 “industrial and other islands” (National Bureau of Statistics 2015, 6). It only vaguely hints at what happened to the five islands that were inhabited before: “the administrative islands in the country have witnessed a significant reduction in number over the years. The drop in the number of islands in 2006 and 2014 is mainly due to the relocation of population after [the] 2004 Asian Tsunami” (National Bureau of Statistics 2015, 22). Despite the ambiguity in the number of islands of various statuses, I continue to use the figures in the official atlas (Government of Maldives 2008). This is because for my argument it is more important to foreground the principles of administrative delineation practices than their specific configurations at a particular point in time.

10. The Maldivian staff in resorts usually refer to an inhabited island other than the resort as their “home island.” Nevertheless, for most of the year, they reside in the resorts they work in.
11. The development of this approach for the Maldives predates the MDP’s period of office, since it was already envisioned in the tourism master plan for 2007–2011 (Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation 2007; see also Scheyvens 2011). It was, however, first implemented during MDP’s tenure of office.
12. However, this is not to suggest that Big Men did not enter the guest house tourism market—quite the contrary in fact. Yet the point is that community tourism altered the tourism industry to the extent that investors with less capital could now, if on smaller scale, take part in it.
13. The MDP was heavily criticized by opposition parties because, it was alleged, five-member councils would increase government expenses for the local administration. Critics argued that this was a system the Maldives could not afford. Yet, as Robinson notes (2015: 72), it was these very critics who had amended the local council bill in parliament to raise the number of council members to five.

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Considering the Island Capital Male' as a Hub for Health-Related Mobilities

Eva-Maria Knoll

INTRODUCTION: FEVERISH CONNECTIONS

Looking through a medical lens at the multidirectional flows and connections that we understand as constituting the Indian Ocean world, we can detect ordinary people (i.e., patients and those supporting them), physicians and other experts, pharmaceuticals, knowledge, *materia medica*, and diseases on the move. Zooming in on diseases from a historical point of view, we recognize that the flourishing long-distance maritime connections resulted in unintended side effects and transfers of risk factors, such as viruses, bacteria, and parasites. Diseases raged on the trading ships and derived from the ships' crews, and conversely ships' crews and travelers caught local diseases on the spot. The Republic of Maldives, nowadays known primarily to the wider public for its upmarket tourism, climate change tragedy, or political turmoil, was in former times of much greater concern from the health-related perspective I have just outlined.

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Over the centuries, historical reports have characterized the Maldives as somewhere best avoided for health reasons—its reputation as a tropical island paradise, by contrast, is barely forty years old. Fourteenth-century traveler Ibn Battuta, for example, was gripped by fever for several weeks at the beginning of his roughly eight months' residence as the royal court's *qadi* in Mahal, today called Male' (cf. Dunn 2005, 232).¹ He had caught so-called *Maldivian fever*, a malady most scholars assume to be what is known today as malaria (Maloney 1980, 398). Battuta was convinced that "every person who goes to that island must inevitably catch the fever" (cited in Vilgon 2001a, 41). Shipwrecked François Pyrard de Laval barely survived the fever attacks when held captive on the Maldives for over five years in the early seventeenth century. Pyrard stressed that the Maldivian fever was "dreaded by traders no less than the currents and reefs" (cited in Bell 1882, 8). Lieutenants Christopher and Young had to prematurely terminate their research sojourn in Male' due to the severe fever both caught shortly after arriving in the mid-1830s (Bell 1882, ii). Dr David Campbell, the surgeon on the East India Company ship *Benares* during her survey of the islands in 1835, suggested that the "noxious influence" of "pestilential vapours" was the cause of various diseases and noted odors that "ought to be taken as a warning to retire" (cited in Vilgon 2001b/IV, 77).

Seven decades before the modern scientific field of medical parasitology identified a parasite as the malady's cause, Campbell and his contemporaries assumed that the foul-smelling stagnant waters in the Maldivian lagoons, swamps, and marshes, interspersed with decaying jungle vegetation, were "generating a poison, or 'Malaria' [*Mala aria*; medieval Italian for 'bad air'] productive of those fevers, when coming in contact with the human body" (ibid., 81). Campbell himself died on the Maldives the year after his report. H.C.P. Bell, Archaeological Commissioner of Ceylon, assigned a subchapter to the "Máldive fever" in his 1882 volume on the archipelago and called the malady an "insidious pest" and a "fatal scourge of the Islands." He reasoned that the Maldivian climate "cannot be considered salubrious even for the natives" and reported that the "unhealthiness for Europeans" of these islands "has become notorious" (Bell 1882, 6–8). It comes as no surprise, then, that the advent of the Maldivian tourism industry coincided with the successful eradication of *Malaria tropicana* between 1972 and 1975 (Firdous et al. 2011; Kundur 2012).

Maldivian fever, however, is not entirely a malady of the past. If we add a genetic lens to our medical gaze, then centuries of Maldivian fever still resonate in the present: The Indian Ocean world becomes recognizable as a space also connected by a genetic mutation in space and time, as I will show.

This chapter reflects “connectivity in motion” by focusing on a contemporary topic and a region neither of which has so far attracted much scholarly attention.² By discussing a care-intensive hereditary blood disorder that is endemic in this part of the world, this chapter will address aspects of health-related mobility in the Indian Ocean³ and the role of the Maldivian capital Male' in it. Male' will be introduced and analyzed as a rapidly changing hub for local, inner archipelagic medical mobility. This aspect of Male' as a central site for domestic connectivity will then be complemented in the chapter's last section by its focus on the long-distance dimensions of medical travel that are also related to this hub. In the end, I shall outline the smooth passages and frictions, destinations, and meanings that result from and shape transnational health-related mobility.

A DEEP STRUCTURE OF BLOOD CONNECTIONS

The legendary Maldivian fever still resonates as an endemic hereditary blood disorder with profound effects on individuals and the overall Maldivian society. The Maldives are located at the center of the so-called thalassemia belt, an area where malaria is or was endemic and where an estimated 4.6 million thalassemia patients live in countries around the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean, and the Pacific (Weatherall and Clegg 2001, 706).⁴ To the west of the Indian Ocean, the prominent neighbor is sickle-cell disease, the second major, and perhaps more familiar, genetic blood disorder, which is endemic in equatorial Africa. Both disorders of the red blood cells have been recognized as an evolutionary adaptation, since carriers of the thalassemia and sickle-cell traits are to some extent protected from the (often lethal) malaria-causing parasite *Plasmodium falciparum* (Weatherall 2010, 28–33). Due to this “beautiful if tragic confirmation of Charles Darwin's principle of evolution through natural selection,” as hematologist David Nathan (1995, 20) put it, the number of carriers in the respective littoral populations has increased over the centuries. Whereas carrying just one defective gene protects against malaria, inheriting two of them (i.e., being homozygous

for the genetic mutation) might require lifelong treatment. Today, the Indian Ocean world is interlinked by the struggle to cope with these hemoglobinopathies through treatment and prevention programs as much as by the genetic mutations *per se*.

Since thalassemia carriers show hardly any symptoms, it is possible for a carrier to be unaware of having inherited a copy of a mutated globin gene with an ensuing probability of passing it on to the next generation. In contrast to carriers, thalassemics, as they call themselves, have inherited not just one but two copies of the mutated gene, one from each carrier parent. The body of a thalassemic produces insufficient amounts of functioning hemoglobin. Since red blood cells are essential to carry oxygen from the lungs to the cells, thalassemics have to fight this severe form of anemia with blood transfusions at two- to three-week intervals. But regular blood transfusions overload the body with iron, and this in turn needs further medical attention. In a nutshell, we are dealing here with a care-intensive and life-threatening blood disorder that is common on the Maldives and beyond, across the entire littoral of the wider Indian Ocean world in diverse variants and intensities. This imposes severe demands on local populations and healthcare systems.

In the late 1980s, thalassemia was recognized as a serious health issue on the Maldives (Firdous 2005, 132), leading the World Health Organization (WHO) to rank the archipelago among the world's thalassemia "hot spots" (Modell et al. 1990, 1170). With 18.1 percent of the population being carriers, the Maldives have one of the world's highest carrier rates for beta-thalassemia (Fucharoen and Winichagoon 2007, 2).⁵ However, this exceptionally high prevalence of nearly one in five Maldivians being a carrier is not entirely due to "nature," that is, not entirely caused by deadly endemic malaria vectors over an evolutionary period. Rather, it is "the continual interactions of biological and social processes across time and space that eventually sediment" into what medical anthropologist Margaret Lock has coined as "local biologies" and "biosocial differentiation" (Lock and Nguyen 2010, 90). Maldivian genomes result from the adaptive interactions between genes and environment as much as from Indian Ocean world migration and tributary and trading connections.

The Maldivian islands form the middle, above-water section of the Chagos-Laccadive Ridge, stretching out for more than 2,300 km along a north-south direction in the central part of the Indian Ocean. In a critical assessment of the charts compiled by G.R. Tibbetts from major Arab

navigational texts and other sources, Andrew D.W. Forbes (1981) argues that medieval Arab shipping often called at Male'. The Maldivian archipelago represents an almost unavoidable maritime passage (Gingrich, this volume) scattered across the direct sea route between Southeast Asia and Southern Arabia and the Red Sea, and the gentle northeastern monsoon allowed for easier navigation through the dangerous reefs on a direct and thus faster route. By consequence, Male' was used (presumably already since pre-Islamic times) as an entrepôt and stopover site on the return route from Southeast Asia to Persia and the Arab Peninsula. Moreover, "following the initial Portuguese assault upon the traditional trade network of the Indian Ocean, much of the indigenous, Muslim-dominated trade of the Malabar region was re-routed via the Maldives" (Forbes and Reynolds 2016).

The Maldivian islanders, in turn, have been dependent on trade connections throughout history since their low-lying tropical coral island environment as such is characterized by a scarcity of resources, poor soils, and space limitations. The *Dhivehin*, as they call themselves, imported staple foods such as rice and other grains, sugar, spices, pots, nails, clothes, and other products for daily use. Even the small but excellent weaving, lacquer, and smithery artisans' industries depended on the import of raw materials.⁶

Genetic surveys have revealed that the Maldivian spectrum of beta-thalassemia gene mutations differs from those in neighboring countries. "Traveling" as genetic stowaways in an intergenerational manner along maritime trading networks or migration routes, some of the prevalent genetic mutations most probably originated in populations of Indians, Indonesians, and Melanesians. Other gene mutations refer to Middle Eastern populations, while yet others derived from Portuguese or Algerian sources (Furuumi et al. 1998, 148–49; cf. Pijpe et al. 2013). In addition to this founder effect of the thalassemia gene mutations, a number of biosocial contributions need to be taken into account to explain the outstanding accumulation of beta-thalassemia carriers in the population and their uneven distribution within the twenty-six Maldivian atolls (Firdous 2005, 134). They include challenging wind and current conditions that have aided or hindered sailing between particular atolls, the traditional Maldivian marriage pattern of island endogamy, and a notably high divorce and remarriage rate (ibid., 132; Fulu 2014, 51–52; Maloney 1995, 5; 1980, 309, 336–37). For medieval Arab shipping, Forbes argues, with reference to Ibn Battuta, the "possibility for

shore leave mid-way on this long voyage” allowed for “forming liaisons, both temporary and permanent, with the Maldivian womenfolk” (Forbes 1981, 80). Battuta reported on the easiness for foreign crews to get married on arrival and get divorced on departure and speaks of a “kind of temporary marriage.” Battuta himself had “four legitimate wives, beside concubines” (*ibid.*).

Management of a blood disorder that is interconnecting generations at the molecular level through genes being passed down according to Mendelian rules comprises care and prevention as the two major fields of intervention and involves a society as a whole. Considerable parts of the public who are not directly affected are involved in, for example, donating blood or bone marrow for thalassemics. In the Maldives as in other developing countries, the procurement of donor blood is organized within the framework of a replacement-in-blood policy. If you need blood, you have to organize a donor. The biweekly organization of matching blood donors or the willingness to regularly donate blood are aspects of acting with limited human resources in a small and developing country’s healthcare landscape that I have discussed elsewhere (Knoll 2017a). An archipelagic setting with a population scattered over hundreds of islands in a vast body of Indian Ocean water thereby is a challenging terrain, both for regular blood transfusions and other treatments in order to keep thalassemics healthy and for preventive population-screening programs aimed at avoiding new cases. The distinctive challenges that “more-water-than-land” habitats present regarding administration, transport, communication, and service delivery to remote areas remain particularly understudied (Warrington and Milne 2007, 416), especially with regard to the focus on connectivity in this volume.

A SMALL CAPITAL ISLAND—FROM SHORE TO SHORE, AND BEYOND

Male’, a port city (Pearson 2003, 30–7) with centuries-old connections to the world, is the capital island of a small coral island state with no hinterland on solid ground. According to Pearson, coral islands are “tiny fragments of land in the ocean” and as such they are “all littoral” (*ibid.*, 38). The major resource of this littoral society today is its high rank among world-renowned long-haul tourism destinations.⁷

The capital island Male' is located near the center of the Maldivian archipelago, a double chain of twenty-six natural atolls comprising about 1,200 islands stretching over 860 km (MPND 2008, 11). Together with a multitude of uninhabited small islands and islets, the archipelago consists of 188 populated so-called administrative islands, together with 128 non-administrative islands reserved for industrial and agricultural use and 109 islands serving as tourist resorts (NBoS 2015a, 6). The waters between them are cruised by 167 safari vessels.⁸

Tourism revenues have contributed significantly to the transformation of the Maldives, a Small Island Developing Country (SIDS), into South Asia's most prosperous country, and eventually—after a delay caused by the 2004 tsunami followed by international aid—to its upgrading from least-developed country (LDC) status in January 2011.⁹ With the exception of coconuts and local fish, almost everything consumed on the Maldives—by approximately 340,000 Maldivians and 64,000 resident foreigners (NBoS 2015a, 11) as well as by over a million tourists per year—has to be imported and distributed, still mostly via Male'. By the time of writing, the Maldives had just one fully operational international airport and three more under construction, while Male' still served to a large extent as the sole hub for the archipelago's airborne and maritime transactions. In 2014, for example, Ibrahim Nasir International Airport handled two million passengers through 99,047 flights (NBoS 2015b, 15). Such a “hub-and-spoke network organization” with “feeder flights” from Male' to the nine local airports in the atolls, and to countless resort destinations operated by the world's largest seaplane fleet, reflects a center-periphery logistic relationship. This is typical for warm water archipelagos with a considerable economic dependence on tourism (Baldacchino and Ferreira 2013, 86–7). It is obvious that transport networks like these also are interacting with the health landscape (Aboobakuru 2014).

The lenticular island of Male' has long been the political, economic, and social center as well as the country's door to the world. The forces of attraction of this singular hub, located on a particular small island, resulted with ensuing consequences on population density, on interaction and exchanges, with their possible effects for health. Referred to as King's or Sultan's Island, Male' was “the emporium both for them [Maldivians] and for foreigners” (Pyrard 1887, 118), the only place where foreign trade was allowed within the framework of conventional quarantine regulations (Bell 1882, 13, 67). Often this trade was subject

to a royal monopoly as, for example, the cowry trade (Hogendorn and Johnson 1986, 85–86). As “the crossroads of the crossroads,” (Neville 1995, 2) with restricted space in combination with population growth and urbanization, the island city of Male’ has time and again come up against its limits. Pyrard describes King’s Island as “the most unhealthy” in the archipelago since it is “the most thickly peopled”—by the living and the dead alike. Pyrard suspected the countless graveyards as the root for Male’s health evil: “the whole island is full of corpses, and the sun, beating down upon the soil, has caused noxious vapours to arise. The water, too, is very bad, wherefore the king is compelled to send, for the use of himself and his house, to a neighbouring island” (Pyrard 1887, 118). Following Pyrard’s observation, H.C.P. Bell (1882, 13) complained about the island’s overpopulation in his 1881 Sessional Papers. At that time, an estimated 2,000 to 3,000 inhabitants were living on the 1.05 square kilometers of Male’ island.

A multidimensional small island hub such as Male’ provided the stage for circulations, translations, and transformations of goods, people, and knowledge among other things. Moreover, these very processes in turn, also transformed the hub itself. Most obvious is the capital’s physical transformation from a small coral island with a fringing reef to a multi-island urban agglomeration. In the 1990s, Adrian Neville (1995, 2) highlighted the uniqueness of Male’ as a capital island among other capitals on islands since “no other capital fills out the island edge to edge, shore to shore.” Due to progressive land reclamations filling up the island’s surrounding lagoons, Male’ was extended to 1.9 square kilometers by 1986 (*ibid.*). With the successive incorporation of the neighboring islands Vilingili (now called Vilimale’) to the west and the island Hulhule’ with its reclaimed appendix Hulhumale’ to the northeast, with the International Airport at one end and a residential area at the other, Male’ has swelled again to about five times its original size. Not included in this calculation of the Greater Male’ area is what is alleged to be the world’s largest, and daily growing, garbage island Thilafushi some five kilometers west of Male’ to which the capital’s waste problem and heavy industries have been outsourced (Naylor 2015, 739). Despite continuous expansion since the 1970s, with 153,904 inhabitants (NBoS 2015a, 17) now living on 5.8 square kilometers, Male’ still ranks among the most densely populated cities in the world, with corresponding environmental and health concerns (Fig. 13.1).



Fig. 13.1 Male' (down right) with its urban satellites Vilingili (in the foreground) and Hulhumale'. In 2015, the most recent completed land reclamation incorporated the island Farukolhufushi (upper left), which until recently was run as a resort island, into the urban capital of the Maldives. At that time the capital already comprised four islands (photograph: E.M. Knoll)

MALE' AND THE ISLANDS: CONSIDERING THE COMPLEXITY OF A MEDICAL HUB

The small, low-lying coral islands of the Maldives make up just 0.33 percent of solid ground within an overall 90,000 square kilometer of sovereign territory (i.e., archipelagic and territorial waters; MPND 2008, 9). Interacting with this outstanding 300:1 sea-to-land ratio, the Maldivian healthcare landscape is organized as a four-tier referral system characterized by remote peripheries, referral hubs, and a center. Health facilities at the peripheral island level refer patients to higher-level facilities with progressively more comprehensive equipment and expertise on the atoll, regional, and central levels successively (Aboobakuru 2014, 18–19; MoH&G 2014, 1). Despite early advances in their decentralization efforts, the Maldives' two referral hospitals at the central level, as well as the majority of specialist laboratories and clinics, are located in the capital Male'. Healthcare in the archipelago's periphery depends on mobility, both on outreach services from Male' and on therapeutic travel by

island patients to Male'. The health landscape thereby corresponds to the general mental map Maldivians have of their archipelago, namely "Male' and the islands." Male' is contrasted with the other islands outside the capital, which are called "the atolls," "the islands," or even "the outer islands."¹⁰

In his analysis of what attracts more and more people from the atolls to migrate to the capital, Maceed M. Zahir (2011) first lists "better medical facilities," followed by better education and better job opportunities. With reference to Male's role as the country's center for service provision, Naylor (2015, 735) speaks of an "institutional overcrowding" of administrative, educational, and medical facilities and of the city as such. In their already cramped living conditions, the residents of Male' get further company in the form of over a million tourists a year and about 100,000 expat workers passing through, as well as *raajje therey meebun* (literally: country inside people, meaning islanders in contrast to Male' residents) visiting Male' for medical purposes, among other reasons. The 2014 census, for example, assumes that the data compiled about the 43 percent of people born in Male' but registered in the islands results from better medical facilities "causing people from other islands to come to Male' to give birth" (NBoS 2015a, 14).

The Maldivian economy, and consequently the Maldivian healthcare system, is tremendously dependent on cross-oceanic mobilities of tourists, labor, patients, goods, and expertise. In Male', health-related mobility within the archipelago intersects with cross-border flows of medical knowledge, health professionals and students, patients, and pharmaceuticals.¹¹ Male's' hospitals and specialized clinics provide the uppermost tier of the country's local health-referral system, while any further referral of patients to health facilities in neighboring countries is also predominately organized via Male' (see, e.g., the ethnographic vignette of Ahmad's son in Wille, this volume). A local healthcare-seeking islander becomes an international medical traveler. According to a survey carried out by the Tourism Ministry in November 2015, 66 percent of Maldivian domestic travel is carried out for medical purposes. This makes medical travel the main reason for domestic travel by the local population in the Maldives. Of these inner archipelagic healthcare seekers, 52 percent were heading toward Male'. This flow of Male'-bound medical travelers is countered by the second major cause of domestic travel among Maldivians, namely the 63 percent of Male' residents who travel for the purpose of "leisure and holidaying" within the archipelago. While Male'-resident pleasure

travelers stay in their own houses, in family houses, or in friend's homes in the islands, the majority of medical travelers from the atolls to Male' stay in rented rooms and, as a result, spend comparatively more money.¹² Accordingly, Male's function as a medical hub, with its relational effects and transformative translations (cf. Schnepel, introduction), became ethnographically visible through private announcements for rooms to rent for medical travelers at convenient distances from medical facilities.

Owing to limited local opportunities, Maldivian students leave to study medicine and other health professions abroad; in the opposite direction, expat medical staff are recruited, arrive, and receive initial training in the capital, some of them then being assigned to island health institutions all over the archipelago. Essential health institutions are located in the capital—the WHO Country Office, the Health Ministry, hospitals, clinics, and NGOs, to name just a few of what medical anthropologist Laurent Pordié (2013) has characterized as “situated nodal points”—institutions through which international networking and transfer of expertise take place. This is also the case regarding the Maldives' engagement with thalassemia.

ON THE PRODUCTION OF GENETIC IDENTITY AND RISKY COUPLEHOOD

An NGO specializing in health education and the only clinic specializing in the management of hemoglobinopathies are the two situated nodal points in Male' where genetic knowledge skills are gathered in interaction with global bodies (such as the Thalassaemia International Federation based in Cyprus), and where genetic knowledge of the local population is produced, translated into lay knowledge, and applied. Here, based on genetic testing and framed by a national population-screening and awareness program, individuals receive their color status—their genetic identity in the form of a laminated card the size of a credit card. Through this *theleseemia caadu* (thalassemia card), responsibility for the management of gene flows literally is handed over to the individual. This colored “somatic individuality” (Novas and Rose 2000, 489–91) is further translated with the help of human pedigrees visualizing the inheritance patterns of the recessive thalassemia genes or with the help of a chart into what Prainsack and Siegal (2006) have called at-risk genetic couplehood. The chart shows genetic identity in six different

colors arranged on X and Y axes. A white card signifies a non-carrier; green, purple, blue, peach, gray, and pink indicate carriers of various hemoglobin gene mutations. A female red-card carrier, for example, and a male with a red, green, or blue card would be informed by this risk assessment and educational tool that they are an “at-risk couple,” indicated by a warning red rectangle at the intersections of the red and red, red and green, or red and blue axes. With reference to the Mendelian laws of inheritance, this couple would be told in a genetic counseling session that they have a 50 percent chance in each pregnancy of having a child who is a carrier (with either a red, green, or blue card), a 25 percent chance of the child being a non-carrier with white-card status, and a 25 percent chance of the least desired outcome: a thalassemic child who has inherited two thalassemia genes. This child’s survival would depend on regular blood transfusions and related treatments.

Since laboratory equipment and expertise for genetic testing and carrier identification are only available in Male’, this kind of genetic risk assessment and risk communication has to be adapted to the archipelagic Maldivian setting. Since 1992, outreach service teams from the local health NGO have been traveling by boat to the islands to provide awareness programs and to collect blood samples from those between twelve and thirty-five years of age (Firdous 2005, 131).¹³ The NGO team usually stays on and continues work the next day on another island; the blood samples, however, have to be transported in a cool box within hours to the laboratory in Male’. This logistically challenging task in an archipelago can be used as a prism to highlight a remarkable form of enhanced connectivity between health-related mobility and tourism mobility in the Maldives.

The logistics of the NGO-launched Maldivian thalassemia prevention program are supported by the tourism infrastructure. Without any intention to downplay justified criticism of the Maldivian tourism sector, there are also creative frictions in tourism–health encounters, as this example shows. It emphasizes coral island and (tourism) infrastructure in relation to human agency (Sheller 2011, 3) and thus reveals the creativity of “frictions” in the organization of multiple flows: that is, the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of “interconnection across difference” (Tsing 2004, 4). Speedboats and seaplanes now and then not only take thalassemic patients for treatment, but also blood samples for genetic testing free of charge on their routes circulating tourists between resort islands and the international airport in Male’. And it is not just blood samples that are on the move from the periphery to Male’ for

preventive genetic testing. In order to fulfill the biopolitical requirement of premarital genetic testing, prospective couples from the islands hurry to Male' (whether by boat or plane, but so far at their own cost) when they do not know their carrier status. This is why some soon-to-be-married couples arrive in a rush at Male's two genetic testing laboratories just days before the wedding, and why the NGO-based laboratory has regular genetic-testing fees, alongside somewhat higher fees for express services. For some of these Maldivian couples, however, Male' will *not* be the final destination but merely one stepping stone in thalassemia prevention.

The chances of two carriers getting married are comparatively high on the Maldives. A love marriage system (Maloney 1980, 309) with the traditionally high divorce and remarriage rates mentioned above raises the probability of matching two carriers with each other in a population where one in five is a thalassemia carrier from the outset. If you have fallen in love with someone with "the wrong color" of *theleseemia caadu* and you neither want to give up the relationship nor stay childless, then more travel is advised to avoid having a thalassemic child with a painful and often short life. Advanced prenatal genetic-testing procedures for the unborn such as chorionic villus sampling (of the placental tissue at the tenth to twelfth week of gestation) or amniocentesis (carried out with the amniotic fluid between the sixteenth and the twenty-second week) have been permitted by a *fatwa* since 1999 (Firdous et al. 2011, 175) but are not available yet in the Maldives. Some expectant at-risk Maldivian couples thus join the pronounced flow of outbound Maldivian medical travelers across the Indian Ocean (see Knoll 2017b).

HURDLES, PATHWAYS, AND CONVENIENT DESTINATIONS IN CROSS-OCEANIC MEDICAL TRAVEL

Two major medical travel routes lead from Male' to India and Sri Lanka.¹⁴ Reaffirming some traditional trading and tributary routes and connections (cf. Didi 1949, 32–39; Hogendorn and Johnson 1986, 66, 87; Maloney 1980, 107–30; Pyard 1887, 227–22), medical travelers follow contemporary medical pathways smoothed by political agreements, public funding, and by Maldivian expat communities as points of contact.

