

**TRACING NARRATIVES:  
THE MAURITIAN-CHAGOSSIAN SOVEREIGNTY DISPUTE**

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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*Art, Design, and the Public Domain*

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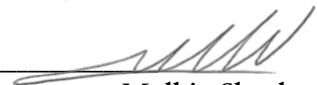
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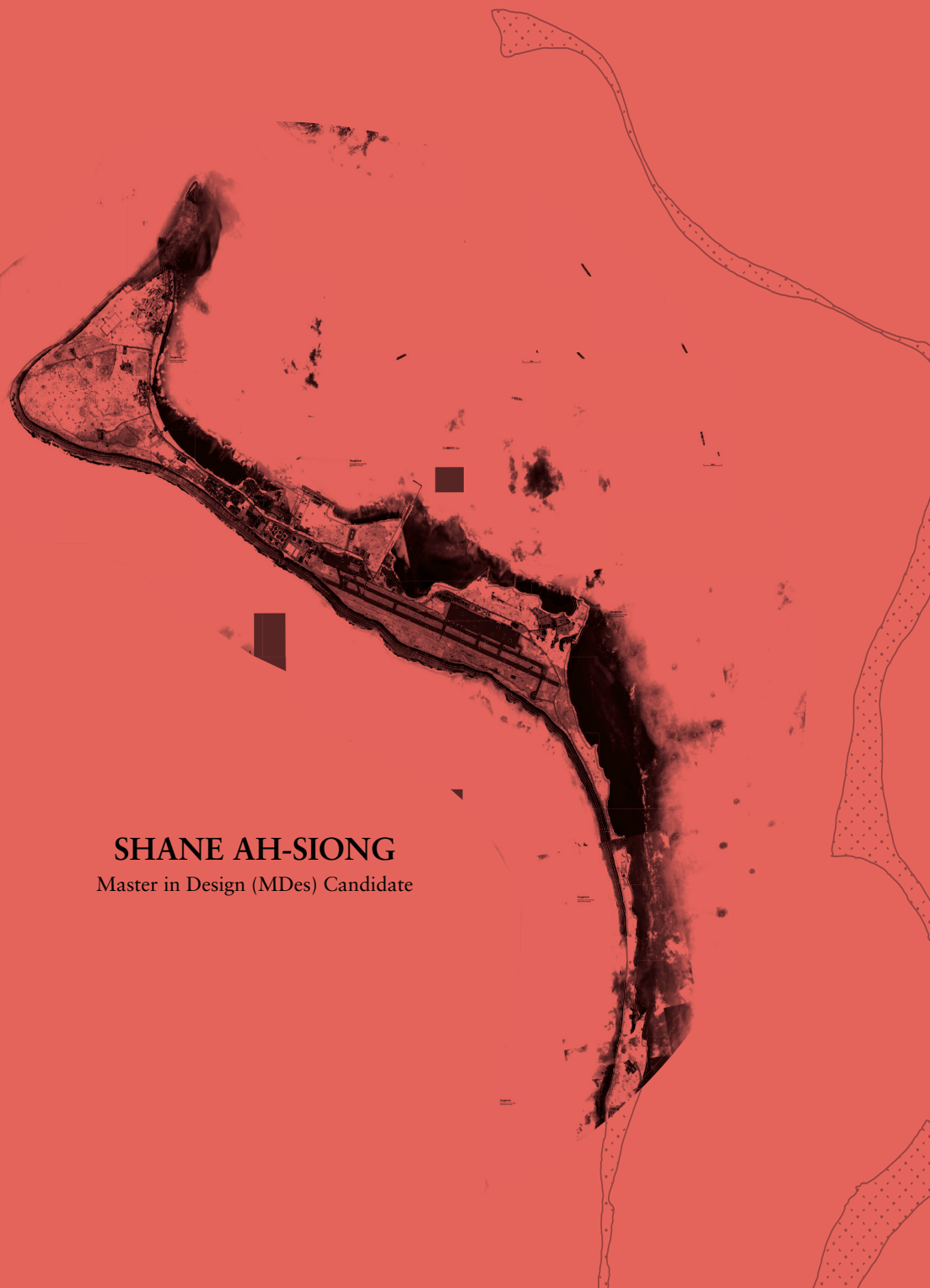
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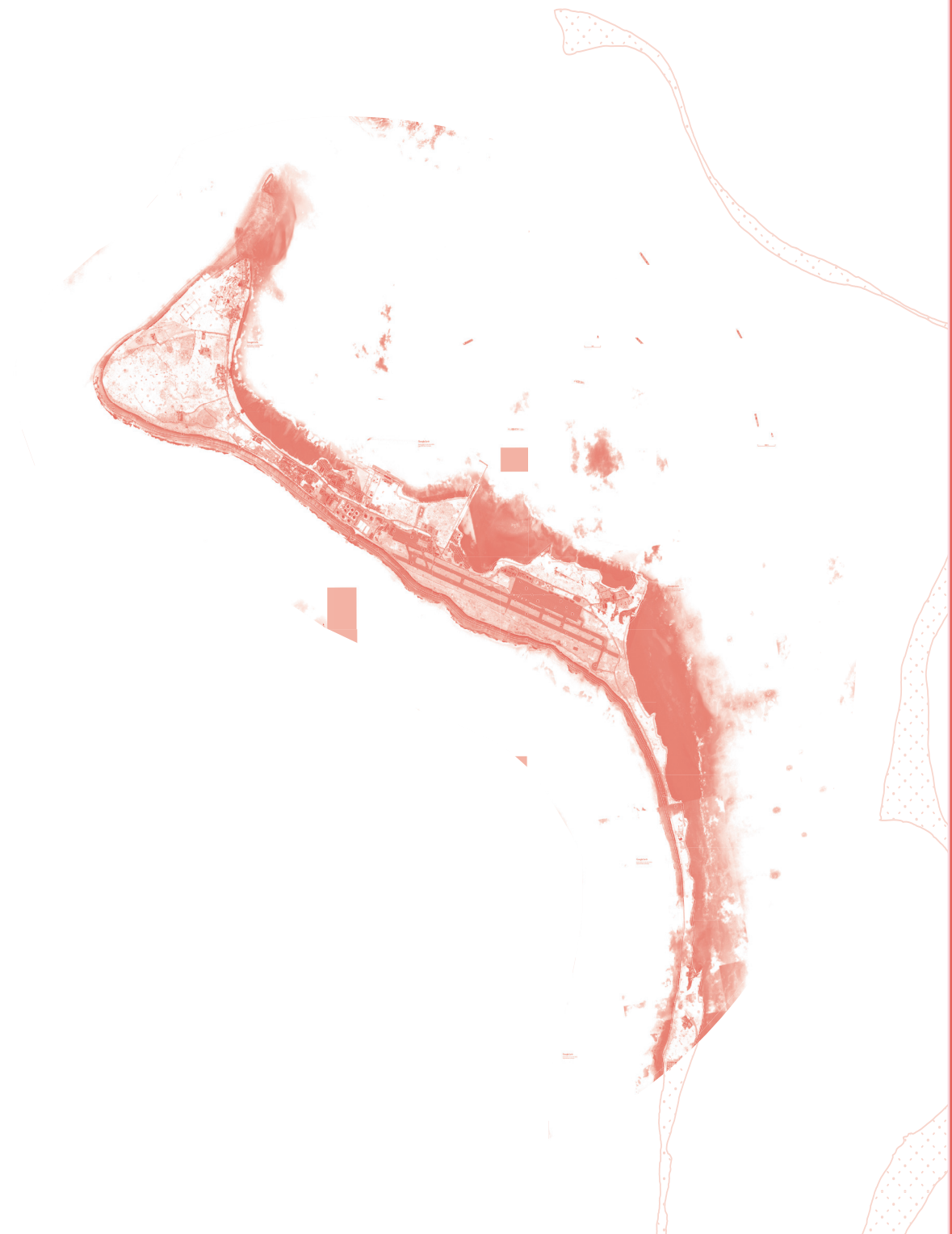
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# TRACING NARRATIVES

THE MAURITIAN-CHAGOSSIAN SOVEREIGNTY DISPUTE



**SHANE AH-SIONG**  
Master in Design (MDes) Candidate



HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ART, DESIGN, AND THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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SHANE AH-SIONG

Master in Design (MDes) Candidate



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis and its body of research are dedicated to the Chagossians and the generation of Mauritians and Chagossians of a true post-colonial and decolonised Mauritius.

The production of this thesis would not have been possible without the assistance of Harvard University Asia Center, Harvard University Graduate School of Design's Advanced Studies Program.

My gratitude goes to my advisor, Malkit Shoshan who has been exposed to the multiple hurdles I have faced throughout the past year and has had my back from the first day. Audrey Albert, her parents, and grandparents, Philline and Seellal, who trusted me with their story. Olivier Bancoult, Patricia, and Makin from the Chagos Refugees Group. JS from the National Archives of Mauritius. My Art, Design, and the Public Domain cohort and their tremendous feedback. Krzysztof Wodiczko for the vision instilled up to this day. Tania Bruguera for her assistance and encouragement. Allison Limfat, Anthony Terzino, Arthur van Havre, Aqiil Gopee, Elyjana Roach, Eva Lavranou, Giovanna Baffico, Hiroshi Kaneko, Karim Saleh, Kathlyn Kao, Kenismael Santiago-Pagàn, Maddie Awan, Noy Mizrachi, Omotara Oluwafemi, Pablo Castillo Luna, Ran Mei, Richard Lesage, Selwyn Bachus, Sumayyah Raji, Tanjona Rakatoarisoa, Thomas Kuei, Trent Tepool, Yu Yan for their participation and affirmation that at the end of the day, all will be okay.

For my parents, brother, cousins, uncles, aunties, grandparents, and the Chagossian-Mauritian community: the legacy Morisyen still lives.

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# INTRODUCTION

*Identifying narratives, history & contexts.*

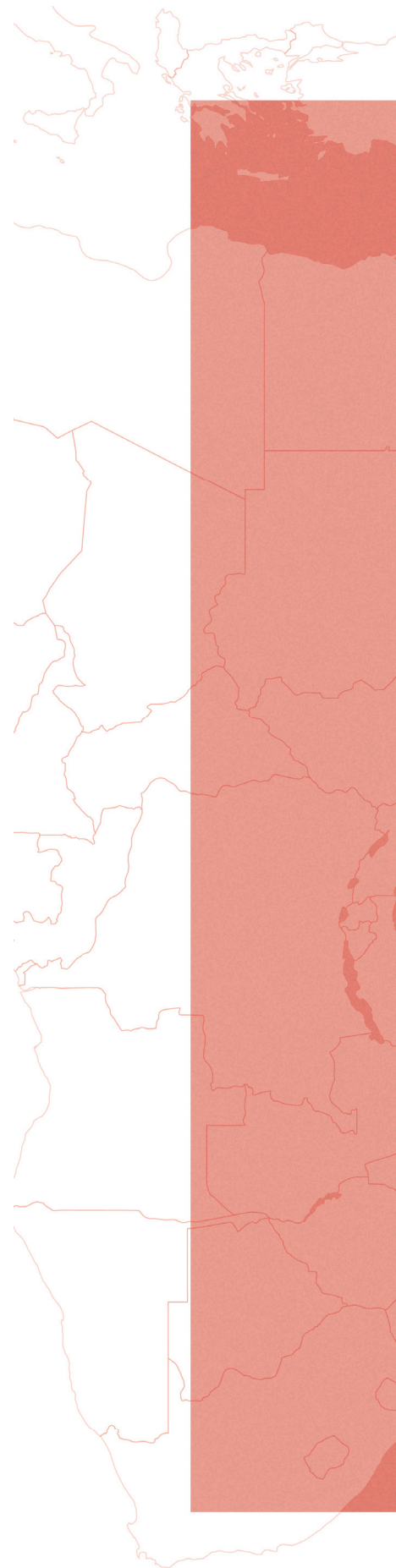
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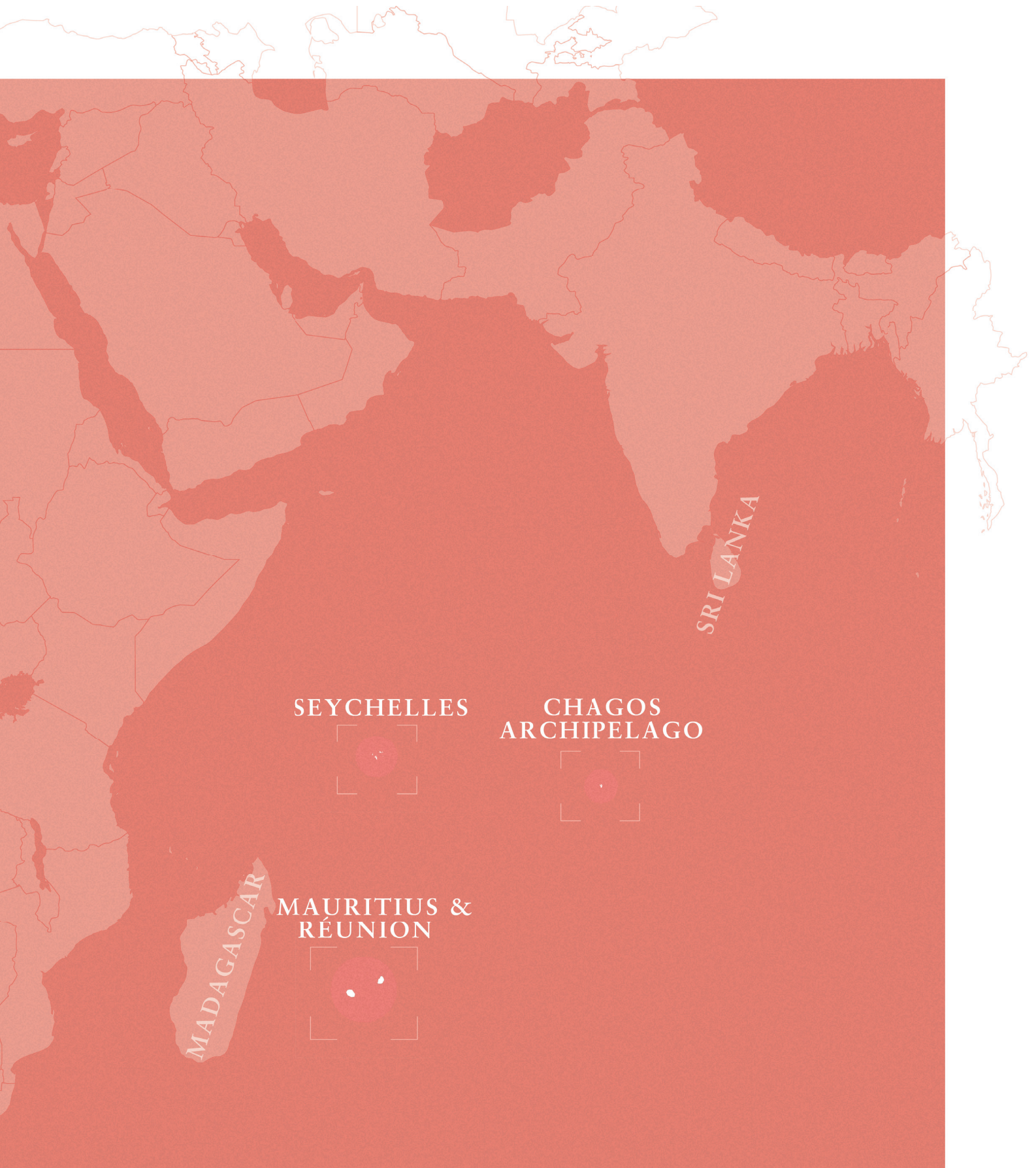
For a year now, I have been researching, investigating, connecting, and attempting to find resolutions to the interconnected issues of sovereignty and land reclamation in the too-often dismissed islands that form the Chagos Archipelago.

Mauritius, an island situated in the Indian Ocean is regarded among the fastest developing and multi-cultural countries in the African continent (Jeffrey). This success, however, tends to overshadow the island's young post-colonial situation and the lingering presence of colonial margins that the country and its citizens tend to forget.

Growing up in Mauritius, colonial history is not taught from the perspective of the oppressed, nor its multi-faceted effects on society and beyond. As a Mauritian having been educated in the public school system, I can attest to that. Since our educational system at that time depended on the Cambridge University O and A-levels, there was a lack of contextual and geopolitical approach to the subjection of Mauritius having been a part of the Crown and its colonial history. Colonial memory: memories of our grandparents and parents dating back to pre-independence are oral memories and anecdotes not often told and oftentimes dismissed as unscripted parts of history. With that, the descendants of indentured laborers, merchants, colonizers, and enslaved are dying of age with their histories. My grandparents are part of that history, and along with their absence, their colonial memories were passed down to me, which has ignited the core of this thesis. As both of my grandfathers passed away when I was young, I had not had the tools to properly record or archive a memory, an anecdote. It was my regret of not being able to do so that started the first iteration of this thesis: archiving colonial memory. The core of this thesis centers on the Chagossians: my neighbours and a community that I got to know more intimately as my thesis project concretised throughout the past year. Just like my ancestors who have endured imperialism throughout their lifetimes, so did the Chagossians - they are refugees in Mauritius, the Seychelles, and the United Kingdom, who were barred entry back to their native islands, the Chagos Archipelago.

En somme: in a treaty for Mauritius to gain independence from the UK in 1968, the island was to relinquish one of its own, the Chagos Archipelago. From then on, Chagossians were evicted from their homes to make space for the United States Navy.







# INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE

Peace Palace, Carnegieplein 2, 2517 KJ The Hague, Netherlands

Tel.: +31 (0)70 302 2323 Fax: +31 (0)70 364 9928

Website: [www.icj-cij.org](http://www.icj-cij.org) Twitter Account: [@CIJ\\_ICJ](https://twitter.com/CIJ_ICJ) YouTube Channel: [CIJ ICJ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCIJCJ)

LinkedIn page: [International Court of Justice \(ICJ\)](https://www.linkedin.com/company/international-court-of-justice)

## Summary

Not an official document

Summary 2019/2  
25 February 2019

### Legal Consequences of the Separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius in 1965

#### Summary of the Advisory Opinion

On 25 February 2019, the International Court of Justice gave its Advisory Opinion on the Legal Consequences of the Separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius in 1965.

## sovereignty over Chagos Islands

Judges advise Britain that separating archipelago from Mauritius in 1960s was wrong



A protester outside the Houses of Parliament in London. Photograph: Andrew Winning/Reuters

The UK has been ordered to hand back the Chagos Islands to Mauritius “as rapidly as possible” after the United Nations’ highest court ruled that continued British occupation of the remote Indian Ocean archipelago is illegal.

Although the majority decision by the international court of justice in The Hague is only advisory, the unambiguous clarity of the judges’ pronouncement is a humiliating blow to Britain’s prestige on the world stage.

The case was referred to the court, which hears legal submissions over international boundary disputes, after **an overwhelming vote in 2017 in the UN assembly** in the face of fierce opposition from a largely isolated UK.

Delivering judgment, the president of the ICJ, Abdulqawi Ahmed Yusuf, said the detachment of the Chagos archipelago in 1965 from Mauritius had not been based on a “free and genuine expression of the people concerned”.



United Nations

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#### MEETINGS COVERAGE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ► PLENARY SEVENTY-THIRD SESSION, 83RD & 84TH MEETINGS (AM & PM)

GA/72146  
22 MAY 2019

#### General Assembly Welcomes International Court of Justice Opinion on Chagos Archipelago, Adopts Text Calling for Mauritius’ Complete Decolonization

The General Assembly adopted a resolution today welcoming a 25 February 2019 International Court of Justice advisory opinion on the legal consequences of separating the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius in 1965, demanding that the United Kingdom unconditionally withdraw its colonial administration from the area within six months.

By a recorded vote of 116 in favour, to 6 against (Australia, Hungary, Israel, Maldives, United Kingdom, United States), with 56 abstentions, the Assembly affirmed that doing so – in accordance with the advisory opinion – would enable Mauritius to complete the decolonization of its territory as soon as possible.

Top: ICJ on the separation of the Chagos from Mauritius

Above: UN response to ICJ

Left: The Guardian UK

And how does all this hit close to home? In February 2019 The International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that the UK return the Chagos Archipelago to Mauritius<sup>1</sup>, following Chagossian protests in Mauritius and London. The United Nations (UN) adopted the ICJ's ruling in May of the same year. Prior to this breaking news, I had been unaware of the issues at stake for the Chagossian people and what was happening on my own island. I grew up 10 minutes away from their community which they had to start from scratch: make a home in exile (Jeffrey 2011, 5). The 2019 ICJ ruling was my awakening to a bigger picture of the post-colonisation of Mauritius - that unless there is no agency within my generation, we could end up in a society of ethical dormancy, controlled by powers like the UK and the U.S. I was not the only one. Private conversations with childhood friends brought more clarity to the fact that a big circle of Mauritian connections had little to no insight into the Chagossian struggle. With privilege comes the inability to relate to certain positions, and the ability of laissez-faire. Like my own entourage growing up, we were able to live our lives despite our neighbours' struggle, because at the end of the day, we had not been displaced, nor forcefully uprooted to start from scratch in a new land.

If a post-colonial cultural movement like the Mauritian-Chagossian sovereignty dispute does not affect all Mauritians and Chagossians alike, who are we, as citizens of the same sovereign islands, to be living on lands that had also been colonised and exploited with our ancestors' sweat and tears? What can such a sovereignty dispute like the Chagos Archipelago prove a system that does not even teach its generations on issues like these?

And this is what really incited this thesis. To find out why and what exactly I was so ignorant about, and incite a future generation of Mauritians and Chagossians to do the same: ask questions, reasons, and incite an inner post-colonial awakening, because if not everything, to this day, we are all colonised.

This thesis evolved, from anticipating a crowd-sourced archive of memories, to a field guide exposing the realities of research to guide myself and others from my generation to conduct research in our home of Mauritius.

*THE COURT, (3) By thirteen votes to one, Is of the opinion that, having regard to international law, the process of decolonization of Mauritius was not lawfully completed when that country acceded to independence in 1968, following the separation of the Chagos Archipelago; AGAINST: Judge Donoghue;*

Excerpt from the ICJ's 2019 Advisory Opinion. Judge Donoghue represents the United States, and presides the ICJ as of 2021.

