

TO KNOW IS TO EMPOWER
Chagos Institute of Environmental Humanities

by

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ABSTRACT

Chagos Archipelago was sanitized in the 1970s for a US military base on Diego Garcia, following a secret “exchange of notes” that evaded legislative approval. 1,500 Chagossian evictees, “dumped” in Mauritius and Seychelles, have since become surplus population dwarfed by the planetary-scale military-colonial network. Of all the denounced legal ammunitions, the Chagos Marine Protected Area (MPA), along with its fiction of *terra nullius*, inflicts the greatest violence by legitimizing environmental fortification on the basis of a denial of the almost 200 years of Chagossian inhabitation. The assemblage of the military, security institutions and certain members of the scientific community, by defining the Chagos MPA as an “organic rationality,” deploys a generalized and abstracted sense of ecological insecurity in aspiration for global environmental administration in opposition to traditional bodies of government.

This thesis proposes the Chagos Institute of Environmental Humanities, a trojan horse with dual agency. While staging an apparent conformity to restrictions and regulations imposed by the UK-US alliance, the Institute quietly and resolutely supports an undercover project of decolonization and empowerment. Beyond physical resettlement, it recognizes and continues Chagossians’ sustained efforts in resisting colonialism and militarism. It reads from the Chagos landscape their forgotten and dismissed stories. To know is to reclaim. To know is to empower. The new system of environmental humanities rejects the nature-culture dichotomy. In problematizing the anthropocentric bias within our production of knowledge, it reveals the racist and colonialist othering of non-Western epistemologies. There is not a deficit in knowledge, in a quantitative sense, but a deficiency at the epistemic level. This thesis urges that we reclaim prior Chagossian knowledge in the formation of their future that is still rooted in Chagossians’ history.

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Thank you, David Vine, for supporting my thesis and for sharing your thoughts on Mauritian stakeholders. Thank you, Laura Jeffery, for generously sharing with me all of the primary interview files and introducing me to your amazing online platform for Chagossian cultural heritage. My thesis is only made possible with your decades-long engagement with the Chagossians and research on their cultural heritage.

Thank you, Ted A. Morris, Jr., for your well-organized online archive that is critical to a truthful representation of the Chagossian history and for allowing me to use your photos in this thesis.

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Special thanks to Yue Wu, for your sweetest support at all times; and to Linsen Chai, Zhicheng Xu, Wuyahuang Li, Mengqi Moon He, Xio Alvarez, Yutan Sun, Ziyu Xu, Adiel Alexis Benitez, and everyone in my thesis cohort for sharing your critiques and cheering up my mood.

Lastly but not the least, to my parents, for your unconditional love.

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Prologue

Urbanism—“city planning”—is capitalism’s method for taking over the natural and human environment. Following its logical development toward total domination, capitalism now can and must refashion the totality of space into *its own particular decor*.¹

Debord 1994: 169

I remember my excitement when I was first introduced to Edward Said in one of my introductory survey classes to architectural history with Ipek Tureli. As a young international student, new in a “French” context, I was torn between an intuitive attraction to Le Corbusier (one of the very few architects I knew at the time) and the socio-cultural dominance or even violence he was associated with. It planted a sense of mission in my teenager mind, which later led me to write “socially responsive architectural interventions” for my MIT application. It sounds too much like a cliché, but as I reflect on it now, I am happy that I wrote that.

I have not discovered how deeply I am influenced by the post-colonialism discourse and particularly scholars and thinkers from the Islamic world until this summer when I embarked on an independent project on (semi-)colonial history of Shanghai in the late 19th century. At so many moments, I felt as if I had been back in Nasser’s class, talking about alternative ways of writing history, an epistemological revolution, surgical killing of cities... I was never and still am not able to fully understand what they all mean but I am always moved by the intensity of intellectual inquiry. His courageous words and unflinching attitude allowed me to realize where my young uneasiness with Le Corb can go. We talked about so many things, starting from early 2019: the funambulist magazine, spaces of protest, offshore financial hubs, nuclear legacy, international bazaar in the Pacific...until we finally arrived at this thesis topic.

I also remember how skeptical I was of all the “inter- and cross-disciplinary” phrases (with their variation) at the open house in March, 2017. Trying to become “rebelliously innovative”, I claimed to study “everything non-architecture” at MIT. I am grateful to the freedom I was allowed. All those classes in planning, law, business, and art are crucial to the formation of this thesis. What a journey. But I deviated maybe too much until my option studios. With Mariana, Alexander and Miho, we played with different temporal and spatial scales—even zooming into a small bike with Miho! More importantly, they demonstrated to me wide possibilities of architecture and allowed me to re-anchor my efforts in design after my voyage into neighboring disciplines. This thesis, as I can now proudly describe it, interrogates everything from plant to planet. It definitely builds upon all the preceding option and core studios, which empowered me to regain the faith that there can be and should be “social responsive architectural interventions.” Design can do more.