Health is one of the five agreed areas of cooperation within the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). The Maldives cooperation agreements—most prominently with India and Sri Lanka—cover the recruitment of medical staff to the Maldives, places for Maldivian medicine students at foreign universities, and the procurement of pharmaceuticals. Since a visa is not needed or granted on arrival, medical travel is easy for Maldivians within SAARC nations. The situation changed, however, when the Maldivian government canceled a contract for the operation and extension of Male' International Airport with a major Indian infrastructure corporation in 2012, and India responded, among other things, with the introduction of “medical visas,” which for a brief period were difficult to get in Male'.¹⁵ This politically tense situation intensified when the Maldivian government signed contracts for the airport and other major construction projects, such as the prestigious 1.4-kilometer bridge connecting Male' to the neighboring airport island Hulhule', with Chinese contractors, thus integrating itself into China's “New Maritime Silk Road Vision.”¹⁶ After the Seychelles, the Maldives is the second smallest sovereign state in the Indian Ocean. The islands' geopolitically strategic and economically attractive position exposes the small republic to competition in various respects between these two competing Asian powers in the Indian Ocean, with some repercussions for the Maldives' complex health-related mobilities.

For the average Maldivian, pecuniary obstacles to medical travel have significantly eased in recent years. Thanks to revenues from the flourishing tourism, construction, and fishing industries, what was previously reserved for the wealthy has become a mass phenomenon. Today, patient mobility is covered by Aasandha, the Maldives' first general health-insurance scheme, established in 2012. The information displayed on Aasandha's web page in September 2014 showed “medical treatment overseas” as the dominant issue. Aasandha covers patient referrals to India and Sri Lanka on two conditions: first, if the treatment is not available in the Maldives; and secondly, if the patient has a prescription for this kind of treatment from a certified specialist doctor. Most specialist doctors authorized to issue such prescriptions (e.g., cardiologists or oncologists) are located at higher levels of the referral system, the majority being in Male'. Aasandha covers treatment costs abroad (including operations, pre- and postoperation checkup, and medical aids such as bandages and crutches), travel costs up to four economy flights per year, and even travel costs for accompanying persons. An additional four

tickets for accompanying persons are covered if the patient is under nineteen, over sixty five, or bedridden. For all other patients, companionship travel is only covered for the first trip. Aasandha, and not the patient, selects the medical travel destination and the treatment package based on economic criteria.¹⁷

Alongside the regional cooperations and financial coverage of medical travel along traditional trading routes, mentioned above, geographical and cultural vicinity, and the prospect that the destination will provide some kind of familiarity, also contribute to making India and Sri Lanka convenient destinations for Maldivian transnational medical mobility. Health-centered connections have generated pathways and resulted in a kind of therapeutic-travel-community-settlement in the vicinity of the Maldives. India and Sri Lanka are traditionally well-known foreign places for Maldivians (Maloney 1980, 108–109). They were ranked first and second in an old “unofficial list of safe countries” for Maldivian navigators (Romero-Frias 2003, 288). From about the late 1980s, more Maldivian families gravitated to medical and educational options abroad and started living in Colombo, Singapore, and Madras. Consistent with and revitalizing and modifying traditional trading routes and related settlements, and enhanced by the tourism-induced establishment of regular air services, contemporary medically related Maldivian expat communities have developed in the areas around Lanka Hospital in Colombo and around the Medical College in Trivandrum.¹⁸ These Maldivian communities allow easy docking for Maldivian medical travelers by bridging the tension between mobility and mooring (cf. Hannam et al. 2006). From this perspective, parts of India and Sri Lanka can be considered a medically related “foreland” (Pearson 2003, 31) of the Maldives, an area of the overseas world linked through patient traffic. Unverified estimates speak of approximately 5,000 people at each location. What seems a small figure would, in fact, amount to about 1.3 percent of the Maldivian population.

Since we know almost nothing about these communities, this chapter also serves to map out a research agenda for a fuller exploration of the roles the Maldivian “medical exile communities,” as one informant has called them, play in Indian Ocean medical connectivity.

Medical transnationalism is conspicuous in the streets around the Medical College in Trivandrum, with many signs in Dhivehi written in Thaana, the Maldivian language and script: Pharmacies advertise English (i.e., biomedical) and Ayurvedic medicines, and billboards advertise the

services of clinics, doctors, opticians, and pharmacies, as well as treatments and drugs. Furthermore, in this area, the Maldivian healthcare seeker will find everything else needed for a medical stay advertised in Dhivehi, such as accommodation and Maldivian cuisine. The Trivandrum Maldivian expat community has evolved by and for Maldivians seeking medical services and also educational options that are not available in the archipelago, as well as by Maldivians doing business in catering services for Maldivian medical tourists.¹⁹

AN EMERGING MALDIVIAN MEDICAL TRAVEL CULTURE

Medical travel is situated at the crossroads of some of the major forms of contemporary mobilities characterized by John Urry (2007, 10–11), such as migration, medical travel, tourism, and family visits. Accordingly, medical travel is a human mobility practice that overlaps with other activities. Moreover, a Maldivian patient hardly ever travels alone. Mostly, a party of several family members crosses the ocean together in order to spend what we might call “multipurpose time abroad.” The time spent abroad ranges from a few days to several weeks, or even months, and within this time frame, people combine activities such as vacationing, business, education, shopping, visiting relatives, and seeking medical services of various kinds. The health referral system of a SIDS with a small population dispersed in an archipelago makes health-related mobility (within and beyond it) almost a necessity. In addition, health facilities abroad are considered by many to be of better quality. Moreover, since biomedical care had been a privilege of the elite until the late 1980s medical travel also has a certain prestige. Social insurance coverage has made patient mobility accessible to a wider range of the population. Crossing the Indian Ocean for medical reasons has become a self-evident, intrinsic part of the medical landscape and thus of everyday Maldivian life and popular culture (Knoll 2017b). A story from a schoolbook for Maldivian first-graders illustrates this in the following final section.

Renarrated here in shortened form, the schoolbook story (Maniku 2011) starts with a drawing of a tiger in agony. According to the accompanying line in Thaana script, the tiger is crying because his belly hurts. Thereupon all the animals agree that the tiger should get treatment. So the fly and the heron take the tiger to a country called “Minikaa,” flying “Minikaa Airlines.” The following drawings in the schoolbook show the

hospital where Anesthetist Dr. Mouse and Surgeon Dr. Squirrel perform an operation with the help of Nurse Rabbit and take a big nail out of the tiger's belly. The final picture and the text has the tiger back in the Maldives, without pain and living happily ever after among the other animals.

The schoolbook tiger's medical journey to Minikaa opens an ethnographic window onto the self-understanding of contemporary medical connections in this part of the Indian Ocean. It also reveals aspects of connectivity between contemporary patient mobility and traditional folklore. Taking a plane trip, the tiger's medical travel party takes the preferred though expensive vehicle of choice in cross-border travel rather than a slow ferryboat. The English term "airline" is written in Thaana script on the plane in the drawing. The Dhivehi term for a plane, *mathindhaa boatu*—the above, on-the-top-going boat—is not used in the text. The gray heron, which accompanies the tiger patient together with the fly as caregivers, is a prominent and respectable figure in Maldivian folklore (Romero-Frias 2003, note 163). Even the tiger, though not indigenous in the Maldives, is—probably owing to trading and migration relations to India—a main figure in some local stories (ibid., 28, 93, 273–74; 2012, xxxi–xxxii).²⁰

According to medical anthropologist Beth Kangas (2007, 293), although medical travel is "perhaps an attractive option in today's global world, the use of medical services abroad affects local perceptions." Patient mobility "fosters the hope that a cure exists somewhere in the world" (e.g., for cancer) and "it perpetuates a lack of trust in local capabilities." In a SIDS with a small, dispersed population, patient mobility is an obvious response to health inequalities. In the Maldives, however, patient mobility is also fueled by mistrust, and this in turn is entangled with the mobility of health professionals. Since the Maldivian population itself is too small to provide enough trained medical personnel, the country's medical system is significantly dependent on a foreign workforce. By 2010, expatriates among general practitioners and specialist doctors amounted to 55 percent in Male' and 98 percent on the atolls (MoH 2013, 55–6). Many of the incoming, often young medical graduates from SAARC countries I have talked to plan to work for just a few years on the Maldives, earn comparatively good money, specialize in a medical field, and in this way filling the waiting time for a desired hospital position in their country of origin. However, a fair proportion of them leave after one year or even earlier, frustrated by inconvenient working and

living conditions (either in the crowded capital or on what for outsiders might be a claustrophobically small outer island), and sometimes also by social isolation and negative experiences with arrogant and unfriendly Maldivian patients. The result is a high turnover of expat health personnel, transforming Male' into a rotating door for a fluctuating expat medical workforce. This, in turn, fuels the mistrust of Maldivian patients toward the domestic healthcare system and propels medical travel activities to cross-border destinations.

CONCLUSIONS

Using the example of Male's engagement with thalassemia, this chapter has discussed human suffering, risk assessment, and healing practices as entangled in Indian Ocean mobility and connectivity in manifold ways. While jeopardized in historical times by Maldivian fever, health has become one among many driving forces in mobility and connectivity in the Maldives in recent decades. Through the example of the prevalent hereditary blood disorder thalassemia, I have introduced health-related mobility as a broad field of biosocial relations that can add historical and contemporary aspects of "connectivity in motion" to Indian Ocean research. The contemporary field of transformative health-related mobility discussed here comprised transformative genes, mobile patients, accompanying family and caregivers, malaria vectors, blood samples, knowledge, and health personnel. The notion of "situated nodal points" has helped to characterize Male's patterns of connectivity in their medical dimensions for this case.

The struggle with inherited gene mutations connects the Indian Ocean littoral to a thalassemia belt where people share a pressing health issue and efforts to deal with it. Inherited blood disorders have profound effects on individuals and societies in the Indian Ocean, including national management and prevention programs. Accordingly, the first Pan-Asian Conference on Haemoglobinopathies was held in Thailand in 2012, and a second in Hanoi in 2015. Prevention efforts result in novel genetic identity formations and influence marriage strategies and the reproductive decisions of individuals, while treatment requirements connect thalassemics and blood donors. Hemoglobinopathies have become an intrinsic part of the oceanic health topography codetermining contemporary everyday life, somehow akin to what Pearson (2003, 13–25)—in rendering homage to Fernand Braudel—identifies as the

Indian Ocean world's irresistible framework of climate, monsoon winds, tides, and currents. Consequently, I would suggest to include hereditary blood disorders (above all thalassemia and sickle-cell anemia) within the contemporary "deep structure" of the Indian Ocean world. Pearson's climatic deep-structure elements lost much of their force in the steam engine era, but regained their socioeconomic significance to some extent as touristic seasons within recent decades. As disorders of the genetic area hemoglobinopathies identified as life circumstances to be dealt with have only lately entered the stage of the Indian Ocean world.

The ubiquitous tension between moving and staying in medical travel was addressed by the ethnographic vignette of Maldivian expat communities catering for Maldivian medical travelers in referral destinations. Health-related mobilities have thus become recognizable not only as a result, but also as a structure and a driving force. In this context, the port city of Male' has become visible in its double function as the hub for inner archipelagic mobility and cross-border connections—both, in fact, as movements across Indian Ocean waters. Through the lens of medical anthropology, we thus recognize the Indian Ocean as the conveyor both of genetic mutations and other diseases, disorders and malaises as well as of hope, healthcare, and medical and biotechnological skills transforming bodies, societies, and locations alike.

NOTES

1. On the different lines of interpretation on the duration of Ibn Battuta's sojourn on the Maldives, see Dunn (2005, 240).
2. I am grateful to the Male' Health Service Corporation Ltd., Maldivian Blood Services; and to Maldivian Thalassaemia Society and Society for Health Education, the two central NGOs in this field. I would also like to thank my research partners in the Maldives and Mehmet Emir, Andre Gingrich, Martin Knoll, Xavier Romero-Frias, Iain Walker, Boris Wille, and the editors for their valued comments on earlier drafts of this chapter and for other forms of assistance.
3. Pioneering compiling work provide Anna Winterbottom and Facil Tesfaye (2015) with a focus on medicine in the Indian Ocean world and Cliff et al. (2007) on island epidemiology.
4. The term "thalassemia" refers to a group of inherited blood disorders affecting the production of the proteins needed to form hemoglobin. The production and synthesis of hemoglobin is controlled by alpha-genes

- (on chromosome 16) and non-alpha-genes (including beta-genes, on chromosome 11) (Eleftheriou 2007, 9–17).
5. Various hemoglobin gene mutations are endemic in the Maldives. Prevention programs screen for alpha- and beta-thalassemia, hemoglobin E and D, and sickle-cell carriers.
 6. For further information on Maldivian migration, tribute, and trade connections, see e.g., Maloney (1995), Mohamed (2008), Pearson (2012), Romero-Frias (2003, 11–19), for the trade in cowries, see Hogendorn and Johnson (1986), for the trade in dry fish to Ceylon, see Didi (1949), and for the role (and expulsion) of the Ismaili Bohra traders in (and from) Male', see Forbes and Reynolds (2016).
 7. Due to upmarket tourism and population pressure, land in the form of tiny coral islands is heavily contested in the Maldives and serves as a medium for the accumulation of wealth and influence (see Wille, this volume).
 8. Ministry of Tourism 2015, "Tourist Arrival to the Maldives Declines in January 2015." <http://tourism.gov.mv/news/tourist-arrival-maldives-declines-january-2015/>, accessed February 20, 2015.
 9. In 2014, the Maldivian economy was ranked by the World Bank as the only "upper-middle-income economy" (i.e., \$4,086 to \$12,615 GNI [gross national income] per capita) within the South Asia category comprising eight developing countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives): http://data.world-bank.org/about/country-and-lending-groups#Lower_middle_income, accessed June 20, 2014.
 10. The spatial organization of archipelagos into a sociopolitical and economic center and dependent "outer islands" with a strong emphasis on the rather cosmopolitan center (cf. Bethel 2000) is well documented for Indonesia (cf. Lukas 2002).
 11. I concentrate here on biomedical treatment for Maldivian citizens in the twenty-first century. Spa facilities and biomedical care offered on island resorts (Knoll 2014), elements of medical pluralism, including Maldivian herbal medicine and magical practices, and the exchange within and beyond the major medical systems in the Indian Ocean are outside the scope of this chapter.
 12. Haveeru online, March 1, 2016. http://www.haveeru.com.mv/domestic_travel/66947, accessed March 1, 2016.
 13. I am focusing here on the outreach services set up in the early 1990s by the oldest and most established health NGO in the Maldives. Due to limited NGO budgets, these outreach services actively sought cooperation with the tourism industry. By the beginning of 2015, Maldivian Blood

Services (MBS) had started with so-called Awareness Campaigns, an additional outreach service.

14. In 2012, about 50 percent of India's medical tourists arrived from neighboring countries. The Maldives accounted for 17 percent of arrivals, second after Bangladesh with 22 percent (KPMG 2014, 18–19). In February 2016, India held the first four-day Indian Health Expo in the Maldives, at the Dharubaaruge, Male's convention center, with the participation of eighteen Indian health institutions, including widely respected names such as Apollo Hospitals, Ananthapuri Hospitals, Manipal Hospitals, NU Hospitals, and Rajan Dental.
15. "GMR Fiasco Apart, India Will Continue as Benign Neighbour." *The Hindu*, New Delhi, January 21, 2013. <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/gmr-fiasco-apart-india-will-continue-as-benign-neighbour/article>, accessed January 25, 2013.
16. Cf. <http://thediplomat.com/2014/09/china-pushes-maritime-silk-road-in-south-southeast-asia/>; http://www.ciis.org.cn/english/2014-09/15/content_7231376.htm, accessed October 15, 2014.
17. All information from www.aasandha.mv, accessed September 15, 2014.
18. Kerala Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS) is another Trivandrum hospital often frequented by Maldivians. KIMS offers International Patient Services, with an airport pickup service, the handling of visa formalities, and ticket booking and reconfirmation, a currency exchange desk, and a separate care center exclusively for foreign patients. According to the KIMS Web page, foreign patient traffic increased from 752 foreign patients in 2003 to 27,734 foreign patients in 2007, most of them from the Maldives (<http://www.kimskerala.com>, accessed October 21, 2014).
19. Some corners of Trivandrum are almost reminiscent of Maliku (Minicoy), the southernmost island of India's Lakshadweep islands, where one is also surrounded by the Maldivian language and script, since culturally Maliku belongs to the Maldives (Kattner 1996).
20. In this case, the therapeutic travel party does not head to India or Sri Lanka, but to *Minikaa Raajje*, an imaginary place prominent in traditional Maldivian folktales as the Kingdom of Cannibals (Romero-Frias 2003, 133–35, 288). Geographically, this refers to the Andaman Islands, previously considered a "wild place" at the bottom of the "unofficial list of safe countries" for Maldivian navigators mentioned above (ibid., 288). Anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown (1922, 8) once tried to alter this widespread reputation. More recently, however, Minikaa Raajje has lost its anchorage in the geography of the Andaman Sea; instead, it has become the archetype for any imagined alien country in contemporary Maldivian children's stories and folktales.

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PART IV

Case Studies: South and Southeast Asia

From Salsette to Socotra: Islands across the Seas and Implications for Heritage

Himanshu Prabha Ray

Historians trace the beginnings of the writing of national histories to the rise of nationalism in Europe in the nineteenth century and its transference to Asia as European powers colonized large parts of the continent. Within this narrative of the terrestrial histories of nation-states, maritime accounts often become an extension of land-based concerns (Ray 2011). A paradigm shift to understanding the history of the sea destabilizes the linear mapping of time and the chronologies of political dynasties and empires. The fluidity of seascapes, transnational narratives, and migrations challenges the sanctity of borders and of terrestrial accounts of the past. The focus shifts from rootedness in the soil to routes and intertwined histories of overlapping spaces. “For indicating the maritime world is not merely to add islands, fisheries and sea journeys to the equation, it is also to query the territorial premises of understanding” (Chambers 2016). Taking a cue from “Maritime Criticism and Lessons from the Sea”, proposed by Iain Chambers in his keynote address at the Hydrarchy Symposium held at Cairo in January 2012,

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this chapter shifts the focus from studying islands located along trade networks to the intertwined history of the cultural route from the west coast of India to the mouth of the Red Sea and analyzes the seafarers on this route and the cultural assemblages of the early centuries of the Common Era that survive. This shift entails re-establishing the centrality of the sea and viewing it not merely as a space that permits movement, but as a site of intertwined cultural encounters and shared experiences. This is expressed through the medium of writing in a common script and language, such as inscriptions in the Brahmi script discussed later. The sea then becomes the site of crisscrossing surfaces that need to be articulated through histories of material remains found at archaeological sites. This chapter takes as its starting point a cultural route in antiquity that connected two islands, viz. Salsette and Socotra, in the Indian Ocean world of islands and discusses their linkages and interconnections through diverse perspectives: first, island imaginaries or ways in which islands were imagined and written about in early texts; and secondly, through a discussion of natural and man-made features such as caves on these islands. The larger issue that this chapter addresses is the extent to which this shift from understanding islands as “hubs” of maritime exchanges to projecting transnational cultural routes as heterotopic spaces that underwrite UNESCO’s World Heritage Convention of 1972 would impact the preservation and protection of a plural understanding of the past and its legacy in a postcolonial globalized world. The idea of “routes as World Heritage Sites” was initiated in November 1994 during the UNESCO Meeting at Madrid on “Routes as Part of our Cultural Heritage.” Academic research in support of this premise would no doubt reinforce recognition of the heritage of cultural routes and the need to include them in academic discourses of the seas.

In the history of the Indian Ocean, islands were important nodal points where different cultures came into contact. At the same time, they were filters through which these cultures permeated into hinterlands, and it is here that architectural features and inscriptions are indicators of human activity. As discussed by Jack Goody, writing facilitated the storing of information, while cumulative knowledge promoted new genres of cultural and artistic expression and aided the ordering of information under numeric and alphabetic heads and the use of maps (Goody 2001, 144).

I start the chapter with a brief discussion of the cultural route that linked the west coast of India with islands at the mouth of the Red Sea

and then move on to a survey of the early literature, including inscriptions that help explain how islands were visualized. The next section deals with cultural assemblages and caves, both man-made and natural, on the islands of Salsette and Socotra. This analysis raises larger issues of connectivity both between islands and between them and the mainland, as well as the seminal role of islands as physical spaces for territorializing religious beliefs and ideas that then spread across the seas. How does the focus on cultural routes provide a different perspective from the history of the sea? The final section shifts to the postcolonial “present” and the need to move beyond colonial legacies of “national heritage” to discuss cultural routes as transnational spaces. I continue this chapter with a discussion of cultural routes as indicated in the first-century CE Greek text, the *Periplus Maris Erythraei*.

CULTURAL ROUTES AND MARITIME LANDSCAPES

In his study of *Dhow Cultures of the Indian Ocean*, Abdul Sheriff has identified several peaks in trading activity starting from the third–second millennium BCE maritime contacts between centers in the Persian Gulf and Gujarat, as well as the mouth of the Indus (Sheriff 2010, 131, 133, 139). By the beginning of the Common Era, these connections had expanded to include almost the entire western Indian Ocean, including the island of Socotra, as is evident from the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* of an anonymous writer (see Ray 2003). The Persian Gulf, however, is one region that continues to be somewhat neglected and that reflects a blind spot of early Greek writing.

The Erythraean Sea is the name by which Graeco-Roman writers referred to the more northerly reaches of the Indian Ocean, including the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea, and the Gulfs of Aden and Arabia. According to the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (Casson 1989, section 13.1.1–4), a text that is unique not only in the corpus of Greek writings, but also within the domain of historical literature on the Indian Ocean, the Egyptian ports of Myos Hormos and Berenike were both the starting points and the final destinations of routes across the western Indian Ocean. The town of Berenike was founded in the first half of the third century BCE and was abandoned before about 550 CE—thus enjoying an extraordinary life span of eight hundred years (Sidebotham 2011). It is located at the boundary of the Red Sea and the Eastern Desert on an extinct coral reef, covering an area of about 300–350

meters north–south and 670 meters east–west. The site is unique in other ways as well, as the arid climate has enabled the preservation of organic remains. As a result, archaeologists have unearthed vast quantities of not easily available organic material in ten seasons of fieldwork.

Berenike was a multicultural site, its inhabitants coming from throughout the ancient world, including Egypt, the Mediterranean, Axum, sub-Saharan Africa, south Arabia, Nabataea, Palmyra, and perhaps India. Tamil Brahmi inscriptions were found on the base of a pot which is of Levantine origin and read *Kanan*, *Catan*. Two *ostraka*, best translated as inscribed potsherds, were inscribed in Prakrit and Tamil, while an amphora fragment carried a Tamil inscription. Ceramic sherds from the site of Berenike were inscribed in twelve different languages, though Greek was the lingua franca in early Roman times, and most texts are in that language. *Ostraka* found in the city indicate a substantial Roman military presence. The Nikanor Archive belonging to a family of camel-owners involved in the transport of goods between the Nile valley and the Red Sea coast indicates the participation of elite families resident in Egypt in trading activity, thus making it difficult to ascertain direct Roman official involvement (Sidebotham 2011, 70). Overall, this Red Sea–Indian Ocean commerce seems to have been freewheeling, and one that included barter (ibid., 249).

A careful analysis of the ceramics shows that the coastal centers on the Red Sea had specific trading partners across the ocean. Thus, while Berenike overlying an extinct coral reef provides little evidence for contact with the Persian Gulf and south Arabia, this was not the case with Myos Hormos further north on the Red Sea coast, which provides confirmation of contact with south Arabia. This raises the issue of trading partners from specific centers sailing along well-defined routes and changes in these over time. From the Red Sea, one route went from Muza, located at the mouth of the Red Sea, to the coast of Somalia and Horn of Africa and further south along the coast of Azania. Rhapta was the last port of call on the Azanian coast, beyond which was the western sea. The *Periplus* provides an interesting account of sewn boats and methods of fishing at Menuthias, identified with Zanzibar (Casson 1989, section 7.1).

A second route proceeded along the south Arabian coast to reach centers at the mouth of the Indus and Gujarat and further down on the Malabar coast. A comparative analysis of commodities traded along the east African, Arabian, and Indian coasts shows that the

west coast of India provided the greatest variety of goods. While East Africa yielded ivory, tortoiseshell, frankincense, myrrh, and various grades of cassis, the products of the Arabian coast were restricted to frankincense, myrrh, and aloe. In contrast, the Indian coast provided spices, medicinal and aromatic plants, gems, textiles, both cotton and silk, dyes such as indigo, grain, rice, sesame oil, ghee, ivory, pearls, and tortoiseshell (ibid., sections 39–61).

The author refers to an island in the open sea off the Hadhramaut coast called Dioscurides or Socotra. “Though very large, it is barren and also damp, with rivers, crocodiles, a great many vipers, and huge lizards. ... the inhabitants, few in number, live on one side of the island, that to the north, the part facing the mainland; they are settlers, a mixture of Arabs and Indians and even some Greeks who sail out of there to trade” (ibid., section 30). Shippers from Muza or Qana stopped at the island, as also those from Bharuch or Barygaza and from the Malabar coast or Limyrike. On the island of Socotra, at the mouth of the Red Sea, grain, rice, cotton cloth, and female slaves could be picked up, although the author also mentions that kings from the Arabian mainland had leased it out and that it was under guard (ibid., section 31).

It is owing to the importance of trade with the Indian coast that the *Periplus* provides graphic descriptions of entry into the different harbors and landfall at several centers. For example, entry into the River Indus, known for its seven mouths, narrow, and full of shallows, is indicated by changes to the color of the water and the sea snakes that emerge from the depths. The Rann of Kutch is described as consisting of bodies of water with shoals and shallow eddies, as a result of which the land is scarcely visible and vessels run the risk of being grounded. The gulf of Barygaza or the present-day Gulf of Khambhat is described as being too narrow and difficult for vessels coming from the seaward to negotiate, while the mouth of the river [Narmada] on which Barygaza is located is hard to find because the land is low and the structures are not clearly visible (ibid., section 43).