*(4) By thirteen votes to one, Is of the opinion that the United Kingdom is under an obligation to bring to an end its administration of the Chagos Archipelago as rapidly as possible; IN FAVOUR: President Yusuf; Vice-President Xue; Judges Tomka, Abraham, Bennouna, Cançado Trindade, Gaja, Sebutinde, Bhandari, Robinson, Gevorgian, Salam, Iwasawa; AGAINST: Judge Donoghue*

1 "Legal Consequences of the Separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius in 1965," International Court of Justice (ICJ), February 25, 2019), <https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/169/169-20190225-SUM-01-00-EN.pdf>.

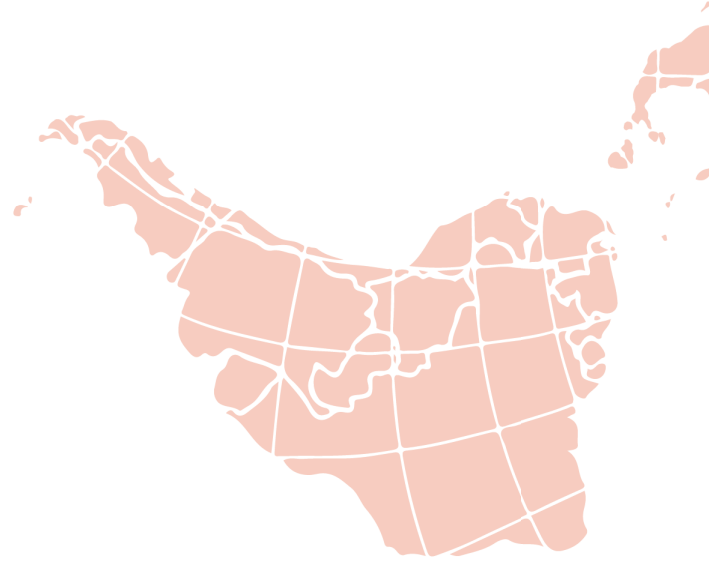
2 "General Assembly Welcomes International Court of Justice Opinion," United Nations (United Nations, May 22, 2019), <https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/ga12146.doc.htm>.

3 This new and unfortunately, constant new fashion of accepting and furthering work without moral evaluation thus highlight the development of a new generation - Zaheer Allam, PhD.

4 "Breaking from the Culture of Ethical Dormancy: A Wakeup Call for Utilitarian Urban Planning in Mauritius." *Lexpress Maurice*, December 18, 2012.

*a back-story*

# HISTORY



Before delving into the harsh history and context of the Chagos Archipelago, one has to be aware of the geopolitical factors that have affected the sovereignty of the archipelago. Ever since the discovery of Mauritius, the Chagos Archipelago, Agaléga, Réunion, Rodrigues, Seychelles, St. Brandon, and Tromelin have formed part or been part of the colonised history and a piece of the governing party of the colonies. This is why a majority of this research centres around Mauritius and the geopolitics that have and still affect its governance to this day.

Flattened Mercator World Map Projection.  
Indian Ocean at centre.





# HISTORY: IN TIMELINE

## TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS: THE COLONISATION OF THE INDIAN OCEAN

- pre-1500s ..... ○ ..... **MAURITIUS:** Arabs, Chinese, Malagasy & Indo-Malay travellers (could have) set foot; **ultimately not settled, nor colonised.**
- 1500s ..... ○ ..... **CHAGOS:** Visited and mapped by Portuguese (**did not settle**)

**1598** ..... ● ..... **MAURITIUS:** Dutch East India Company starts using Mauritius en route to East Asia

**1710** ..... ● ..... **MAURITIUS:** Dutch East India Company abandons Mauritius colony

**DUTCH**

**1715** ..... ● ..... France claims Mauritius

**1721** ..... ○ ..... **MAURITIUS:** French colonialists settle, rename **ÎLE DE FRANCE** with enslaved people from Madagascar & Eastern Africa

**1740s** ..... ○ ..... **SEYCHELLES:** French colonise

**1780s** ..... ○ ..... **CHAGOS:** Coconut plantations established. **1783:** 22 enslaved brought to Diego Garcia from Mauritius, becoming the archipelago's first inhabitants

**1786** ..... ○ ..... **CHAGOS:** British East India Company arrive to create a provisional plantation, but leave due to French colony.

**FRENCH**

194-1810 — British seize control of Seychelles and Mauritius

1814 — **Treaty of Paris:** Napoleon Bonaparte is defeated. France formally cedes Mauritius and other French-controlled Indian Ocean islands (Chagos, Seychelles) to Britain

1960 — **U.S.:** U.S. Navy initiates secret conversations with British Govt. to make Diego Garcia a base (**COLLUSION**)

1962 — **CHAGOS:** Chagos-Agaléga Ltd consolidates plantation ownership on Chagos

1965 — **British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) ORDER:** Chagos Archipelago excised from Mauritius

1967 — **BIOT (EX-CHAGOS):** UK purchases plantations from Chagos-Agaléga Ltd.

1968 — **Mauritius gains independence**

1968-1971 — **BIOT:** Chagossians travelling outside of archipelago barred entry back

1971 — **BIOT:** U.S. Navy start construction on Diego Garcia

1971 — Chagossians exiled to Mauritius and Seychelles

1973 — **Chagossian expulsion complete**

1973 — **BIOT:** U.S. Navy base deployed in Israeli-Arab war, Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts

1976 — **SEYCHELLES:** Seychelles gains independence from UK

1978 — UK Govt. compensates (some) Chagossians in Mauritius (5 years post expulsion) £650/adults=£3900, inflated for 2022. Many families receive none

1980 — **MAURITIUS:** Mauritian Govt. reiterates claim to Chagos sovereignty

1981 — **MAURITIUS:** Chagossian-born islanders become eligible for British Dependent Territory citizenship under the British Nationality Act 1981

1990 — **BIOT:** U.S. participation in Gulf War

1996 — United Nations Working Group recognises Chagossians as **indigenous people**

2001 — **BIOT:** U.S. retaliation: Afghanistan (9/11)

2008 — **UK:** House of Lords decide the Queen had power to exile Chagossians: **BIOT was a ceded, not a settled colony** (in 1971)

2010 — **WIKILEAKS:** UK&U.S. officials' tactic to block Chagossians' return: UK establishes BIOT Marine Protected Area (MPA), supposedly to ban commercial fishing (544,000 km<sup>2</sup>)

2016 — **BIOT:** UK extends lease of Diego Garcia for American use until 2036

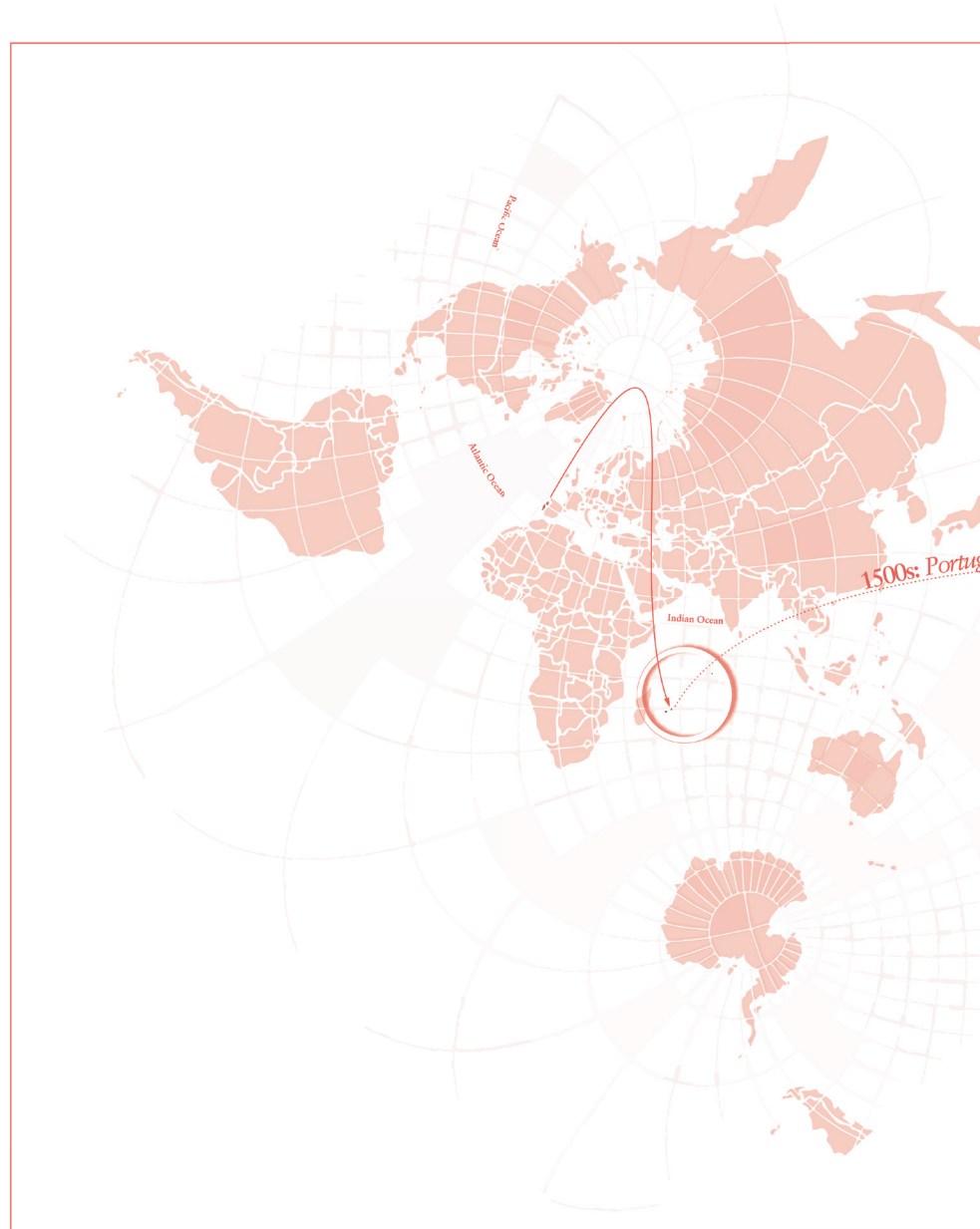
2019 — **INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE:** "the process of *decolonization of Mauritius was not lawfully completed* when that country acceded to independence," "the United Kingdom is under *an obligation to bring to an end* its administration of the Chagos Archipelago as rapidly as possible."

2036 — **BIOT:** American Occupation of Diego Garcia: **END OF LEASE** (can always change...)

# Portuguese Visit (1500)

Right: Map 01

According to Mauritian historian Sydney Selvon “A New Comprehensive History of Mauritius: A History of Private Enterprise & Economic Evolution from Dutch Mauritius to the 21st Century.,” there is no clear indication of when Mauritius was first found by the human race (Selvon 2019, 4). Although debatable, as Selvon states, the Portuguese are widely said to have been the first discoverers of Mauritius and Réunion in July of 1500, all of which form part of the Mascarene Islands named after the Portuguese explorer Pedro de Mascarenhas. The latter, however has most likely not been the Portuguese sailor to have discovered the Mascarene Islands (Selvon). Indications as to human-introduced plants and animals can be traced on the adjacent map (Map 01). Those introductions were curated to show the impacts of colonisation, and how some introduced species have induced and/or influenced the extinction of others. The Portuguese military decline induced by the annexation of Portugal by the Spanish from 1580 to 1640, influenced the British, French, and Dutch to take up the colonial mantle and settle on unclaimed territories (Selvon 2019, 16).



Flattened Mercator World Map Projection. Indian Ocean at centre.

1500s: Portuguese first to step on Mauritian soil



Portuguese first to step on Mauritian soil

Thriving Species:  
black ebony a.k.a:  
bois d'èbène/mauritian ebony/  
Diospyros Tessellaria



Portuguese-Introduced Wild Pigs and Coconut Varieties



Dodo Birds

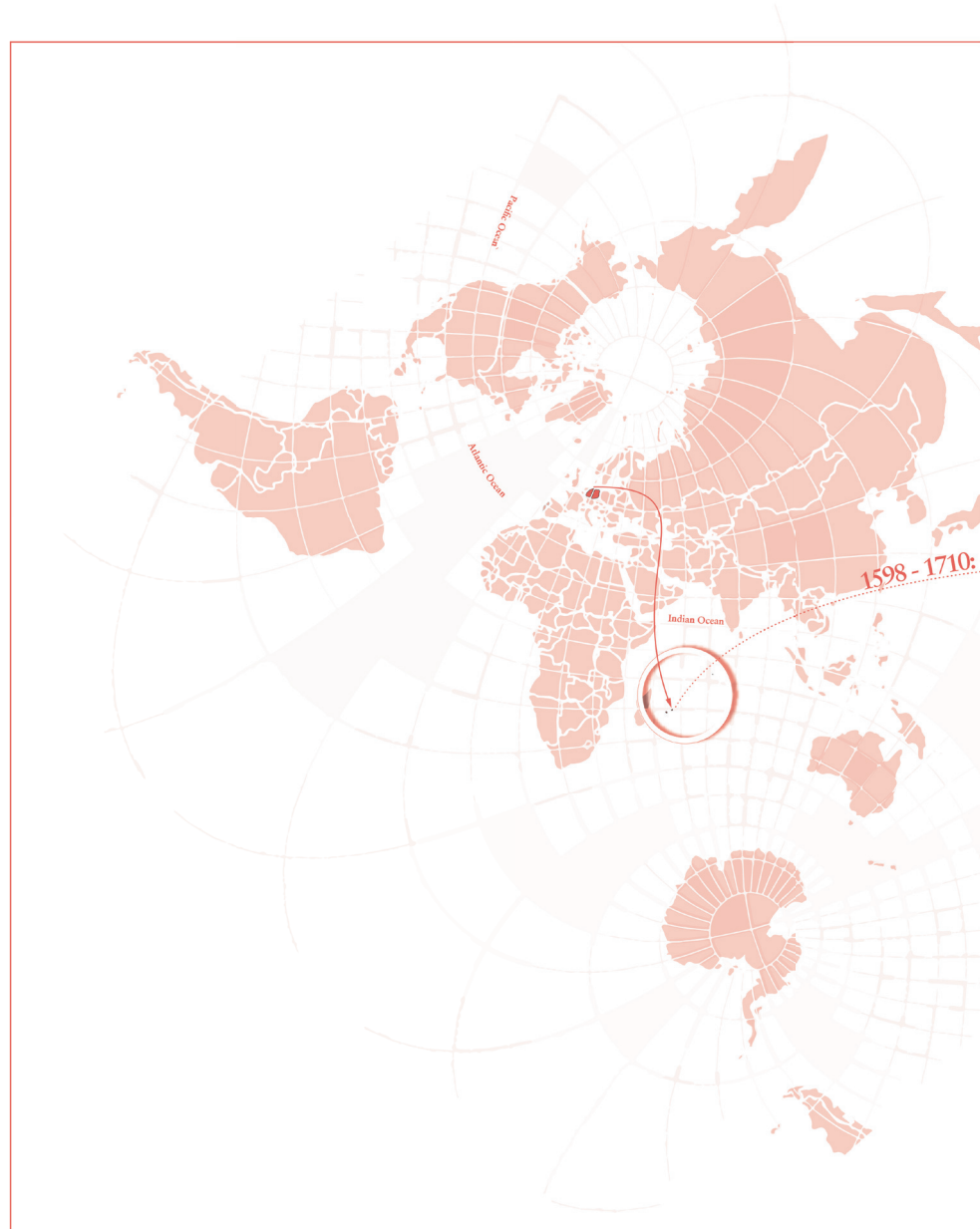


(Some) Indian Ocean Island Territories.

# Dutch Colony (1598-1710)

Right: Map 02

Contrary to the Portuguese, the Dutch stayed and settled in Mauritius. The Dutch Republic was under the presidency of Prince Maurice de Nassau when they discovered Mauritius in 1598, thus why the name Maurice when translated into French. The Dutch East India Company only officially settled in 1638 but had ships frequenting the island, warning the French and British of a Dutch-occupied Mauritius (Toussaint, 1972). Map 02 indicates other species introduced by the Dutch, prompting additional misbalance in the Mauritian fauna and flora. The Dodo bird, for example, which was once a thriving endemic being to Mauritius, went extinct in (officially) 1681 - during the Dutch occupation. The dates, however can be debated as later, as voyageurs claim to have seen “big” birds being killed by humans in 1688 (Main)<sup>4</sup>. Although the Dutch left Mauritius by 1710, some escaped enslaved people stayed and later joined French-enslaved runaway shelters (Selvon 2019, 61).



Flattened Mercator World Map Projection. Indian Ocean at centre.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas Main, “When Did the Dodo Go Extinct? Maybe Later than We Thought,” NBCNews.com (NBCUniversal News Group, October 9, 2013), <https://www.nbcnews.com/science/main/when-did-dodo-go-extinct-maybe-later-we-thought-8c11361418>.

1500s: Portuguese first to step on Mauritian soil

1598 - 1710: Dutch East India Company

(some) Endemic Mauritian Species:



1606: Dutch-introduced crops:  
bananas & coconuts



1681: Human-induced extinction  
Dodo Bird goes extinct



Dutch introduce invasive species: cats, rats, pigs, deers

Dutch East India Company settle and leave (introduce sugar cane)



(Some) Indian Ocean Island Territories.

# French Colony (1715-1814)

Right: Map 03

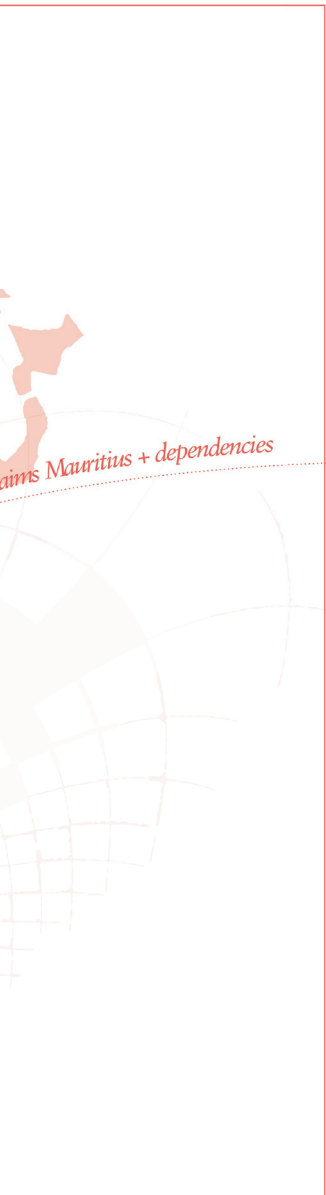
The French had heard of the Dutch planning to leave Mauritius, as they had been settled nearby in Bourbon (now Réunion). The French “immediately saw the opportunity to cultivate coffee in the Mascarenes for the European market,”<sup>5</sup> thus introducing and cultivating Arabica coffee crops in the Moka region of Mauritius after settlement (Map 04). Mauritius was then named Isle de France (island of France) upon an official 1721 French settlement on the Dutch-abandoned island. With Bourbon being located so closely to Isle de France, the French colony became a powerhouse coffee cultivator in the Indian Ocean, with Bourbon being the main coffee plantation.

The Chagos Archipelago, including Peros Banhos, Trois Frères islands were discovered in 1743 under the orders of French governor, Mahé de Labourdonnais. The island Trois Frères became a pivotal stopover for the French route to India (Selvon 2019, 89). France and England declared war against each other the following year. The French-British clash continued within the Indian Ocean until 1814, and the Subcontinent until 1815 (Chew 2008). The French eventually settle on the Seychelles islands in the 1740s, establishing a coconut plantation and closer outpost from the Chagos. Giving the British a glimpse of the French colonies, in 1786, the British stepped on Chagos Archipelago, to only retreat after realising it was a French colony. It can only be assumed that this somehow generated a ripple effect which Britain waged war on France to gain the total control over the Indian Ocean islands.



Flattened Mercator World Map Projection. Indian Ocean at centre.

<sup>5</sup> Selvon 2019, 63.



1500s: Portuguese first to step on Mauritian soil

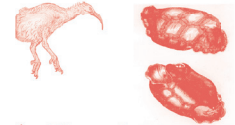
1598 - 1710: Dutch East India Company

1715: France claims Mauritius + dependencies

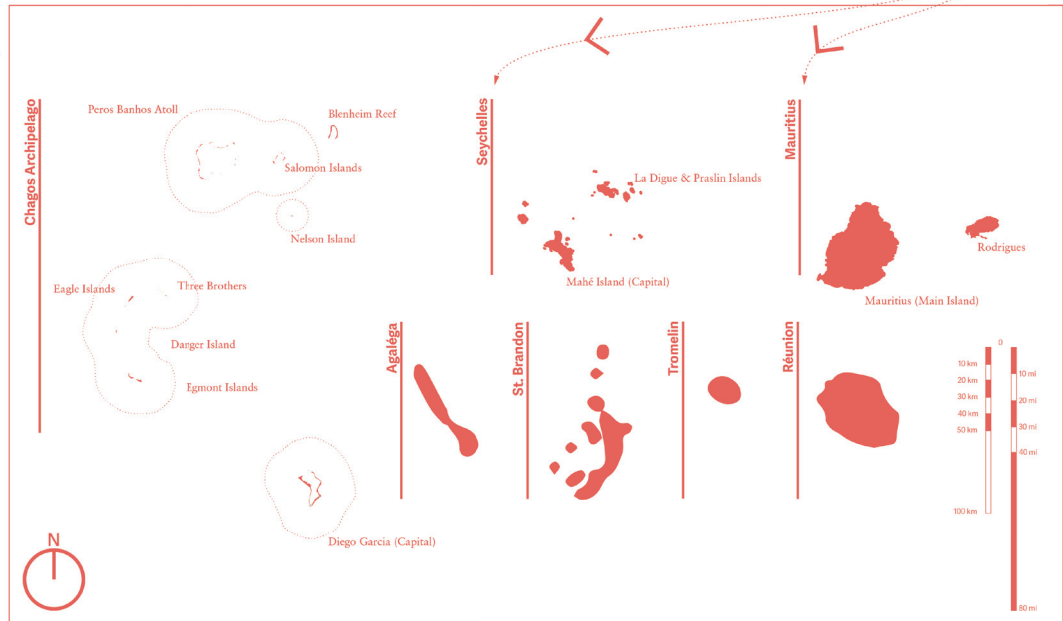
Endemic Mauritian Species: flyin<sup>g</sup> fox



Human-induced Extinction:  
Domed Mauritius Giant Tortoise  
& Red Rail



1970's Spice Trade: Pierre Poivre introduces  
cloves and nutmeg: challenging Dutch monopoly



(Some) Indian Ocean Island Territories.