These graphic accounts resonate with descriptions of the west coast in later texts and the problems associated with navigating this stretch. However, the *Periplus* is somewhat ambiguous when describing islands on the west coast of India. Beyond the Gulf of Kachchh, it refers to the Gulf called Barake, “which itself embraces seven islands. Ships around its entrance that blunder in and then pull back the short distance into open water, escape; those that get closed inside the basin of Barake

get destroyed” (ibid., section 40). Clearly, the approach into the seven islands was not easy to navigate.

ISLAND IMAGINERIES

In this section, the focus shifts from early Greek writing to accounts of islands as visualized in Buddhist and Puranic cosmologies, the most pertinent of these being the *dvipa* or island of Jambudvīpa, which is often contrasted in early Buddhist texts with Sihaladīpa or Sri Lanka. Early Sanskrit literature, such as the Vedic texts, does not refer to Jambudvīpa; nor does the fifth–fourth-century BCE Sanskrit grammarian Panini, though he mentions the *jambu* tree, while the somewhat later *Arthashastra* alludes to the *jambu* river, which is mentioned as a source of gold (Olivelle 2013, 462). Thus, early Buddhist canonical works provide the earliest reference to the island called Jambudvīpa (Jambudīpa) (Malalasekera 2003, 940–1), its name being derived from the *jambu* tree which grew there, having a height of one hundred *yojanas* (each *yojana* roughly equaling 1.6 kilometers), a trunk fifteen *yojanas* in girth with outspreading branches fifty *yojanas* in length, whose shade extended to one hundred *yojanas*. In Buddhist texts, Jambudvīpa or the island of the *jambu* tree is the southernmost of the four islands/continents where human beings reside in this world. At the center of Jambudvīpa is found the Vajrasana (“diamond seat”), the spot where the Buddhas realize their enlightenment; hence, Jambudvīpa is always the continent where Buddhas spend their final lifetimes establishing their dispensations and is therefore the most auspicious site for beings to assume rebirth (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 946). Alternatively, in Puranic cosmology, Jambudvīpa is said to be at the center of the seven islands that surround Mt. Sumeru. The entire cosmos is divided into seven concentric island/continents (*sapta-dvīpa vasumati*) separated by the seven encircling oceans, each double the size of the preceding one (going outwards). Jambudvīpa is also a name used for the Indian subcontinent in early epigraphic sources, such as the third-century BCE minor rock edicts of Asoka at Brahmagiri, which refer to Jambudvīpa or the “island of the Jambu tree,” and the same term occurs in the *Mahabharata* (VI 12,1 and VI 8,19).

However, scholars are divided on the identification of the *jambu* tree (Nugteren 2005, 81), though the sacred nature of the tree was not in doubt, as is evident from a relief from the Buddhist monastic site of Bharhut in central India that is labeled *jabu naḍode pavate*, “the jambu

tree on Mt. Naḍoda,” showing two arms of a tree-spirit extending from the tree to offer a “bowl” of food and a vessel of water (Luders 1963, 17). Dominik Wujastyk (2004) identifies it as Jambul or Black Plum, while traditionally it is seen to refer to the rose-apple tree (*Eugenia jambolana*), a tree native to Southeast Asia. Michael Meister, on the other hand, identifies *jambu* with the jackfruit on the basis of sculptural representations at early Buddhist monastic centers (Meister 2009). The jackfruit is indigenous to the rainforests of the Western Ghats of India and is the largest tree-borne fruit in the world. It is no coincidence that some of the earliest Buddhist architecture at sites in peninsular India included a series of rock-cut caves excavated along passes in the Western Ghats. The coastal orientation of many of the third-century BCE edicts of the Mauryan king Aśoka and the differential development of centers along the coasts as compared to those located in the inland region has been discussed elsewhere and need not be repeated here (see Ray 2006).

The adoption of the name of the sacred *jambu* tree for the central island of Buddhist cosmology indicates a change in the relationship with the seas in the Mauryan period and an increasing engagement with waters surrounding settled areas. Maritime voyages in the early centuries of the Common Era were regarded as profitable ventures, and Buddhist literature describes a variety of social groups who were involved (*Jatakas*, Book I, no.4; Book X, nos. 439, 442; Book XI, no. 463; Book XVI, no. 528). In addition to merchants, there are references to princes who traveled across the seas to make money (*Jatakas*, Book XXI, no. 539). The prosperity and status of these mariners is evident from the donations they made to Buddhist monastic establishments and recorded in the inscriptions of the Early Historic period.

This shift toward a more sea-friendly view in Mauryan times is further corroborated by inscriptions from Buddhist sites, such as at Nasik in the western Deccan. Locally known as Pandu Lena on account of the association of the site with the Pandavas of the *Ramayana*, the caves are cut into one of the three isolated hills called Trirasmī in the inscriptions, about sixty-seventy meters above the level of the plain below. They are situated at a distance of eight kilometers from the town of Nasik on the river Godavari and are connected to the west coast through the Thalghat, a pass in the Sahyadri range. The region around Nasik was occupied as early as the prehistoric period, and settlement there is known to have continued. The earliest cave to be excavated in the hill range at Nasik was not a shrine, but a residence or *vihāra* 19, which carries an

inscription indicating that the cave was excavated when Kanha or Krishna was king. Krishna has been identified as one of the earliest kings of the Satavahana dynasty controlling the Deccan from the first century BCE to the third century CE. Nagaraju dates the cutting of caves at Nasik to the rule of this dynasty (Nagaraju 1981, 279).

By the second–first centuries BCE, royal inscriptions initiate the practice of defining the land that was under the control of the king. Thus, the record of Balasiri, mother of Gotamiputa Siri Satakani at Nasik, while recording the gift of a cave to the Buddhist Sangha, also contains a eulogy to her son Gautamiputa, whose honorific titles claim his sovereignty over a vast territory stretching until the three oceans. This is a practice that continues into later periods.

It is significant that inscriptions mentioning the caves refer to the hill of Kanhagiri or Kanhasela (Gokhale 1991, cave no. 26, inscription no. 27; cave no. 98, inscription no. 54; cave no. 101, inscription no. 57), where they are located, rather than the fact of the site being an island. Most of the caves at Kanheri are located in small clusters between sixty and ninety meters above the surrounding plain (Nagaraju 1981, 190). The caves are carved in three different hills with a stream flowing between them. Almost every cell contained a *podbi* or cistern where rainwater from the top of the hill was collected, and at least ten of the inscriptions record donations of cisterns, tanks, and bodies of water.

Another association prominently represented in early Buddhist texts and of relevance to this discussion is with caves. Phyllis Granoff (2013) has analyzed the issue with reference to both Buddhist and Hindu textual sources and makes a distinction between natural caves, which are often described as fearful places of demonic forces, and ornate man-made caves considered to be worthy residences of the divine, as, for example, the elaborately sculpted divine Indasala Cave, where the king of the gods Inda or Indra visited the meditating Buddha.

James Fergusson surveyed many of the rock-cut caves in the western Deccan from 1836 to 1842 and presented the results of his survey to the Royal Asiatic Society in 1843. At his behest, the Government of Bombay constituted the Bombay Cave Temple Commission in 1850 to investigate the history of the rock-cut caves and to take measures for their preservation. In 1909, after promulgation of the Ancient Monuments Protection Act of 1904, the caves were declared to be nationally protected monuments and placed under the care of the Archaeological Survey of India. From these early beginnings in the nineteenth century,

the study of rock-cut caves in the western Deccan has come a long way. In the next section, I focus on patronage provided to the Buddhist monastic center by traders and travelers who visited Kanheri Island mainly from towns and cities in the hinterland.

SALSETTE ISLAND AND THE CAVES AT KANHERI

At present, the rock-cut caves at Kanheri are located on the outskirts of Mumbai, the financial capital of India. They are six kilometers inside the reserved forest known as Sanjay Gandhi National Park. What is often forgotten in discussion of the art and architecture of the caves is the radical transformation in their geographical contexts in the nineteenth and twentieth century. The original location of the caves was on Salsette Island, one of the seven islands that were merged in the last two hundred years through land reclamation to form the present city of Mumbai. Other important islands included Elephanta, Hog (Nhave), and Karanja, with the River Amba flowing past the latter. Many of the islands, such as Elephanta, are known for their architectural treasures, rock-cut caves, structural temples, and forts *which survive to the present*. Many of the rivers flowing past the islands were navigable and provided routes that linked the coast with the Deccan plateau across *ghats* or passes, such as Thalghat, Nanaghat, and Bhorghat.

At the time of their construction, the caves at Kanheri were surrounded by the waters of the Vasai and Thane creeks, the Ulhas river and the Arabian Sea. The island of Salsette was settled by the fishing villages of the Kolis well into the premodern period. It is difficult to appreciate this oceanic orientation of the caves at present or the ancient cultural landscapes and routes. Salsette is dominated by a central mass of hills surrounded by tidal flats, the highest point being the conical peak of Kanheri (467 meters) in which 109 Buddhist caves have been cut. Richly sculpted and inscribed with donations from patrons, the rock-cut caves at Kanheri continued to be occupied from the beginning of the Common Era well into the thirteenth century. They present valuable insights into the world of patronage and religious travel across the seas in the ancient period (Ray 1986).

The earliest extant rock-cut cave at Kanheri, cave 2, consisted of six separate units, four flat-roofed *caityas* or places of worship with stupas, and two single cells, although the front of the entire cave is much damaged at present (Nagaraju 1981, 191). This cave is also inscribed with

four records of donations, of which three are dated to the second century CE, while the fifth belongs to the sixth century CE (Gokhale 1991, 46–47). Two of the second-century CE inscriptions refer to gifts from merchants and the community of ascetics and lay brothers from Kalyan, while the third is the donation of a resident of Nasik. *Caitya* cave 3 at Kanheri was started by two merchants called Gajasena and Gajamitra and completed by another merchant called Aparenu. The work was executed by *bhadata* (*bhadanta*) Bodhika. The *pratityasamutpada sutra* “Ye dharma hetuprabhava tema [...]” is inscribed in letters of the fifth century CE on a small bas-relief stupa on the right side wall outside the veranda of *caitya* cave no. 3 and is one of the several fifth-century inscriptions in *caitya* cave 3.

Nearly fifty-one legible inscriptions and twenty-six epitaphs are recorded in the more than one hundred caves at Kanheri on the west coast, including three Pahlavi epigraphs in cave 90. In contrast to the monastic site of Sanchi in central India, where 200 of the 631 inscriptions record donations by monks and nuns, at Kanheri the single largest group of donors (as mentioned in nineteen inscriptions) consists of *negamas* (merchants), a *vanija* (trader), *suvanakovara* (goldsmith), and *heranika* (treasurer). Thirteen gifts by women and ten by monks and nuns follow in second place. Merchants traveled to the monastic site from other settlements along the west coast, such as Kalyan, Sopara, Nasik, and Chaul, and refer to their donations as *deyadhamma* or obligatory donations made for the welfare of their families. It is significant that these donations were made in association with other members of the family and that at least two refer to affiliation with the Sangha and a *thera* or monk.

Gifts of money and land are other striking features of the donations at Kanheri. This brings us to the issue of the resources available at the site, which included both trading activity (coastal, inland, oceanic) and agricultural practice. At least ten of the inscriptions record donations of cisterns, tanks, and bodies of water. Almost every cell contained a *podhi* in which rainwater from the top of the hill was collected. A second-century inscription on a detached rock opposite indicates a more complex arrangement at cave 41 at Kanheri, which refers to the construction of a tank by *setthi* Punaka. The stone slab measures 1.10 x 1.25 meters and is located close to an ancient stonewall across a rainwater stream emerging from the nearby catchment area at the foot of the hill. In the broken wall, a conduit excavated in the rock and measuring 1.7 x 1.75 x 1 meters has

been located, which may provide the earliest evidence for the damming of water and the construction of a tank. What was the water to be used for? Several inscriptions at the site refer to the fields around Kanheri, which were under cultivation for the maintenance of Buddhist monks (Gokhale 1991, 84–6; Ray 1986, 61–4). Clearly, then, the lay following at Kanheri was rich and prosperous, and this accounted for the development and continued prosperity of the monastic site.

In front of cave 2, a stone casket was found containing an earthen pot with shell and carnelian beads, coins, terracotta objects, a copper lotus, and pottery (Mitra 1980, 168). Three inscriptions are carved on the back wall of the hall designated 2f that record gifts from residents of nearby sites such as Nasik and a goldsmith from Kalyan (Nagaraju 1981, 192–3). These are not the only inscriptions that provide evidence of visits of devotees to Kanheri from different parts of the coastal region. A six-line inscription in cave 11 dated to 12 September 854 records the visit of a devout worshipper of the Buddha from Gauda or Bengal and a permanent endowment made by him of one hundred dramas for the construction of a meditation room and clothing for monks residing at the *mahavihara* at Krsnagiri (Gokhale 1991, 70–1). The link with eastern India is further corroborated by the finds of a wooden image of a seated Tara in front of cave 31 at Kanheri. The image bears a striking resemblance to the Pala figures of Tara from Nalanda (Sankalia 1981–84). Thus, Kanheri continued to be linked to several other sites through coastal networks, as also to several inland centers. These networks continued in subsequent periods, as is evident from inscriptions.

Copper plates dated to the Kalachuri era were found by James Bird in 1839 during excavations at the site. In the fourth–fifth centuries, Kanheri seems to have been an important center of learning, as indicated by small brick stupas in caves 84 to 87 dedicated to Buddhist monks. Forty-four inscriptions recording the names of monks and their proficiency in Buddhist learning are known. Excavations conducted by West led to the recovery of a large number of clay sealings with the *pratityasamutpada sutra* (West 1862). A fifth-century copper plate was found inside a Buddhist stupa excavated at Kanheri recording the construction of a *caitya* by a pilgrim from Sindh and dedicated to the Buddha's disciple (Mirashi 1955, xliii). Three Pahlavi inscriptions from the early eleventh century were found in cave 66 and translated by James Burgess. These are dated to between the years 378 and 390 of Yazdakard and record the visits of Parsis to the site. The names of the visitors are given,

as also the months of their journeys (Burgess and Indrajī 1881; Gokhale 1991, 142). No doubt the inscriptional record of Kanheri is both rich and varied and shows donations by a diverse range of patrons, including merchants and other professional groups, as well as monks and nuns, but how does it compare with the sculpted panels in the caves? The next section addresses this theme through an analysis of the subjects depicted.

KANHERI AS VISUAL TEXT

The visual record at Kanheri is somewhat limited compared to that at many of the other early monastic sites, consisting of images of the Buddha, Bodhisattvas, donor couples, Tara, the Sravasti miracle, and the litany of the Avalokitesvara. There is evidence of plastering and painting in the caves, though this survives only in a few places. The miracle of Sravasti is depicted in numerous sixth-century panels at Kanheri, such as the halls of caves 67, 73, 89, and 90 (Pandit 2015). As described in several Buddhist texts, the best known being the Sanskrit *Divyavadana* dated to the fourth–fifth centuries CE, the scene depicts miracles performed by the Buddha at Sravasti to subdue the challenge of the heretics. The miracles included the appearance of both fire and water from the Buddha’s body, the instantaneous growth of a mango tree, and the creation of multiple Buddha images seated on thousand-petaled lotus thrones. The Sravasti miracle was popular with early Buddhist sculptors and is found widely represented in both time and space from the early centuries of the Common Era onwards. It does not, however, occur in the Pali Nikayas and the existing Agamas preserved in Chinese translations, though it is found in the *Asokavadana* as available in the 306 CE Chinese version (Rhi 1991, 20). Rhi suggests that the story of the Sravasti miracle gained popularity in certain schools of Buddhism, such as the Sarvastivada, Mulasarvastivada, Dharmaguptaka, and Theravada, in the early centuries of the Common Era. Another important concept that developed during this era was that of a savior from the dangers of travel, especially travel across the waters. According to the *Saddharmapundarika Sutra* (24, 6), “If one happens to fall into the dreadful ocean, the abode of Nagas, marine monsters and demons, he has but to think of Avalokitesvara, and he shall never sink down in the king of waters. ...”

This was not merely an empty promise of protection from the danger of shipwreck described in the texts; the scene was also sculpted

prominently in the rock-cut Buddhist caves at Kanheri. The icon of Avalokitesvara as protector of the faithful is a type that occurs widely in the caves of western India. Several renditions were made in the western Deccan, and over twelve painted and/or sculpted versions are known from Ajanta (caves 2, 4, 6, 10A, 11, 17, 20, 26) (Spink 2005, 5), four from Kanheri (caves 2, 41, 66, and 90), one from Aurangabad (cave 7), one from Pitalkhora (cave 3), and two from Ellora (Leese 1988), although nowhere is the composition so elaborate and the treatment so elegant as in cave 90 at Kanheri. The image in cave 90 is unique in that it depicts Avalokitesvara as protector against ten perils (rather than the usual eight) and includes numerous subsidiary figures. In this litany, Avalokitesvara offers the devotee the promise of salvation from the various perils depicted at the sides of the composition, including attack by elephants, lions, robbers, and similar disasters (Huntington 1993, 264–5).

Tara is shown as his consort in both cave 90 and cave 2. A unique eleven-headed image of the Avalokitesvara dated to the sixth century is carved in cave 41, in a niche to the entrance of the cave. An iconographic description of the eleven-headed Avalokitesvara occurs in *Avalokitesvara Ekadasamukhadharani*, translated into Chinese in 561–77 CE. A representation of this theme on a Chinese stele is dated to 691 CE and suggests the prevalence of this concept in China in the seventh century (Chutiwongs 2002, 37). The cave is an astylar hall with a shrine at the back depicting an image of the seated Buddha. It is thus evident that no general explanation can work for all the Buddhist sites. Instead, while a notion of the Savior and its depiction on monastic structures reflects the active engagement of the patrons and sponsors of Buddhist monastic architecture with the sea, it also underscores the unique context of each monastic site, in this case, the location of the Buddhist caves at Kanheri on an island.

At the western end of the more than two thousand-kilometer maritime route from the Konkan coast to the Red Sea, Socotra is a small archipelago of four islands about 250 kilometers east of the Horn of Africa off the coasts of Yemen and Somalia in the western Indian Ocean. The largest island in the group is also called Socotra, and in the next section, I discuss its role in the maritime history of the Indian Ocean.

SOCOTRA AND THE SOUTH ARABIAN COAST

Recent research has brought to light nearly eight thousand inscriptions in the south Arabian alphabet carved on rock and dated from the first millennium BCE to the sixth century CE. These have been divided into four thematic groups, viz., prescriptive texts, including decrees relating to socioeconomic issues, religious texts, property claims, and commemorative texts (Kitchen 2000). The Nabateans in modern Jordan had been involved in trade with the eastern Mediterranean, transshipping aromatics and incense from modern Yemen and Oman to Gaza in Judea long before the *Periplus*. The *Periplus* refers to three coastal centers of the south Arabian coast, viz. Muza (Casson 1989, sections 20–24), which was termed *emporion nomimon* and describes a long list of commodities bought and sold at it; Okêlis described as a “watering station” (ibid., section 25) and the first place for those sailing on; and finally the seashore village (*kômê*) of Eudaimôn Arabia (ibid., section 26).

The preferred center for exchange on the south Arabian coast was Qana, situated below the cliff at Husn al-Ghurab, 300 kilometers east of Aden. The period between the early second century and fifth century was probably the heyday of the Bi'r ‘Ali settlement, as the present village is termed, which expanded to more than five hectares at that time. A huge temple probably dedicated to Sayin was built at this time to the southwest of the settlement. On the northwestern outskirts of the city, a building used as a synagogue was erected. In the sixth–seventh centuries, the ancient town of Qana occupied the northwestern part of the settlement only, and the settlement was abandoned around the seventh century CE (Sedov 2007, 92–4). Amphorae fragments of the Aqaba kilns from the upper (BA-III) period at Qana show strong trade links between Late Qana and the regions of southern Palestine or southwest Jordan.

The walled ancient settlement of Sumhurram, located about forty-five kilometers east of Salalah on the coast of Dhofar, was visited in the nineteenth century, but archaeological work was only undertaken at the site first by an American team in the 1950s and then by the University of Pisa from 1996 onward. A series of radiocarbon dates from the site and analysis of pottery sequences and numismatic material indicate that the city was founded at the beginning of the third century BCE and continued until the fifth century CE. There is a graffito of a boat on the plaster of the city wall near the gate representing a whale fishing scene. Thus, recent excavations at Sumhurram have underscored its importance in

the kingdom of Hadramawt and the centers on the south Arabian coast within western Indian Ocean sailing networks well into the seventh century CE (Avanzini 2007). This recent evidence underscores the significant participation of centers along the south Arabian coast in maritime networks, though no doubt centers of political authority had meanwhile changed, as is evident from the writings of Cosmas Indicopleustes, a sixth-century Greek merchant from Alexandria and author of *The Christian Topography*.

At 132 kilometers long, Socotra Island is often described as the most isolated place on earth, though this account does agree with its central location in the maritime networks of the early centuries of the Common Era, as is evident from archaeological excavations conducted over the years. The excavations at Socotra need to be viewed in the context of the marine resources of the island. One of the earliest descriptions of the island is to be found in the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (sec. 30) which refers to it as Dioscurides, as discussed earlier. One of the oldest known archaeological sites on the island has been located in the vicinity of the modern village of Rakuf in the eastern part of the island, where the remains of a workshop used for the manufacture of flint tools were found. Close to the site was a small cemetery with ten dolmen-shaped grave structures consisting of burial chambers of stone cists unique on the island. These burials had scant grave furniture, and as a result, the excavators found it difficult to provide a precise date. The graves were very different from those found in other parts of the island, but structurally similar ones have been uncovered in south Arabia and in the Persian Gulf and Oman (Naumkin and Sedov 1993, 581–2). On the basis of analogies with these remains, the burials on Socotra have been dated to the second half of the first millennium BCE, a date which corresponds well with the evidence from Greek sources regarding the beginnings of trade contacts with the island. It also indicates colonization of the island by local communities with close links to the south Arabian coast.

Contemporary with these burials are the graffiti found on limestone outcrops on the eastern coast of the island at Eriosh. The graffiti include drawings of the outlines of feet, purely geometric shapes, and animal and human forms. There are attempts at imitating a script, but no identifiable south Arabian inscription could be found. Another type of stone structure found extensively on the island of Socotra is what has been described as “boundary walls,” though the function of these is not quite clear. It would seem that they demarcated plots of land growing incense trees

such as aloe and cinnabar. In many cases, stone structures and cemeteries were found in the vicinity of these walls.

One of the most interesting discoveries was that of a settlement along the northern littoral of the island two kilometers south of the modern village of Suq. An analysis of the archaeological data from the site indicates two phases of settlement: An earlier phase dated to the early centuries of the Common Era, and a second phase from around the tenth to thirteenth centuries CE. The archaeological data also suggest similarities with the Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf.

In the first centuries CE, Hoq cave on the northern face of the island of Socotra was known over a wide region by merchants traveling between Africa, India, the Middle East, and the Far East. Explorations in the 2000-meter-deep cave in 2001 led to the discovery of two hundred graffiti, drawings, and small offerings dated to the late second to fourth century CE. Of these, 192 are in the Brahmi script, one in Kharosthi, one in Bactrian, three in Greek, one in Palmyrene Aramaic, and twenty-odd in Axumite or ancient Ethiopian. The graffiti and inscriptions are not randomly engraved in the cave; instead, they occur in clusters at specific sites, most likely reflecting a deliberate choice of location. In the graffiti written in the Brahmi script at site 14, for example, individuals adopt several terms to identify themselves, such as sea-captains, *yavana* (a term indicating “Greek” or “foreign” that is frequently also used in the epigraphs of the western Deccan caves), or by their place of residence such as Barygaza or Bharuch on the west coast of India (Strauch 2012).

These overwhelming cases of the self-representation of individuals and groups from the Indian subcontinent may be compared with contemporary epigraphs on the west coast of India (Ray 1986) with reference both to content and locations. They add a hitherto under-researched perspective to maritime activity in the western Indian Ocean, which has largely centered on discussions of pottery and identifications of coastal centers mentioned in early Greek writing (Seland 2014). What has been the impact of this archaeological work and research on the contemporary understanding of heritage, and what is its relevance?

THE MAKING OF HERITAGE SITES

In 2008, the Socotra Archipelago was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage site under the natural category. The site is described as being of universal importance because of its biodiversity, with rich and distinct

flora and fauna, and it is this biodiversity that is celebrated in its inscription to World Heritage status. However, no mention is made of its cultural or archaeological significance.

This marginalization of the cultural factors also seems to apply to the Kanheri caves, which were notified in 1909 as protected monument under section 3 of the Ancient Monuments Protection Act of 1904 (VII of 1904). In 1916, an agreement under section 4 of the Act was entered into with the then owner, and the Collector of Thana was constituted the guardian of the monument. Ownership changed hands more than once, and the instrument remained more or less a dead letter.¹ In May 1944, the Archaeological Survey of India received representations from the public against the then contemplated transfer of the estate containing the caves to a foreigner. In deference to these representations, and in view of the national importance attached to the caves, it was decided to acquire them. Accordingly, early in August 1944, the Collector of Bombay Suburban District was requested to have the caves and the land occupied by them surveyed and their value assessed. Mr RD Birla of Bombay, who had been approached earlier in the matter, donated Rs. 10,000/- to acquire and preserve the caves as a national monument. In 1983, the area around the caves was notified as the Sanjay Gandhi National Park, although the caves remain in the charge of the Archaeological Survey of India. Clearly in both these cases, the biodiversity and the natural flora and fauna have been given primacy over the cultural and archaeological wealth of the islands. This further underscores the need to highlight the role of islands and cultural routes in maritime travel and history.

In the final analysis, this chapter is not merely an archaeological study of cultural routes in antiquity, and it also raises the critical issue of their celebration in world history. An important indicator of “universal values” lies in their inscription as World Heritage sites based on UNESCO’s 1972 Convention. It is important to stress that several World Heritage sites, especially sites and monuments located on islands along the coasts, have already been identified as national treasures by individual nation states. These include the fortified city of Mozambique on the island of the same name inscribed in 1991; the ruins of Kilwa Kisiwani on two small islands off the coast of Tanzania (inscribed in 1981); the Stone Town of Zanzibar (inscribed in 2000); Lamu Old Town, off the coast of Kenya (inscribed in 2001); Aldabra Atoll in the Seychelles (inscribed in 1982); and so on. The need is to bring these coastal monuments

and structures into dialogue with those located across the Ocean for a holistic understanding of the maritime cultural heritage of the Indian Ocean. This is an issue discussed elsewhere (Ray forthcoming) and need not detain us here. It is suggested here that this dialogue across the seas would help in the protection and preservation of a maritime heritage that is universal in nature, rather than being fragmented in the somewhat debatable categories of the tangible and the intangible, or being restricted to either a single architectural relic or a group of monuments, as has been the case in many countries.

The emphasis in this chapter has been on cultural routes, rather than on islands per se. As stated at the beginning, the larger issue relates to the ways in which accepting the centrality of the seas helps shift the focus from national to transnational forms of heritage and routes. Does this shift detract from the objective of the volume, namely to highlight the significant roles and functions that island hubs have played over time? I would argue that this shift to routes helps broaden the field of enquiry to the postcolonial global understanding of heritage as accepted by UNESCO and as ratified by 191 countries around the world.

It also draws the sailing ships (often called “dhows”) of the premodern period into the discussion. These traditional craft exemplify the concept of “connectivity in motion” and continue to be employed in a vibrant network between Socotra and the west coast of India. Teakwood for the construction of the *hawāri* boats on Socotra is still imported from India (Rensburg 2010). As documented by an Oral History Project of the University of Warwick, sailors from Kachchh in Gujarat often stop at Socotra on their way to East Africa to pay homage to the Goddess Sikotar Mata, offering her models of ships and seeking her blessings. The temple of Sikotar Mata (*padia*) situated on the Sikotar Hill coast is maintained by a Hindu priest known as the *pujari*, and a visit to the temple is an integral part of the beliefs that the seafarers have followed for centuries to protect them from the perils of the sea.² Thus, several traditions of the past live on, and there is an urgent need to include them within academic discourses not only for their protection and preservation, but more so that a holistic understanding of sea spaces may emerge.

NOTES

1. Archaeological Survey of India File no. 15J/2/46: Purchase of Kanheri caves—Letter from R.E.M. Wheeler, March 17, 1946.

2. <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/ghcc/eac/oralhistoryproject/resources/nishantandshivji/> accessed on April 5, 2016.

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Serendipitous Connections: The Chinese Engagements with Sri Lanka

Tansen Sen

In 1409, the Ming court (1368–1644) in China prepared a trilingual inscription tablet written in Chinese, Persian, and Tamil for installation in Sri Lanka. The tablet was eventually taken to the island, most likely to Dondra Head at its southern tip, in 1411–1412. While the Chinese text of the inscription pays homage to the Buddha and Buddhist relics on the island, the Persian text invokes Allah, and the Tamil version offers reverence to the deity Tenavarai-nāyanār, an incarnation of the Brahmanical god Vishnu.¹ The inscription, which is now in the National Museum in Colombo, is a unique and important artifact for several reasons. First, it demonstrates Ming China's awareness of the presence of different peoples on the island, as well as their respective faiths and languages. Secondly, it is a symbol of connectivity in the Indian Ocean, the southern coastal region of Sri Lanka being a hub for itinerant merchant groups, shipping networks, and strategic interests. Thirdly, the fact that the inscribed tablet was composed and carved in China, perhaps at the Ming capital of Nanjing, and carried to Sri Lanka indicates that even prior to the arrival

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of the European colonial powers, objects symbolizing state interests in the Indian Ocean could travel long distances. Indeed, the inscribed tablet marks the culmination of Indian Ocean connections prior to the arrival of the Portuguese at the end of the fifteenth century. These connections consisted of intensive maritime commercial activity, the circulation of religious ideas, the spread of diasporic communities, and the assertion of state power.

The fifteenth century also marked the pinnacle of the Chinese understanding of South Asian geography, with frequent visits to the region by envoys dispatched by the Ming court and navigational charts composed by officials who accompanied the maritime expeditions led by Admiral Zheng He 鄭和 (1371–1433) across the Indian Ocean between 1405 and 1433. Sri Lanka was an important base for these Ming expeditions, as the ships sailing into the Arabian Sea halted at the ports of the island's southern coastal region. This was also a site where the Ming forces engaged in military action, capturing a Sri Lankan opponent and taking possession of the sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha, the patronage of which symbolized political sovereignty over the island.

This essay explores how commercial, religious, and political interests in the island of Sri Lanka converged for the Chinese in the early fifteenth century. It does so by examining Chinese encounters with the island since the fifth century through Buddhist monks, traders, and eventually court officials. It analyzes different genres of Chinese sources in order to understand the evolving knowledge about Sri Lanka, the Buddhist and commercial links to the region, and the eventual presence of the Chinese state on the island.² The Chinese engagements with Sri Lanka also illustrate the role of islands, small and large, in the Indian Ocean world, which extended from the Swahili coast in Africa to the Ming capital, Nanjing. Finally, it argues that islands, as geographical entities, did not draw special attention from Chinese authors writing about the Indian Ocean world.

THE [IS]LAND OF THE LION

The Buddhist monk Faxian 法顯 (337?–422?), who traveled both the overland and maritime routes between China and South Asia and was probably the first Chinese person to travel extensively in South Asia, composed the earliest record of Sri Lanka found in Chinese sources. Faxian embarked on his journey in search of monastic rules (*vinaya*) in 399 and visited the leading monastic institutions located in the Gangetic region of present-day India. Sri Lanka was most likely not on Faxian's

original itinerary. Rather, when staying in Tāmralipa (Tamralipta/Tamluk, in present-day West Bengal state of India), where he lived for two years, Faxian may have heard about Buddhist artifacts and institutions in Sri Lanka. The Chinese monk reports that from Tāmralipa he boarded a “large trade ship” and traveled for fourteen days, “helped by the favorable dry monsoon wind” to reach the “Polity of Lion” (Sīṃhala/Sinhala).³

Faxian provides a detailed description of Sri Lanka, the first in Chinese sources. He writes,

This country was on an island [spanning] fifty *yojanas* from east to west and thirty from north to south. To its right and left there were about one hundred small islands, ten or twenty or even two hundred *li* apart. All these small islands were under the domination of the main island.⁴ (Li 2002, 203)

Faxian also describes the gems and pearls produced on the island, the climate, and the main Buddhist relics and monasteries, as well as the ceremonies conducted by the local ruler. The monk further notes the importance of long-distance trade in the region. Writing about the first inhabitants on the island, he quotes the following local legend:

There were originally no inhabitants of this country except for spirits, deities, and *nāgas*. Merchants of different countries came here to trade. At the market the spirits and deities would not appear in person but would simply display their valuable commodities with prices marked on them. The merchants would pay the marked prices and take the goods away directly. As the traders traveled to and fro or settled on the island, people of various countries heard about the pleasant conditions [on] this country and came there, too. In this way it gradually became a large kingdom. (Li 2002, 204)

Faxian’s account of Sri Lanka informed his audience in China, which included fellow Buddhist monks and other intellectuals, about the island as a site with important Buddhist relics, particularly the footprint and Tooth Relic of the Buddha, and also as a place to acquire Buddhist texts and teachings. Thereafter, a number of Chinese monks drawn by these artifacts and prospects visited the sites on the island mentioned by Faxian. The next detailed account of Sri Lanka appears two centuries later in the work of the monk Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–665).

Xuanzang did not visit Sri Lanka during his sojourn in South Asia in the 630s. Despite this, he provides a comprehensive account of how the island received its name. Describing it as a “precious island” (“*baozhou*” 寶洲), Xuanzang writes that it was “more than seven thousand *li* in circuit.”⁵ When in South India, he notes that he “heard local people say that from here going southeast over the sea for more than three thousand *li* one can reach the country of *Siṃhala*” (Li 1996, 322). He distinguishes Sri Lanka from rest of the subcontinent by noting that it was “not in the domain of India.” He then narrates several legends about the early history of the island. One story relates to the union between a princess and a lion, which led to the birth of a boy and a girl “with human bodies but of animal extraction.” The boy convinces his mother to escape from the lion’s den and live among humans. When the lion discovers that the princess and his children had left him, he goes on a rampage, killing people and destroying property as he roams from village to village. Unable to stop the lion himself, the king offers a reward to anyone who is able to capture it. Since the family has been suffering from hunger and cold, the son of the lion volunteers to hunt it down.

The son eventually kills the lion, who became emotional when he saw his child and did not try to attack or escape. The son received the advertised reward, but upon learning the story about the family, the king banished the son for killing his father. When the ship carrying the banished son reached the “precious island,” he saw pearls and gems scattered all around. He therefore decided to settle down there. Sometime later, when a group of merchants came in search of pearls and gems, the son killed the chief of the traders and kept his daughter. The inhabitants of Sri Lanka, according to the legend, were the offspring of the lion’s son and the merchant’s daughter. “As their forefather was a seizer of a lion,” the legend concludes, these inhabitants “named their country by that title in commemoration of the merit of their origin” (Li 1996, 324–26; T. 2087, 933a).

Xuanzang also tells a “Buddhist” story concerning the origin of the name *Siṃhala*. In this story, the Buddha, in one of his previous lives, was born in *Jambudvīpa* as the son of a “great merchant.” He was credited with rescuing merchants traveling to the “precious island” from the *rākṣasīs* (she-demons) lurking there. These *rākṣasīs* lured away and eventually ate the traders traveling to the island. After *Siṃhala* drove the *rākṣasīs* off the island, merchants and other immigrants came to the region and subsequently named the place in his honor.

Xuanzang's description of Sri Lanka and his accounts of the island were based on the information he collected in India. These legends appeared in texts such as the *Mahāvamsa* ("The Great Chronicle"), which the Chinese monk would have had access to at the leading monastic institutions in India, or heard them told. In addition to these stories, Xuanzang, like Faxian before him, underscored the availability of precious objects on the island, the various Buddhist relics that it housed, and the Buddhist and commercial contacts it had with neighboring regions. It was apparent from these two records that the Chinese Buddhists made a distinction between the island and the rest of the Indian subcontinent, which to them was the sacred island called Jambudvīpa. While Jambudvīpa could somehow be reached from China overland, the only way to approach the Land of the Lion was by sea.

Although Faxian and Xuanzang provide estimates of the island's size, it is doubtful that either of them, especially the latter, was familiar with the island's contours or able to place it within the wider networks of the Indian Ocean. However, Faxian's return journey from Sri Lanka to China by the maritime route made the island's connection to places in Southeast Asia and coastal China known among Chinese monks and scribes, as his work circulated widely in China. Consequently, passages on Sri Lanka from the work were either cited verbatim or paraphrased in several other Chinese records. Faxian's writings, like Xuanzang's, also enticed other Chinese monks to visit the island.

Some of these monks went to Sri Lanka to venerate the relics of the Buddha, while others traveled to acquire specific doctrinal texts. The latter group included a South Asian monk called Amoghavajara (Bukong 不空, 705–774), who was active in Tang China (618–907) for several decades before deciding to go to Sri Lanka to procure texts associated with Tantric Buddhism. Another Chinese monk who attempted to steal the Tooth Relic of the Buddha by hiding it in his thigh.⁶ Although the monk failed to smuggle the artifact out of the island, the Ming Admiral Zheng He may eventually have brought it to China. This can be discerned from a passage that was added to Xuanzang's account of Sri Lanka, when the Ming edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon was composed. A similar version of the passage has been found in a letter the Yongle emperor (r. 1402–1424) wrote to a Tibetan Lama on March 11, 1413 (Sen 2014a). These two texts are significant because they reveal continued Buddhist connections between China and Sri Lanka even after Chinese Buddhist monks had ceased to visit the island by the tenth century. The two Ming

texts are important for other reasons as well. For instance, they connect the Buddhist legend of Siṃhala outlined above to the appearance of the Buddha's Tooth Relic on the island. They also make an association between the earlier name of the island, "Shiziguo" 獅/師子國 (i.e., Siṃhala), to the later designation "Xilan" 錫蘭 (i.e., Ceylon) prevalent in the fifteenth century. Finally, the two sources suggest a possible reason for the military conflict between Ming representatives and a local ruler or official that is not mentioned in other Chinese sources.

The note appended to the section on Sri Lanka in Xuanzang's work first describes origins of the place, consistent with earlier Chinese records:

The country of Siṃhala, known as the Land of Lions in olden times, and also called the Country of No Sorrow, is south of India. As it produces plenty of rare gems, it is also named the Precious Island. Formerly, Śākyamuni Buddha transformed himself into a man named Siṃhala, and as he was a man possessing all virtues, he was made king by the people of the country. Therefore it was also called the country of Siṃhala. With his great supernatural powers, he destroyed the great iron city, annihilated the *rākṣasīs*, and rescued the victims who were in peril. Then he constructed a capital city and built towns to convert and guide the local people. After having propagated the right teachings, he passed away, leaving a tooth behind in this country. It is adamant and will last for many *kalpas* without being damaged. It issues a precious light like a brilliant star, like the moon shining in the night, or the sun brightening the daytime. Whenever a prayer is said to it, it responds as swiftly as an echo. In times of natural disaster, an earnest prayer will bring instant divine auspiciousness.

It then mentions the presence of the Buddha's Tooth Relic and the "reigning king" who is reported to be a "heretic":

What is now called the Mountain of Ceylon was the country of Siṃhala in ancient times. Beside the royal palace is a temple for the Buddha's Tooth Relic, decorated with various gems and shining with great brilliance. It has been worshipped from generation to generation without negligence. The reigning king Aliekunaier is a native of Soḷī.⁷ He worships heretics, does not venerate the Triple Gem, is a brutal and tyrannical ruler, has no feeling of pity for his people, and blasphemes the Buddha's Tooth Relic.

Zheng He's military encounter with the "heretic king" found in this colophon is similar to the other Ming narrative of the episode:

In the third year of the Yongle period (1405 C.E.) of the great Ming dynasty, the Emperor dispatched the eunuch Zheng He as an imperial envoy to send incense and flowers to that country and make offerings [to the Tooth Relic]. Zheng He exhorted King Aliekunaier to respect Buddhism and keep away from heretics. The king was enraged and intended to kill the envoy. Having got wind of the intrigue, Zheng He went away. Afterward he was sent again to bestow gifts on various foreign countries, and he visited the king of the mountain of Ceylon, who was all the more arrogant and disrespectful, and attempted to kill the envoy. The king mobilized fifty thousand troops to fell trees to obstruct the road and sent a contingent to ransack the seagoing vessels. At that juncture a subordinate official leaked the secret, and Zheng He and his men, having realized the situation, at once tried to return to their ships. As the road had been cut off, they could only secretly send some men out, but the captors of the ships would not allow them to go on board. Zheng He, commanding three thousand soldiers, made an assault by a shortcut at night and took possession of the royal city.

The native troops who had captured the ships joined forces with the native soldiers on land and launched a counterattack from all four sides. They besieged the royal city with a tight encirclement and fought for six days. Zheng He and his men captured the king and opened the city gate, and after cutting down trees to make a way, they moved away while fighting. Going for more than twenty *li*, they reached their ships in the evening.

At this point, the narrative inserts a report that is not found in any of the other Ming reports on Zheng He's military action in Sri Lanka:

They brought the Buddha's Tooth Relic on board with due ceremony. It emitted a brilliant light in a most unusual manner as mentioned above, while a peal of thunder rumbled with such a loud crash so that people at a great distance saw the lightning and hid themselves. The ships sailed on the great sea without encountering a windstorm, [and they were as safe] as if they were walking on dry land. Ferocious dragons and mischievous fishes emerged before the ships but caused no harm. All the people on board the ships were safe and happy.

On the ninth day of the seventh month on the ninth year of Yongle (1411 C.E.) they returned to the capital, and the Emperor ordered that

a precious diamond seat [made of sandalwood] be prepared in the imperial city for the Tooth Relic, in order to make offerings to it for the benefit of living beings and the welfare of the people, so that they might perform countless meritorious deeds.⁸

The above episode, which is analyzed later in this essay, is indicative of the overlapping Buddhist, commercial, and political interests in Sri Lanka among the Chinese in the fifteenth century. By this time, the Chinese were regularly frequenting the island and already knew its importance to the broader Indian Ocean connections.

THE TRANSITION TO SERENDIP

The term “Xilan” used in Chinese sources to refer to Sri Lanka after the ninth century originated from the Persian/Arabic word Serendib or Sarandib. Persian/Arab merchants frequenting China introduced the term along with their descriptions of the island. “Dib,” or “island” in this term, however, was not translated with the corresponding Chinese term.⁹ Instead, the words “*guo*” (polity/kingdom) or later “*shan*” 山 (mountain) were used (thus, “*Xilan guo*” 錫蘭國, lit. “Xilan Polity” or “*Xilan shan*” 錫蘭山, lit. “Xilan Mountain”). The latter term, associated with Adam’s Peak, became prominent when Chinese sailors and navigators started sailing into the Indian Ocean region and mapped the islands and coastal areas based on the mountains they saw from the sea. The eventual arrival of Chinese sailors and traders in Sri Lanka took place in the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries. Between the ninth and thirteenth centuries, knowledge about Sri Lanka in China remained murky as information about the island and South Asia in general came indirectly through various intermediaries.

These intermediaries—Persian, Arabs, and Southeast Asians—had been contributing to the intensification of commercial exchanges between Sri Lanka and China since the fifth century, when tribute missions from the island are mentioned frequently in Chinese dynastic histories.¹⁰ The use of the Straits of Malacca by seafaring traders active in the Bay of Bengal and South China Sea regions, the engagement with the maritime world by Chinese polities located south of the Yangzi River, and the expansion of Southeast Asian and Persian shipping networks were some of the key factors in the expansion of the commercial links. Despite this, Chinese knowledge about Sri Lanka did not extend beyond

what was reported in Buddhist sources. A curious note appended to the section on Sri Lanka in the late-eighth-century Chinese encyclopedia called *Tongdian* 通典 (“Comprehensive Record”) is an example of the limited awareness of the island that persisted among Chinese writers.

“According to Du Huan’s 杜環 records,” the note in *Tongdian* states, “Shiziguo 師子國 is also called Xintan 新檀, and referred to additionally as Poluomen 婆羅門. It is South Tianzhu 南天竺.¹¹ The people in the north of the polity all have barbarian appearances (*humao* 胡貌). Autumns and summers are very hot. The people in the south of the polity all have ugly faces. It has long spells of rain throughout the four seasons. Buddhist teachings, temples, and monasteries originated here. The people have ornamented ears (similar to the minorities of the south-west region) and wrap cloth around their waists.” Du Huan was a relative of Du You 杜佑 (735–812), the author of *Tongdian*. He participated in the battle of Talas against the Arabs in 751 and is reported to have traveled to West Asia and Africa subsequently. The diary of his travels to these places was titled *Jingxing ji* 經行記 (“Records of Experiences and Travels”), but is now lost.

This confusion about Sri Lanka in the eighth century, which is described as part of Tianzhu (or India), is indicative of the lack of knowledge among the Chinese after reports from Buddhist monks ceased to appear. The above description of Sri Lanka also suggests that Du Huan is unlikely to have visited the island. Most of the notices about Sri Lanka from the eighth to the eleventh centuries in other Chinese sources are similarly perplexing, some of them simply reproducing the fifth-century record of the island by Faxian. The transition from Buddhist informants to Arab and Persian sources is apparent in the twelfth-century work *Lingwai daida* 嶺外代答 (“Responses to [Questions about] the Land Beyond the Passes”) by a court official stationed in the present-day southern Guangxi Province called Zhou Qufei 周去非, who makes the following passing references to the island: “To the south [of various polities of Xitian, i.e. India] there is an island (*zhou* 洲) called the Xilan polity (*Xilan guo*), its sea is also called Xilan Sea (*Xilan hai* 錫蘭海).” Elsewhere, Zhou notes that the region from Jiaozhi (northern Vietnam) to the west is separated by a great sea. “This sea,” he writes, “is called Ceylon [Sea]. Within this great sea there is big island called the Ceylon Polity.” This seems to be the first reference in Chinese sources to Sri Lanka as Ceylon.

A detailed account of Sri Lanka appears a few decades later in the work of Zhao Rugua 趙汝適 entitled *Zhufan zhi* 諸蕃志 (“Records of the Various Barbarians”). It notes,¹²

With a north wind¹³ one comes within twenty odd days to the kingdom of Ceylon, which is under the rule of Nanpi. Sailing from Lanwuli,¹⁴ one knows that one is nearing Ceylon by continual flashing of lightning.

The king (of Ceylon) is black, his hair unkempt and head uncovered. He wears no clothes but has a cotton cloth of different colors wrapped around him; on his feet he wears sandals of red leather, tied with golden strings. When he goes forth he rides an elephant or is carried in a litter. All day he chews a paste of betel nut and pearl ashes.

His palace is ornamented with cat’s-eyes, blue and red precious stones, carnelians and other jewels; the very floor he walks upon is so ornamented. There is an eastern and western palace, and at each there is a golden tree, the trunk and branches all of gold, the flowers, fruit and leaves of cat’s-eyes, blue and red precious stones and such like jewels. At the foot of these trees are golden thrones with opaque glass screens. When the king holds his court he uses the eastern palace in the forenoon and the western in the afternoon. When (the king) is seated the jewels flashing in the sunshine, the glass (screens) and the jewel-tree shining on each other, make it like the glory of the rising sun.

Two attendants are always present holding a golden dish to receive the remains of the betel nut (paste) chewed by the king. The king’s attendants pay a monthly fee of one *yu*¹⁵ of gold into the government treasury for the privilege of getting the betel nut (paste) remains, for it contains plum flower, camphor and all kinds of precious substances.

The king holds in his hand a jewel five inches in diameter, which cannot be burnt by fire, and which shines in (the darkness of) night like a torch. The king rubs his face with it daily, and though he were passed ninety he would retain his youthful looks.

The people of the country are very dark-skinned, they wrap a sarong round their bodies, go bare-headed and barefooted. They use their hands in taking up their food; their household utensils are of copper.

There is (in this country of Ceylon) a mountain called Xilundie,¹⁶ on the top of which there is a huge imprint of a man’s foot, over seven feet long, and a like imprint is visible in the water (of the sea) within a distance of

over 300 *li* from the mountain. The forest trees on the mountain, little and big, all bend towards it (as if reverencing it).

The products of (Ceylon) include cat's eyes, red transparent glass, camphor, blue and red precious stones. The products of the soil are cardamoms, mulan bark and both coarse and fine perfumes. Foreign traders exchange for them sandal-wood, cloves, camphor, gold, silver, porcelain-ware, horses, elephants and silk stuffs.

This country sends a yearly tribute to Sanfoqi.¹⁷

There are several reasons for citing this account in its entirety. First, it demonstrates the increased interest in the local products and commercial prospects of Sri Lanka. Secondly, it makes no reference to the important Buddhist sites in the region. Thirdly, it provides a baffling account of the subjugation of the Xilan polity under Nanpi 南毗 (indicating the Malabar coast) and Sanfoqi 三佛齊 (*Śrīvijaya*). And fourthly, the author of the record does not find it relevant to mention that the region he described was an island.

Chinese merchants were not frequenting the Bay of Bengal region in large numbers when Zhao Rugua composed the above account. His main sources were most likely Arab, Persian, South Asian, and Southeast Asian sailors and traders. This would explain the focus on trade and the lack of any mention of Buddhist relics on the island. The confusion over the subjugation of Sri Lanka by Nanpi and *Śrīvijaya* could also have been due to the fact that Zhao used multiple informants, who provided reports about different regions and periods of Sri Lankan history. As a result, he identified Sri Lanka not as an independent polity, but as a place governed by Nanpi which later, or at the same time, was a vassal state of *Śrīvijaya*. (Nanpi could be a variant of Lambri, a polity in the north of Sumatra that was subject to *Śrīvijaya*).

While the Nanpi reference seems to relate to the Pāṇḍyan-Chola domination of northern Sri Lanka during the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Nilakanta Sastri 1929), subjugation to *Śrīvijaya* was more complicated. The Song Chinese sources mention *Śrīvijaya*, a thalassocratic polity controlling Sumatra, the Straits of Malacca, and other sites in maritime Southeast Asia, as having several “dependencies” in the Bay of Bengal region, including Sri Lanka. They also report that the Chola polity located on the Coromandel coast was a vassal state of *Śrīvijaya*. This perception developed because of the active and deliberate role of

Śrīvijayan representatives, envoys as well as traders, in visiting the Song court to obtain higher status, and therefore greater trading privileges, in China (Sen 2009). The fragmentary nature and deliberate manipulation of information may also have resulted in Zhao Rugua neglecting the fact that the place he described was an island. Zhao was clearly unaware of the earlier Chinese Buddhist sources that contained detailed records of Sri Lanka and of a Song-period map of South Asia that depicted the site as an island.¹⁸ Although Zhao dedicates a subsection of his work specifically to the islands in the Indian Ocean, including the Andamans and Madagascar, he does not seem to know the exact location or geographical contours of Sri Lanka.

Due to the fragmented and often contradictory nature of information coming from many different foreign sources, several areas of South Asia appeared disjointed in these Chinese records. Some of these misperceptions changed, particularly for the coastal regions, in the subsequent century with the expansion of Chinese trading networks and the visit to South Asia by court representatives.¹⁹ It became evident to Chinese scribes and officials that Sri Lanka was a key hub in the Indian Ocean's networks.

AN ISLAND HUB

The *Daoyi zhi lue* 島夷誌略 (“Brief Records of the Island Barbarians”), written by Wang Dayuan 汪大淵 (1311–?) in the mid-fourteenth century, contains the first Chinese eyewitness account of several Indian Ocean polities. Wang twice sailed into the Indian Ocean region with Chinese sailors, probably in 1330 and 1337. A total of 220 sites across the Indian Ocean world, extending from the Ryukyu islands in the east to Zanzibar in the west, are recorded in his work. Three sites located in Sri Lanka are noted: Sengjiala 僧加剌 (Sinhala), Gaolangbu 高郎步 (Colombo), and Dafoshan 大佛山 (lit. “the great Buddha mountain,” i.e., Adam’s Peak).²⁰ Sinhala most likely indicated the Beligam area in the southern coastal region of the island. “The oceanic-sea spreads all across it,” Wang writes. Chinese merchants traveling to the island traded in commodities such as cotton stuff, tin, rose, sapan wood, gold, and silver. He mentions the existence of the remains of the Buddha, his footprint, as well as his alms-bowl at these places. He also reports that the Yuan court had dispatched three missions to bring one of the Buddhist relics to China (*Daoyi zhi lue*, 244; Rockhill 1915, 376). This latter aspect is confirmed

in the *Yuanshi* 元史 (“Dynastic History of the Yuan”), which notes that a Uighur official named Yiheimishi 亦黑迷失 was sent twice by Qubilai Khan (r. 1260–1294), in 1282 and 1287, to fetch the Buddha’s alms bowl. Marco Polo, on the other hand, mentions a mission dispatched by Qubilai, reportedly in 1284, with the same objective (Sen 2006b).