# French Colony - ctd (1715-1814)

Right: Map 04



Flattened Mercator World Map Projection. Indian Ocean at centre.

1500s: Portuguese first to step on Mauritian soil

1598 - 1710: Dutch East India Company

1715: France claims Mauritius + dependencies

1740 - 1780s: French establishments on Seychelles + Chagos Archipelago

Tea first introduced in Mauritius  
by the French (emphasise irony)



Coffee also first introduced  
in Mauritius by the French

French colonizers introduce coconut plantations  
to Chagos Archipelago for copra oil production



1740 - 1780s: French establishments on Seychelles

French establishments on Chagos Archipelago

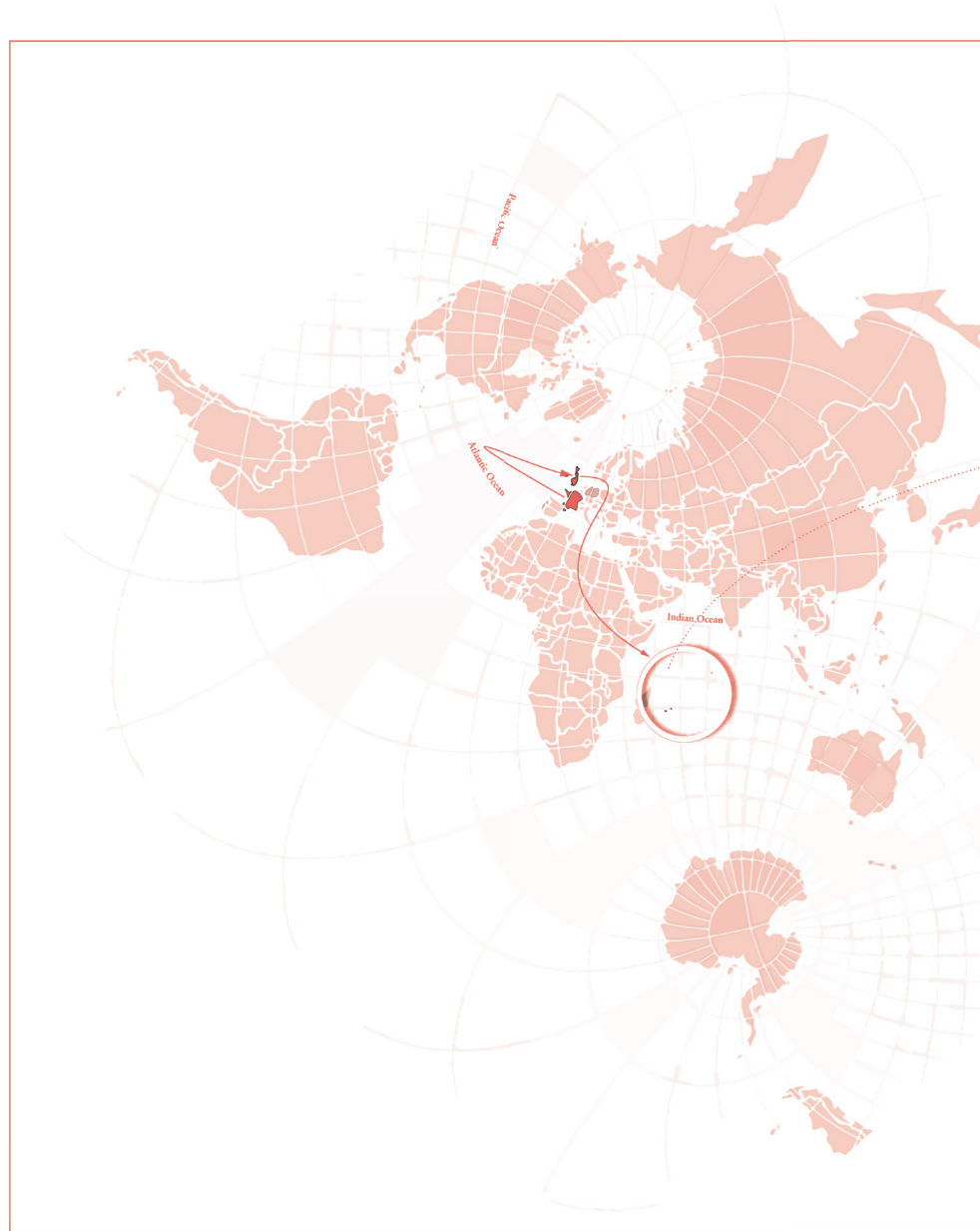


(Some) Indian Ocean Island Territories.

# British Empire (1814-1968)

Right: Map 05

Napoleon Bonaparte was defeated in 1814 by none other than the British, forcing France to formally cede Mauritius, Agaléga, Seychelles, Tromelin, Rodrigues, St. Brandon, and the Chagos Archipelago over to the British (James 1886). France kept and presently still keeps control of Réunion (previously Bourbon). The British governance allowed French dominance (land, enslaved people, properties, manufacturing plants) throughout the island of Mauritius to continue, however (Selvon 2019, 168), thus perpetuating a culture of racial and nonetheless administrative “dominance.” On top of having kept the Napoleonic Code of Law<sup>6</sup>, this is now the reason why Mauritians speak French as a first language, and why to this day, the wealthiest population of Mauritians are of French descent.



Flattened Mercator World Map Projection. Indian Ocean at centre.

<sup>6</sup> French Civil Code, Paris: L'Imprimerie de la République. XII. 1804. “Code Civil Des Français : Éd. Originale Et Seule Officielle,”

1500s: Portuguese first to step on Mauritian soil

1598 - 1710: Dutch East India Company

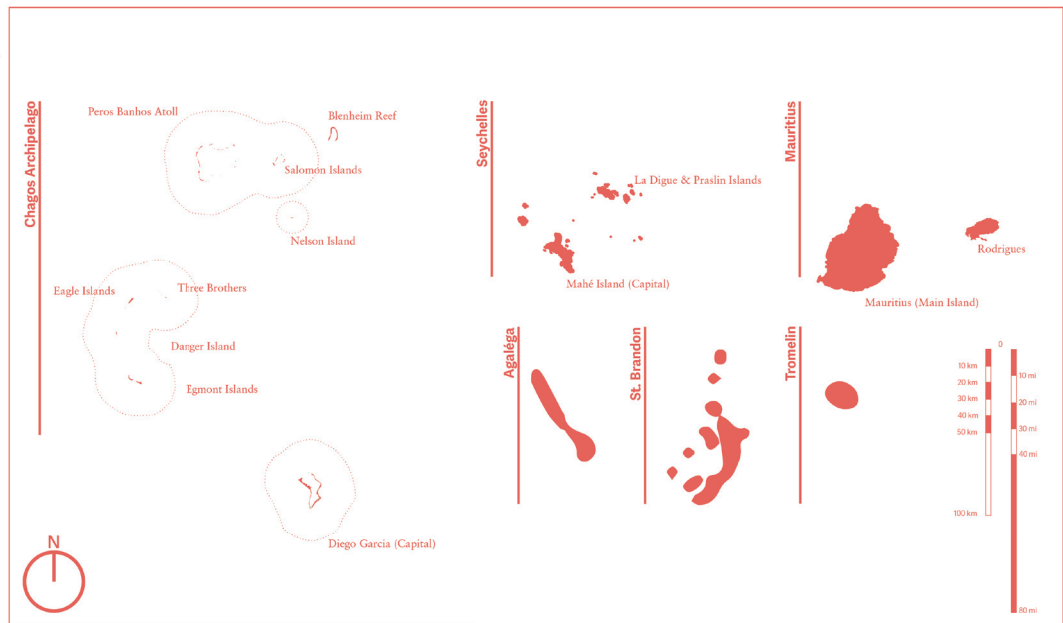
1715: France claims Mauritius + dependencies

1740 - 1780: French establishments on Seychelles + Chagos Archipelago

1814: Treaty of Paris: Great Britain acquires Mauritius + dependencies Colonizer-induced extinctions



1814: Treaty of Paris: Mauritius + "lesser" dependencies are ceded to the Crown

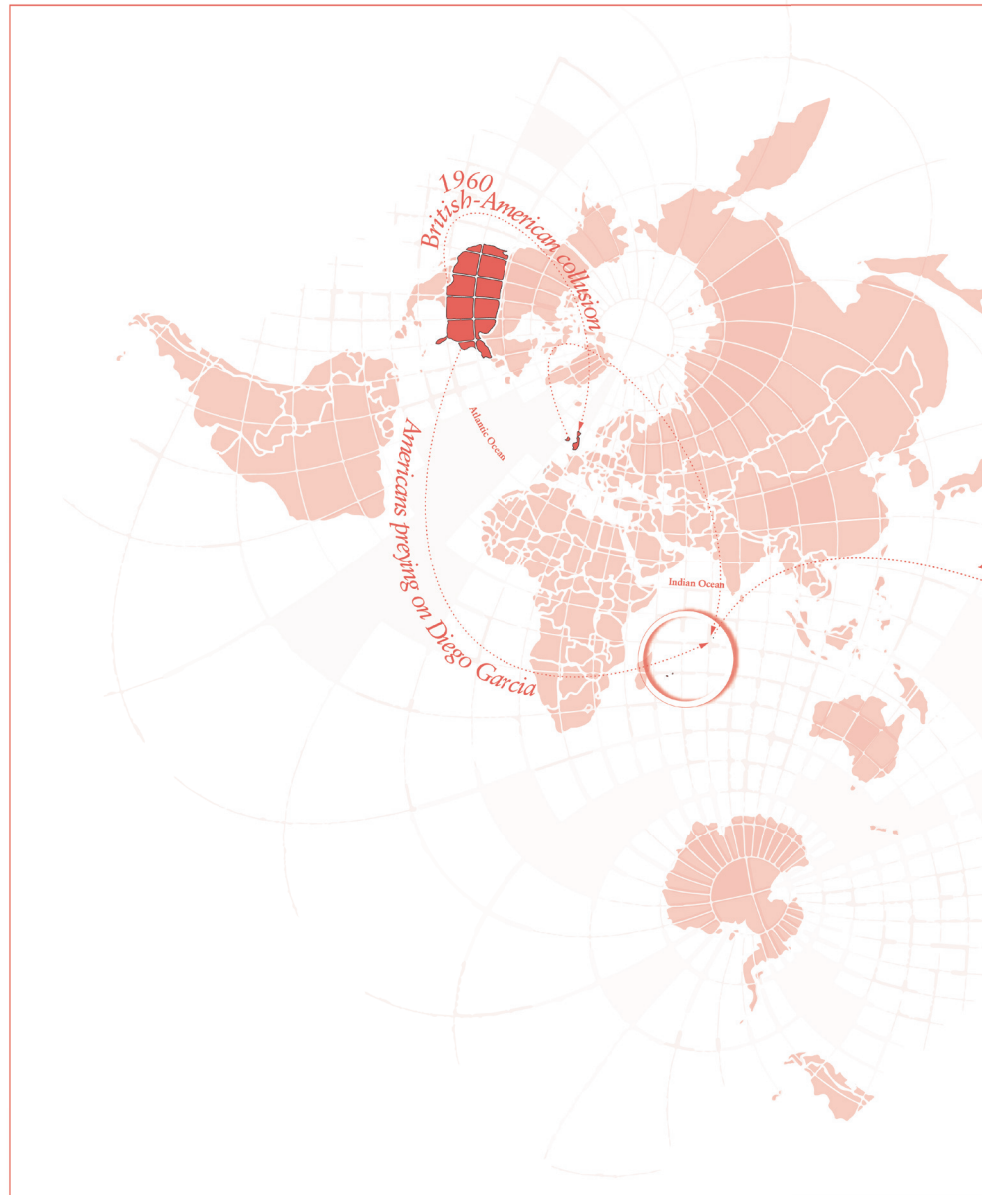


(Some) Indian Ocean Island Territories.

# British Empire - ctd (1814-1968)

Right: Map 06

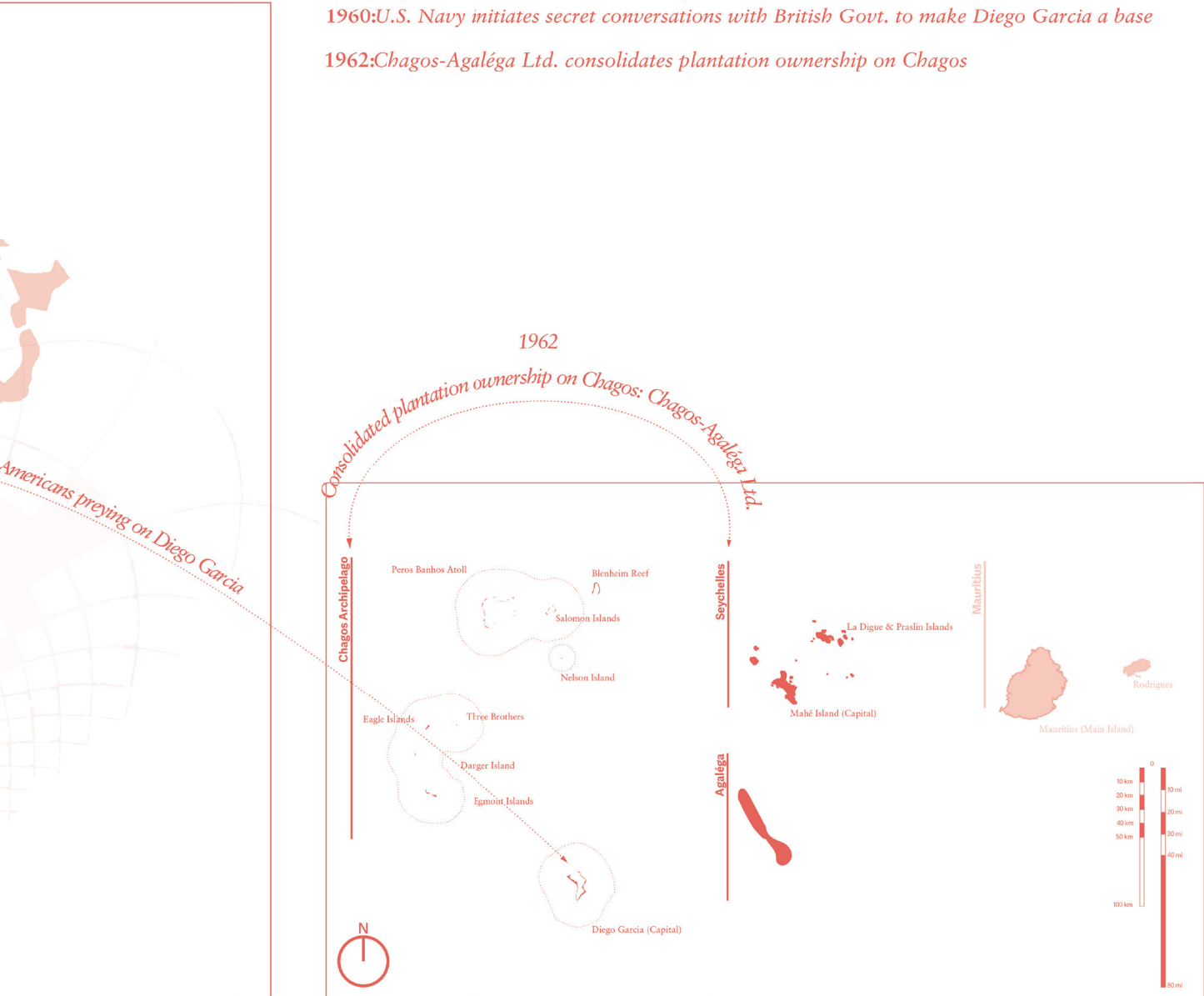
Mauritius has been nicknamed the “Star and Key of the Indian Ocean,” due to its strategic location within the Indian Ocean for trade across Asia and Africa. Throughout their empire, the British also underwent the abolition of slavery on the 1st of February 1835 (Manning 2013). Before claiming independence, however, Mauritius was rocked with unprecedented challenges from the Crown. Referring to Map 06, in 1960 the U.S. Navy initiated secret meetings with the British to discuss implementing a base in the Indian Ocean, with the Chagos Archipelago in mind. This was the initial collusion that prompted the ripple effect throughout the history of the Mauritian-Chagossian sovereignty. The Mauritian government had been unaware of those British-American talks.



Flattened Mercator World Map Projection. Indian Ocean at centre.

1960: U.S. Navy initiates secret conversations with British Govt. to make Diego Garcia a base

1962: Chagos-Agaléga Ltd. consolidates plantation ownership on Chagos

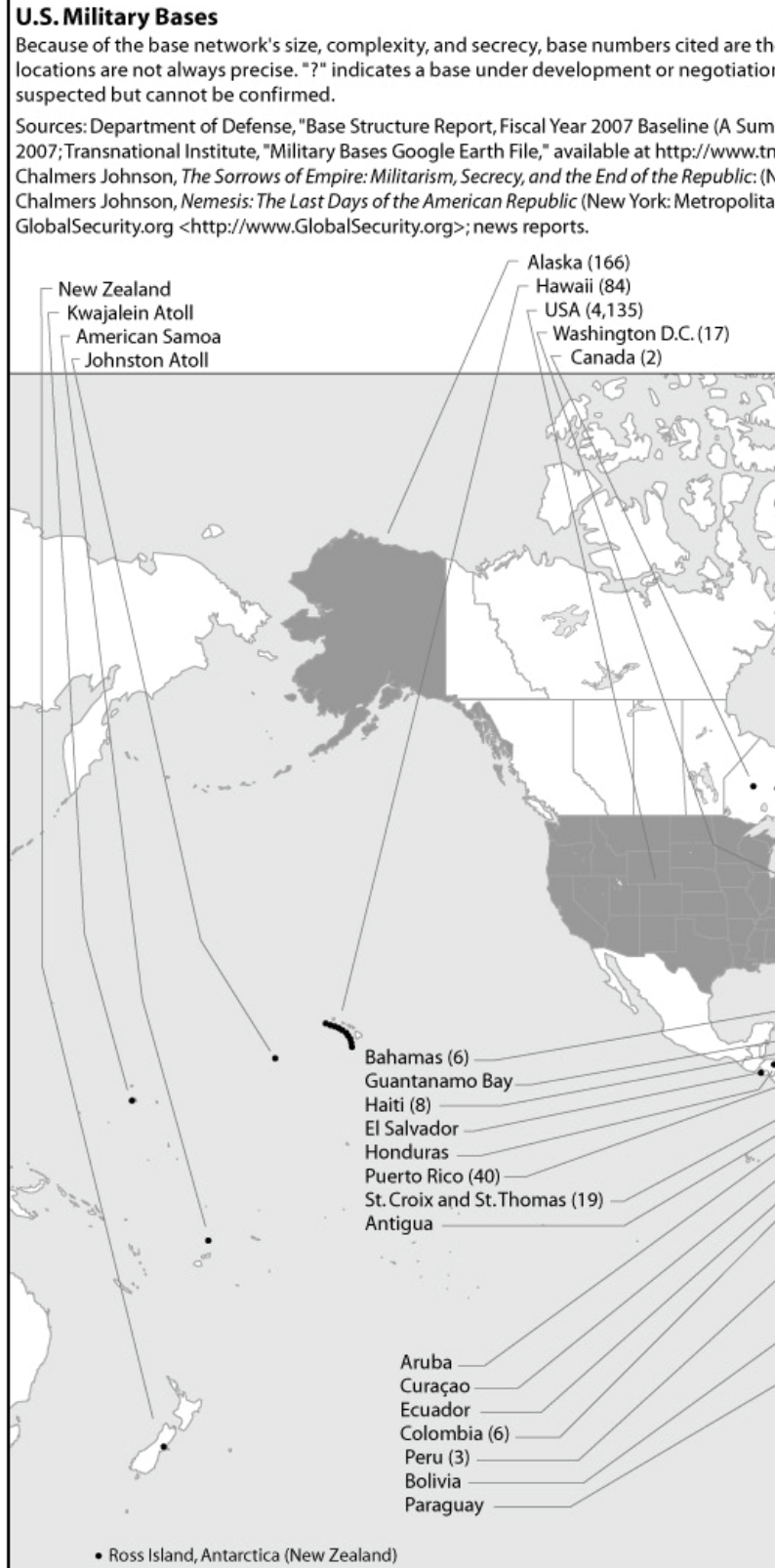


(Some) Indian Ocean Island Territories.