The decline of Buddhist monasteries in the Gangetic region of India, sites court representatives from China had previously visited to acquire Buddhist relics and artifacts (Sen 2003), seems to have made Sri Lanka an alternative site for procuring such items. In fact, by the thirteenth century, Sri Lanka had emerged as a key hub for Buddhist exchanges in the Bay of Bengal, as a source of Buddhist artifacts across the Buddhist world, a place for pilgrimage activity, and an important center for Theravada teachings. Several Southeast Asian polities, including the Pagan polity in Burma and Sukhothai in Thailand, maintained networks of diplomatic, Buddhist, and commercial exchanges with various monasteries and courts in Sri Lanka (Blackburn 2015).

Chinese interest in Buddhist artifacts from Sri Lanka persisted through to the early Ming period. This is evidenced from the passage about Zheng He obtaining the Buddha’s Tooth Relic cited above. It is unlikely that Qubilai and the Yongle emperor attempted to procure Buddhist relics from Sri Lanka merely to venerate them. Instead, such relics served to legitimize political regimes and were, therefore, objects desired by foreign rulers. This interest in Buddhist relics and artifacts from Sri Lanka was not limited to emperors in China. In 1247 and 1262, the ruler of Tāmbraḷiṅga (in the Malay Peninsula) named Candrabhānu is said to have mounted naval attacks on the island to obtain these relics (Sirisena 1978: 36–57). While Qubilai, when he sought relics from Sri Lanka, was trying to assert himself as the true “Khan” of the divided Mongol Empire, the Yongle emperor usurped the Ming throne by deposing his nephew and now wanted to legitimize his regime. There may have been an additional Indian Ocean factor for both Qubilai and the Yongle emperor to obtain Buddhist relics from Sri Lanka. The Ilkhanate in Persia was an important ally for Qubilai in his struggles within the Mongol Empire. The primary channel for maintaining contact with the Ilkhanate was through the maritime route. The Coromandel and Malabar coasts, as well as the southern coastal ports of Sri Lanka, formed important transit centers for this communication between Yuan China and the Ilkhanate. As a result, Qubilai sent multiple diplomatic missions to the region, which involved negotiations with local rulers and

merchant groups (Sen 2006b). His reason for obtaining Buddhist relics from Sri Lanka could have been to hold sway over some of these peoples in this crucial transit region.

Similarly, the Yongle emperor dispatched several diplomatic missions to foreign regions soon after his usurpation. One of his objectives was to persuade foreign polities to send tributary missions to China and recognize him as the rightful Son of Heaven. The expeditions led by Zheng He between 1405 and 1433, at least the first six of which took place during the reign of Yongle, were intended to accomplish this goal. The Malabar coast and Sri Lanka were again the main transit centers for the ships commanded by Zheng He. At both places, the Ming admiral interfered in local disputes or initiated regime change as part of his attempt to gain access to important nodes in the Indian Ocean (Sen 2011; Sen 2016b). The Tooth Relic, which Zheng He acquired after his battle with Aliekunaier, had long been used by rulers in Sri Lanka to assert territorial sovereignty and kingship (Strong 2004, 196). Acquisition of the relic and the capture of Aliekunaier may have served not only to demonstrate the Yongle emperor's legitimacy as the emperor of the known world, but also to declare his symbolic claim over Sri Lanka.²¹

The trilingual inscription erected in Sri Lanka by Zheng He was most likely also related to Ming China's attempt to proclaim authority over the island and the maritime routes between China and South Asia. This inscription, which primarily targeted merchant communities, indicates the Ming court's awareness of the religious practices of various merchant groups and also suggests the court's interest in engaging in commercial activities. Additionally, it demonstrates the Ming court's knowledge of the importance and complexities of the southern coastal region of Sri Lanka, which was one of the main thoroughfares for shipping networks across the Indian Ocean, especially for ships sailing from Southeast Asia to the ports of the Arabian Sea and those on the Swahili coast of Africa.

While the Persian text of the inscription is not fully readable, the opening lines of the Chinese and Tamil texts both allude to the Ming emperor's interest in propagating himself as the "supreme overload of kings" (Tamil text) and announcing to foreign nations his mandate to rule (Chinese text). It is within this context that the Chinese text acknowledges the "supreme virtue" of the Buddha, the Persian text offers "respects" to Allah, and the Tamil text honors Tenavarai-nāyanār. By the time Zheng He embarked on his expeditions, Chinese, Persian, and Tamil had emerged as the three main languages of communication

in the Indian Ocean world. The Ming court itself had acquired linguistic abilities in several of the Indian Ocean languages through the establishment of translation bureaus (Nappi 2016), members of which would have participated in composing the Persian and Tamil texts of the inscription.

The use of the Chinese, Persian, and Tamil languages in the inscription may have had other objectives. Inscriptions containing various proclamations by the Ming court were sent to maritime polities in the South China Sea and Bay of Bengal, including Malacca and Cochin. These inscriptions, written in Chinese, served either to symbolize Ming offers of military protection or to demonstrate Ming supremacy in a specific region (Ptak 1991, 27). Some of these inscriptions were probably also directed toward Chinese merchant groups and sailors, whose networks had extended to the Malabar coast by the early fifteenth century. The Ming court seems to have been concerned about anti-Ming sentiments among some of the Chinese traders settled at foreign ports. These inscriptions, including that in Sri Lanka, announced the presence of the Chinese state among overseas Chinese communities.

The Persian language dedication to Allah in the inscription was aimed at Muslim merchants in Sri Lanka who frequented the island not only for commercial purposes but also to pay homage at Adam's Peak, a religious site shared by the Buddhists and the Muslims.²² Persians (as well as Arabs) were also important operators of ships that connected several parts of the Indian Ocean world. Similarly, the Ming court would have known about the networks of Tamil traders in Sri Lanka, in the ports of Southeast Asia, and even in coastal China. The court was evidently aware of their presence at Dondra Head, where the Tenavaram temple dedicated to the deity Tenavarai-nāyanār had existed for over half a millennium. It is also possible, albeit speculative, that the Ming court had knowledge of the conflict between polities in Sri Lanka and the Tamil rulers on the Coromandel coast. The use of multiple languages on the inscription, therefore, indicated the Ming emperor's attempt to extend his influence over foreign regions, as well as the key mercantile groups in the Indian Ocean.

The Ming court's knowledge about the geography and diversity of Sri Lanka can be discerned from other sources as well. For instance, the island is depicted on a navigational chart known as the "Maokun Map" (Fig. 15.1). Included in the seventeenth-century compilation called *Wubei zhi* 武備志 ("Records of Military Preparations"), it is accepted

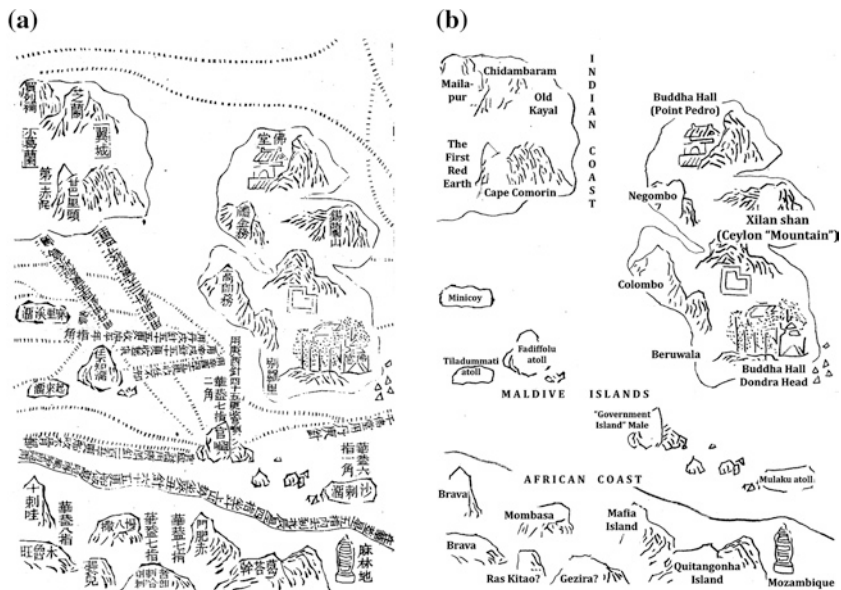


Fig. 15.1 The Maokun Map Section showing Sri Lanka, India, and Africa; on the left the Chinese map and on the right a sketch rendition (after Mills [1970/1997])

that it was a chart drafted during Zheng He's expeditions. It may have been carried by ships' commanders along with a manual of compass bearings (Mills [1970] 1997, 239). The map includes stellar altitudes centered on India and the region west of it.²³ According to Mills ([1970] 1997, 251), this map "is a cartogram which performs at one and the same time the function of charts and sailing directions; it provides a pocket-size directory, specifying the courses to be followed, the principal land-marks, the time taken in sailing between them, most of the points along the coasts, and other matters which could be of importance to sailors, on the voyages from China to Persia, Arabia, and East Africa."

The Maokun Map gives directions from Pulao Rando (see below)/Pulo Rondo, located at the northern tip of Sumatra, to Sri Lanka and from Beruwala and Dondra Head on the latter island to other sites in the Indian Ocean. "The ship starts from Longxianxu (Pulao Rando)," it notes in the section on Sri Lanka, "and crosses the ocean. Steer exactly

285 for forty watches; the again steers 285–270 for fifty watches; [then] the ship sees Xilanshan [Ceylon]” (Mills [1970] 1997, 292). The section also provides an alternative route from Pulao Rando through the Nicobar Islands to Sri Lanka. The directions from Sri Lanka to other sites include from Dondra Head to Male Island, from Beruwala to Male Island, from Beruwala to Fadiffolu Atoll, from Beruwala to Kelai Island, and from Beruwala to Kalpeni Atoll.²⁴ The *Xiyang chaogong dianlu* 西洋朝貢典錄 (“Records of Tributes from the Western Ocean”), another Ming source compiled in 1520 by Huang Shenzeng 黃省曾 (1490–1540), records the directions from Bengal to Male Island through Dondra Head and Galle (Mills [1970] 1997, 291–92). The sailing directions found on the Maokun Map appear alongside representation of relevant islands and coastal regions of the Indian Ocean. The representation of Sri Lanka is “correctly oriented” (Mills [1970] 1997, 245) and depicts major sites around the island.

It should be noted here that the navigational directions supplied on the Maokun Map indicate the important role of islands, many of them small isles, atolls, and reefs, in connecting various regions of the Indian Ocean. Pulao Rando, Male Island, Fadiffolu Atoll, and Minicoy were clearly hubs for Chinese ships sailing in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea, all of which were strategically located between ports across maritime space and formed key nodes in Chinese shipping networks. Many of these smaller islands appear on the Maokun Map.

Detailed information about Sri Lanka also appeared at this time in the works of some of those who accompanied Zheng He on his expeditions. All agreed that there was an abundance of commodities and prosperous inhabitants on the island, which made it, according to these writers, second only to Java in this regard. Ma Huan 馬歡 (c. 1380–1460), a Muslim who served as the Arabic interpreter on three expeditions with Zheng He, offers the most detailed account of the island. Like Wang Dayuan before him, Ma describes the footprint of the Buddha and other Buddhist relics in Sri Lanka.²⁵ For Adam’s Peak, he gives the Islamic legend, saying that “Adam” was the ancestor of mankind. Ma also points out the various precious stones available on the island and the collection of pearls that took place under the direction of the ruler. The clothing of men and women, eating habits, funerary customs, agricultural products, and the monetary system in the polity are all noted in Ma Huan’s section devoted to Sri Lanka (Mills [1970] 1997, 124–29).

Specifically with regard to interactions with Ming China (mentioned as the “Central Country”), he writes,

The musk, hemp-silk, coloured silk-taffeta, blue porcelain dishes and bowls, copper coins, and camphor of the Central Country are very much liked; and so they take precious stones and pearls to give in exchange.

The king constantly sends men with offerings of precious stones and other such things; they accompany the treasure-ships returning from the [Western] Ocean and bring tribute to the Central Country. (Mills [1970] 1997, 129)

Not recorded by Ma Huan is the military conflict between Zheng He and the local “ruler,” Alikunaier. This episode appears not only in the note appended to Xuanzang’s travelogue quoted above but also in other Ming sources, including the work of Fei Xin 費信 (c.1385–: ?), who, like Ma Huan, traveled with Zheng He. Fei Xin mentions the trilingual inscription, which he says was set up “to honour the peaceful government [of this country] through [our] imperial plan” (Mills 1996, 64). The account of the events leading to the armed conflict, the defeat and capture of the Sri Lankan, and his pardon by the Ming court appear almost verbatim in Fei Xin and his other sources. A few writers exaggerate the victory, which, as Loïse Levathes (1994, 117) points out, was “considered the most glorious moment in the history of the voyages.” Levathes (1994, 118) quotes a less-cited source on the battle that is important to include here. Included in the collection of the writings by Yang Rong 楊榮 (1371–1440) entitled *Yang Wenmin gong ji* 楊文敏公集 (“Collected Works of Master Yang Wenmin”), it reads:

Straight-awaits, their dens and hideouts we

ravaged,

And made captive that entire country,

Bringing back to our august capital,

Their women, children, families and

retainers, leaving no one,

Cleaning out in a single sweep those

noxious pests, as if winnowing chaff

from grain
 These insignificant works, deserving to die
 Ten thousand times over, trembling in
 fear...
 Did not even merit the punishment of
 Heaven.
 Thus the august emperor spared their
 lives,
 And they humbly kowtowed, making crude
 sounds and
 Praising the sage-like virtue of the imperial
 Ming ruler.

This source, as well as others, such as that by Fei Xin, does not mention the removal of the Tooth Relic from the island, nor does Yang point out that the Ming court appointed someone else as the “new ruler” of Sri Lanka. The *Ming shilu* 明實錄 (“Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty”), a court chronicle of the Ming Dynasty, reports that on the thirteenth day of the seventh month of the tenth year of Yongle (August 20, 1412) a person named Yebanaina 耶巴乃那 ([Parākramābahu] Apana?) was enfeoffed as the king of Sri Lanka.²⁶ “Previously,” the record notes, “Yaliekunaier, the king of the country of Sri Lanka, had been seized for the offences he had committed and the Emperor ordered that one of his relatives who was worthy be appointed as ruler. At this time, the Ministry of Rites advised: ‘We have enquired of the people of this country and they all say that Yebanaina is virtuous and worthy.’ Accordingly, an envoy was sent with an Imperial proclamation and a title patent and seal to confer upon him.”²⁷

The removal and replacement of a potential opponent in foreign politics in the Indian Ocean took place several times during Zheng He’s expeditions (Wade 2005a). These sites, which included Palembang and Aceh, were strategic nodes of maritime connections. The armed conflict in Sri Lanka, for which the Ming court rewarded almost all members of the Chinese expeditionary force with promotions as well as monetary awards,²⁸ seems to have been a significant event. When analyzed together with the trilingual inscription, it shows that the military action

on the island was clearly aimed at establishing control over an important hub that connected Southeast Asia to ports in the Arabian Sea and beyond.

CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that the Maokun Map represents Sri Lanka as an island and that the Ming visitors to South Asia were all aware of this, none felt the need to highlight the distinct geographical feature of the place. Moreover, unlike the Buddhist monks Faxian and Xuanzang, the Ming writers, who may have circumnavigated the island, do not provide any estimate of the size of the area they were describing, nor do they mention any of the sites in the hinterland. Consequently, there are no apparent distinctions between large islands and coastal regions in these writings. For Fei Xin, who uses Sri Lanka as a reference point to situate Cochin and Calicut on the Malabar coast, the high mountains mattered more as a geographical determinant than its “islandness.” The same is true of Ma Huan’s depiction of Sri Lanka. In fact, several other islands, both large and small, in the Indian Ocean are not described as islands either. The two most important geographical features that stand out to these Chinese writers, traveling multiple times across the Indian Ocean, seem to be the sea and the mountains. However, this was not true of the Maokun Map, which clearly depicted Sri Lanka as an island. This was perhaps because Chinese navigators on the Indian Ocean were more interested in the correct geographical representation of sites along their shipping networks. Yet, they do not call these places islands either.

This indifference to the island nature of the places described is prominent, for example, when Ma Huan and Fei Xin describe the Maldive and Laccadive Islands.²⁹ They call the place the polity of Liushan 溜山國 or Liuyang 溜洋, i.e., Liu-mountain or Liu-Ocean respectively, having “eight large places, all having the name liu” (Mills [1970] 1990, 147). As Mills ([1970] 1990, 146n.4) has pointed out, *liu* (lit., stream, glide, or glossy) is the Chinese transliteration of *dīu* or Sanskrit *dvīpa*. However, neither Ma Huan nor Fei Xin seems to have known the meaning of the term. Ma Huan notes that foreigners called the place “Diewa,” which also appears to be a transcription of *dvīpa*, but was unable to associate it with the meaning of the term. And while both Ma Huan and Fei Xin note that the place is “surrounded by the sea on all four sides,” they choose to designate the larger islands as “mountains”

and say that there are several thousand islets. Thus, Fei Xin reports that there were eight Liu mountains and thirty-eight thousand islets in the polity of Liuyang (Mills 1996, 102–103). The names on the Maokun Map use the same terminology.

The Chinese accounts of the islands in the Indian Ocean differ from those of the Arab writers in various ways. Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfi, the author of the ninth-century work *Akbbār al-ṣīn wa-l-hind* (“An Account of India and China”), for example, points out that there were 1900 islands between the Sea of Harkand (Bay of Bengal) and the Sea of Lārawī (the Gulf of Oman and northern Arabian Sea). The last of these islands, according to the author, was Sarandīb in the Sea of Harkand. “The sea entirely surrounds the island,” which he describes as, “large and extensive island in which aloewood, gold, and gems are to be found, while in the sea surrounding it there are pearls and chanks, which are those trumpets that are blown and which they keep in their treasuries” (Mackintosh-Smith 2014, 25). The author elsewhere makes a distinction between large and small islands, as well as “rocky islets.”

Although islands, large and small, were clearly important factors in connecting various regions of the Indian Ocean for the Chinese, a conscious “island factor” is not expressed in their writings. As is evident from the above discussion, Sri Lanka was a Buddhist center for Chinese monks during the first millennium CE, a source of precious commodities destined for Chinese markets and sacred relics desired by rulers in China, as well as an important hub for Chinese sailors, but the “islandness” of the place was not factored into the description of it by either those who wrote based on secondary information or those with firsthand experience. Rather, they perceived Sri Lanka and other islands through the prism of hills and mountains.³⁰ Perhaps what mattered to the Chinese venturing into the Indian Ocean was not the “island imaginaries” but the reality of mountains and hills that guided them as they sighted land when sailing across the seas.³¹ Within this context, nor did Chinese writers distinguish between ports on large islands (such as Beruwala on Sri Lanka) and those located on the mainland (such as Calicut). Similarly, small islands (Pulao Rando and Male, for example) could be hubs that were as important as the large islands and the mainland ports. At least as far as the description of the Indian Ocean world by these writers is concerned, the “islandness” of a place was not worth special mention.

NOTES

1. The translations of all the texts of the inscription can be found in “The Galle Tri-Lingual Slab Inscription.” A detailed study of the Chinese text is available in Devendra (1990).
2. Earlier studies of Chinese sources on Sri Lanka include Lévi (1900), Senaveratne (1915-16), and Petech (1954). Werake’s (1990) overview of the historical interactions between China and Sri Lanka has several shortcomings, including a misreading of Chinese sources.
3. *Gaoseng Faxian zhuan*, T. (51) 2085, 864c; Li (2002, 203).
4. A *yोजना* is around 12–15 km. A Chinese *li* is about half a kilometer.
5. *Da Tang Xiyu ji*, T. (51): 2087, 932b18–933a12; translation in Li (1996, 323).
6. On the Buddhist connections between Sri Lanka and China, see Sen (2014b).
7. Aliekunaier 阿烈苦奈兒 also appears in Chinese sources as Yaliekunaier 亞烈苦奈兒. These could be renditions of Alakésvara or Alagakkonara.
8. Translation by Li Rongxi (1996, 353–55) with slight modifications.
9. It is also possible that the Chinese term was the transcription of the Arabic/Persian “Saheelan.” On Sri Lanka’s connections with Persia and the Persian names for Sri Lanka, see Imam (1990).
10. A later source reports that the tributary relations between Sri Lanka and China were established during the Eastern Jin period. *Tongdian* 193.
11. “Shiziguo” was the Chinese rendition of Siṃhaladesa/Sinhaladesa (Lion Country/Polity). “Xintan” seems to be a phonetic representation of Sindhu, referring to India. The terms “Puluomen,” which is the Chinese representation of “Brahmin,” “Tianzhu” (lit. “Heavenly Bamboo”), and Xitian 西天 (or “West Heaven”) were commonly used in Chinese sources as names for India.
12. The variant phonetic form for Ceylon (Xilan 細蘭) is used in the text.
13. Most likely referring to the northeast monsoon.
14. Lambri (present-day Banda Aceh) in Sumatra.
15. Hirth and Rockhill (1911, 74n.5) explain that a *yi 鎰* weighed 20 *tacks* and was only used, according to them, for weighing gold.
16. Xilundie 細輪疊, according to Hirth and Rockhill (1911, 74n.8), is the Cantonese rendition of Arabic Serindip, implying specifically the Adam’s Peak.
17. Translation by Hirth and Rockhill (1911, 72–73), with slight modifications.
18. On this and other Buddhist maps, see Park (2010).
19. On the expansion of Chinese trading and sailing networks to South Asia during this period, see Sen (2006a).

20. Rockhill (1915, 385n.1) and Petech (1954, 226) believe that Disangang 第三港 (lit. “the third port”) in the work stood for Mannar/Gulf of Mannar in the northwest part of Sri Lanka. Others (Su 1981, 291) identify it as Punnaikayal on the Coromandel coast. Passing mention is also made in the text of Galle (Yali 迓里).
21. Such attempts to steal religious artifacts (or monuments) to assert territorial claims or assert political power were not uncommon elsewhere in South Asia. See, for example, Burkhard Schnepel’s (2004) study of the episodes of “stealing” images of deities in Orissa (now Odisha).
22. On Muslim traders and pilgrims in Sri Lanka, see Dewaraja (1990).
23. See Roderick Ptak’s (1987) analysis of the map in the context of his study of Maldivian and Laccadive Islands. Sri Lanka had already appeared as an island in some of the earlier maps from the Yuan and early Ming Dynasty. This includes the *Da Ming hunyi tu* 大明混一圖 (The Amalgamated Map of the Great Ming [Dynasty]), created in c. 1368 and based on the Yuan-period drawings.
24. Mills ([1970] 1990, 334) suggest that Beruwala was the “Chinese base in Ceylon,” visited by Zheng He on six of his seven expeditions. Mills provides a detailed discussion of the sailing directions to Sri Lanka in Appendix 5 of his translation of *Yingyai shenglan*.
25. However, he confuses Buddhism and Brahmanism and errs when he reports that the Buddha attained Nirvana on the island.
26. On Yebanaina, see Karashima (1978).
27. Geoff Wade (2005b), <http://epress.nus.edu.sg/msl/reign/yong-le/year-10-month-7-day-13>, accessed December 25, 2016. On the conflict between Zheng He and Yaliekunaier, see Sen (2014a, 2016a), Hettiaratchi (2003), and Levathes (1994).
28. Geoff Wade (2005b), <http://www.epress.nus.edu.sg/msl/reign/yong-le/year-9-month-8-day-25>, accessed December 15, 2016.
29. For a detailed study of the Maldives and Laccadive Islands in Chinese sources, see Ptak (1987).
30. The Chinese character for “island” comprises a combination of elements representing a mountain/hill and a bird 島 (*dao*).
31. On the issues of “island factor,” “island imaginaries,” and “islandness,” see the Introduction to this volume.

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Changing Connectivity in a World of Small Islands: The Role of Makassar (Sulawesi) as a Hub Under Dutch Hegemony

Jürgen G. Nagel

STARTING WITH AN OLD LEGEND

European sources from the seventeenth century that refer to Makassar, the urban trading center of South Sulawesi, very often relate the same little story, according to which the Sultan of Makassar sent for Muslim scholars from Aceh on Sumatra and for Christian missionaries from Portuguese Malacca on the Malay Peninsula to come to Makassar in order to instruct his people in religious practices. He promised that Makassar would accept whichever creed whose representatives reached the city first. For whatever reason, according to the story, around 1600, the Muslims from Aceh won the race. As a result, Makassar became an Islamic sultanate and a Muslim trading center.¹

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However, this “race for souls” between Jesuits and Muslims is not merely an issue of missionary history. First of all, it might have been a reaction by the Jesuits to the fact that the Islamic port city of Makassar was acquiring regional supremacy, even though they enjoyed the protection of the Portuguese *Estado da India* and had succeeded in baptizing the ruler of the former supreme power of Siang in the north several decades earlier in 1544 (Villiers 1990a, 147). In this respect, the story tells us something about missions, especially the hapless efforts of the Jesuits to explain their proselytizing campaign in the Malay Archipelago, which ended with only sparse success. Ultimately, it was little more than a legend with which to console themselves.

But more than that, the story portrays the foreign contacts of the city-state of Makassar, which obviously tied it closely to the most important centers of the western Malay Archipelago. Aceh at the northwestern peak of Sumatra and, even more, Malacca in the middle of the straits of the same name were the most important hubs at the end of the sixteenth century, connecting the Malay Archipelago to the Indian Ocean. At the same time, Makassar acquired a central role as hub of the Moluccan spice trade. Places of such importance were interrelated on several levels—even, as the story tells us, with regard to religion.

In this context, the legend also stands for European efforts to gain a foothold in this particular port. Makassar had not come to the attention of Europeans primarily for religious reasons, but as an entrepôt for spices, the “Key to the Moluccas.” Dutch and English ambitions to obtain access to the Moluccan spices and, if at all possible, to establish a monopoly in the spice trade steered their attention to the Sulawesi hub. While the Portuguese *Estado da India* concentrated its spice trade activities in Malacca and directly in the Moluccas, the English and Dutch East India Companies approached Makassar at the beginning of the seventeenth century utilizing the variety of strategies they had in their portfolios (Nagel 2010, 2011, 63–67). Initially, negotiations with the Sultan and the founding of a factory were the main concerns, but the long-term objective was to control the market, even though military force would become necessary to achieve this. In these terms, Makassar was a “classical” hub in the Indian Ocean world. On the other hand, the city was a model for colonial encounters with these island networks.

Certainly, Sulawesi is not a small island in the narrow sense of the word. Thus, its metropolis of Makassar is not representative of smallness in the sense of Burkhard Schnepel’s introduction to this volume.

But there is a “world” consisting of small and even smaller islands which fill the surrounding seas and serve as bridges between Makassar and the Indian Ocean. This was particularly the case at the time Makassar was becoming entangled in the early globalization of the Indian Ocean world.

This chapter provides an overview from the Islamization of Makassar up to Indonesian independence. It aims to give an impression of the changing connectivity of Makassar and its varying role as a hub. Simultaneously, it broaches the world of small islands in the waters of the Malay Archipelago, emphasizing the fact that we should consider the relations of great port cities with such smaller islands, as well as the different “levels of hubbing,” if we want to understand the changing connectivity in that region.

SPICE TRADE AND ISLAMIZATION

We have only scant evidence for the early history of the emporium of Makassar and its precolonial spice trade. However, if we follow contemporary witnesses from Europe, we see a highly linked trading center with contacts all over the Archipelago—and beyond.² Makassar maintained more or less regular connections with most of the destinations in the Archipelago. The Moluccas, Java, and Sumatra were constantly visited by Makassarese vessels, but the Lesser Sunda Islands (Nusa Tenggara) also had lively connections with southern Sulawesi, as did the Philippines, especially Mindanao and Manila, and the Coromandel Coast and Golkonda in India. The connections with China via Macau and with Japan via mainland Southeast Asia were indirect. Some regions without any relevance at this time became important destinations later on, like the coasts of eastern Borneo or northern Australia.

The character of the precolonial port city was shaped by the Sultan’s open-door policy, which allowed and promoted the settlement of different merchant groups from South, Southeast, and East Asia, as well as from Europe, regardless of origin and faith.³ Makassar was a multiethnic trading center which, significantly, was situated in the middle of the far-reaching networks of Muslim merchants. Traders of different origins founded communities of their own in the precolonial city (Nagel 2003a, 265–76). Bugis from the immediate hinterland lived there, as well as Malays from the western Malay Archipelago (Cummings 1998; Noorduyin 2000; Sutherland 2001) or Chinese from overseas (Kispal-van Dijk 2013).

Even the Europeans were integrated into this system. A community of Portuguese *casados* (unbound settlers) lived in their own compound (Boxer 1967, 1–53; Villiers 1985). The English East India Company (EIC) had been running a factory there since 1613 (Villiers 1990b; Nagel 2003a, 296–313), and the Danish Company also had a presence, but less continuously (Krieger 1998, 58–65; Diller 1999, 248–52). The Dutch East India Company (VOC) failed to build up a comparable representation and started to escalate the situation, culminating in the conquest of 1667 (Nagel 2003a, 277–95).

At this point, we can look back at our initial legend. It was precisely this urban economic function which proved relevant for the religious development of the region, which had become completely Islamic by the middle of the seventeenth century, with Makassar as the center of Islamization in the region. The Islamic creed came to the Malay Archipelago at the end of the thirteenth century (Wendt and Nagel 2015, 631–33). It found its way by several different, but correlated means: Muslim merchants from India, Arabia, and Persia, and in lesser numbers from Southeast and East Asia, were followed by scholars and members of mystic Sufi orders with missionary intentions. Both of these groups brought the new faith to their contact persons and initiated a mission from below. Also, they both influenced the local rulers, who often accepted Islam, whether for spiritual or purely tactical reasons, and therefore became responsible for top-down Islamization.

The Sultans of Makassar, a federation of the two sultanates of Gowa and Tallo, accepted Islam probably in 1605 (Noorduyn 1956). The whole state is reported in local sources to have been Islamized by 1607, which means nothing more than the date of the first official Friday Prayer. Thereafter, Makassar became an active “Islamizer” throughout the region (Laffan 2011, 11). The city-state fought several wars for regional supremacy, glossed as religious wars. The Sultanate had discovered a new opportunity for legitimation, encouraged by the Javanese state of Giri and following Sufi models from Mataram and Aceh. In 1609–1610, the neighboring Bugis states of Soppeng, Wajo, and Boné were “converted” in the course of such a war. In the years that followed, Makassar Islamized the surrounding islands—including, finally, Sumbawa—in four campaigns between 1618 and 1633. The self-promoted integration into the *Dar al-Islam* was strengthened by the growing connectivity of the Islamic core region in the Arab–Persian area with the newly Islamized regions in Southeast Asia, especially in that period

(Laffan 2003, 11–18). This connectivity was distinguished by the deliberate dispatch of Muslim scholars from the center of the religion to the periphery.

Against this dynamic development and the powerful interrelations between trade, religion, and politics, the slight Jesuit efforts stood hardly any chance. In the case of Makassar, frustration about the situation led to a legend of exoneration—the story of the Muslim scholars who were able to sail faster than the Jesuits.

Both developments—the Islamization and the key role in the spice trade—extended their impetus to politics and power. In southern Sulawesi, a federation of the two regional sultanates of Gowa and Tallo emerged, with Makassar being chosen as its urban center and as the residence of both sultans. The city-state acquired a regional preponderance, rising step by step through a system of hierarchical levels of governmental patron–client relations. It was not territorial control that was the crucial foundation of this power but the number of vassals each Sultan controlled, mostly smaller sultanates on the numerous islands of the eastern Archipelago. Thus, a system of alliances with Ternate and Makassar as competing hegemonic powers emerged.

This complex political system was the objective of a cautious approach by the European chartered companies during the first half of the seventeenth century. First of all, we can observe the ambition to acquire staging posts and the factories founded by the Dutch, the English, and the Danish. Further demands by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) resulted in the Sultan closing down its factory. Subsequently, the Dutch followed a policy of gradual escalation: through a policy of maintaining the highest prices on the spice market, through blockades, and not least, through a war of conquest between 1666 and 1669.⁴

POLITICAL TURNING POINTS

The surrender of the fortified city of Makassar to the Dutch and their Bugis allies in 1667 marks one of the great political turning points in the city's history. In order to focus on the long view of history, five of these turning points are worth stressing here.

First, after the conquest of Portuguese Malacca by the VOC in 1641, Makassar became the main destination for all the merchants who were expelled or who wanted to avoid the strict system of control of Asian merchants introduced by the Dutch Company. The forced exodus of the

Portuguese community, including the governor and the cathedral chapter, resulted in a separate Portuguese quarter being created in Makassar. Simultaneously, the Malay community in Makassar increased in size and acquired further political power. Frequently, Makassar was the last hope for refugees fleeing the VOC. Makassar became the thorn in the company's side. On the one hand, the city was the refuge of its enemies; on the other hand, it was constantly increasing in economic power, particularly due to its ability to circumvent the Dutch spice monopoly.

Second, the conquest of Makassar, one of the costliest wars fought by the VOC in the seventeenth century, put an end to this function of the port city. The rulers of the Goa-Tallo federation kept their formal positions as sultans, but now only as vassals of the company. Through the treaty of Bengaya (Stapel 1922, 237–47; Andaya 1981, 305–307), the real power was transferred to the Dutch governor, the new player in the regional multilayered political system. The reconstruction of the inner city gave it a new character, comparable to Batavia (Nagel 2001). A Chinese majority and a powerful European minority dominated the urban center and greater parts of the economy. The local population was forced to the urban periphery. The new economic situation was assured by strict control of the harbor by the administration of the Dutch harbormaster (*syahbandar*).

Third, given that the VOC had kept all the harbors under its control closed to Chinese vessels in the seventeenth century, the reopening of the sea route between Makassar and Amoy (Xiamen) in Fukien province in the 1730s was not a particularly striking turning point, but it should not be underestimated. Caused by economic considerations and handled pragmatically, this decision strengthened not only the VOC's mercantile relations but also, and primarily, the role of the Chinese community. The connection with China had run dry with the Dutch conquest of Makassar. The first Chinese junk to reach the harbor again was registered not earlier than 1736 (Nagel 2003a, 600–601). To accept its landing without the company's permit was a pragmatic decision on the part of the governor. Until then, Chinese vessels were only allowed to head for one specific harbor under Dutch control, to Batavia, where the VOC was trying to concentrate its China business. Due to these efforts, Chinese vessels were again prohibited in Makassar between 1746 and 1752, as well as between 1762 and 1768 (Sutherland 2000, 78). Nevertheless, the Chinese connection with Makassar became a strong part of the private trading network in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries

until the new colonial administration decided to open other ports to Chinese merchants.

Fourth, due to the ending of the VOC (1799) and colonization by the Dutch state beginning in 1815, the entrepôts, having lost their importance in the spice trade to the VOC, now recaptured some of their old role. The main reason that the recovery of the precompany era never completely succeeded is to be found in the loss of the producer's monopoly of the Moluccas. Finally, after Indonesian independence in 1945 and 1949, respectively,⁵ Makassar became the provincial capital and started its career as a modern metropolis, growing to 1.5 million inhabitants by the end of the twentieth century.

ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES

All these political turning points produced their particular economic consequences. The conquest of Portuguese Malacca by the VOC in 1641 corresponded to the strengthening of Makassar's position as a spice emporium. Only Makassar, Banten, and Aceh survived as free entrepôts for Moluccan products in the Malay Archipelago. Of them, Makassar was situated closest to the Moluccas and far away from places controlled exclusively by the Dutch. In addition to its strategically favorable situation, the newly immigrated merchant elites, many of them from Malacca, contributed to the short-term boom.

The Dutch conquest of Makassar itself between 1666 and 1669 resulted in its reduction to a mere regional entrepôt.⁶ Its basis was the prohibition of all private trade in spices, which the Dutch were able to enforce completely, at least in this particular harbor. Ultimately, the prohibition of the private textile trade could not be enforced, as after a while, an officially accepted textile trade can be observed in the port of Makassar. In addition to the regional textile trade, connections existed at a lower level directly with China, especially Fukien, and to a more significant extent, but indirectly, via Batavia to India. Trade connections of little interest to the Dutch company survived and sometimes increased. At first glance, these activities seem to be markedly local, but very often they were integrated into far-reaching networks. In particular, all the products in great demand in the Chinese markets, such as *trepang*⁷ or birds' nests, underpinned the new form of Makassar's hubbing. I will come back to this point below.

The reopening of the harbor to Chinese junks from Amoy in 1736 meant an expansion of trading activities due to the integration of Makassar into the Chinese–Dutch system. In Canton (Guangzhou), the only port open to Europeans in China, the VOC was only represented at a low level. The opening of ports in the Malay Archipelago guaranteed alternative modes for the trade in tea and porcelain. Of course, Batavia persisted as the center of the China trade, but Makassar was able to profit likewise, as were other ports later on. Here, one junk a year arrived from Amoy, but this single ship had a cargo capacity exceeding that of every other vessel by far (Nagel 2003a, 601–603). According to Heather Sutherland (2000, 78–79), an increasing orientation of Makassar’s private trade toward China can be observed after the port was opened. Accordingly, the size of the junks increased at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Crawfurd 1820, 184). Contemporary witnesses stressed the central role of the China trade for Makassar at that time, but during the 1820s, this role was lost as quickly as it had arisen (Sutherland 2000, 77–79). The opening of ports like Kota Ambon, Semarang, or Surabaya to Chinese vessels limited the connectivity of Makassar with China. On the other side of the China Sea, the forced opening of Chinese port cities after the First Opium War (1839–1842) also changed the situation, because until then only Amoy had been allowed to maintain overseas trade. Against this background, a group of specialized “ocean traders” was established in Amoy which ran the connection with Makassar (Ng 1983, 167–77).

For Makassar, the colonial era after 1815 brought the acquisition of new connections and the introduction of new products into the export trade. The growing diaspora groups allowed the utilization of expanding networks. The search for new areas for the exploitation of natural products such as *trepang* led Makassans to destinations at greater distances (see below). Also, the plantation economy, which started at the end of the eighteenth century and became the core of the Dutch colonial economy, provided Makassar with new export goods such as coffee and, at a later point in time, tea.

The era of independence saw a modern upswing on a traditional basis. Makassar became one of the largest and most important ports of the republic. The home port of the famous “Makassar Schooner” again served as an entrepôt as well as an export harbor. The exports consisted partly of plantation products from colonial era farms or “Makassar oil,” as it regained its former fame. Some products that were exported

traditionally played a regional role, mainly spices, rubber, and forest products such as rattan or timber.

RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENTS

At first sight, religious developments were interrelated less with such turning points, but at second glance, it seems possible to observe some parallels. The most decisive processes of a religious nature took place before the Europeans became a dominant factor in the Malay Archipelago. Thus, during the first political and economic turning points, the religious situation was highly stable. Neither the conquests of Malacca and Makassar by the Dutch VOC nor the latter's changing policies concerning the Chinese junk trade affected the religious landscape significantly. In addition, the period of the company's dominance was characterized by a significant Muslim scholarship in the mosques and *madrasas* of the city. Some of its exponents became famous religious teachers far beyond the shores of Sulawesi. Sending delegations from Makassar to Mecca "seems to have been the order of the day in the seventeenth century" (Laffan 2011, 17). And not least, the city was the place of origin of the influential scholar Yusuf al-Maqassari (1627–1699), who stayed for two decades in Arabia after 1644 (Laffan 2011, 19–20).

During the colonial phase after 1815, the Dutch administration permitted Christian missionary activities for the first time since the unfortunate efforts of the Jesuits. Protestant missions became a part of Dutch colonialism, and the revival of Catholicism during the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries (Steenbrink 2003, 2007), which originated mostly in the splitting off of a minority from Protestant communities, was at least tolerated. On Sulawesi, the colonial government officially supported—in moral as well as financial terms—Protestant missionaries in order to prevent the interior ethnicities from becoming Muslims (Steenbrink 1993, 109). The results of the new religious policy can be seen in the Protestant Christianization of the Toraja in the hinterland of South Sulawesi or in the Catholic cathedral in the center of Makassar, made possible by the immigration of "secessionist" Toraja, Minahasa, and Moluccan Christians (Steenbrink 2003, 189–202; Steenbrink 2007, 259–84) and by the new tolerance of the colonial administration. The Muslim majority society in Sulawesi responded to this development with growing antagonism, but—unlike in other Indonesian regions—still without violent reaction.

Finally, the confrontational path to Indonesian independence resulted in the increasing politicization of Islam. Decidedly, Muslim organizations and groups played a vital role in the independence movement. Makassar as the capital of eastern Indonesia was one of the central arenas of the independence struggle (Vickers 2005, 88, 99). And the given infrastructure of Muslim scholarship was able to provide a basis for political discussion in a religious context, though never in the radical way seen, for example, in Aceh.

CONNECTIVITY IN MOTION: THE SLAVE TRADE ...

Under Dutch administration, Makassar became an entrepôt of the small-scale or middle-range trade across the world of the Indian Ocean. Nevertheless, “hubbing” remained an important function of the port city. The shrinking direct connections were replaced by indirect connectivity, thanks chiefly to the role played by the diaspora communities. Also, connections with other port cities controlled by the Dutch provided Makassar with indirect access to global modes of exchange. One of the examples of “connectivity in motion” in this field was the slave trade.

Makassar, like the other urban centers of maritime Southeast Asia, had traditionally been a slave-holding society. In prosperous *kampung* (quarters), probably more than 50 percent of the inhabitants were slaves. Also the colonial city center, called Vlaardingen, was inhabited by a majority of slaves living in the compounds of their masters. But Makassar was also a traditional center of the slave trade, before the conquest of 1667 being the core of a slave-trading network reaching from Sumatra to Tanimbar. The origins of the slaves had an even wider range: They came from Sulawesi and its neighboring islands, from Timor, Solor, Flores, Alor, Sumba, and the further Lesser Sunda Islands, from Tanimbar, Mindanao, Sulu, and the Philippines (Sutherland 1983; Villiers 1990a, 151–52). Makassar served as an emporium as well as an export port for slaves, as a place for the intermediate trade in captives from all over the Malay Archipelago, as well as a place for the disposal of those from the Sulawesi hinterland. When the demand for labor increased with the development of export-oriented spice plantations during the seventeenth century, Makassan slave-traders actively participated in regional slave raids (Nagel 2003a, 243–44). The port city was part of the commercialization of the Southeast Asian slave trade, induced in no small part by European demands. During the colonial regime of the VOC,

Makassar temporarily experienced a decline in its position in that system. Makassan slave-traders acted independently of Dutch influence and continued to undertake slave raids, for example, on Sumba (Needham 1983, 20). Sometime in the 1780s, Makassar again experienced a boom, especially in exports of slaves from Sulawesi and the Lesser Sunda Islands to Batavia, a trade organized by the free Dutch *burghers* (unbound settlers) living in the large company towns (Nagel 2003a, 541–46). The majority of this trade was oriented around Batavia, where the greatest demand came from the Chinese community (Abeyasekere 1983, 286, 299). But apart from this, Dutch planters on the Banda Islands also sent ships to buy slaves in Makassar, Timor, and Aru (Wright 1958, 18). Simultaneously, the Sultanate of Sulu developed into a wealthy and powerful center competing in the Asian slave trade (Warren 1977, 1990; Nagel 2003c). Obviously, the demand for labor in colonial times after 1815 was strong enough that Makassar’s resurgent role in this sector could not be harmed by the northern sultanate. The Makassan trade in slaves was directed primarily toward Batavia, that of Sulu toward China, and no evidence has yet been found for the two systems being connected. However, we know about another new issue in the Makassan slave trade: The growing colonial plantation economy in Sulawesi stimulated further demand for labor, which could only be satisfied by new slaves. Consequently, the various highland peoples called Tojara became the targets of systematic slave raids (Bigalke 1983), the “surplus” from which could be exported to plantations on other Indonesian islands. Again, Makassar developed a sales network extending over the whole Malay Archipelago which was mainly controlled by European and Chinese merchants. In addition, in the West, it found access to further trading networks, for example, the Hadrami diaspora, which supplied the Arab market for slave labor.

... AND THE *TREPANG* TRADE

A further example of “connectivity in motion” is provided by the trade in *trepang*.⁸ The demand for sea slugs was a specific Chinese phenomenon (Milburn 1813, 305; Crawford 1820, 442; Dalrymple 1769, 78). The Chinese used it in cooking and healing and as an aphrodisiac. Some demand for *trepang* since the seventeenth century was reported for Southeast Asia as well. For a long time, fishing for *trepang* had been in the hands of sea nomads, the Bajau.⁹ The trade was an integral part of

indigenous private trade in Makassar under Dutch rule (Nagel 2003a, 501–505). During the VOC period, it tended to increase, the harvesting of *trepan*g taking place off the shores of Sulawesi, Sumbawa, and Nusa Tenggara. Initially, *trepan*g was exported to Java, from where the Chinese diaspora in Batavia re-exported it to China. After the 1770s, three quarters of Makassan *trepan*g exports went directly to Amoy in Fukien. Accordingly, the *trepan*g trade was primarily a Chinese business, but other ethnic groups discovered a profitable activity in it. During the nineteenth century, Makassans expanded the fishing grounds to the Sulu Archipelago, Australia, and New Guinea (Macknight 1976, 2011). The financing of the trade by Chinese wholesalers enabled a proper *trepan*g industry to arise with Makassar as its center. The first Makassan fishing trips to Australia took place in the 1780s. During the nineteenth century, fleets of up to forty vessels stayed for half a year in Australia, exclusively for *trepan*g fishing, which now was controlled by the Makassans in contrast to the Bugis and Bajau dominance before. The distribution networks were run by the Chinese diaspora and could be found on several coasts around the Indian Ocean. Not until the early twentieth century did this traditional seafood industry experience a massive decline.

HUBBING OF MERCANTILE DIASPORAS

These brief examples give some impression of the trading systems, either with European participation, as one among many, or without any European participation. In either case, the various diaspora communities spread across the Malay Archipelago were active participants serving as operators of connectivity.

The greatest and most important mercantile diaspora network was that of the Chinese.¹⁰ All over Southeast Asia, they were in key positions long before the Europeans arrived. In Makassar too, Chinese merchants were present before the Dutch conquest. During the period of Dutch control, they were the dominant group in the colonial city center. After the reopening of the connection to Amoy, they negotiated direct trade with China with the Dutch company. Thus, their central role endured throughout the colonial period and continued into independent Indonesia. The massive restructuring of the labor markets by the system of indentured labor and Chinese coolies in the later years of colonialism played only a minor role in Sulawesi: The demand for labor from the regional plantations could be satisfied using regional

resources. But in several other regards, the continuity of the “hub” that was Makassar would not have been possible without the activities of the Chinese diaspora.

Of special interest to Makassar was the so-called Bugis-Makassarese diaspora (Leirissa 2000; Harmonic 1988). Perhaps, the presumed unity of the old rivals, Makassans and Bugis, is only a conglomeration when seen from a distance through the eyes of Dutch or other European witnesses. But even in precolonial times, we can observe a dispersal of both groups throughout the Malay Archipelago. The construction of a Bugis diaspora is already reflected in the town of Makassar itself, where the Buginese Wajo built a separate community of their own (Noorduyn 2000). These developments increased during the eighteenth century under Dutch supremacy. In particular, in the western Archipelago, the Bugis were an essential factor in the balance of power. Very often their settlements were to be found on the smaller islands, not in the colonial-dominated cities. Well-known examples are Riau, Bangka, or Belitung near Sumatra, which came completely under Bugis control (see below). But the islands in the immediate vicinity of southern Sulawesi, with Buton and Selayar as the largest ones, the eastern coast of Borneo, the Sulu Archipelago, and the Moluccas, could also be mentioned in this context (Nagel 2003a, 723–25). In such places, smaller centers of political and religious influence developed, partly beyond the perception of historical sources, but highly cross-linked. Furthermore, their networks guaranteed widely ramified connections with the seaborne trade that found new hubs on these small islands, much to the profit of the old trading metropolis Makassar.

In the long run, the history of diaspora groups with origins in or strong relations with Makassar shows the development of complex networks through decentralization and with diaspora communities as agencies. Several places, very often small islands, can be identified as hinges or subcenters.

HUBBING IN A WORLD OF SMALL ISLANDS: BONERATE

One of the most improbable examples of this phenomenon is the tiny island of Bonerate, halfway between Makassar and Sumbawa. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the Dutchman J. A. Bakkens mentioned that Bonerate “had cliffs and reefs and thus a very dangerous fairway for ships which nowhere offers a convenient anchorage and therefore

forced ships doing business on these islands to stay offshore during that time.”¹¹ At the same time, John Crawford described the island as “a settlement or colony of the Bugis, and a considerable native emporium. ... The majority of the inhabitants are Bajaus or wandering Malay fishermen who collect tortoise-shell, holothurion [i.e. *trepang*], and birds’ nests: but the carrying trade is conducted wholly by the Bugis, whose praus make yearly voyages to Bali, Batavia, and Singapore to the west, and New Guinea, the Moluccas, and Manila to the east and north” (Crawford 1856, 57).

Current opinion holds “that in the past a combination of trading, slaving and piracy, in addition to fishing and swidden agriculture, formed the base of Bonerate economy” (Broch 1991, 215). The origin of this development is to be found in the late eighteenth century and in the relationship with Makassar. At that time, the trading connections from Makassar to Bonerate started hesitantly, as we can find in the records of the harbormaster in Makassar. Bonerate provided no products of its own, but, despite the dangerous coastline, started to serve as a site for the exchange of textiles, foodstuffs, and sea products, primarily sea slugs. This might be the explanation for why Bajaus never appeared in the Makassar harbor registers, despite being reported as the main providers of *trepang* in the region (Nagel 2003a, 578–79).

In the next century, Bakkers, mentioned above, reported on the exchange of *trepang*, opium, and textiles by the Bajau and in foodstuffs on the island. He also mentions an expansion of trade relations to more distant destinations such as Java, Bali, or Lombok (Bakkers 1861, 242–44). The inhabitants of Bonerate were employed in shipbuilding, fishery, and some coarse textile production (ibid., 246). Exports of self-grown cotton and textiles are also reported at the beginning of the twentieth century (Kriebel 1920, 216), and later on even some deer hunting (Broch 1991, 217). A traditional resource management system which took into consideration seasonal conditions for fishery and *trepang* harvesting strengthened the backbone of the local economic system (Alder and Christanty 1998, 235–36).

The scarce sources we have for Bonerate’s history show for the nineteenth century a population representing a huge ethnic diversity, which is also reflected in its trading contacts and existence as a commercial hub. Peoples from Makassar, South Sulawesi, Buton, Sumbawa, Flores, and Timor lived on the island (Bakkers 1861, 236–37). Around 5,000 inhabitants made up a colorful mixture consisting of the Bajau sea nomads

and all the other ethnicities with whose islands Makassar kept up trade connections during the VOC period. Later on, in the twentieth century, Bugis and Bajau remained dominant groups (Alder and Christanty 1998, 234). Despite its small size, Bonerate experienced the emergence of an emporium without an urban character, as illustrated by the institution of its own harbormaster, but with sustainable relations to the city, with, for example, patron–client relations between Bajau fishermen on Bonerate and Bugis merchants in Makassar (Alder and Christanty 1998, 234–35).

To use the terminology of Frederik Barth, the inhabitants found an ecological niche to make their living in a difficult environment.¹² But such a niche did not mean isolation: Quite the contrary, it allowed connectivity which supported the hubbing of colonial-controlled Makassar.

... THE TUKANG BESI ...

Another example is the small archipelago of the *Tukang Besi* (“Blacksmith Islands”), with its three major islands of Wangi Wangi, Kaledupa, and Binongko, to the east of Buton. It is a much larger archipelago than Bonerate and its surrounding islands, but at least has the same natural conditions. “Here, on these rather dry and unfertile islands, a group of daring seafarers, shipbuilders and maritime traders became settled, who up to now carry on a brisk maritime peddling trade throughout Eastern Indonesia and the Java Sea” (Evers 1988, 94). The maritime traders of the *Tukang Besi* islands—among them a significant number of nomadic Bajau (Stacey 2007)—not only built their own typical vessels, but also launched trading expeditions to several destinations in the eastern Malay Archipelago (Evers 1988, 94).