# British X American Empires

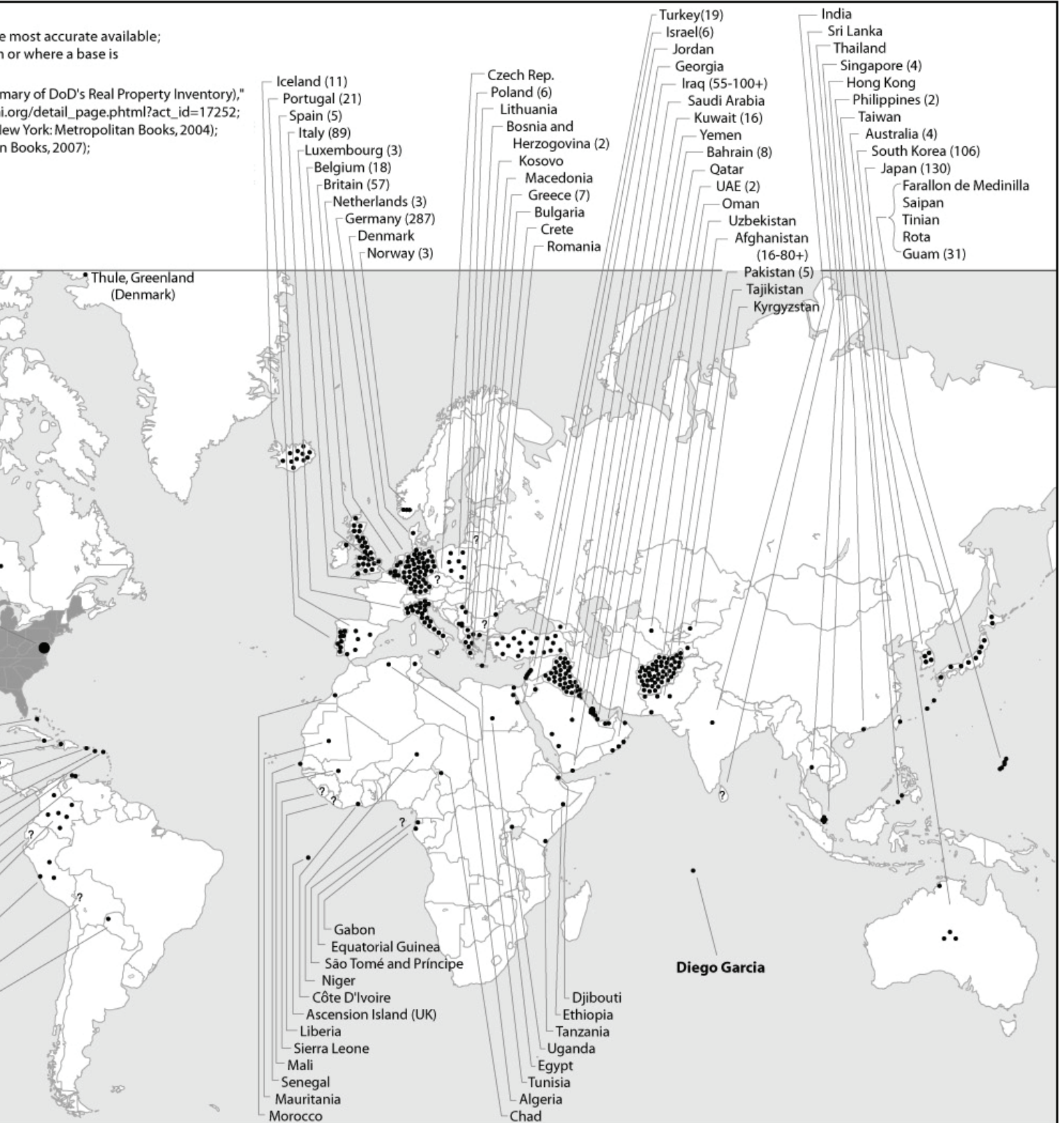
“[Stu Barber, civilian naval planner who dreamed up the “Strategic Island Concept] realized, however, that opportunities for acquiring such islands were rapidly disappearing as territories around the world were gaining their independence. *If the United States was going to secure islands a potential base locations, it would have to move quickly to purchase them outright or win guarantees from the remaining colonial powers not to grant independence and to provide the United States with long-term basing access.*” (Vine 2009, 42)

U.S. Bases Abroad Map, David Vine, “Island of Shame” (Princeton 2009)



the most accurate available;  
 on or where a base is

Summary of DoD's Real Property Inventory,"  
[www.dodig.mil/Detail\\_Page.phtml?act\\_id=17252](http://www.dodig.mil/Detail_Page.phtml?act_id=17252);  
 New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004);  
 in Books, 2007);





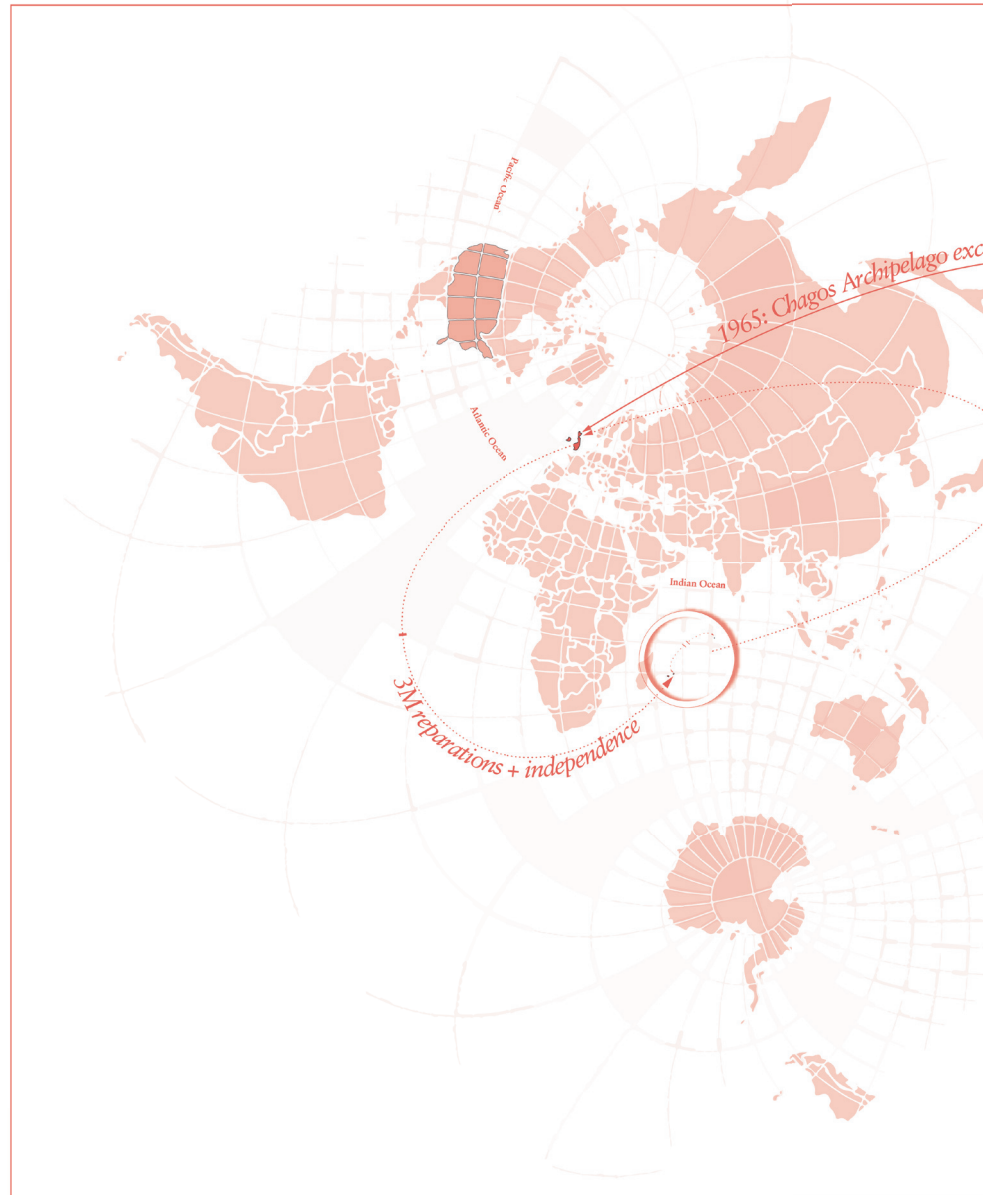
# British Empire - ctd (1814-1968)

Again in *Island of Shame*, David Vine states:

*“Importantly, Navy officials understood that the archipelago was not only of marginal interest globally but also of marginal interest to Mauritius: Given Chagos’s limited economic output, Britain would have an easy time convincing Mauritian leaders to give up the islands..., Given the general isolation and obscurity of Chagos and its people, the Navy realized that few elsewhere would notice, let alone object.” (Vine 2009, 61)*

As part of this exposé on the cruel intention to the forced removal of the Chagossians, Vine includes words taken from Jonathan Weisgall’s *Operation Crossroads*, from Horacio Rivero from Puerto Rico who served on the USS San Juan. On the selection of Diego Garcia, Chagos Archipelago as a base, Rivero who at that time was responsible for finding an island location for the Navy, states:

*““We just took out dozens of maps and started looking for remote sites. After checking the Atlantic, we moved to the West Coast and just kept looking.” (Weisgall 1994, 32)*



Flattened Mercator World Map Projection. Indian Ocean at centre.

Above: Map 07



- 1960:U.S. Navy initiates secret conversations with British Govt. to make Diego Garcia a base
- 1962:Chagos-Agaléga Ltd. consolidates plantation ownership on Chagos
- 1965:Mauritius accepts detachment of Chagos for independence and 3M reparations
- 1965:BIOT Order: Chagos Archipelago excised from Mauritius
- 1966:UK & U.S. exchange on Diego Garcia control strategies

Excised from Mauritius. Officially renamed BIOT

Excised, cut off  
Chagos Archipelago excised from Mauritius



(Some) Indian Ocean Island Territories.

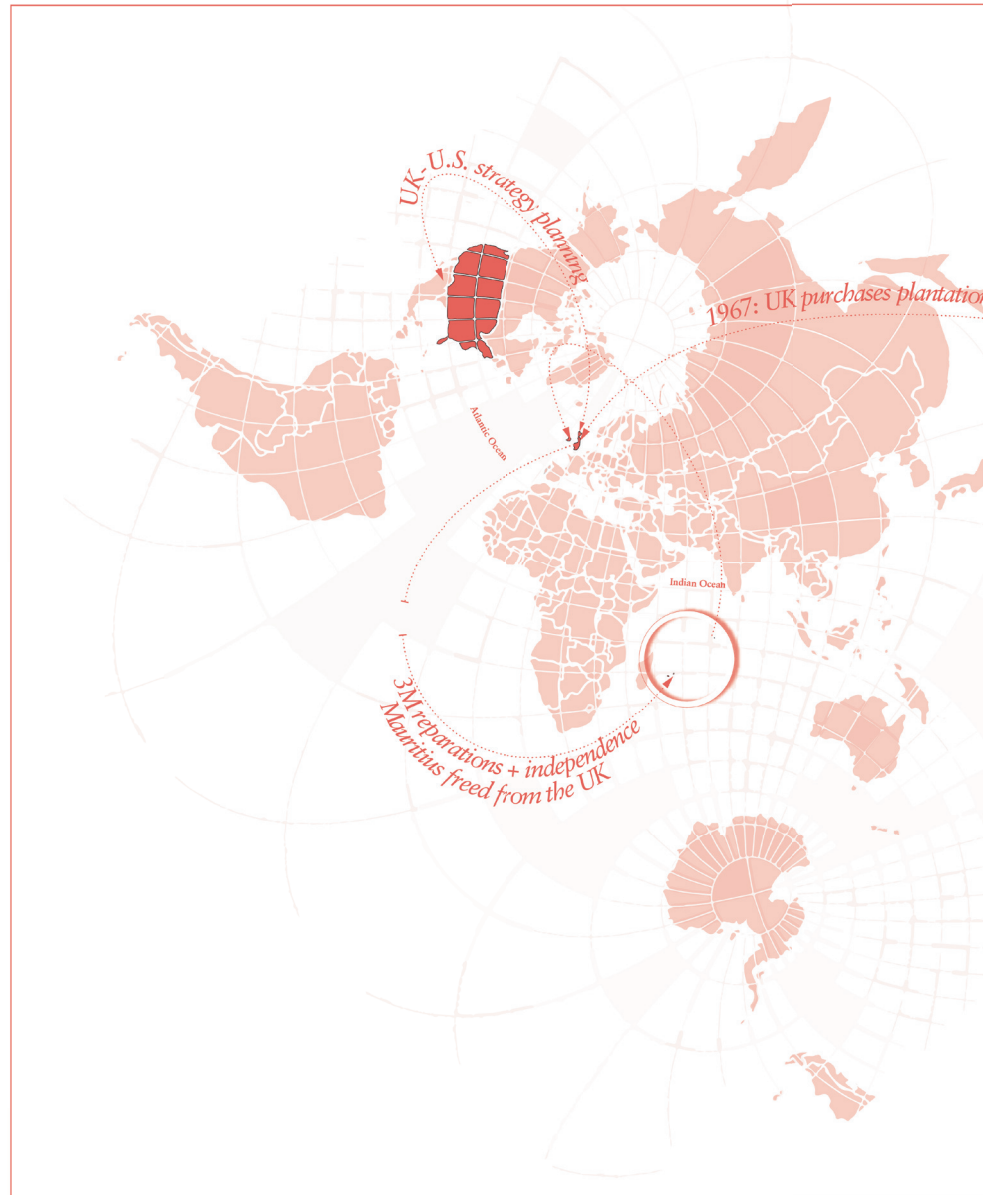
# British Empire - ctd (1814-1968)

As Map 08 states, from 1965, after a British-American collusion to acquire the Chagos Archipelago, it was no longer part of the Mauritian sovereignty - the Chagos were excised from Mauritius by the Crown (Grosset 2021, 16) The reinstated, or new British colony would be known as the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) as from the 8th November 1965. In December 1966, the UK formally agreed to lease Diego Garcia to the United States, initially for 50 years, supposedly ending in 2016, which was further extended to 2036 in 2016. In the aftermath of a Mauritian independence from the British in 1968, until 1971, Chagossians travelling outside of the archipelago were barred entry back in the Chagos, then known as the BIOT. In 1971, the Navy officially started construction on Diego Garcia, whilst Chagossian people were exiled to Mauritius and the Seychelles. The expulsion and total eradication of Chagossian welfare in the archipelago was completed by 1973. These events, when put aside articles 9, 12, 17, 13 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights,

*“... No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property... Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State.”*

Articles 9, 12, 17, 13, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948

Alas, the Chagossian people - or Ilois, those who are from the Chagos Archipelago, were indeed deprived of their property. They did not have the right to speak on their borders.



Flattened Mercator World Map Projection. Indian Ocean at centre.

Above: Map 08

- 1960:U.S. Navy initiates secret conversations with British Govt. to make Diego Garcia a base
- 1962:Chagos-Agaléga Ltd. consolidates plantation ownership on Chagos
- 1965:Mauritius accepts detachment of Chagos for independence and 3mi reparations
- 1965:BIOT Order: Chagos Archipelago excised from Mauritius
- 1966:UK & U.S. exchange on Diego Garcia control strategies
- 1967:UK purchases plantations from Chagos-Agaléga Ltd.
- 1968:Mauritius gains independence



Excised: cut off

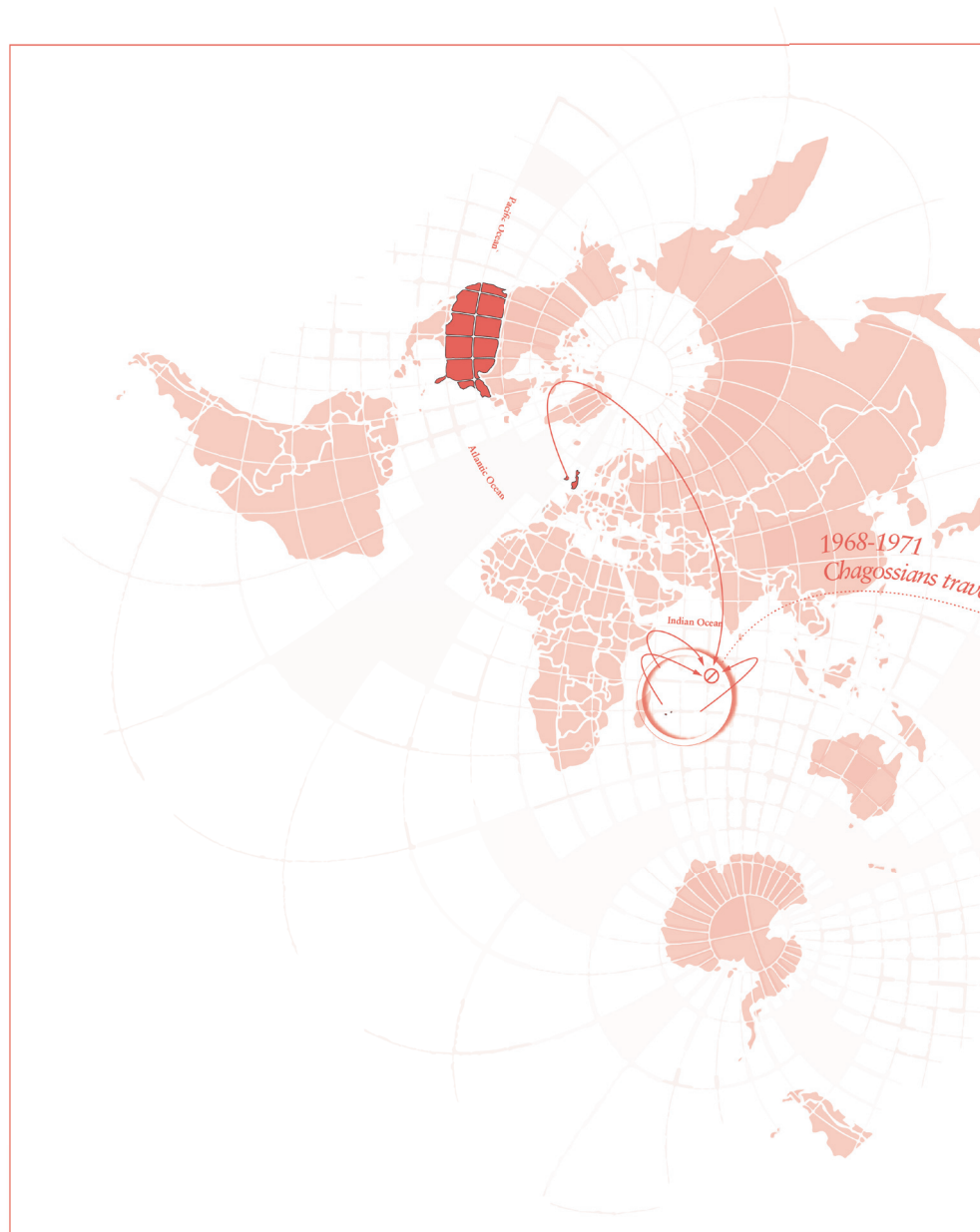
Chagos Archipelago excised from Mauritius



(Some) Indian Ocean Island Territories.

# Independent Mauritius (1968-)

Okay, they want the archipelago. What about the people that live there? In the administration's report to congress, the Navy had 3 justifications to the forced removal of Chagossians from the islands: (1) Security (2) British concerns in costs of maintaining administrative duties on the colony (3) Social problems: a veil to racist and sexist references to fears of military entanglement with Chagossian women if they were allowed to stay on the island.



Flattened Mercator World Map Projection. Indian Ocean at centre.

Above: Map 09

1968 - 1971 Chagossians travelling outside of archipelago barred entry back



(Some) Indian Ocean Island Territories.

# Chagossians Exiled

Some more pieces of evidence proving the inhumane consideration of Chagossian people:

*“In the absence of more complete data, it is impossible to establish the status of these persons and to what extent, if any, they formed a distinct community.”*

**Despite the basically transitory nature of the population of these islands, there were some often referred to as “Ilois”, who were oriented more toward the islands than toward Mauritius or the Seychelles. In the absence of more complete data, it is impossible to establish the status of these persons and to what extent, if any, they formed a distinct community. In 1964, perhaps 42 men and 38 women, with 154 children out of the total population of Diego Garcia might be considered to be Ilois, of whom no more than 3 men and 17 women could be regarded as having their permanent homes on the island. Any survey of the “Ilois”**

U.S. 38th President Gerald Ford's Administration to U.S. House of Congress on Diego Garcia, 1975

CONFIDENTIAL

*Luks*

RE
ARCH
31 AUG 1966
204/56

Mr. Greenhill

British Indian Ocean Territory

The Permanent Under-Secretary has seen UKMIS New York telegram No. 1781 of 23 August and has minuted as follows:

"We must surely be very tough about this. The object of the exercise was to get some rocks which will remain ours; there will be no indigenous population except seagulls who have not yet got a Committee (the Status of Women Committee does not cover the rights of Birds)."

Diplomatic cable from Patrick Wright, Baron Wright of Richmond signed by D. A. Greenhill, dated August 24, 1966, stating:

*"Unfortunately along with the Birds go some few Tarzans or Men Fridays."*

Friday is one of the main characters of Daniel Defoe's 1719 novel Robinson Crusoe, used to describing a loyal servant.

<https://educalingo.com/en/dic-en/man-friday>

(P. R. H. Wright)

24 August, 1966

Copy to: Mr. du Boulay

*Unfortunately along with the Birds go some few Tarzans or Men Fridays whose origins are obscure, and who are being hopefully wished as to Mauritius etc. When this has been done laque we must be very tough and a submission is being done accordingly.*

*DA Greenhill 24/8*

PRO

- 1 Mr du Boulay 24/viii*
- 2 Mr Wright*

CONFIDENTIAL

*Res. woman 25/8*



# Independent Mauritius (1968-)



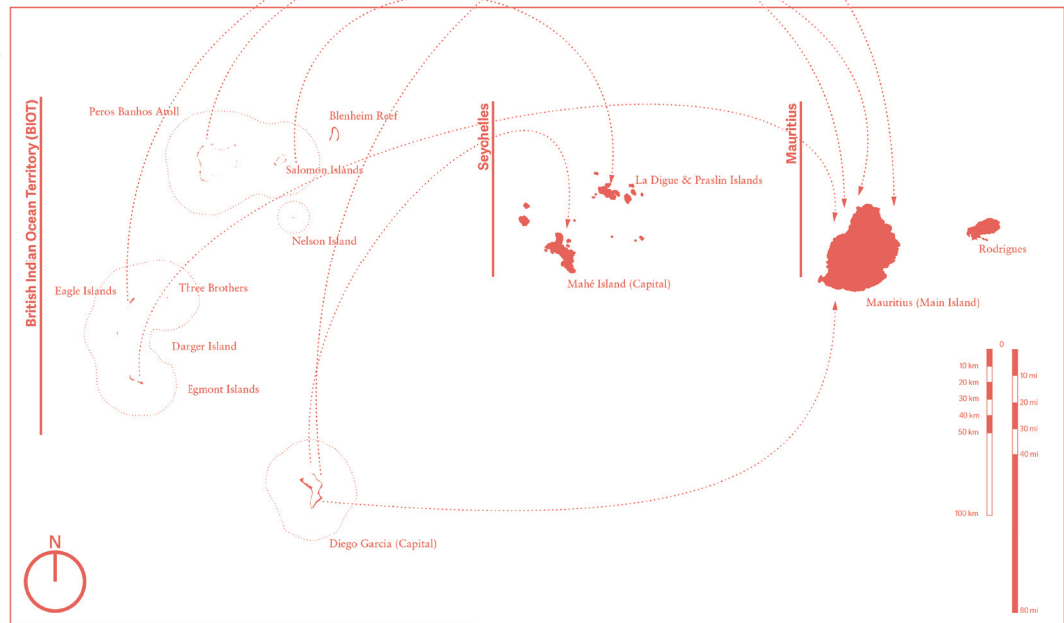
Flattened Mercator World Map Projection. Indian Ocean at centre.