For the VOC, the *Tukang Besi* Archipelago was primarily a center of smuggling and illegal clove plantations. Several expeditions of smaller VOC vessels from Makassar investigated the archipelago in order to find clove plantations and to fight “smugglers.” The reports of the VOC’s ships’ captains are fruitful sources of insights into trading and networking in that area (Nagel 2003a, 779–80, 787–89, 796–97). They show that Kaledupa served as a central trading point for foodstuffs, as well as for cash crops such as cloves, beyond the control of the VOC. The advantages were on the side of seafarers who had excellent knowledge of these places, while Dutch captains had problems finding their way through a confusing insular landscape. To make matters worse, the persisting dominance of local rulers enabled them to restrict the access of

Dutch officials to the interior of the islands. This was the closed world of an archipelago of small islands. Nevertheless, it acquired the function of an “outsourced” emporium of Makassar and of a hiding place for the local competitors of the Dutch. In that sense, one advantage that seafarers might have looked for in an island hub was the possibility of evasion and hiding.

... AND THE WESTERN INDONESIAN ARCHIPELAGO

The most striking example of the rise of small islands in the context of the changing connectivity of great port cities is provided by the island world of the western Archipelago. The Riau Archipelago, Lingga, Bangka, or Belitung were of much greater relevance than the aforementioned *Tulang Besi* or *Bonerate*. They developed a certain centrality in political and economic as well as religious respects: new Bugis sultanates, new hubs of trade, and the strengthening of Islamization by Muslim Bugis.

It was the Bugis diaspora which offered the basis for these developments. The Bugis from South Sulawesi were a traditionally mobile community, partly for reasons of trade, partly for political and dynastic reasons (Lineton 1975, 31–38; Pelras 1996, 319–26). Traditionally, they settled on the southern peninsula of Sulawesi, where they established several kingdoms. They converted to Islam during the first decades of the seventeenth century, following the example of Makassar. But Makassar was not only a spiritual objective for Bugis: A significant number of Bugis merchants lived in the port city, both before and after 1667. Trade and religion were the home ties which connected those Bugis who dispersed throughout the Malay Archipelago to Makassar. Such a Bugis diaspora, whose origins cannot be determined in the sources, had already existed for a long time when the conquest of Makassar by the VOC produced a further push factor.

Situated at the southeast of the Strait of Malacca, the Riau Archipelago offered ideal conditions for a merchant community. The geographical setting allowed profitable business in all commercial sectors in which Bugis were engaged, while the lax political control of the Sultanate of Johor at that time, to which Riau officially belonged, guaranteed that no encroachment would be suspected. In fact, the Bugis were strong enough to intervene in the political conflicts of the local Malay sultanates, which led to war against the regional power of Johor.

In the end, a balance of power between the Bugis states on the smaller islands, the sultanate of Johor on the Malay Peninsula, and the VOC in the central port cities was established (Lewis 1995).

Alongside commerce and politics, Riau became a center of Muslim scholarship, especially during the nineteenth century, after the decline of Aceh and Banten (Laffan 2003, 19). In the middle of the century, a regional printing center for Muslim publications was established in Riau, acting on a level equal to those in Palembang on Sumatra and Singapore (Laffan 2011, 55). Furthermore, Riau is regarded as a center of Muslim pilgrimage (Barnard 2009): Great numbers of pilgrims started their *hajj* from Riau or used the islands as stopovers on the way to Jeddah and Mecca. However, these travels were not limited to the Arab Peninsula with its holy places: Even at the end of the nineteenth century, Riau-Lingga was an active part of influential relationships with Cairo (Laffan 2003, 149–50). All of this could not remain without influence on the political strength of the Riau Bugis states.

The home ties with Makassar and South Sulawesi were strong in the beginning, but their connectivity changed with the rise of the Bugis communities of Riau, Lingga, Bangka, and Belitung. The Bugis diaspora kept up direct connections with Makassar until the first half of the eighteenth century. Thereafter, direct maritime contacts disappear from the sources (Nagel 2003a, 721), suggesting that the new Bugis centers dissociated themselves from Makassar and succeeded as self-contained hubs. The Bugis states in the western Archipelago succeeded as independent hubs between the South China Sea and the Java Sea (Kathirithamby-Wells 1992, 602; Curtin 1984, 164–65), all the while supported by their own resources. Regionally landed *trepang* was sold directly to Chinese merchants (Lange 1850, 43). During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the rise of tin mining brought new groups of Chinese workers to the islands.¹³ This meant new demand for the sea products of the local fishermen and the related merchants. On the other hand, the greater Dutch influence and attempts to subjugate the Riau Archipelago since the late eighteenth century fostered piracy and some new instability in the region (Ota 2010). The newly founded city of Singapore became a promising alternative for a significant number of Bugis (Dalton 1838, 73–74).

CONCLUSION

The history of Makassar is the history of a consistently created connection with the interrelations of global markets. Political developments were able to reduce Makassar's role, but they also provided new occasions for new relationships, new expansions, and new markets. The cycles of connectivity in Makassar were political as well as economic in nature. And finally, the emergence and incidence of religious ideas went hand in hand with connectivity in the political and economic fields.

Makassar never was a "cultural island"—and that is why it was able to transfer several of its functions to other islands and to integrate its hubbing into the surrounding world of small islands. In other words, due to their connection with the Makassar hub, even the smallest islands in the surrounding area did not remain "insular islands" permanently. Some of them were able to achieve liminality, furthering their own connectivity and, in the end, Makassar's also. The imperial connection of small islands—presumably a natural consequence in a world of rising Dutch control—was not the sole experience: Not all of the small islands came under the influence of European empires. Nevertheless, they were able to play a crucial role in hubbing and connectivity in motion.

Keeping this in mind, the example of Makassar and its surrounding world of small islands supports Burkhard Schnepel's dictum that "insularity is not detrimental to globality, but integral to it."¹⁴ And it becomes clear that studying "a world of islands," instead of studying "the islands of the world," must be the objective of research, as Godfrey Baldacchino (2007, 14–17) has suggested.

NOTES

1. The story is told in several sources mainly of Jesuit origin: see Jacobs (1988, 114–18, 151–57, 166–74, 198–209, 253–57, 257–62). Other sources include Gervaise (1701, 124–29) or Cummins (1962, 113). See also Lach and Kley (1993, 1445).
2. The main European source for Makassar's trading connections before 1667 is a *notitie* by Cornelis Speelman, the Dutch conqueror of Makassar, kept in the Dutch National Archive in The Hague. For a detailed analysis including additional sources, see Nagel (2003a, 213–38).
3. For basic literature on the political situation in Makassar before the Dutch conquest, see, for example, Reid (1981, 1983), Villiers (1990a), or Cummings (2002).

4. The most comprehensive account of the Dutch war against Makassar (1666–1669) and the establishment of VOC’s colonialism in South Sulawesi is still Andaya (1981).
5. Declaration of Independence on August 17, 1945, Recognition of Sovereignty by the Netherlands on December 27, 1949.
6. All evidence concerning private trade in Makassar during the VOC period is based on an analysis of the harbormaster’s lists kept in the Dutch National Archive in The Hague, broadly presented in Nagel (2003a). For a short summary emphasizing the informal and clandestine trade, see Nagel (2003b); for an overview of the relevance of private trade to the company’s economy, see Nagel (2004). In this context, see also—partly based on the same sources—Knaap and Sutherland (2004).
7. *Trepang* is the Malay word for the biological class of *holothuroidea*. In English, it is known as sea slug or sea cucumber; in French, as *bêche-de-mer*, and in German, as *Seegurke*.
8. Koningsberger (1904) represents the Dutch knowledge of the colonial period, as well as still being a valid overview of the biological as well as commercial aspects of *trepang* fishing.
9. For basic historical literature on the Bajau regional sea nomads, see Sopher (1965), Nimmo (1968), or Sather (1997).
10. For basic literature on the Chinese diaspora in maritime Southeast Asia, see Tan (2013), Pan (1999), Wang (1981), Reid (1996), or Chirot and Reid (1997).
11. Original quote: Bonerate “*zijn met klippen en reven en dus met een voor schepen zeer gevaarlijk vaarwater, dat nergens goeden ankergrond aanbiedt, en derhalve schepen, die zaken op deze eilanden te verrigten hebben, noodzaakt gedurende dien tijd op en neer te houden.*” Bakkers (1861, 215)
12. Broch (1991) offers an interesting analysis of the local Bonerate economy using the concept of ecological niches introduced by Frederick Barth.
13. The tin industry in the western Malay Archipelago and its relation to the Chinese diaspora cannot be discussed here. For a comprehensive case study, see Somers Heidhüs (1992).
14. See the Introduction to this volume.

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Ambon, a Spicy Hub: Connectivity at the Fringe of the Indian Ocean

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INTRODUCTION

Between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific lie the thousands of islands of the Indonesian archipelago.¹ Some are large and have for centuries been deeply embedded in trade networks within the Indian Ocean. A few small islands became politically and economically important at a particular point in time, only to decline again at a later stage. For some islands, it may seem obvious why they became important. For example, the small islands of Ternate and Tidore in the Moluccas,² in the east of the archipelago, where cloves are indigenous, became powerful and well-embedded regional polities within the spice trade. The islands of the Banda group, on the other hand, the only place where nutmeg was indigenous, became connected in trade networks, but did not develop into a polity of any significance. It was another small island, Ambon, where neither cloves nor nutmeg grew indigenously, that would surpass most other islands in the region in connectivity.

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The questions are why a small island a mere 775 km² large could become a hub of considerable significance in the global trade networks from the sixteenth century onward; why it lost that position again in the late eighteenth century; and why and how these early connections have shaped present-day Ambon. My argument will be that the global interest in particular natural resources at a particular point in time, combined with its geopolitical position and regional and global changes in political constellations, accounts for the rise and fall of Ambon as a hub in the Indian Ocean. The spice trade and clove cultivation made the island particularly important from the sixteenth till the eighteenth century, when its role slowly faded due to shifting economic interests in the direction of other natural resources. The rise of prominence typically brought about a substantial increase in connectivity, but the connections did not fully disintegrate when Ambon lost its dominant position. Rather, these early connections had long-term effects and shaped the connectivity of Ambon's population up to the present in a specific way.

THE EARLY INTERREGIONAL SPICE TRADE

The Moluccas have been something of an enigma for scholars interested in bio-geological history. They share certain wildlife species with Eurasia and others with Australia, but they also have species that are unique to the region (Clode 2006). Two unique species, which came to be known as “the holy trinity of spices” (Andaya 1993, 116), were nutmeg and mace (*Myristica fragrans*, Linn.), indigenous to the Banda islands, and cloves (*Eugenia aromatica*, Kuntze), indigenous to Maluku.³

Cloves and nutmeg were known for their olfactory, medicinal, and preservative qualities, being widely used in food, medicine, and perfumes, as well as in incense. The use of cloves was first recorded in China during the third century BCE (Donkin 2003, 159), with nutmeg following later. In India, cloves were mentioned in the first half of the first millennium (ibid., 48). The spices were traded from the second century onward to Persia, the Arabian world, and the east coast of Africa, and on a regular basis from the seventh century (ibid., 85). They reached the Mediterranean in the fourth century, and from the eighth or ninth century, they were known throughout Europe.⁴

From at least the first century CE, vibrant long-distance trading networks connected what Tansen Sen (2010, 991) calls “the Afro-Eurasian world”. Hall (2006) points to the multidimensional character of trading

relations in Southeast Asia that included political embassies, emigration, and diverse forms of acculturation and adjustment. In the second half of the first millennium CE, Funan and Srivijaya became focal points in long-distance trade and the dissemination of Buddhism (Tansen Sen 2010, 993). Merchants from Srivijaya kept up intensive contacts with Chinese and other ports in the region, and at its height Srivijaya controlled much of the trade from the Moluccas to Sumatra and Java (Meilink-Roelofs 2013 [1962], 16–17). Chinese merchants were highly active in trading networks in insular Southeast Asia, where they founded a number of settlements in the region (Lockard 2010, 223), though they only visited the Moluccas in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Otherwise, the clove trade was mediated by Malay and Javanese merchants (Reid 1993, 4). Beginning in the ninth century, Chinese merchants traded spices as far as the Persian Gulf, but later on they concentrated on the eastern region of the Indian Ocean as far as the west coast of the Indian peninsula (Tansen Sen 2006, 423). From the eighth century onward, Arab and Muslim merchants from the western Indian coast controlled much of the spice trade, but the dominance of Arab traders weakened from the eleventh century onward due to geopolitical developments in the west (the crusades), the Mongol conquests (China), and the rise of the Chola empire and Hindu and Buddhist empires on the Malay Archipelago (see Tan Ta Sen 2009, 158–9). European, Indian, and Arab traders did not reach Maluku before 1500. Chinese, Javanese, and Sumatrans collected spices within the region of production and shipped them to Melaka, from where the spices were traded throughout the Indian Ocean. Arabs transported them to as far as Damascus and Aleppo, from where merchants from Venice and Genoa distributed them throughout Europe.⁵ As Beaujard (2005, 435) points out, in the fourteenth century a “downward spiral” occurred in East and West Asia, and commerce in the China Sea was disturbed after 1433.⁶ This political decay offered European powers the opportunity to expand their influence in the east.

Thus, long before the first Europeans arrived in the region in 1511, the Moluccas had become important nodes in the international spice trade carried on by regional traders from Makassar, Ternate, Tidore, Java, Sumatra, Melaka, Mindanao, and Luzon, and by merchants from all the regions throughout the Indian Ocean and the Chinese Sea. Trade in the Indian Ocean was a matter of tough competition marked by attempts to demarcate areas of influence, inclusion, and exclusion, as well as shifting alliances, in which no one achieved a definitive and lasting monopoly.

Europeans would remain for centuries a factor of minor importance in these networks and for long managed to establish no more than a few stable strongholds.

EARLY EUROPEAN TRADERS

For centuries, spices were only one of many valuable goods such as silk and cotton textiles, pottery and porcelain, ironware and copperware, silver and jewelry, and foodstuffs such as sago, rice, and fruit. However, during the “Age of Commerce” (Reid 1988, 993) beginning in the mid-fifteenth century, demand rose steeply. As a result prices surged, which generated intensified competition over the spice trade. Finding an overseas route to the East Indies was intended to allow European traders direct access to the spices and capture a larger share of the enormous profits than could be achieved at the far end of the chain only.

Spain and Portugal were the main powers in the European expansion of the fifteenth century. Having settled their wars with their Ottoman and North African competitors, they were ready to expand their influence beyond the Mediterranean. In order to prevent time- and wealth-consuming controversies over legitimate claims for conquest of places they expected to find, they concluded the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494. This treaty split the world into two and, with the blessing of the Pope, assigned each of the two European seafaring superpowers one half of the globe for purposes of conquest. This happened to the exclusion of basically all the other powers in the world, ignoring the fact that outside Europe this treaty was hardly taken seriously, if it was known at all. However, at the time the treaty was concluded, no one in the Western world really knew where exactly the Spice Islands were located, for a route to the region had yet to be found. It was therefore unclear who was to have the exclusive right to explore and occupy undiscovered lands in that part of the world. While Spanish seafarers started to circle the globe westward, via the Americas, Portuguese seafarers found a way to the mythical Moluccas via the Cape route, conquering the major trade center of Melaka in 1511. From there, a fleet under Afonso de Albuquerque set out to the Spice Islands later that year. His deputy commander, Francisco Serrão, was shipwrecked, and with a handful of men, he was rescued and brought to Ambon, from where he was invited to Ternate by the Sultan’s brother (Widjojo 2009, 9). Thus, the first European encounter with two islands that were to play such an important role in the European expansion happened coincidentally.

The Portuguese recognized the importance of controlling the main nodes of the spice trade. Staying ahead of their Spanish competitors was their main concern, and they claimed primary rights on the basis of the Treaty of Tordesillas, denying the Spanish the right of access to the region. The bigger challenge, however, was to secure a stable position within the complex webs of economic, political, and religious relationships in which various powerful actors forged ever-shifting alliances in their attempts to gain control and exclude newcomers (Rietbergen and Locher-Scholten 2004, 4–5). Melaka was the basis from which the Portuguese developed a web of trade relations with Maluku, in particular with the Sultan of Ternate (Knaap 1987, 12ff.). In contrast to South Asia, China, and the large islands of Java and Sumatra toward the west of the archipelago that had powerful, well-established states and principalities, polities in the Moluccas were less powerful. The Sultans of Ternate, Tidore, and Jailolo, the centers of clove production, were involved in fierce competition, each eager to expand his influence within the region and to establish a spice monopoly (Widjojo 2009, 9). Ternate entered into an alliance with the Portuguese to improve its position vis-à-vis Tidore, which was allied with Jailolo. Amboyna and the Banda islands were in a much more rudimentary stage of state formation at that time, with few political structures beyond village federations jointly ruled by village heads, without single rulers. Alliances between villages on different islands by fictive kin relations called *pela* were to strengthen their position against the expansion of Ternate and Tidore.⁷

When the Spanish rounded the globe through the western route, they entered Maluku from the Pacific. As had happened to Portuguese expeditions, many of their expedition ships sank, and once again, the early survivors were initially welcomed by Ternate (Widjojo 2009, 9). Confronted with a strong alliance between the Portuguese and Ternate, the Spanish linked up with Tidore. The Portuguese protested against what they saw, on the basis of their interpretation of the Treaty of Tordesillas, as a Spanish infringement on their jurisdiction. But Spain rejected the accusations and instead staked claims to the region as well. In 1523, this resulted in a war between the Portuguese, with their Ternaten allies, and the Spanish, supported by Tidore and Jailolo. Ternate and Portugal won this war and in 1525 forced the Spanish to withdraw from Maluku to their strongholds on Mindanao and Luzon (Reid 1993, 145; Widjojo 2009, 9). Portugal now set out to have its claim officially confirmed by the Pope. At the request of the Portuguese

King Manuel, a Papal bull, *Preaelsae Devotionis*, was issued that stipulated that the demarcation line of the Treaty of Tordesillas only referred to the Western Hemisphere (Donkin 2003, 29). In a last step, the Treaty of Saragossa of April 22, 1529, fixed the line of division east of Maluku, thereby assigning jurisdiction over most of Southeast Asia to the Portuguese. Formally excluded from jurisdiction in the region by Papal decree, the Spanish could only pursue their part in the spice trade from Manila (Donkin 2003, 31).

Once their joint fight against Tidore and the Spanish was over, the Portuguese and Ternate realized that they were both seeking expansion and fell out with each other. The Portuguese imposed their emerging monopoly on the spice trade with increasing violence, forcing the destruction of clove trees when the produce was offered to traders other than themselves. However, Andaya (1993, 202) suggests that eradicating clove trees was so laborious that they never fully succeeded. Ternate, Tidore, and the Portuguese also faced strong competition from Javanese and Chinese traders, as well as from various Moluccan elites, who also tried to secure a portion of the lucrative trade. The Portuguese attempts to establish a monopoly were further undermined by private Portuguese and other European merchants who had found their way to the region and who also tried to circumvent the Portuguese monopoly (Knaap 1987, 12).

Competition between the Portuguese and Ternate was further complicated by missionary activities. Conversion was a main pillar of European expansion and served to garner political and economic support. Conversion was also heavily entangled with the struggle for political domination among Muslim rulers. Islam had been introduced to Ternate in the fifteenth century by Arab and Indian merchants and had become a powerful factor in mobilizing support and shaping patronage relationships.

What made Portugal's position especially precarious was the difference in ideas about what proper trading relations entailed. Within the region, highly competitive trading relations usually took on the form of patronage systems. Even relations of great inequality tended to be expressed in terms of kinship, for example, as if they involved brothers if relations were relatively equal, or, in the case of great inequality, as if between fathers and sons. By contrast, a core task of Portuguese colonial expansion was conquest and with it the establishment of sovereignty under a Catholic king. Usually, they could not achieve more than the

status of junior partner, but where they did manage to turn local populations into subjects, as on Ambon, these were not seen as partners in exchange, let alone kin. Andaya (1993) suggests that the tensions between the Portuguese on the one hand and Ternate and Tidore on the other might have been more a result of a misunderstanding over what politics and trade implied than of mere competition.

In this highly volatile political context, and in light of the great profits that could be achieved by trading in spices, many yearned to break the emerging Ternate–Portuguese monopoly on the spice trade. To that end, in the early sixteenth century, seedlings of clove trees were secretly exported from Maluku to Amboyna, where they grew unexpectedly well, soon turning the island of Ambon into an important center of clove production (Knaap 1987, 12; Chauvel 1990, 13). In response, the Portuguese secured control of the island in 1538. With its well-protected harbor, a mixed population from various parts of the archipelago, and a low level of political organization, the island offered a perfect base from which to operate. In contrast to their fragile position in Ternate and Tidore, they managed to establish themselves as the sovereign power on part of the islands of Ambon, Saparua, Haruku, and Nusalaut (Knaap 2004, 42). They also began to convert the local population, but Christianity only gained ground haltingly. In 1547, a Jesuit baptized 600 persons, but the Muslim Hitunese on the north coast responded with an attack on the Portuguese (Widjojo 2009, 11; see also Bartels 1978, 103ff.).

Treaties with local leaders stipulated that the local population should pledge to be loyal subjects of the Portuguese king. However, from the beginning, there was misunderstanding about the exact meaning of these treaties. The Portuguese read them as signifying a transfer of sovereign power, which entitled them to impose taxes. The local signatories, by contrast, regarded them as a promise that the Portuguese would protect them in exchange for being able to levy taxes and impose exclusive delivery of cloves at set prices. For several decades, the Portuguese were very successful and established a robust settlement. But when taxes rose to an intolerable level, the Ambonese population began to resist, feeling that the Portuguese had not kept the promises contained in the treaties and that this discharged them from their obligation to deliver their cloves to them. They began to seek trading relations with other merchants who offered better conditions. As a result, the strong Portuguese economic position began to decay. In their sixteenth century heyday, the

Portuguese dominated the clove trade, carrying 75 percent of all cloves that were transported to Europe, mainly as a consequence of their initial strong alliance with Ternate. But in 1575, they were evicted from Ternate. They resettled in Tidore and were allowed to build a fort on Ambon in 1576 (Knaap 1987, 15), but by then, Javanese, Chinese, and Acehnese traders had re-established themselves as major spice merchants. The Portuguese reverted to being a minor player among many powerful competitors (Andaya 1993, 56).

THE VOC

The Dutch came relatively late to the region. Under Spanish rule, their trade had been mainly focused on the Baltic Sea. Banned from Spanish ports when they tried to separate from Spain, for a while commodities from the east were still accessible through Portuguese ports. But when the Spanish and Portuguese kingdoms were united in 1580 and the Dutch officially declared independence in 1581, they were denied access to Spanish and Portuguese ports and prohibited to engage in overseas trade. The Seven Provinces now began to think of expanding trade to the east. Initially, each province established its own private East India Company, but in 1602, they joined forces and founded the United East India Company (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, or VOC), a company with a chartered monopoly on overseas trade extended by the highest Dutch authority, the States General (*Staten Generaal*), with delegated sovereign powers that included the right to conclude treaties, wage wars, and establish colonies east of the Cape and west of the Magellan Strait. The VOC would exist until 1799.

With the help of a Portuguese route description that Jan Huyghen van Linschoten had smuggled to Amsterdam (Winus 2002, 109), the first Dutch ships arrived in Ambon in 1599, but hardly managed to lay hands on cloves at all. A year later, Steven van der Haghen arrived with two ships on the north coast, which was not occupied by the Portuguese where he entered into an agreement with local rulers stipulating that all cloves were to be delivered exclusively to the Dutch. Five years later, in 1605, Admiral van der Haghen returned with ten ships. With the help of Ambonese rulers who wanted to get rid of the rigid and punitive Portuguese regime, the Dutch managed to oust the latter and brought the region under their control. They also allied themselves with local rulers against Ternate's and Tidore's claims over the region.

In the course of time, the VOC founded a large number of trading posts along the coasts of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Like Spain and Portugal, in each of these settlements, the VOC had to adapt to the power relations within the region in which they were a junior partner, and only rarely could they impose their will on local rulers. In contrast to the Spanish and Portuguese, and despite its far-reaching charter, in this initial period, the VOC saw itself in the first place as a trading company, though violence was not shunned when considered necessary. Relations with local rulers were of mutual, yet unequal dependence (Rietbergen and Locher-Scholten 2004, 7–12).

Within the Moluccas, Ambon became the VOC's major stronghold. Far enough away from Ternate and Tidore, and without powerful polities in the region, the island was deemed a suitable place in which to settle their competition with the Portuguese. When the Dutch took over the Portuguese castle in 1605, without intending to do so, they became the rulers of the small Christian population that had been subjects of the Portuguese Crown since 1538 (Knaap 2004, 42). As vassals of the VOC, the local population had to provide forced labor for the fortifications and deliver their cloves exclusively to the *Compagnie*, but the Christians, now turning from Catholicism to Protestantism, also obtained the status of *burghers* (citizens) with specific duties and special privileges, such as access to Western education, the civil service, and the army. Christian Ambonese would retain a privileged position until the end of the colonial era, the effects of which would last decades beyond Indonesia's independence.

On the north coast of Ambon, the Dutch had to deal with a village alliance led by four leaders who were to remain independent of Ternate. Neither this alliance nor the *pela* alliances each of the villages had entered into within the region were very powerful. Dutch support was therefore welcomed, but since these villages were Muslim, their relations with the VOC stood on a different footing from those in the Christian south.

To establish its position in Amboyna, the VOC and its predecessors concluded a series of treaties and contracts with local leaders from 1599 onward throughout the first half of the seventeenth century, notably in 1600 and 1605, and again in 1607 and 1609 with the Sultan of Ternate (Knaap 1987, 15–23). The VOC treaties with villages on the north coast stipulated that the local leaders would deliver all their cloves to the VOC at prices set by the VOC. In exchange, the VOC would provide military and political support to the Ambonese on the north coast against a potential Ternaten invasion (Knaap 2004, 42–43). The treaty signatories

acknowledged their mutual jurisdiction (Knaap 1987, 17). Despite the treaties, however, the Dutch had to work hard to keep the population under their control. To that end, they forced people to resettle from the mountainous areas, where they were difficult to control, to the coast, which was more easily accessible to the new rulers, and imposed a new government structure. However, dissatisfaction with the forcibly imposed monopoly of the spice trade began to grow. Islam proved to be a powerful means to mobilize political support against the Dutch, but the Muslims were not quite strong enough to chase them out. While this part of Ambon always remained less loyal to the Dutch than the Christian south, the Muslim leaders could not prevent it from becoming a VOC vassal in 1646 (Knaap 2004, 46–51).

Local leaders on the north coast of Ambon nonetheless allowed the Dutch to build a fort in Hitu and a fortification in Hila to defend the island against Ternate and Tidore. From then on, the Dutch had a relatively solid settlement that would serve as their center of the spice trade and from where they competed with the other powers of the region and the numerous merchants looking for a share of the trade. Ambon had a safe harbor, the Christian south was loyal, and the Muslim north with its fortifications could be well defended. During a short period, from 1605 to 1618, Ambon was even the regional seat of the VOC. However, further reflection led to the desire to be closer to the major trading routes to India and China taking precedence, and in 1619, the newly founded town of Batavia on Java became the VOC's headquarters (Reid 1993, 274). Java would eventually outdo the Moluccas in importance because of its emerging coffee production in the eighteenth century.

To maintain control over the clove trade, the Dutch followed the policy that the Portuguese had used, namely mounting so-called *hongí* tours⁸ to the clove-growing islands, where they destroyed the trees of producers who had been accused of illegally delivering their produce to non-VOC merchants. As it takes at least six years before newly planted trees begin to produce, it was a fairly effective measure, although like the Portuguese and Spanish before them, the VOC never managed to assert full control. In practice, the spice trade continued to attract a great many traders who dealt on their own or acted as middlemen for powerful rulers, especially from Makassar and Java. The Dutch applied increasing force to achieve their monopoly, violence that met with growing resistance, but eventually they were successful. When the last main competitor, Makassar, was defeated in 1642, they finally seemed to

have consolidated their monopoly (Knaap 1987, 22). But unexpectedly they faced another problem, as in 1647–1648, overproduction threatened clove prices. The Dutch responded by confining clove production to Amboyna and by seeking to have all clove plantations in the region under Ternate’s authority destroyed. Like the Portuguese, they never eradicated all the clove trees in these regions, but by the middle of the seventeenth century, the islands of Amboyna were the only remaining places where cloves were being produced on a large scale (*ibid.*, 23).

In the beginning of the seventeenth century, another European actor appeared on the scene in search of a share in the spice trade: the English East India Company (EIC). As a latecomer, they were junior to the Dutch, but because they had supported the Dutch against Spain, they were treated as allies. However, from 1616 onward, relationships deteriorated, and in 1617, complaints about humiliating and unjust treatment eventually reached Europe. In an attempt to relax the tensions, but also on the basis of discussions among diplomats of the VOC and EIC in Japan in 1610, the VOC and EIC signed a treaty in 1619 that gave the English authority to trade alongside the Dutch in exchange for sharing the costs of the Dutch garrisons (Starling 2004, 142–3; Games 2014, 514). Meanwhile, mutual suspicion grew in the east, and relations between the Dutch and English deteriorated further. Tensions came to a head in 1620, when a group of Englishmen, Japanese, and a Portuguese were arrested and found guilty of conspiracy against the Dutch. Ten Englishmen were beheaded. When news of this reached Europe only three or four years later, this put relations between the Low Countries and England under severe strain. In the context of the political realignments of the late seventeenth century, these events came to be known as the “Amboyna Massacre” (Bassett 1960; Starling 2004).⁹ Dutch harassment became so disruptive that the EIC hastened to withdraw from the region (Bassett 1960, 7–8; Starling 2004). In 1621, the Dutch consolidated their monopoly of the nutmeg and mace trades with an act of extraordinary violence, murdering 14,000 to 15,000 Bandanese and replacing them with slave labor (Games 2014, 515).

In the seventeenth century, the VOC was mainly interested in spices, but many other commodities were also traded in the Moluccan markets, and this affected the spice trade. Before the Europeans arrived, spices were traded for sago, rice, salt, textiles, ironware, jewelry, earthenware, and porcelain with merchants from the region, China, and the Indian Ocean world. The Dutch could not offer these products due to

peculiar trade policies that set them apart from other merchants. From the Low Countries, the Dutch ships carried in the first place soldiers, military and ship-repair equipment, navigational instruments, lead and iron, and large amounts of money to buy up spices (Knaap 1987, 19; Rietbergen and Locher-Scholten 2004, 11). In the many Dutch trading posts along the Indian Ocean, they traded regional commodities from which they earned additional money to buy spices (Raben 2004, 1387). The Company rule was that in the Moluccas spices were to be bought with money and not exchanged for other goods. This policy put an enormous strain on the Dutch monopoly. Local people were not keen on being paid in money, if only because they could not always convert it into food. There were times when they were too weak to pick cloves for lack of sago. Several officials warned VOC headquarters of this problem, but the Heeren XVII, the heads of VOC in Amsterdam, were far away. It would take about two years before an answer to a letter would arrive. Against the advice of his governors in the region, Governor-General Jan Pieterszoon Coen ordered all other merchants to be excluded, and the contracts with local chiefs to be maintained, even though they had often been made under duress. Treating the local population fairly and with consideration, as the Heeren XVII wished, was of no concern to him (Boxer 1988, 105–9). However, the practice turned out to be different, as the local population turned to other merchants to obtain the food and commodities they were seeking. The Dutch could not prevent large numbers of merchants from entering their port to exchange spices for commodities, thus bypassing the supposed Dutch monopoly. As Knaap (1987, 19) suggests, this turned out to be the weak point in VOC rule, as its own policy invited constant breaches of the very monopoly that the VOC was so keen to establish. The VOC tried to keep control of the inter-island trade by means of passes, extended in Ambon, which gave the holder the right to trade in certain regions for a limited period of time. However, even this system never fully prevented what the VOC viewed as illegal spice trading. The fact that VOC employees themselves also engaged in the illegal spice trade to bolster their meager salaries did not help either (Boxer 1988, 225). Thus, the VOC's own policies prevented the monopoly from being more than partial at best. Boxer (*ibid.*, 223) estimates that of the total spice production, two-thirds arrived in Europe, while one-third was traded within the Indian Ocean.

Though the VOC had started as a trading company, in the course of a few decades, it established an increasingly stable administration in Amboyna (Knaap 2004, 44). The Dutch further stabilized their position

by building fortifications and by trying to impose their rule on their allies (ibid., 56), relying predominantly on the Protestant population. Their fortifications were defended by loyal Protestant Moluccans, and Ambon town would develop into an urban center with a mixed but predominantly Protestant population. The Dutch also established a small Christian settlement in Hila on the Muslim north coast to protect Fort Amsterdam. This Christian settlement would remain there until the civil war at the beginning of the twenty-first century. By contrast, the Muslim population never fully accepted Dutch domination and several times launched serious rebellions. Their forced resettlement on the coast contributed to the fact that in the end they had to submit to the powerful Dutch.

Thus, due to the arrival of Europeans, in the seventeenth century, Ambon evolved from an unimportant island into a spicy hub, with global trading networks that connected the region with the Indian Ocean and with Europe. Due to VOC policies, the local population remained well connected with trade relations outside Dutch control. However, despite harsh measures, the Dutch position long remained precarious.

FROM PRIVATE COMPANY TO COLONY

From the middle of the seventeenth century onward, power relations between the Dutch and the English shifted dramatically. Three wars with England between 1652 and 1674 took a heavy toll on Dutch financial reserves. Besides, in the decades that followed the English conquered many of the Dutch trading posts in the Indian Ocean, which severely constrained Dutch trade. By the end of the eighteenth century, the VOC was virtually bankrupt, for which the heavy losses incurred in the fourth Anglo-Dutch war (1781–1784) were also largely responsible. The recently established new Dutch state, the *Bataafse Republiek*, nationalized the company in 1795, and on December 31, 1799, the VOC was officially dissolved. In 1811, during the French occupation of the Netherlands, the English occupied the Dutch East Indies, but were obliged to return them in 1816. Under their new King William I, the Dutch East Indies became a colony of the Netherlands. By then, Ambon's preeminence had already declined.

As long as high returns on cloves and nutmeg could be achieved, Ambon remained an important center of commerce. But when, in the course of the eighteenth century, spices no longer yielded high profits, Dutch planters began to experiment with other crops, notably tea, coffee, sugar, palm oil, and rubber, products that were not suitable for

Moluccan soils. With the decline of the spice trade, Ambon ceased to be a center of colonial commerce and lost influence in favor of Java and Sumatra, where most of the new production was located. With the arrival of the plantation economy, the Dutch East Indies mutated from a mercantile into a settlement colony.

In the course of the twentieth century, the national demand for cloves would rise once again because of an emerging industry of clove cigarettes. However, by then, clove cultivation had spread widely throughout the world, and prices fluctuated according to developments on the world market. Cloves were cultivated throughout Indonesia, while the world market was also served by Zanzibar, Bengal, the West Indies, Penang, Sumatra, and Madagascar, to which cloves had been exported during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁰

Yet, despite the decline in Ambon's economic importance, the island did not sink into total oblivion but continued to maintain considerable networks of relationships. Together with a handful of other regions, such as Toba Batak on Sumatra, Menado, and Minahasa on Sulawesi, Timor, and Papua, it had a sizeable Christian population from which the colonial government recruited civil servants and soldiers for its army, the *Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indisch Leger* (KNIL) (Oostindie 2015, 134–36).¹¹ The Ambonese Christians belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church, for which Ambon town was a regional center.¹² The privileged position of the Christian Ambonese did not, however, extend to Muslims, who participated far less in Western education. As an administrative center, the island continued to attract immigrants of various ethnic backgrounds. The Chinese and Arabs were mainly involved in commerce. Some of the Arab Hadrami families had a good Islamic education and provided religious leaders, as they still do today. Migrants from other Indonesian islands were mostly engaged in petty trade and services. Butonese immigrants were valued for their food production, mainly fishing and vegetable gardening. As second-class citizens, they were not allowed to own land and were prohibited from cultivating cloves or any other tree crop. They had very little access to education and virtually none to government jobs (F. von Benda-Beckmann 1990).

By the end of the colonial era, the Ambonese population had become quite segregated. Half of rural Ambon was Protestant, the other half Muslim. Segregation was somewhat mitigated because old kin and *pela* relations were still recognized between groups that had turned Protestant and those that had converted to Islam. In general, relations

among Christians and Muslims were relaxed, cordial, yet distant (Bartels 1978). The sizeable Butonese population in the northern part of Ambon lived mostly segregated from the Ambonese settlements. Only Ambon town had a truly mixed population. Education and government were largely in the hands of Christians. Each of the population groups carved out their own economic and social niches and maintained specific networks of relationships with worlds outside the Moluccas, the extent and importance of which differed greatly, depending on their economic activities and on their access to government facilities.

KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS

As Leuker suggests (2010, 167), networks of trade were also knowledge networks. From the fifth century onward, knowledge and information spread by Brahmanical and Buddhist networks extending from the Indian subcontinent (Donkin 2003, 70–71). And from the seventh until the eleventh century, Buddhist merchants had communicated knowledge from Funan and Srivijaya (Tansen Sen 2010, 993). Later Islamic commercial and religious contacts brought knowledge about Islam and the Arabic language to the region. The Arabic script became the common form of written communication, and Muslims used it long after the Dutch had arrived in the region. Yet oral communication long remained dominant in Southeast Asia (Reid 1993, 133, 153–4).

From the fifteenth century onward, enormous changes occurred in culture, education, legal systems, and building styles and fashion. Until the mid-seventeenth century, these changes were dominated by Southeast Asians (Reid 1988, 235). Cook (2007), in his study of the scientific revolution that occurred in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, analyzes the rising demand for objects of nature. This demand was stimulated by preservation techniques, the documentation of observations of plants and animals, a rising interest in comparison, and the hope that such knowledge would improve health conditions. The Netherlands were at the forefront of these developments, and the VOC became deeply involved in the emerging nexus of trading, “military fiscalism,” and the production and exchange of knowledge that connected Europe with Asia (*ibid.*, 225). Ambon was a node in this nexus, thanks to Georg Everhard Rumphius, a German who had traveled to the east as a soldier, was hired as a VOC official, and from 1660 to 1669 worked in Hila on a comprehensive study

of Ambon's wildlife. His *Amboinsch Kruidboek* (*the Amboinese Herbarium Rumphius* 1705) and *D'Amboinsche Rariteitkamer* (Amboinese Cabinet of Curiosities, Rumphius 1741–1750), in which he described numerous plants and animals, would become world famous. He not only gave new names to species that were as yet unknown in the Western world, he also provided indigenous names in various languages and developed a comparative method. The products of this new scientific technology were jealously guarded by the VOC. His work, which included ethnographic descriptions, was published posthumously (Leuker 2010, 151; Donkin 2003, 329; Cook 2007, 329–32; Huigen 2010a, 8). His friend and son-in-law, the Dutch minister François Valentyn (1724–1726), who also worked on Ambon, published a first comparative ethnography (Huigen 2010b).

With the introduction of Christian religious and secular European texts, the Latin script and Dutch would slowly replace the Arabic language and its script. This provided the Christian population with access to Western learning and knowledge. Education in the Dutch East Indies would nonetheless remain limited to a small elite in which Christians were overrepresented. For the privileged Christians, education formed a main conduit to the major colonial centers of education on Java and in later colonial times to the Netherlands. Literacy in Ambon was among the highest in Indonesia (Reid 1988, 217–18). The Christians were far better embedded in extended European knowledge networks than the other parts of Ambonese society. The Dutch also introduced modern medicine. The Catholic hospital in Ambon is still considered the best in the region.

From the beginning of the Early Modern Period in Southeast Asia, Protestant ministers entertained close contacts not only with their mother churches in the Low Countries, but also with Protestant settlements in Batavia, Banten, Melaka, Ceylon, and other Christian settlements on the Indian coast (Boxer 1988, 163). Although there is no evidence that many Ambonese Muslims actually traveled to Mecca before the twentieth century, their trading relations brought them into contact with the broader Islamic world. Through trade, religion, and political activity, Moluccan Muslims became embedded in religious networks that extended to Java, Melaka, Sumatra, India, the Arab world, and Persia. And the more successful the Dutch were in imposing their rule and spice monopoly, the more Muslims relied on these networks (Boxer 1988, 172; Reid 1993, 134, 147–48, 278).

The Dutch also brought Dutch law to the region (Knaap 1987; F. von Benda-Beckmann 1990; Reid 1993), with its treaties, contracts, market and trade regulations, pass requirements, property regime, family law, and courts, et cetera. Merchants resented some of these regulations because they imposed restrictions on their trade. But Dutch law also offered opportunities. For example, an important Muslim leader on the north coast of Ambon, Hassan Suleiman, made a series of testaments in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that comprised a curious mixture of elements of Islamic and Dutch colonial law, testaments that were carefully kept by his descendants. By the end of the twentieth century, they served as evidence for claims to the position of village head (von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann 1987). Dutch colonial law became so deeply entangled with Ambonese customary law that only a few knew that some of their customary law and institutions go back to early colonial regulations.

POST-COLONIAL AMBONESE RELATIONSHIPS

When Indonesia declared itself independent in 1945, Ambon's position took an unexpected turn. The peace treaties stipulated that Indonesia would become a federal state, and the Dutch had promised the Moluccans an independent state within that federation. When Indonesia formally became independent in December 1949, the Dutch government had to decide what to do with its Moluccan KNIL soldiers. In order to protect them from retaliation for having fought on the wrong side during the War of Independence, they were "repatriated" to the Netherlands, though they had never lived there. They were to stay there until an independent South Moluccan Republic had been established. Having been demobilized onboard, the KNIL soldiers arrived in the Netherlands as civilians. They were settled in army barracks, where they were provided for by the government, but initially were denied access to the job market (von Benda-Beckmann and Leatemia-Tomatala 1992). Soon it became clear that Indonesia had become a unified state without a Free South Moluccan Republic and that returning would be impossible. They were resettled in neighborhoods especially built for them on the fringes of small towns scattered throughout the country. The dream of a free South Moluccan Republic would remain a defining characteristic of these Dutch Moluccans.

During the first decades after independence, Indonesia denied Dutch Moluccans access to Indonesia. When the ban was lifted, visits to the Moluccas became frequent. Some young Dutch Moluccans married spouses from Ambon, and several elderly Dutch Moluccans decided to retire there. Large sums of money were sent to support relatives and to renovate churches and mosques, which they felt balanced well the ritual and spiritual support they received in return (von Benda-Beckmann and Leatemia-Tomatala 1992). Yet the re-established relationships were often complicated. In the 1990s, disagreement among Dutch and Ambonese Moluccans about the proper organization of development projects laid bare the wide cultural gap four decades of separation had created (K. von Benda-Beckmann 2015). But there were also positive examples of cooperation, for example, a flourishing nutmeg export business set up by a highly esteemed Muslim Dutch Moluccan around 2008 with relatives in Hila. Participants told us that they welcomed the Dutch way of organizing. Thus, the intensive contacts and the money that began to flow from the Netherlands to Ambon gave a new boost to existing transnational networks. Once again, the Protestant part of the population profited most.

Although the Indonesian Ambonese learned to live within a unified Indonesia, here too the dream of a South Moluccan Republic did not die completely. The government kept a firm lid on public expressions of such ambitions. Indonesia established a major navy base in Ambon, which was to serve several purposes, not only defending its eastern flank, but also allowing the Suharto regime to keep an eye on the dormant separatist movement. Toward the end of the twentieth century, the navy was given yet another task: protecting Indonesian's maritime territories from having its rich fishing grounds depleted through the encroachment of high-tech fishing boats from the Philippines, Taiwan, and China. During my fieldwork in 1984 and 1985, the press reported the seizure of ships and criminal proceedings against their captains. Persecution of foreign fishing ships became a rich source of corruption and competition between the navy, the police, and the office of the public prosecutor. The interest in fish had become the new natural resource to affect the political position of Ambon.

In 1991, the Suharto regime established a clove monopoly, headed by Suharto's youngest son, to cater for the increasing demands of the clove cigarette industry. After independence, Indonesia became an importer of cloves to supply the demand for these cigarettes. Prices were low until the 1980s (van Fraassen 1972). When they rose, clove plantations were set up throughout Indonesia (Bulbeck 2004b, 1239). On

Ambon, the rural population was heavily engaged in clove production on their family property by the mid-1980s (F. von Benda-Beckmann 2007, 162). Although clove production was a welcome source of income for the local population, this income was unpredictable not only because of fluctuating prices on the world market, but also because clove trees have a production cycle of four years with only one full harvest. When prices were good and the harvest was rich, peddlers flooded the villages and people wallowed in conspicuous consumption and gambling. Only the more prudent families saved their earnings to send their children to school. This also enabled many Muslims to do the pilgrimage to Mecca. Low prices or years without a harvest did not generate hunger, as people could revert to their predominantly subsistence economy of sago, fish, vegetables from their gardens, and forest products. Access to sago was also possible through *pela* relations or on the basis of share-harvesting arrangements on Seram (F. von Benda-Beckmann and K. von Benda-Beckmann 2007, 63). Many also began to plant nutmeg and experimented with cocoa, but these crops suffered from similar price instabilities as cloves. Cultivation of cash crops became more diverse, but never again reached the overwhelming importance it had enjoyed before the end of the eighteenth century.

Under the Suharto regime, another shift occurred that would have a great impact on Ambon. Suharto had initially favored a secular government, but during the last two decades of his regime, he gave more priority to Muslim concerns. As a legacy of the colonial era, the provincial government of Ambon had been staffed mainly by Protestants, especially the higher positions. When Muslims began to catch up in terms of education, they began to demand a larger share in government. As Ambon's economy was going through a low period, and jobs outside government were scarce, it was vitally important for educated young people to secure positions within government. Whole departments are being "taken over by Muslims," Christian civil servants explained to us in 1984, generating a deep sense of uncertainty among them. When the Suharto regime fell, the tensions exploded, throwing Ambon into what amounted to little less than a civil war. A mixture of political, economic, religious, and ethnic factors made the events particularly violent. Many were killed, and many migrants fled. Inter-religious relations deteriorated dramatically, and the conflicts were increasingly framed in religious and ethnic terms. The Christian enclave in Hila was attacked by Muslims, but the people were warned by their Muslim neighbors and were able

to flee. Their houses were burned and they took refuge in a Christian village from which they have still not returned. Conflict was aggravated by the fact that the armed forces feared to lose influence after Suharto's regime ended and saw an opportunity to demonstrate their indispensability. There are strong indications that unofficial militias (some of whom allegedly were trained in Afghanistan) were employed by the army to stir up unrest (See Bubandt 2000; Manuhutu et al. 2000; van Klinken 2001; Bräuchler 2010, 15ff.).

The Dutch Moluccans were distressed by these events and found themselves in a dilemma. While they felt responsible for helping their relatives whose living conditions were deteriorating so rapidly, they also realized that if they sent money, this might well be used to buy weapons, which would deepen the conflict. Most Dutch Moluccans did not want to support this violence and found other ways to support their relatives (Manuhutu et al. 2000; K. von Benda-Beckmann 2004). Violence only came to an end when the political situation in Jakarta had calmed down and the armed forces had been accommodated within the new political constellation. Within the Moluccas, a process of reconciliation started that built upon the re-establishment of customary structures (Bräuchler 2010, 25–26).

The civil war left the island more segregated than it had been before, and the economic situation has not greatly improved. As before, there are few jobs outside the government, and many young Moluccans leave the region to seek education or jobs outside the Moluccas. Nutmeg and cloves, along with other cash crops, are still grown and represent a hope for a better future, but the aspired for future is not on the island. The income from spices, when it comes, is often used to allow the young to emigrate to where jobs are available and to pay for education of a higher quality than what Ambon itself can offer.

CONCLUSIONS

The rise and fall of Ambon as a spicy hub on the fringes of the Indian Ocean resulted from the struggle for economic and geopolitical power among rulers in the Indian Ocean world, the China Sea, and Europe. Specific natural resources were the driving force for these developments. The Moluccas would not have become important but for the fact that cloves, nutmeg, and mace were exclusively indigenous in that region. Having been traded in modest quantities within the areas of the Indian

Ocean and China, they became among the most desired products globally between roughly 1450 and 1650. Political instability in West and East Asia and political developments on the Iberian Peninsula enabled European expansion to flourish. Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, and English merchants entered the Indian Ocean to capture shares in the profitable spice trade from Southeast Asia. By serendipity, Ambon first caught Portuguese attention, but it was eventually able to become the spicy hub because local political structures were relatively weak, which facilitated the VOC obtaining the access they could not secure in regions with more powerful rulers. Besides, the smuggled clove trees happened to grow very well in Amboyna's soils. An additional reason was that the natural condition of the Bay of Ambon offered a well-protected port halfway between the two original regions of spice production: Maluku proper in the north, and the Banda islands in the south. Thus, the unimportant and less well-connected island of Ambon became the center of European commerce in the region. Reaching its zenith in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Ambon became a vibrant node in networks of commerce and of knowledge exchange and production, as that produced by Rumphius and Valentyn. By the late eighteenth century, spices had lost their economic significance due to over-production and falling prices. The colony's center gravitated toward West Indonesia, where more profitable crops were cultivated. The growing demand for cloves for the cigarette industry in the second half of the twentieth century did not translate into a new hub in Ambon because cloves were no longer exclusively grown in that region.

Ambon's history also suggests that, long after a hub has faded away, a distant past may keep resonating into the present. The colonial experience had been about finance, trade, and government, as well as knowledge exchange and education. This nexus had left the island with a religiously segregated population and a diaspora in the Netherlands of Ambonese striving for an independent South Moluccan Republic. The colonial legacy was also one of tensions over access to education and jobs in the government that came to a head around the time of the fall of the Suharto regime and in which the armed forces played an aggravating role. The military base serves to protect Indonesia's fishing grounds, as well as keeping potential separatists quiet. With their close relationships with Moluccan relatives in Netherlands and the remittances that still come in, the people of Ambon are in characteristic ways outward-oriented. Spices remain important cash crops, but they no longer serve

to attract many people to the island. Because of a growing well-educated population and a tight job market, revenues from spices are allowing many young people to find a more promising future elsewhere. They turn to Makassar, Java, Malaysia, and Thailand, as well as to Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Europe, and Japan, or, in the case of Muslims, to Islamic centers of learning, once again changing the networks of connectivity.

NOTES

1. I thank Burkhard Schnepel and Ned Alpers for their valuable comments and suggestions.
2. I use the term “Moluccas” as it is used today. In the VOC period and well into the nineteenth century, the term “Maluku” was restricted to Halmahera and the small but influential islands of Ternate and Tidore, which today are known as the North Moluccas. The island of Ambon was called Amboyna in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, but Knaap (2004, 37) mentions that Ceram, Buru, and the smaller islands together, including Ambon, were also referred to as Amboyna. I shall use Ambon for the island and Amboyna for the groups of islands.
3. Andaya (1993, 1). See Donkin (2003, 1–23) for debates on nomenclature.
4. Donkin (2003, xviii–xix, 118). Reid (1993, 4) states that the first records of cloves and nutmeg in Alexandria date from the tenth century.
5. See Donkin (2003). See also (Widjojo 2009, 13) for regional trade in Southeast Asia, and Bulbeck (2004a, 849) for the early Chinese and Javanese clove trade.
6. See also Fukuyama (2012, 210–11).
7. *Pela* alliances were based on a common pre-Christian and pre-Islamic religion. It was not unusual for Islamic and Christian villages to have *pela* relations (Bartels 1978, 103ff.).
8. A *honggi* was a fleet of galley-like ships called *kora-kora*, manned by indigenous rowers (Knaap 2010, 150).
9. See Games (2014) for a discussion of the global context in which these events that initially were a judicial process became labeled as massacre during the English–Dutch wars in the late seventeenth century.
10. Donkin (2003, 4) also mentions Mauritius and Bourbon, the later La Réunion. Burkhard Schnepel pointed out to me that here cloves never became important.
11. Protestant minorities from Menado and the Moluccas were overrepresented in the KNIL (Oostindie 2015, 83; see also Raben 2002, 188; Andaya 2002, 289).

12. It also would become the seat of the Roman Catholic bishopric in the mid-twentieth century.

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