Above: Map 10



1968 - 1971: Chagossians travelling outside of archipelago barred entry back

1971: U.S. Navy start construction on Diego Garcia  
Chagossians forced to Mauritius and Seychelles

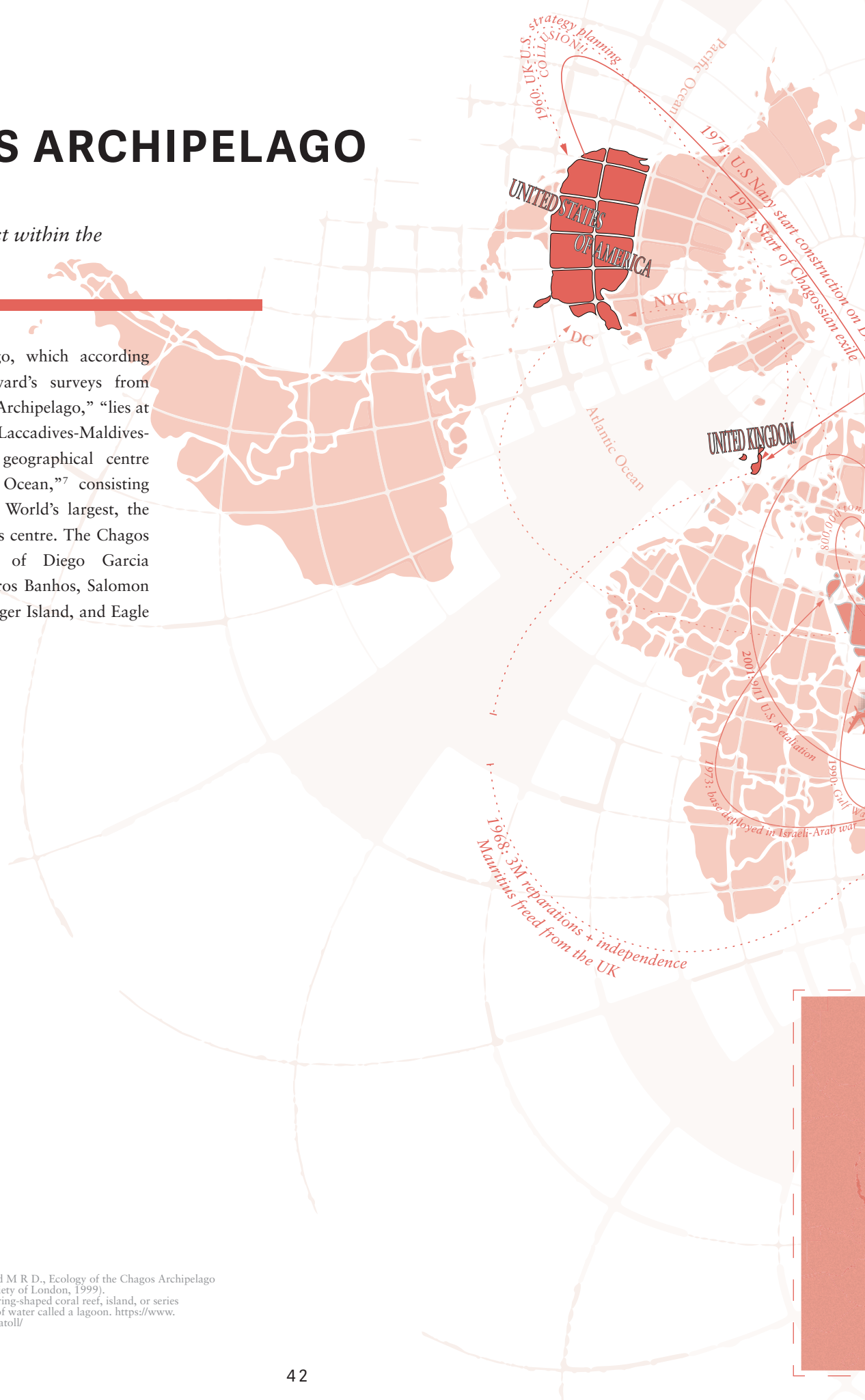


(Some) Indian Ocean Island Territories.

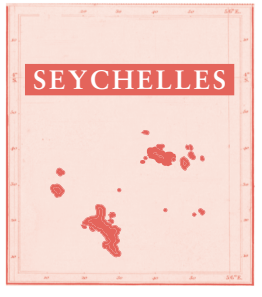
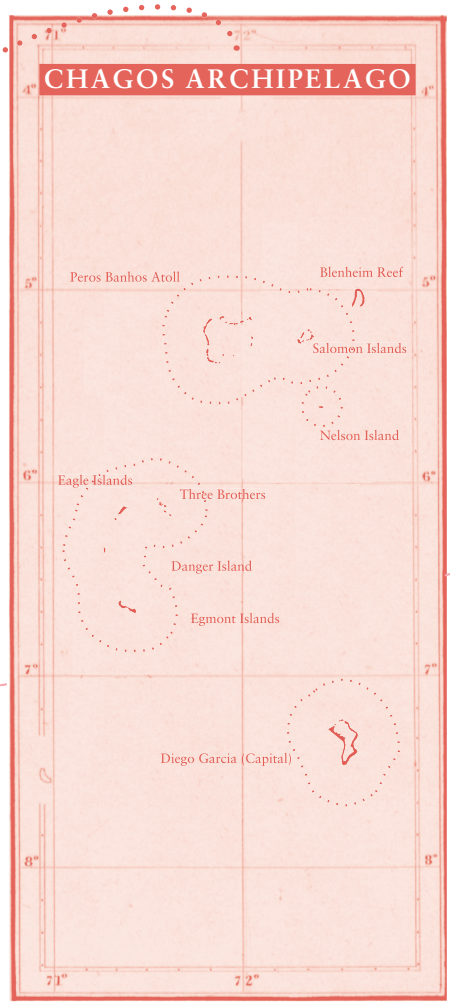
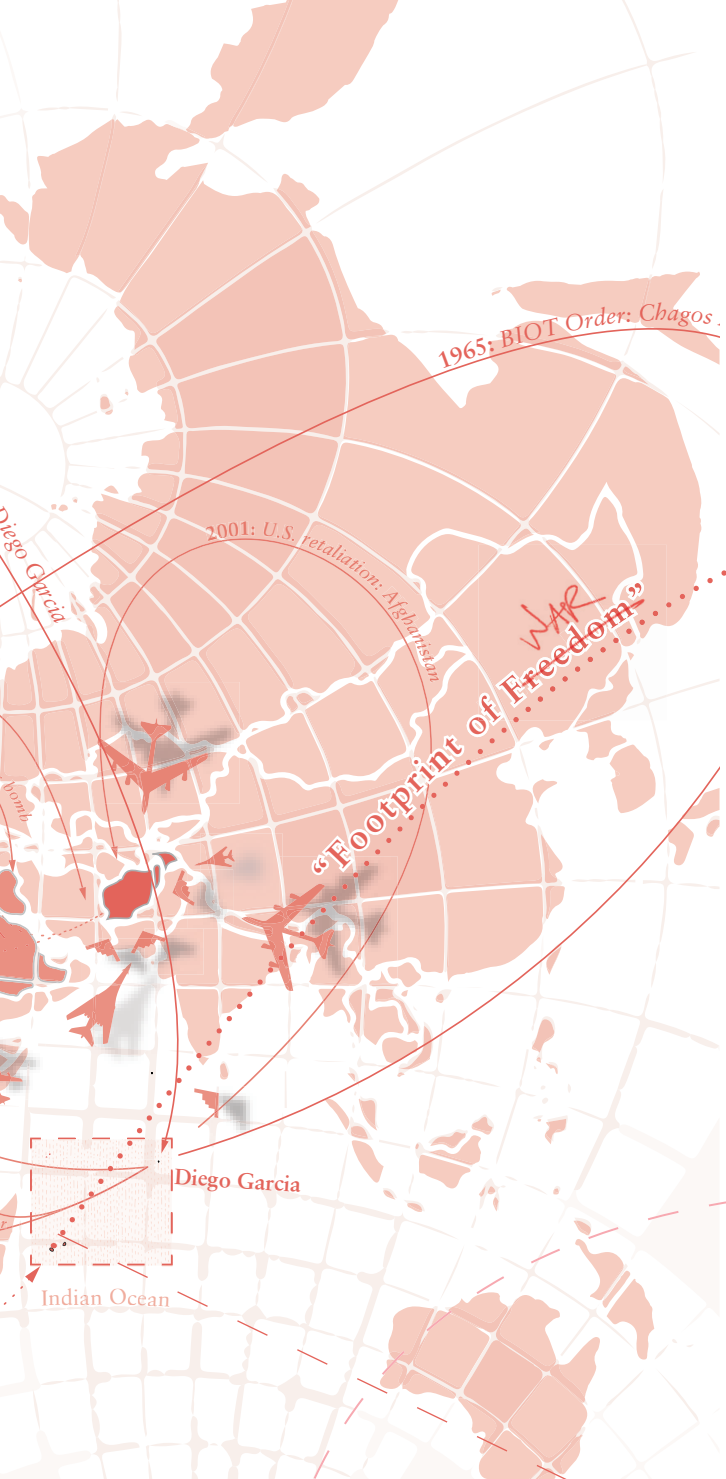
# CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO

## Geographical context within the Indian Ocean

The Chagos Archipelago, which according to Sheppard and Seaward's surveys from "Ecology of the Chagos Archipelago," "lies at the southern end of the Laccadives-Maldives-Chagos ridge, in the geographical centre of the tropical Indian Ocean,"<sup>7</sup> consisting of five atolls<sup>8</sup> including World's largest, the Great Chagos Bank at its centre. The Chagos Archipelago comprises of Diego Garcia (largest), Six Islands, Peros Banhos, Salomon Island, Trois Frères, Danger Island, and Eagle Island (Précieux).

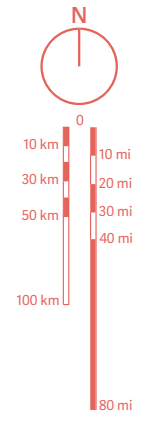


<sup>7</sup> Sheppard Charles R. C. and Seaward M. R. D., Ecology of the Chagos Archipelago (Oteley: Westbury for the Linnean Society of London, 1999).  
<sup>8</sup> National Geographic: An atoll is a ring-shaped coral reef, island, or series of islets. The atoll surrounds a body of water called a lagoon. <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/atoll/>

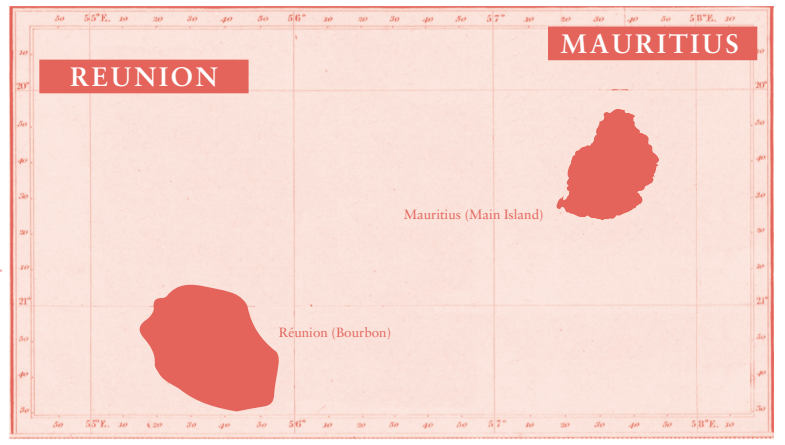


A2

MAP SCALE FOR A1, A2, A3



A1



A3

If referring to the timeline, the British established the BIOT Marine Protected Area (MPA), supposedly to ban commercial fishing and to preserve the biodiversity of the BIOT waters and land. That comes in contrast to Wikileaks' reportage on that being just another imperial tactic to block Chagossians from returning to the archipelago.<sup>9</sup>

*Roberts [Colin Roberts, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's (FCO) Director, Overseas Territories] that "we need to find a way to get through the various Chagossian lobbies." He admitted that HMG "pressure" from the Chagossians and their advocates to permit resettlement of the "outer islands" of the BIOT. He noted, without providing details, that "there are proposals (for a marine park) that could provide the "warden jobs" within the BIOT. However, Roberts stated that, according to the HMG, "current thinking is that there would be "no human footprints" or "Man Fridays" on the BIOT's uninhabited islands. He asserted that establishing a marine park would, in effect, put paid to resettlement claims of the archipelago's former residents. Responding to Polcoun's observation that the advocates of Chagossian resettlement continue to vigorously lobby the UK, Roberts opined that the UK's "environmental lobby is far more powerful than the Chagossians' case,*

---

<sup>9</sup> <https://biot.gov.io/environment/marine-protected-area/>  
<sup>10</sup> "HMG FLOATS PROPOSAL FOR MARINE RESERVE COVERING THE CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO (BRITISH INDIAN OCEAN TERRITORY)," Cable: 09LONDON1156\_a (WIKILEAKS, May 15, 2009), [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09LONDON1156\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09LONDON1156_a.html).

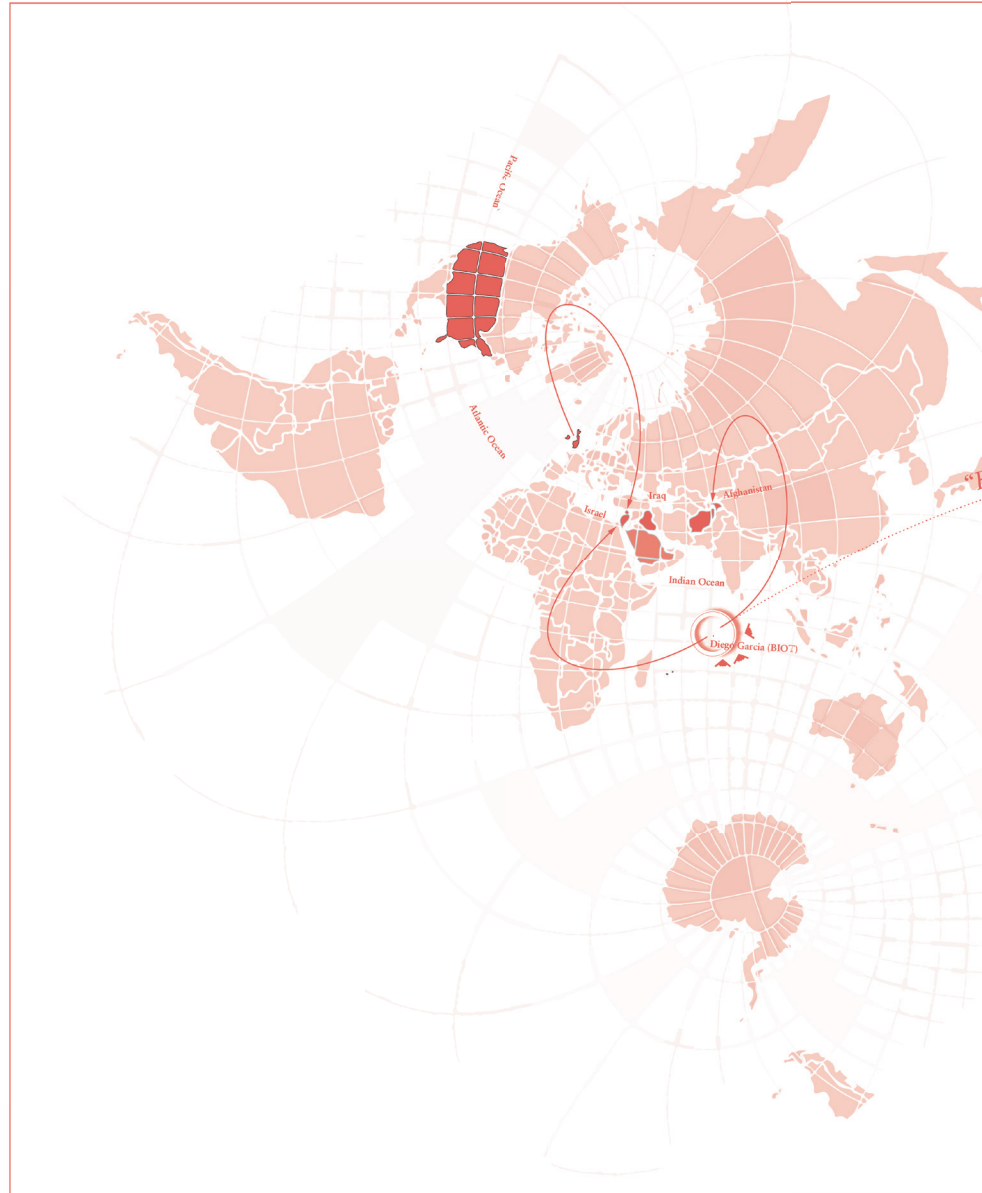
s] acknowledged  
 is “under  
 the BIOT. He  
 Chagossians  
 ing on a reserve,  
 erted that  
 er residents.  
 ously press their  
 advocates.”<sup>10</sup>



Right: Stamp series  
 ordered by the UK,  
 biotpostoffice.com

# Diego Garcia Base Deployments

“Footprint of Freedom” sounds more antiethical due to the origin of the U.S. base in Diego Garcia and the exile of Chagossian people.



Flattened Mercator World Map Projection. Indian Ocean at centre.

Above: Map 11

1968 - 1971: Chagossians travelling outside of archipelago barred entry back

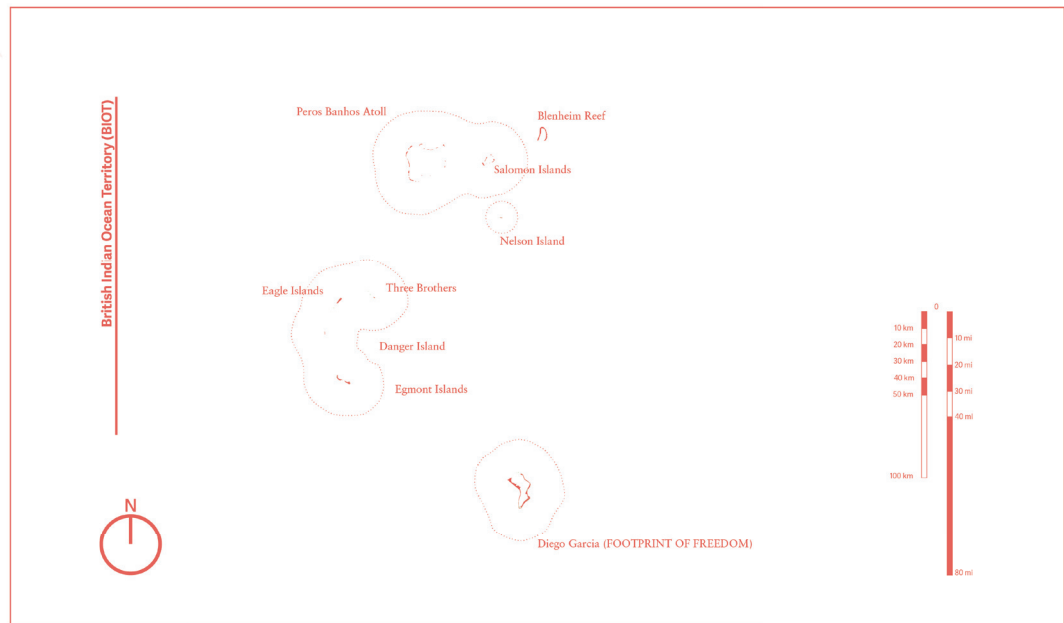
1971: U.S. Navy start construction on Diego Garcia  
Chagossians forced to Mauritius and Seychelles

1973: Chagossian expulsion complete  
Diego Garcia nicknamed "Footprint of Freedom"  
U.S. receives permission from UK for \$400M expansion of military facilities

1973: U.S. Navy base deployed in Israeli-Arab war, Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts



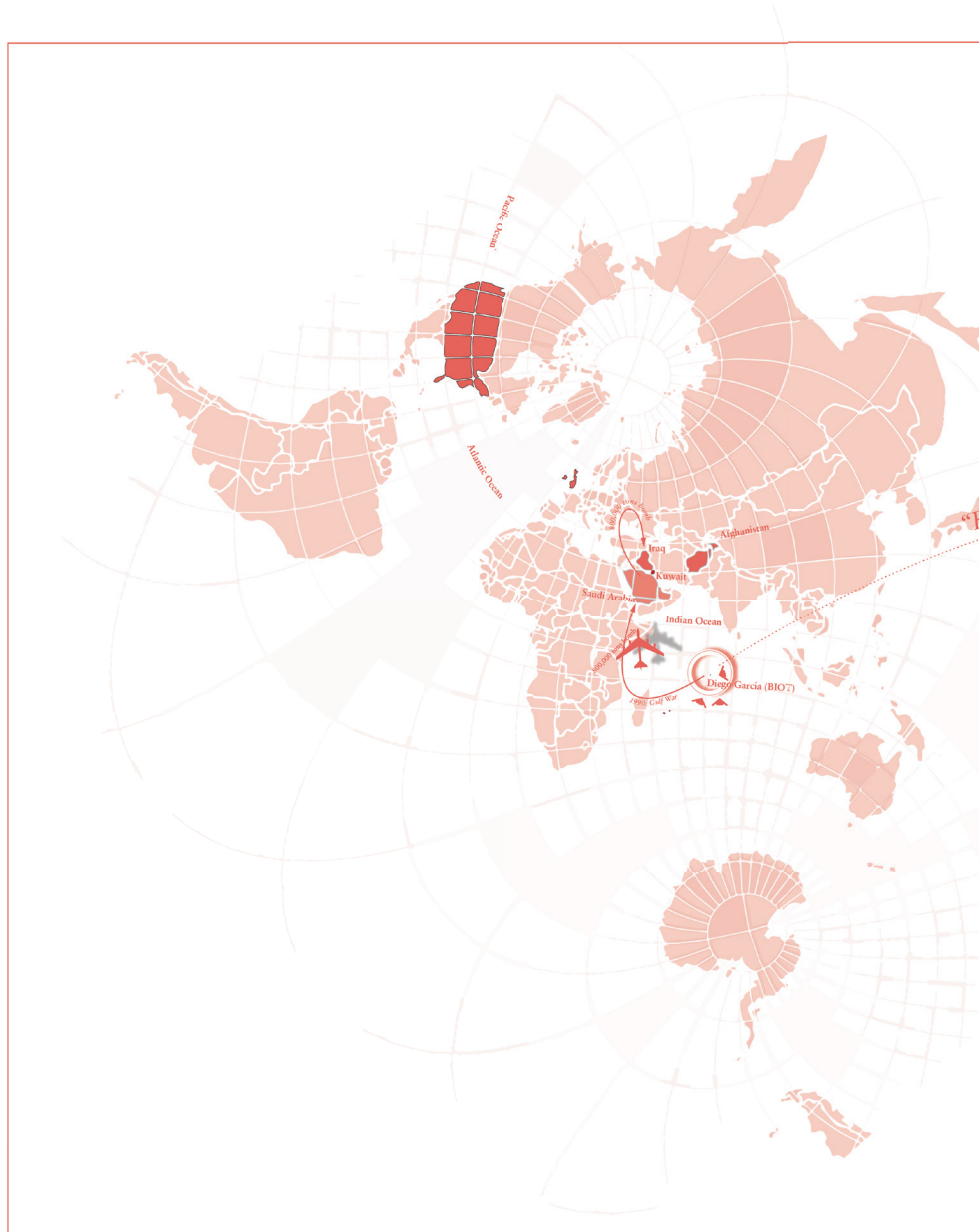
Northrop Grumman B-2 Spirit  
Stealth aircraft



Contested British Indian Ocean Island Territory.



# Diego Garcia Base Deployments



Flattened Mercator World Map Projection. Indian Ocean at centre.

Above: Map 12



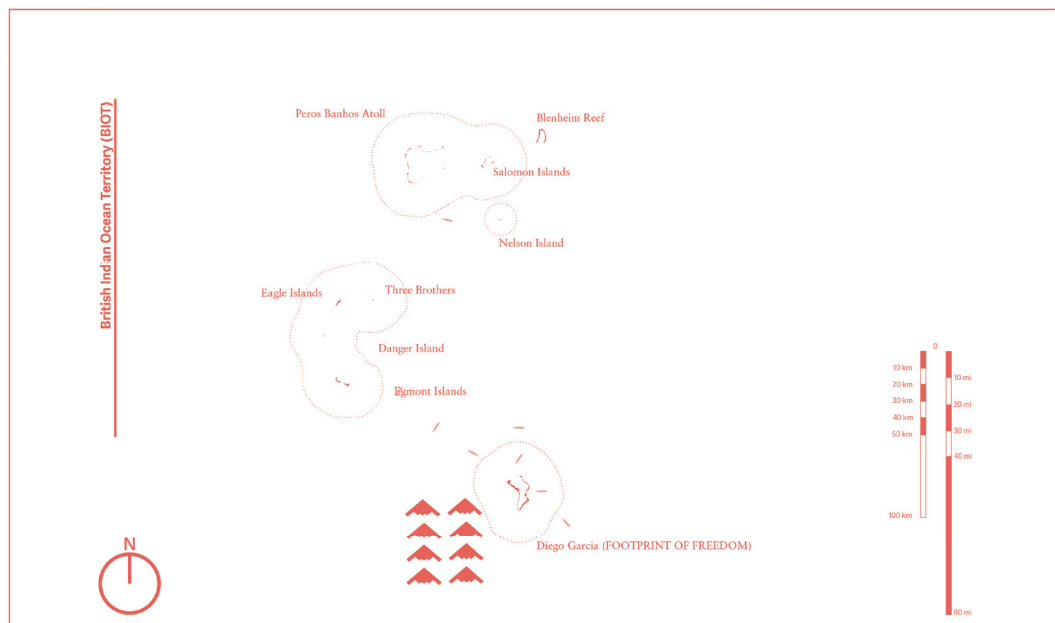
1968 - 1971: Chagossians travelling outside of archipelago barred entry back

1971: U.S. Navy start construction on Diego Garcia  
Chagossians forced to Mauritius and Seychelles

1973: Chagossian expulsion complete  
Diego Garcia nicknamed "Footprint of Freedom"  
U.S. receives permission from UK for \$400M expansion of military facilities

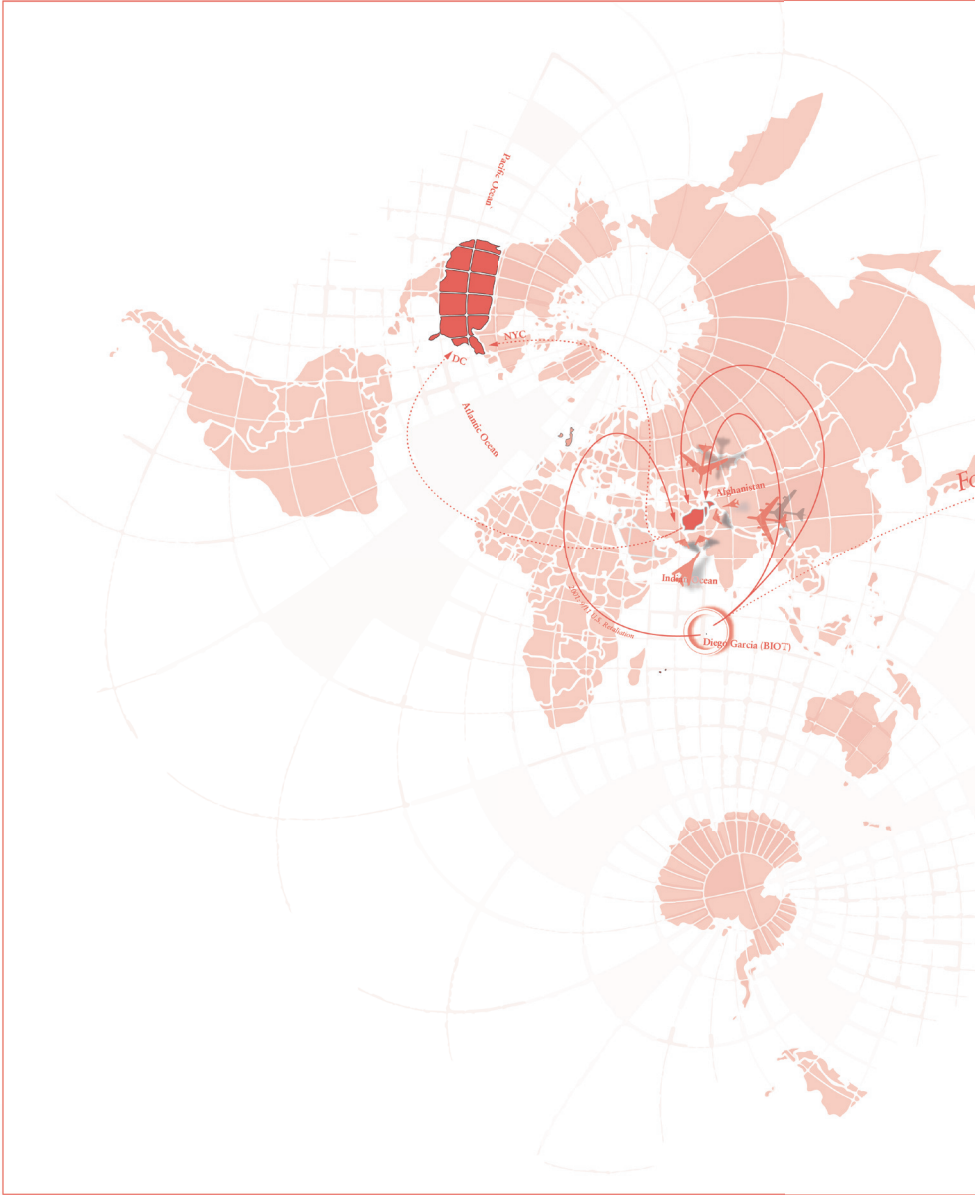
1973: U.S. Navy base deployed in Israeli-Arab war, Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts

1990: U.S. Participation in Gulf War



Contested British Indian Ocean Island Territory.

# Diego Garcia Base Deployments: Today



Flattened Mercator World Map Projection. Indian Ocean at centre.

Above: Map 13



1968 - 1971: Chagossians travelling outside of archipelago barred entry back

1971: U.S. Navy start construction on Diego Garcia  
Chagossians forced to Mauritius and Seychelles

1973: Chagossian expulsion complete  
Diego Garcia nicknamed "Footprint of Freedom"  
U.S. receives permission from UK for \$400M expansion of military facilities

1973: U.S. Navy base deployed in Israeli-Arab war, Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts

1990: U.S. Participation in Gulf War

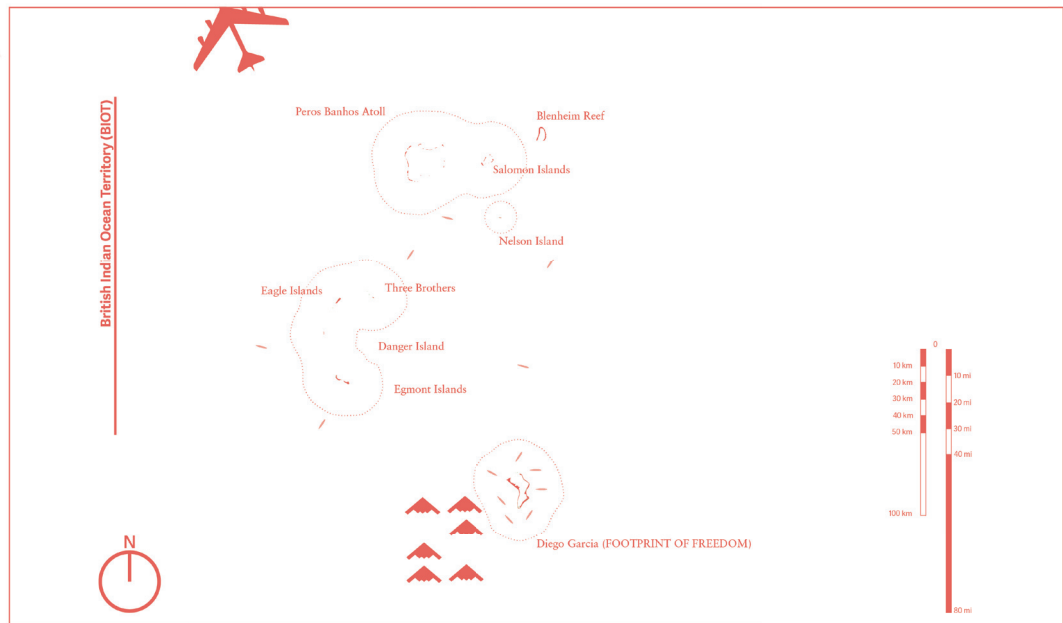
2001: U.S. retaliation: Afghanistan (NYC & Pentagon attacks)

Warship 

Northrop Grumman B-2 Spirit  
Stealth aircraft 

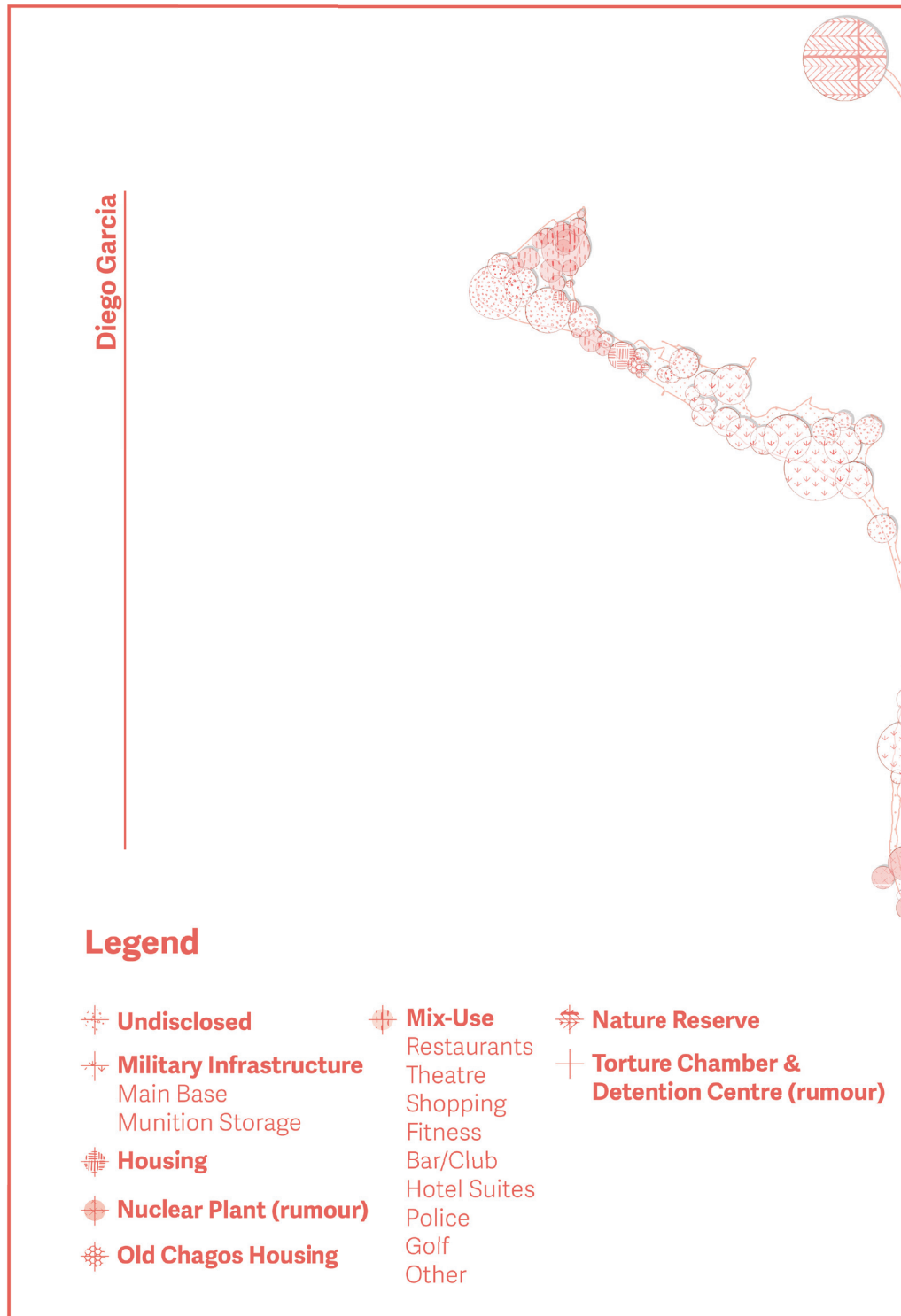
Boeing B-52 Stratofortress  
Strategic bomber 

Rockwell B-1 Lancer  
Heavy bomber 



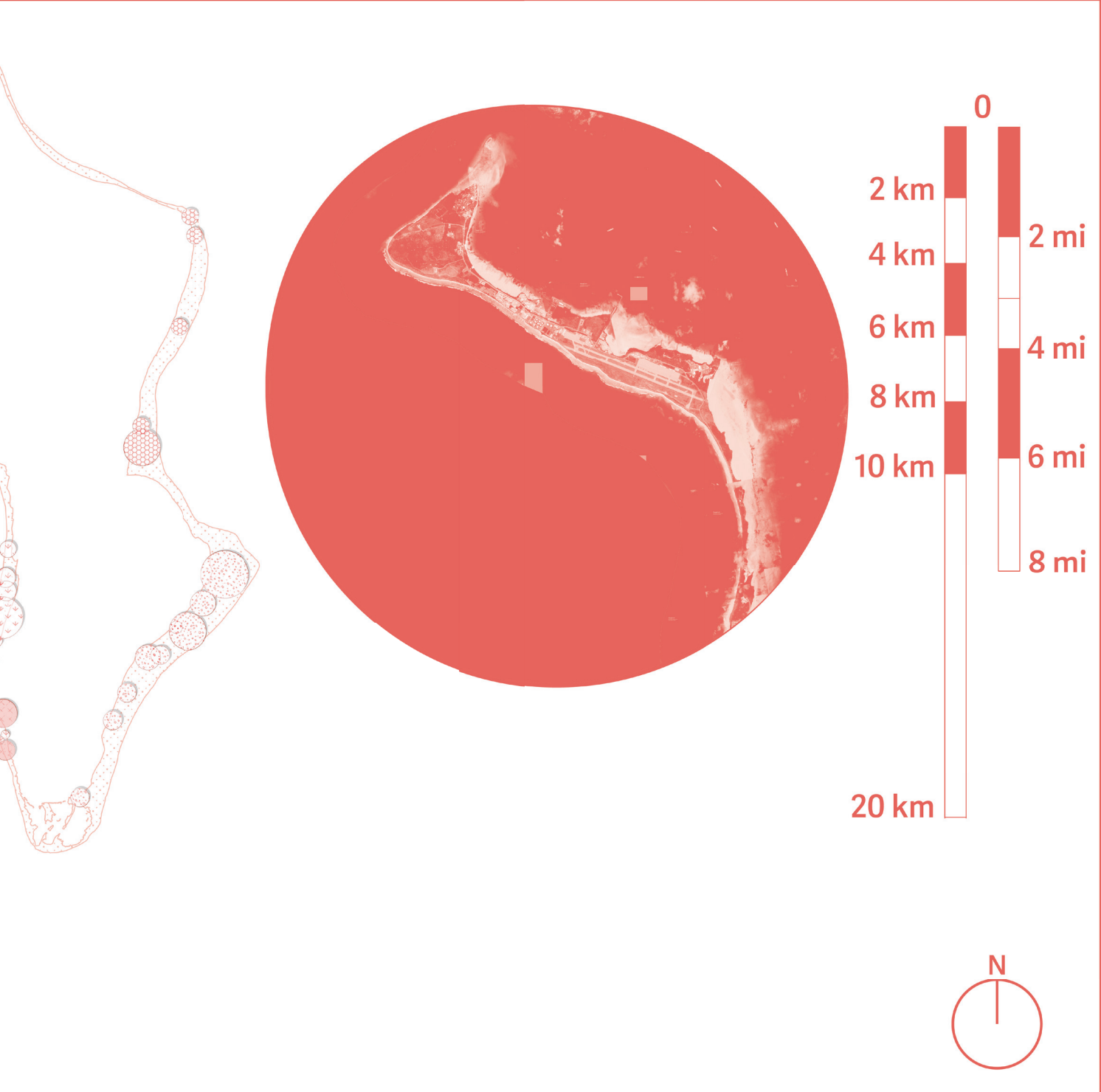
Contested British Indian Ocean Island Territory.

# Diego Garcia: Land Occupation Survey



Map 14

Diego Garcia: current U.S. Navy base

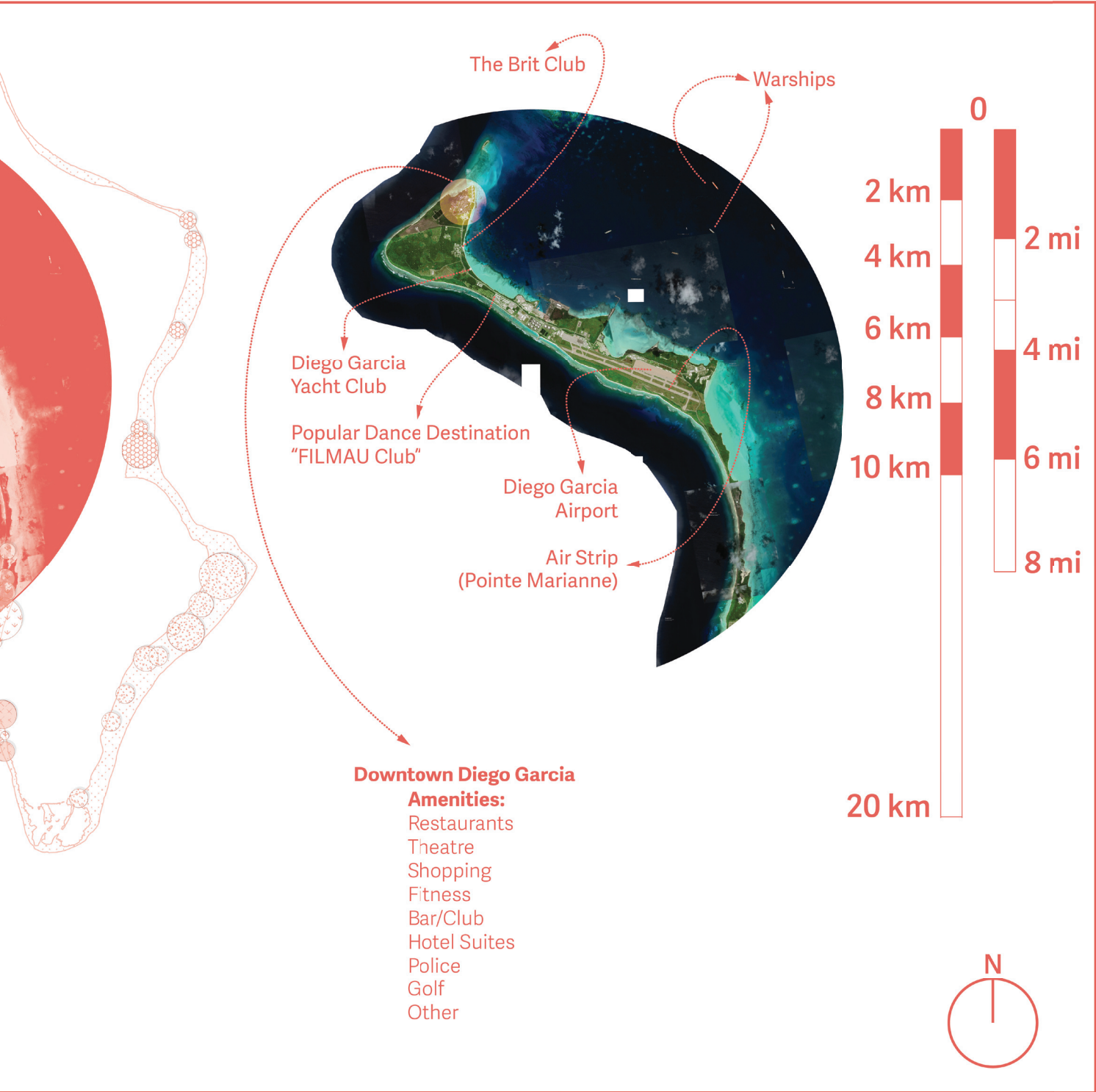


# Diego Garcia: Land Occupation Survey



Map 15

**Diego Garcia: current U.S. Navy base**





# Chagossians Today

In 1996, the United Nations Working Group recognised Chagossians as indigenous people.<sup>11</sup>

The snippets attached collage an exhibit of how the Chagos Archipelago, or BIOT are portrayed throughout the media.

To this day in 2022, the United States Navy still controls the base in Diego Garcia.

To this day in 2022, the Chagossian people were merely allowed to go back to the Chagos Archipelago. In early 2022, a group of Chagossians representing the Chagos Refugees Group (CRG) with the Government of Mauritius visited Peros Banhos, without a British approval. They were able to safely go and return to Mauritius.

## Exiled Chagos Islanders return without UK officials for first time

Fifty years since they were deported to Mauritius by the UK, Chagossians are still fighting for their homeland



❏ Olivier Bancout, Lisbey Elyse, Marie Suzelle Baptiste, Rosemonde Bertin and Marcel Humbert. Photograph: handout

Credit: The Guardian UK & Olivier Bancout (Chagos Refugees Group)

<sup>11</sup> Minority Rights Group International, World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Mauritius : Chagossians/Ilois, April 2009, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/49749ce6c.html>

## UK could forfeit security council seat over Chagos Islands dispute, former diplomat claims

Defying the UN's highest court may put Britain's place at the international top table in jeopardy, warns former envoy



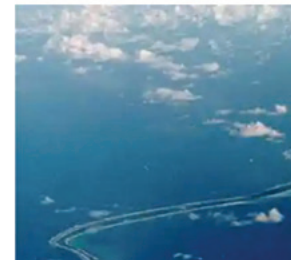
▲ Protesters demanding a return to the Chagos Islands

## World

The 2019 ruling was my awakening to a bigger picture of the p... dormancy, controlled by neo-imperialist powers like the UK and

## UN ruling raises exiled Chagos

Britain acted illegally, say j Mauritius's rights and rest base on Diego Garcia



## Britain's ownership of the Chagos no basis, Mauritius is right to claim

Published: February 20, 2022 12.54am EST

## Mauritius formally challenges Britain's ownership of Chagos Islands

Mauritian ambassador to UN raises country's flag above atoll of Peros Banhos



❏ Officials raised the Mauritian flag above an atoll on the Chagos Islands, pictured, and sang the national anthem in a ceremony on Monday. Photograph: Bruno Rinvulucni/The Guardian

Chagos Islands: to UK shows row go away

Published: February 21, 2022 12.52pm EST

# Chagos islanders cannot return home, says Supreme Court

29 June 2016



## Mauritius urges Britain to end occupation of Chagos Islands

Exiles from the archipelago are determined to go home — and they are not short of support

The New York Times

# China Holds On to a Colony in the South China Sea, With America's Help

China is sabotaging their own efforts to curb China's advances in the South China Sea.

Post-colonization of Mauritius - that unless there is no agency within my generation, we could end up in a society of ethical and the US. April 1, 2021



## China's islands has taken them

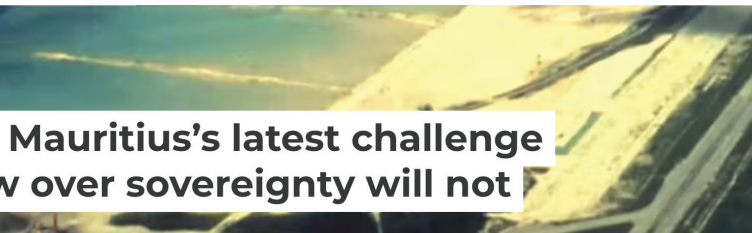
## World Court - Britain must return Indian Ocean islands to Mauritius

World Court - Britain must return Indian Ocean islands to Mauritius

By Stephanie van den Berg

4 MIN READ

THE HAGUE (Reuters) - The World Court on Monday told Britain to give up control over the Chagos Islands in the Indian Ocean, and said it had wrongfully forced the population to leave in the 1970s to make way for a U.S. air base.



## Mauritius's latest challenge over sovereignty will not

# Mauritius asks Google map to mark Chagos islands as part of its territory amid row with UK

INTERNATIONAL

## UN bans British stamps in Chagos island



PORT LOUIS AUGUST 26, 2021 23  
UPDATED: AUGUST 26, 2021 23

SHARE ARTICLE



# Human-induced effects: fauna & flora

With a satirical take, this is a curation of some of the predominant species that were affected, or have affected the fauna and flora in Mauritius or the Chagos Archipelago.

Illustration credits from open sources, free access libraries, and Abercrombie & Fitch.

(A TASTE OF SOME EXOTIC)  
**EXTINCT SPECIES**

"AS DEAD AS THE DODO"  
-A WESTERN PROVERB

The Western world seems to be very educated on the Dodo bird, so much that there are more Dodo remains exhibited in countries other than in Mauritius. Below are some of the many species that were introduced and invaded, or species that led to others' ultimate extinctions.

**THE INFAMOUS DODO BIRD**

*Native: Mauritius*

*Extinct: 1681*

"Walgvogel," or the "distasteful bird"

- Dutch Colonisers<sup>12</sup>



**MAURITIAN GIANT TORTOISE**

*Native: Mauritius*

*Extinct: early 18th century*

Slaughtered for food and oil fat for Dutch Colonisers.



**RED RAIL**

*Native: Mauritius*

*Extinct: ~1700*

"An unbelievably stupid" bird

- Johannes Pretorius, Dutch Coloniser



**MAURITIAN GIANT SKINK**

*Native: Mauritius*

*Extinct: early 18th century*

Did not fear humans. It should have.



COLONISER-INTRODUCED  
**INVASIVE SPECIES**

How can one mitigate the human-induced factors to this era of the anthropocene? What other than plants and animals can be considered as an invasive species?



**COCONUT CRAB**

Initially brought to Diego Garcia as an endangered species to replenish elsewhere. Is now widespread on the island, preying on birds.



**COCONUT**

Introduced in Mauritius & Chagos Archipelago in 1598-early 1600s by Dutch



**INDIAN MONGOOSE**

Introduced in Mauritius in 1902 by British to control rats. Now threatens native fauna.



**AMERICAN NAVY BOYS**

Boys introduced on Chagossian land in 1971. The British deemed the Chagos Archipelago waters as protected areas post-expulsion with the BIOT Marine Protected Area (MPA). Why?

Following the MPA's logic, were the Chagossian people deemed "invasive" to the natural fauna, but NOT the U.S. Navy?

# Diego Garcia Base Speculations: Today

To this day in 2022, speculations still feed throughout the public.



people

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(21, '16)

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Now What

at?

The precedent are a snippet of the information I was able to find and curate on the Mauritian-Chagossian sovereignty dispute, most of which were found through books and online archives.

With all this research at my hands, however, I was at a standstill: most of the authored research were narrated by non-Mauritian and non-Chagossian voices.

As a Mauritian, this research aims to bring forth cultural intimacy to a historically white-authored research, and investigate in parallel with locals on what was once a home for Chagossians. This is a bid to change the colonial narratives, especially the historical dispossession that undermine Chagossian and Mauritian stories: what lies ahead for this thesis hopes to also re-ignite the conversation of colonial memory amongst Indian Ocean islands, and attempt to bring a fraction of solace to the Chagossian people. The inception of this thesis cumulation came after a research trip to Mauritius in December 2021 and January 2022. The initial aim of this research was to generate conversation and an archive of memory-centric to the Chagossian diaspora's stories. Part of this thesis recites findings (exposed in prior chapters) and experiences subject to the initial aim of the research, and the forthcoming part is dedicated to outlining the challenges of being an outsider to a struggling community, thus why a field guide.

The following attempts to demystify the exotic idea of island nations through exposing the realities of research, and the predatory powers at play in socio-political discourses belied within the incredible leverage of the Indian Ocean's locality to at-risk war territories.

Together with all of this historical and geopolitical contexts the body of this thesis narrates into a field guide, represented as a "menu" guide, a website that stores the collection of exposé I have gathered so far, and an installation and performance piece that communicate the irony of the reality that is researching in one's home upon a culture that is resisting erasure.



# Tracing Narratives: through a Field Guide

## To-Go Field Guide: Menu

---

As an introduction to a field guide on the Chagossian-Mauritian contest for sovereignty, this menu is a to-go guide for enquirers to territories of the complex post-colonial waters that we call the Indian Ocean. The maps and the timeline represent a curated exposé of the Chagossian geopolitics, heavily intertwined with British-American warfare and neo-colonial supremacy.

The format of this to-go guide reminisces a food menu, which plays with the temptation of imperialistic powers scavenging for more land like predators hunting for food.

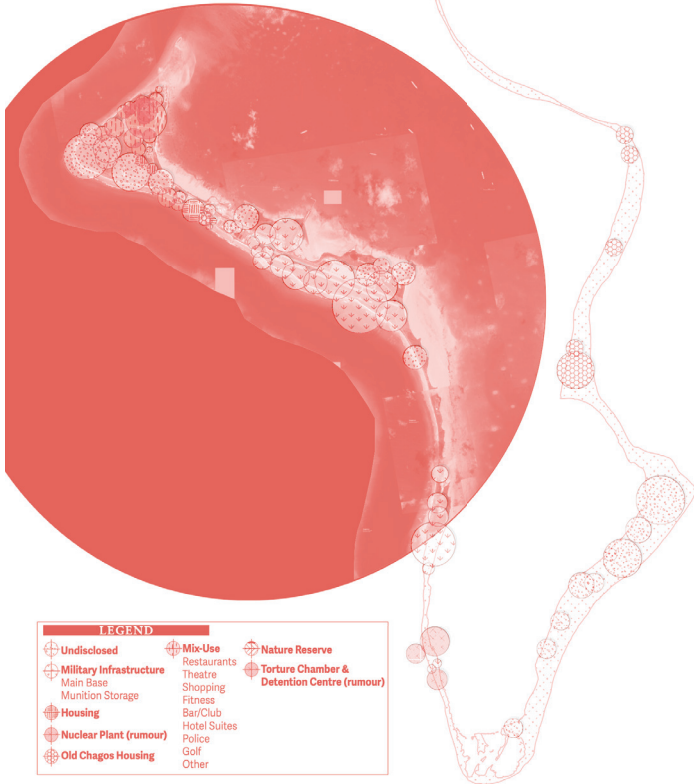
In the reverse of the menu are natural species that were either colonised (and extinct) or are colonising endemic fauna and flora in this era of the anthropocene. With the imperial urge to conquer, the Indian Ocean and its islands are now at the heart of a modern warfare, being strategically located for first world countries to reach African, Middle-Eastern, European, Asian, and Australasia territories. It is with hope that this incites agency and beneficial discourse towards the Mauritian-Chagossian fight for a rightful, and lawful sovereignty.

Left: foldable menu print-ready

A closer look at the contents of the menu will navigate the reader to a War Key, indicating the exact war machines that are and have been deployed from Diego Garcia. They are also stored there. Along with the species that have gone extinct, or the species that perpetuate such erasure, the menu is a condensed form of the field guide of research that hopes to engage with the public, giving them a glimpse of the intense and complex dispute at stake for Chagossians.

The rest of the thesis lies inside the Field Guide website, which although still in construction, elaborates on the historical contexts as well as acts as a journal for my future self undertaking and continuing this work.

**DIEGO GARCIA AMERICAN OCCUPATION SURVEY**



**LEGEND**

Undisclosed	Mix-Use	Nature Reserve
Military Infrastructure	Restaurants	Torture Chamber & Detention Centre (rumour)
Main Base	Theatre	
Munition Storage	Shopping	
Housing	Bar/Club	
Nuclear Plant (rumour)	Hotel/Suites	
Old Chagos Housing	Police	
	Golf	
	Other	

**(A TASTE OF SOME EXOTIC) EXTINCT SPECIES**

**"AS DEAD AS THE DODO"**  
- A WESTERN PROVERB

The Western world seems to be very educated on the Dodo bird, so much that there are more Dodo remains exhibited in countries other than in Mauritius. Below are some of the many species that were introduced and invaded, or species that led to others' ultimate extinctions.

**THE INFAMOUS DODO BIRD**

*Native: Mauritius*  
*Extinct: 1681*  
"Walvogel", or the "distasteful bird"  
- Dutch Colonisers



**MAURITIAN GIANT TORTOISE**

*Native: Mauritius*  
*Extinct: early 18th century*  
Slaughtered for food and oil fat for Dutch Colonisers.



**RED RAIL**

*Native: Mauritius*  
*Extinct: ~1700*  
"An unbelievably stupid" bird  
- Johannes Pretorius, Dutch Coloniser



**MAURITIAN GIANT SKINK**

*Native: Mauritius*  
*Extinct: early 18th century*  
Did not fear humans. It should have.



**COLONISER-INTRODUCED INVASIVE SPECIES**

How can one mitigate the human-induced factors to this era of the anthropocene? What other than plants and animals can be considered as an invasive species?



**COCONUT CRAB**

Initially brought to Diego Garcia as an endangered species to replenish elsewhere, is now widespread on the island, preying on birds.



**COCONUT**

Introduced in Mauritius & Chagos Archipelago in 1598-early 1600s by Dutch



**INDIAN MONGOOSE**

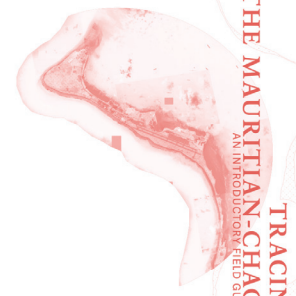
Introduced in Mauritius in 1902 by British to control rats. Now threatens native fauna.



**AMERICAN NAVY BOYS**

Boys introduced on Chagosian land in 1971. The British deemed the Chagos Archipelago waters as protected areas post-expulsion with the BIOT Marine Protected Area (MPA). Why? Following the MPA's logic, were the Chagosian people deemed "invasive" to the natural fauna, but NOT the U.S. Navy?

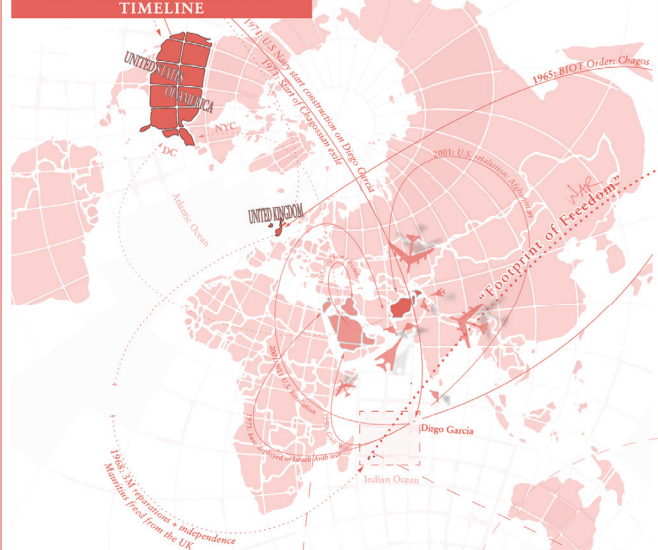
**TRACING NARRATIVES: THE MAURITIAN-CHAGOSSIAN SOVEREIGNTY DISPUTE**  
AN INTRODUCTORY FIELD GUIDE, CRITICAL HISTORY, CONTEXTS AND SIGHTS



SCAN TO ACCESS FULL FIELD GUIDE

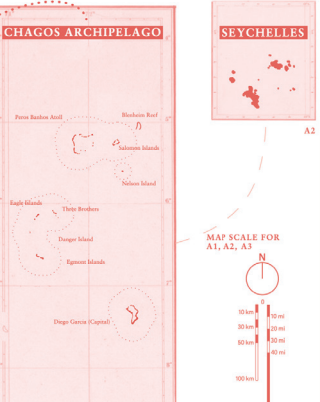
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:  
SHANE AH-SOONG  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF DESIGN  
MASTERS IN DESIGN CANDIDATE  
ART, DESIGN, AND THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

**CONTEXTUALLY-MAPPED TIMELINE**



**WAR KEY**

- Killing machines wielded by the U.S. Navy all stored and deployed from the BIOT American base.
- Warship
- Rockwell B-1 Lancer Strategic Bomber
- Bombing B-52 Stratofortress Strategic Bomber
- Northrop Grumman B-2 Spirit Stealth aircraft

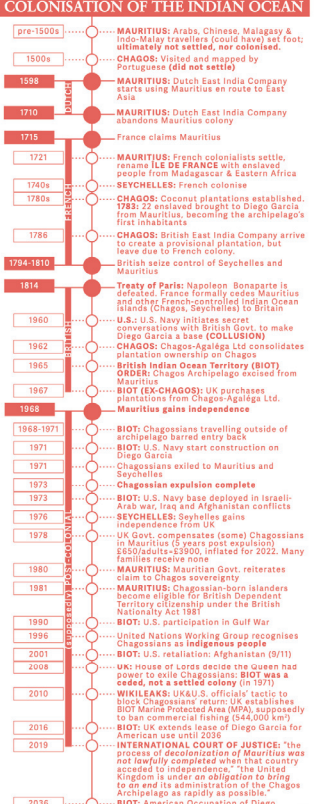


**ABOUT**

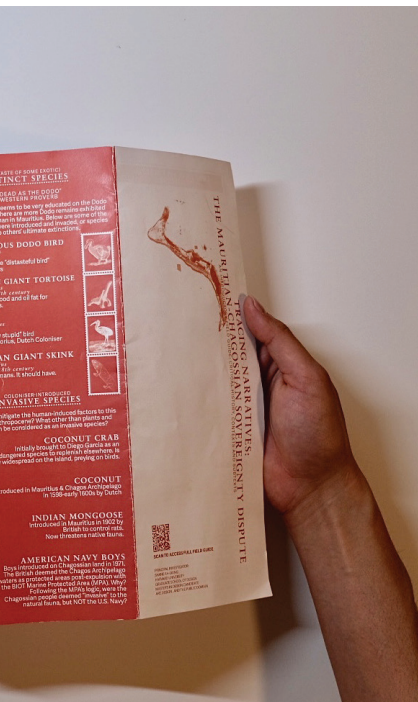
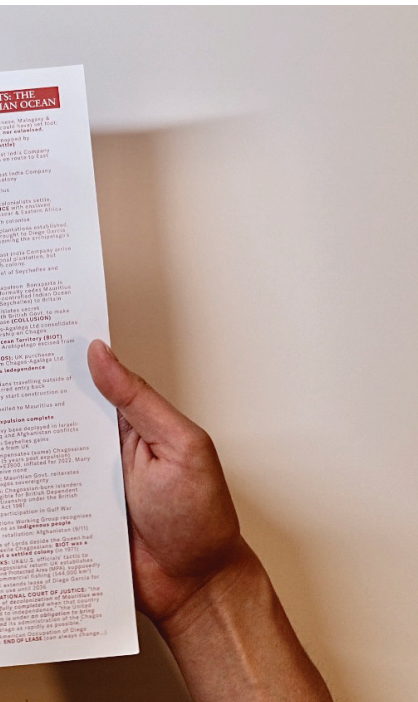
As an introduction to a field guide on the Chagosian-Mauritian contest for sovereignty, this menu is a to-go guide for enquirers to territories of the complex post-colonial waters that we call the Indian Ocean. The maps and the timeline represent a curated exposé of the Chagosian geopolitics, heavily intertwined with British-American warfare and neo-colonial supremacy.

In the reverse of the menu are natural species that were either colonised (and extinct) or are colonising endemic fauna and flora in this era of the anthropocene. With the imperial urge to conquer, the Indian Ocean and its islands are now at the heart of a modern warfare, being strategically located for first world countries to reach African, Middle-Eastern, European, Asian, and Australasia territories. It is with hope that this incites agency and beneficial discourse towards the Mauritian-Chagosian fight for a rightful, and lawful sovereignty.

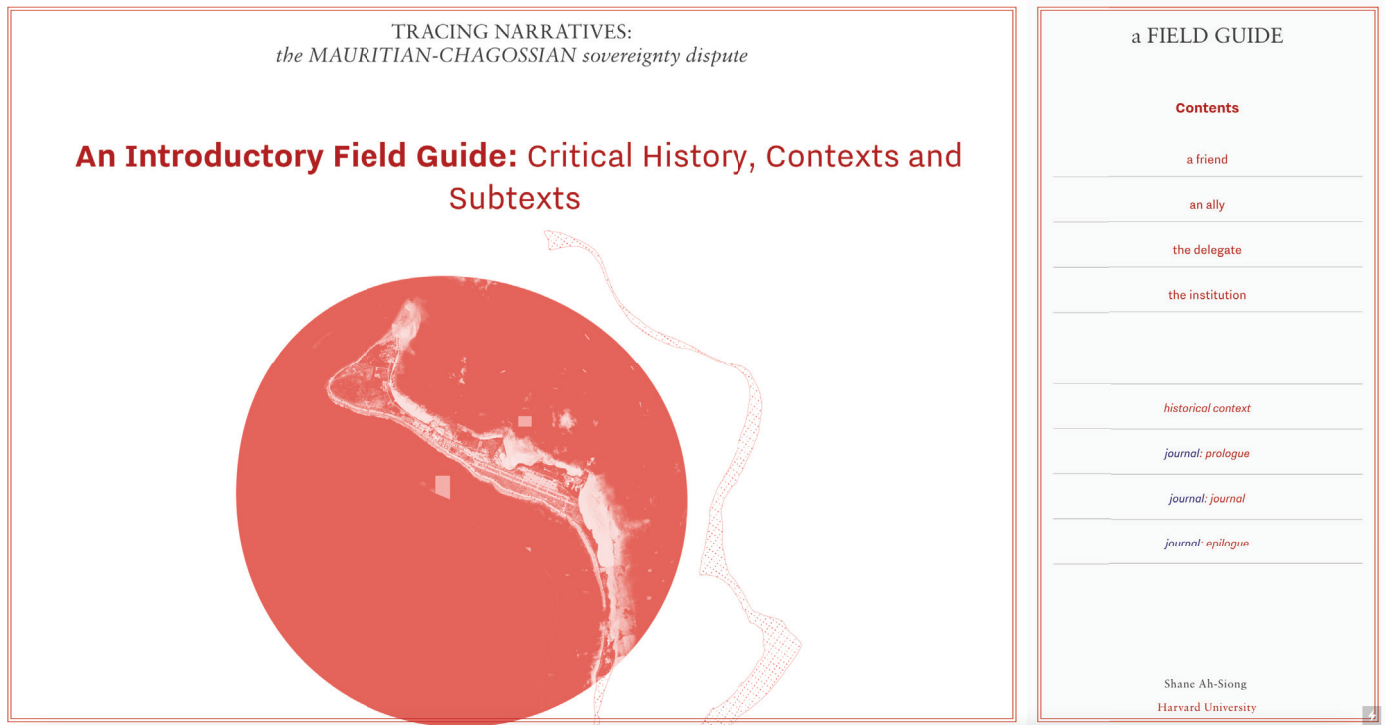
**TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS: THE COLONISATION OF THE INDIAN OCEAN**







Hands-on menu: an introduction to the field guide



Online Field Guide: [tracingnarratives.cargo.site](http://tracingnarratives.cargo.site)

# Tracing Narratives: through a Field Guide Website

This website is dedicated to all of the agents that have helped or prevented the advancement of this thesis exploration. As a field guide, it is also a personal journal in progress, which is going to be dependent on the growth and process of the continuing research.

An audio-visual collection is dedicated to each of the agents, which hope to guide myself and others into conducting research at a scale like Mauritius. Also like a journal but visual journal, I hope that the visuals trace my steps into navigating the complexities that come with the Chagossian sovereignty dispute.

With an accumulation of all of the maps that I have also drawn throughout this thesis, the historical and geo-political contexts to this field guide deploy as tools of representation of the historical erasure, the Mauritian-Chagossian sovereignty dispute, as well as the inaccess to supposedly public information. As my research on field back in Mauritius led to mostly no substantial form of information, the online field guide will also serve as an online exposé of my experience and a way to keep references for future friends, delegates, allies, and institutions at play in such a complex project.

TRACING NARRATIVES:  
*the MAURITIAN-CHAGOSSIAN sovereignty dispute*



About



a Friend





the delegate

a FIELD GUIDE

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- a friend

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- historical context

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- journal: prologue

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- journal: journal

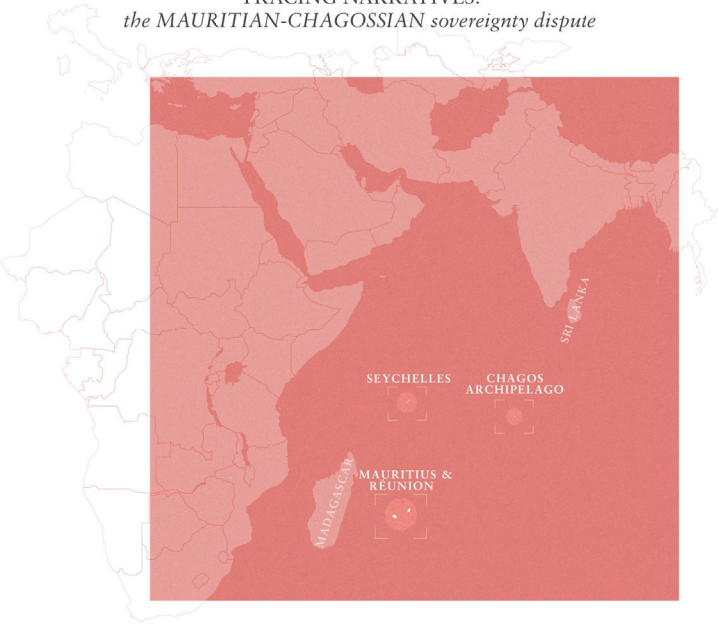
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- journal: epilogue

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Shane Ah-Siong  
Harvard University

TRACING NARRATIVES:  
*the MAURITIAN-CHAGOSSIAN sovereignty dispute*



above: geographical location of Mauritius, Réunion, Seychelles, and the Chagos Archipelago

a FIELD GUIDE

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Shane Ah-Siong  
Harvard University

# Tracing Narratives: through a Field Guide

## Audrey: a friend

Audrey told me about her family history, and how little even she was taught about her own people at school. Her story reminded me of my own education back in Mauritius - in primary and secondary school, we were not taught about the Chagossian history, just vaguely on the Mauritian sovereignty, which included the Chagos Archipelago. As stated in the introductory sections, outer islands that belong to Mauritian sovereignty consist of Rodrigues, Agaléga, Tromelin, and Saint Brandon.

Audrey's maternal grandmother was born and raised in Diego Garcia, the biggest island of the archipelago. Her grandfather is Mauritian, but grew up on Peros Banhos, also part of the archipelago. I was finally able to meet them in Mauritius in January, and speaking to them was refreshing, yet with amertume, given that Audrey was not able to make it back home to Mauritius. She is based in Manchester, UK.



Shane with Audrey's grandparents, Seellal (left), and Philline (right) in their home. Cassis, Mauritius.

The audio-visual collection can be found on the online field guide:

[www.tracingnarratives.cargo.site](http://www.tracingnarratives.cargo.site)

*The following is a conversation transcription with Audrey and myself, discussing and debriefing my field research and meeting her family.*

**AA:** Funny enough, Shane and I met through social media via the Chagossians of Manchester creative community project. I feel like we instantly clicked and connected the first time we spoke; from our activist-driven work, to our displacement, trying to understand our mixed Mauritian heritage. For over more than a year now, we have built on a connection that started out both from being from Mauritius and not being able to go back home due to COVID.

In the Fall of 2021, our piece entitled “UNITED STATES OF ARCHIPELAGOS: AN INTIMATE TAKE ON THE CHAGOSSIAN STRUGGLE,” was published in The Funambulist magazine, which we co-authored together. In there I tell the story of my grandmother, Philline who was born in Diego Garcia and portray our Chagossian culture. This is not an easy subject matter; exploring collective memory, past trauma that is hard to relieve, recall and retell. It often feels that to make the exile, forceful displacement, and discrimination faced in Mauritius more bearable, my grandma erased and buried memories of her past life.

Co-writing with Shane gave us the opportunity to expose the injustices and current post-colonial trauma which still haunts mine and so many Mauritian-Chagossian families to this day.

SA: how did you feel about me meeting your grandparents?

AA: When Shane sent me a photo of himself with my grandparents, I CRIED. It felt very warm and I also felt very proud, to be making these connections and witnessing my family have conversations that have never happened before, with myself and with Shane. This photo, the moment they all shared is very precious to me, even though I wasn't there to witness what was said.

Even today, the UK government is looking at a bill<sup>13</sup> that would enable the government to automatically remove British citizenship from anyone, which would most definitely harm immigrants, or British Overseas Territory naturalised citizens like my family. (UK government's Nationality and Borders Bill) From Global citizen.org: "...proposal to allow the Home Secretary to more easily strip people of their British citizenship if the government believes they are eligible for citizenship elsewhere."

The irony is that the same bill also now includes a process (which will start in May 2022) allowing descendants like myself to access a BOTC visa for free. Following the BOTC visa, Chagossian families and their descendants like myself will also be able to apply for the British Citizenship and passport. This is historical as Chagossian descendants and 3rd generation Mauri-Chagossians like myself were never allowed to apply for this. The process was too complicated, too expensive, or just not possible due to an anomaly in nationality law. The British government has now decided to amend this. Which is great news. This means I no longer have to spend ridiculous amounts of money to apply for a visa every two and a half years, a privilege a lot of people from the community do not have. I feel torn with all this. Torn because I do not want the British Nationality, I do not identify as British nor do I want to be British. This is something I am still trying to figure out. Even more so as my personal principles and morals do not align with that of the conservative British Government in power. Unlike so many people within the community, I do not support the monarchy, nor the repressive conservative laws directed at migrants, refugees, and marginalised communities. This bill is historical and great news for people like myself and the community but I fear the repercussions of it all as well for people like me, for refugees, for migrant families, and people from the global majority.

AA: This comes a few weeks after the UK approved of naturalising Chagossian descendants like myself. But what now?

Are we back in a limbo?

A sensation that I am all too familiar with? An alien in Manchester?

[to the UK government] You told me I could finally belong, and be administratively acknowledged, and now, I am at risk of having that right revoked.

## Chagos Islands descendants can apply to become British nationals

New route offers children of those born on islands right to be British overseas territory citizens or British citizens



British Indian Ocean Territory islanders gather at Parliament Square in London during legislative scrutiny of the nationality and borders bill. Photograph: Vuk Valcic/Alamy

The Guardian, 2022



Rosemond Sameenaden, 70, joins other Chagos islanders outside the High Court, London, where they are fighting the UK government for the reinstatement of their homeland (Image: PA)

NEWS POLITICS FOOTBALL CELEBS TV MONEY TRAVEL

### EXCLUSIVE: Chagossians fear being booted from UK 50 years after they were removed from own islands

Between 1968 to 1973 the UK deported islanders to make way for a US Air base and 3,000 settled in Crawley, West Sussex but now risk being deported because they were not born in the UK

Mirror UK, 2022

13 "Nationality and Borders Bill - Hansard - UK Parliament," UK Parliament, February 22, 2022,



# Tracing Narratives: through a Field Guide

## Chagos Refugees Group Olivier Bancoult: the delegate

The Chagos Refugees Group (CRG) is the main group that has been most politically active and in constant discussion and negotiations with the Mauritian government. With their headquarters situated in Pointe Aux Sables, Mauritius, the CRG is also a meeting point and museum for the Chagossian diaspora. For more context, the locality of Pointe Aux Sables is well known in Mauritius for being dilapidated, industrial, and low-income.

My first encounters with the Chagos Refugees Group were not ideal. North-American Spring time 2021: COVID-19 was rampant in Mauritius and a lockdown was put in place by the government. The Mauritian borders were closed, so the closest access I had to the CRG was through my family.



Photo Arch

### *Olivier Bancoult*

Olivier Bancoult is the head of the Chagos Refugees Group. He is the main spokesperson for all Chagossian matters and has made a name of himself for being known as the tenor of the Chagossian fight. I had initially tried emailing them, but finally made contact with him via my mother. I had persuaded her to call the CRG's landline, which succeeded after 4-day consecutive attempts. The name Harvard University carried some weight, I thought, or rather hoped. Alas, due to the strict nature of Mauritian COVID-19 protocols and the distance, I was not able to speak to anyone from the CRG. I could not blame them - who was I, a Mauritian student trying to find more information about them, while a global pandemic was ravaging our island.

Simultaneously, I had contacted another refugee group that I had come across while searching for non-Wikipedia answers. The Instagram group, Chagossians of Manchester, was seemingly managed by a millennial, I thought. And right I was, as a friendship flourished with the founder, Audrey. The rest is history.

On-site, in the end of December 2021, I was finally able to meet Mr. Bancoult. As an electrician for the Central Electricity Board of Mauritius (CEB), he has now been fighting for Chagossian rights for 38 years. The court cases brought him all the way to the United Kingdom, where the Chagossian-Mauritian fight was formally acknowledged in 2002, and deemed unlawful by the United Nations and the World Court in 2019, as recounted in previous sections. He recounts them in the interviews traced in the visual collective.



Photo by Shane at the CRG



Photo by Shane at the CRG

Rita Élysée Bancoult, Olivier Bancoult's mother, with activists Charlesia Alexis and Lisette Talate, founded the CRG in 1982. Their office and place of congregation is located in Pointe aux Sables, around 20 minutes away from the capital, Port Louis.

As mentioned in the visual collection in the field, guide, the CRG only had 1 viable map of the Chagos Archipelago in hand (image right). This brought me to the National Archives of Mauritius, prompting me to conduct a thorough search for more maps, but also trace the reasons as to how and why Chagossian maps are so scarce - if it is not already obvious why.



Bancoult showing the only map the CRG has in their archives. The map is of Peros Banhos, Salomon & Egmond Islands, circa 1903.

## JS: an ally

### The National Archives of Mauritius



It took me about a full 24-hour day to get in contact with the National Archives back home. It was December, and their offices were closed for the festivities.

Upon the moment I pronounced the name “Chagos,” I heard ruffling, and confusion from the desk lady, calling out her colleague for assistance.

Her colleague, JS took over the phone, who (rightfully so) skeptically asked for more information about my research. Jessen warned me about the risks I was partaking here: information, valuable or not might or might not be shared with me, even if deemed “public.”

[JS] is kept for anonymity

JS is a young archivist, and we quickly became acquainted as we are of the same age and have similar post-colonial interests. They later became my ally in my quest for information on the Chagos Archipelago.

What was public was *not really public*. The information I was trying to get was simply maps that dated back to a pre-British Indian Ocean Territory colonial settlement, any available colonial-drawn maps, or any visual information that could have given me more insight on the state and architecture of the islands.

There, I was treated like a spy. I was not allowed to have water or any electronics by my side at the viewing table - logical, no? But why was a Canadian woman also being served tea at the same table? And why was I not greeted and escorted like the French mauritian gentleman was in one of the few days I spent there? The PMO had “banned” access to all Chagos documents as of 2021, and despite having also received official approval to view them after multiple attempts, I was denied, back in the national archive. In all the chaos of being in the middle of a PMO-Archive dispute of he said she said, I ended up with is this exposé of what it is rewally like to conduct research and to still be living in a younge postcolonial country that is still grappling with the effects of colonialism



It is important to note the National Archives' moto here in their HQ: "MISSION: Our mission is to provide the nation with a National Archives which fulfills its historical and cultural roles, i.e., to collect, preserve, make accessible the collective memory of the nation, for the benefit of the present and future generations, for research and exploitation purposes."

# The Institutions

## The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) & The National Archives of Mauritius

I was able to get in touch with ministry personnel in charge of Chagos-related affairs after multiple hunts on Mauritian Yellow Pages. Secretaries of Officers would delegate me over to one another, until the 8th person at the Prime Minister's Office, and after 2 days of on/off phone calls, I was delegated to Martine Y. K. F.

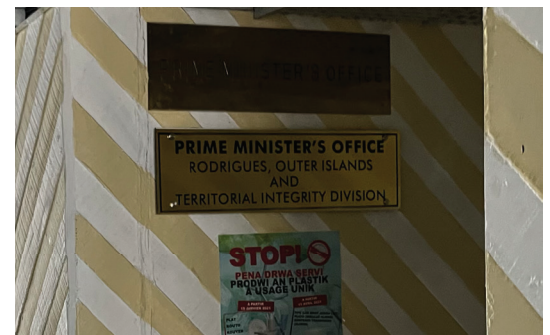
Ms. Y. K. F., formally known as the First Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Mauritius welcomed me into her office after a few exchanges and chats over the phone. I was not allowed to film, nor record our conversation, but allowed to take some notes.

Throughout the topic of conversation, ranging from a true Mauritian sovereignty with a re-attachment of the Chagos Archipelago, to future plans for the pursuit of lawsuits against the British Government, it was clear that everything had been rehearsed, but also focused on one thing: the total decolonisation of Mauritius.

**Ms. Y. K. F.:** Mauritius will not be decolonised until we regain the sovereignty of the Chagos. With time, we hope to succeed.

On the decolonisation of Mauritius intertwined with the Chagos, Mansour Fallah states:

*This (sixth) story of international law is one of opposites. It ventures into the **victory of independence over colonialism** on the one hand, while demonstrating the defeat of full self-determination in light of still existing influence of former colonial powers over unliberated territories. This paradox seems inherent to the notion of 'decolonization': a truly pivotal process of emancipation in international law that was, however, **never been fully completed**. (Mansour 2021)*





# Realities of research

As stated through the field guide, the research I conducted on site, at home, was not easy. The road blocks I have faced just proved to me that even as a Mauritian, I was still not privileged enough to gain access to supposedly “public” information (at the National Archives, for example).

I had to, at some point, resort to niche websites, and Google Maps Reviews. The absurdity and irony of having found information and stories from those made it into an installation and short film, presenting the personal struggle of having to resort to non-academic resources to meet ends. Although I was not allowed on the land, I have, in fact found Diego Garcia. Despite being satirical, this exposé of findings aims to prove the insanity of unlawfully occupied lands - while the Navy are enjoying their time on the Chagossian beaches, Chagossian lives are at stake in territories they were forced to live.

The intentionality with this installation was to provoke, which culminated in a performance. The performance was a self-critique: a commentary on my colonised self. As I am making a cocktail, named Diego Garcia by Navy men, I am also walled-in by an interpretation of “Diego Garcia,” having found pieces and traces of evidence and narratives to what it is like to live in Diego Garcia. This interpretation of Diego Garcia, and life of the Navy men there, are projected onto the back screen, and two opposing screens inside of the room (refer to pictures).

Installation  
11 May 2023  
Graduate S

Projecte  
voice a  
Map r  
Garcia  
restaura  
over fro  
were in  
Krzyszto  
(2021)  
the Har  
Althoug  
live the  
installat  
a peak  
amongst  
of the  
audienc  
all: we  
experien  
but wha

Copy to: Mr. du Boulay

Unfortunately along with the Birds  
 go some few Tarzans or Men Fridays  
 whose origins are unknown, and who  
 are being hopefully wished as to  
 what will be the result of it has been



A drink named after the island...

**Diego Garcia**

**Liquors:** 1oz. Dark Rum  
 1oz. Light Rum  
 1/2 oz. Orange Curacao

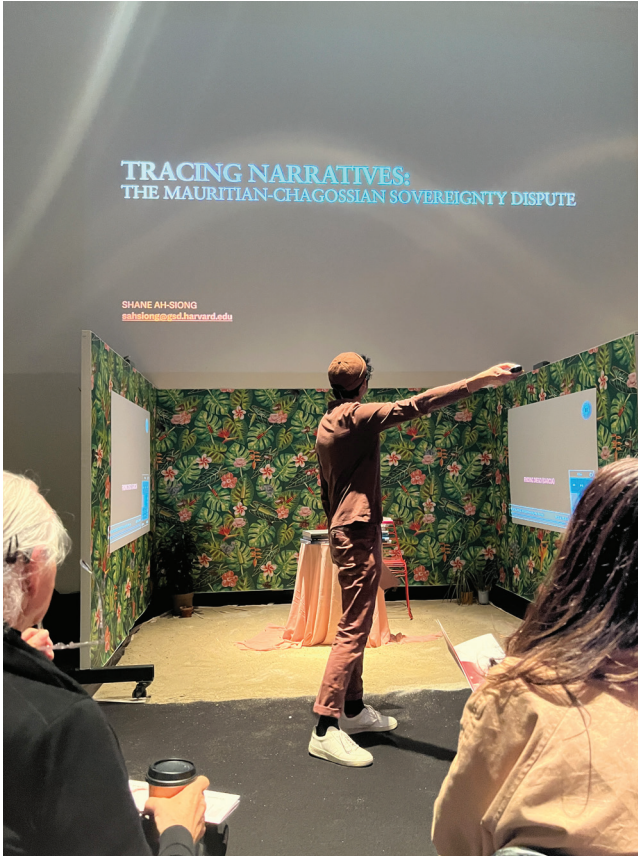
**Mixers:** 1 oz. Lemon Juice  
 1 1/2 oz. Pineapple Juice  
 1 Wedge of Pineapple

**Combine with ice and shake well.  
 Strain and add ice.**



and performance, "Finding Diego"  
 2, Piper Auditorium, Harvard University  
 School of Design.

and is the short film collaging  
 actors interpreting Google  
 reviews of various Diego  
 establishments such as  
 restaurants or bars. The voice-  
 over from the film and projection  
 inspired by my Area Head,  
 of Wodiczko's Portrait  
 4K Projection Exhibited at  
 Harvard Art Museum.



though none of us could legally  
 here, this performance and  
 projection attempted to give  
 a sense of life as a Navy, but  
 at the beauty and colours  
 of the installation, also bring the  
 audience back to the reality of it  
 as we are privileged to be sitting,  
 watching such a performance,  
 what about the people at stake?







An in-depth analysis and deconstruction of the installation will show clues as to the complexities of the Mauritian-Chagossian sovereignty dispute. Just like tracing a dispossession, every single detail of the installation serves a purpose.

For example: the books on the table portray a reminder of the unlawful American occupation of an indigenous land. The extinct species elaborated previously can be found on the wallpaper. Beer is a “hot” and “cheap” commodity in Diego Garcia. The Bacardí Rum is a nod to island manufacturing plants, and land exploitation. As a satire, this installation attempts to mimic what it is like to live in Diego Garcia: with an abundance of alcohol within a tropical environment and smooth sandy beaches, despite the constant reminders of whose land one is occupying.



# In Conclusion

These are the realities of researching in a very young post-colonial country - let alone an island.

Going back home left me with more pessimism than optimism and I cannot lie to you by saying that I think that things are going to be better, because I quite frankly think they are not. Unless our generation does not wake up. The field guide aims to accelerate this awakening; hoping that our colonial memories will not get buried with our grandparents and that the Chagossian community is given the right seat at the bargaining table for their cause.

What my role as a designer and now researcher is not only to make observations, and take notes, but also to incite agency into people like you who, just like me, are in a position of privilege and power to start a generational awakening.

The field guide to tracing Mauritian-Chagossian narratives starts here and the trip to finding Diego Garcia, and bringing forth justice to Chagossian voices only begins at this [end](#).





Tracing  
Narratives



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