¹ Chapter 7, Territorial Management of Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1994).

I remember N52 has noisy ventilation. I quite miss it now. Miho and I sat around a tea table, and talked about *Ecologies of Power*. It was such an illuminating moment. I was simply amazed by how she was able to detect small potentials in my absolutely “no idea what I’m talking” intuitions and bridge them with disciplinary discourses, from architecture to planning and to landscape. I am finally able to connect all the dots as I am wrapping up my thesis now. I also realize how spoiled I have been every week we met. Even when I could not come up with anything for a week, I was given the warmest trust and support. I learnt to be critical and compassionate, sharp and gentle, rigorous and imaginative—all are important lessons for life, beyond this thesis project.

It was in Delft, the Netherlands, 2019. We turned off the projection because no one was able to process the full brutality of Rwanda genocide. But behind those horrifyingly truthful photos and videos, I remember Delia’s most gentle and loving voices. *Communion* with people, is the best phrase I can think of to describe how I felt, as Paulo Freire describes Che Guevara: the humility and capacity to love that make possible this *communion* with people, transform a lyrical decision into a more serene force.² Although our interactions so far stayed only in the virtual world, her sensibility and sense of caring have reached me deeply and influenced my thesis immensely in so many ways.

Lastly, for whoever going through this book, in addition to the actual research on Chagos history and my design proposal—which you will find more than 100 pages below—what I would also like to share with you is a journey that started years before. I hope to convey how precious this journey is to me. It is fed with care and love from Miho, Nasser and Delia, who have been so patient and considerate for my slow learning. I am grateful for my own reclaimed sense of empowerment. I wish you the very best for your journey.

With Gratitude,
Chen Chu

² Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 143.

Introduction

This book starts with an overview of Chagos history and its recent development. It is explicitly political as I purposefully disrupt a chronological order in attempts to foreground Chagossian people's experience of diaspora and displacement—in formal narrations, often ignored or downplayed as inevitable sad anecdotes to a military history. I then discuss theories around extra-territoriality, reading the archipelagic status of Chagos in both a physical-territorial and legal-political sense. Building upon Saskia Sassen's theorization of territory—as a spatial concept—versus territoriality—as a legal construct—I explain how Chagos has been enmeshed in a network of powers who impacts extend beyond territorial and temporal boundaries.

Of all the denounced legal ammunition, the Chagos Marine Protected Area (MPA), inflicts the greatest violence by legitimizing environmental fortification on the basis of a denial of the almost 200 years of Chagossian inhabitation. It differs from settler colonialism that constructs the *terra-nullius* fiction in that Chagossians are dismissed as “unpeople” and un-indigenous. I reveal military exceptionalism and its conceptual root in an Agambenian state of exception such as the military's exceptional rights to fish and unpoliced damage to the Chagos coral reefs. This green- and blue-washing strategies is not exclusive but also deployed for masking other military buildups. Next section analyzes the violence at the epistemic level. I explain how environmental science is militarized and instrumentalized to consolidate the exclusionist nature of the Chagos legal and scientific power apparatus.

This thesis proposes the Chagos Institute of Environmental Humanities that effect decolonization and demilitarization at the epistemic level. It seeks to be simultaneously realistic and projective by conceptualizing a trojan horse with dual agency both in terms of the knowledge production framework as well as the design and narration of the Institute. I distinguish the staged, official agenda from an undercover subversive one. Before defining what this environmental humanities is, I first describe what decolonization is not and the common pitfalls. Central to my proposed environmental humanities is an understanding of the people-land relationship as reciprocal respectful subject-subject relation. Design actions seek to reclaim forgotten knowledge from the land in the formation of a Chagossian future. I briefly discuss decolonization at the methodological level regarding sites, modes of operation, and representation.

My design is presented in three chapters: Garden of Diaspora, East Point; Rooting Heritage, Former Plantation; and Reclaiming Vision, Barton Point. I see the design equally as a curation, a process and a narrative that purposefully combine archival materials with projective illustrations. Each design action explores the interstitial space between plant, architecture, landscape and territory with a cross-temporal mentality. I conclude unpacking “what to know is to reclaim and empower” describes.

History of Chagos

Non-chronological episodes

2006. After 36 years of displacement, a selected group of Chagossians was able to visit “home” on a “heritage” trip organized by the UK government to the Chagos.



Figure 1. A selected group of Chagossians visited Chagos on a “heritage” trip organized by the UK government in 2006.³



Figure 2. Same as above.

³ Michel Daëron, *Il était une île, Diego Garcia* (Marie-Georges Suriam for Filao Films, Michel Daëron for Filao Films), accessed November 8, 2020, <https://www.idfa.nl/en/film/a35ad845-7507-47fa-93e6-92013a4020b5/once-upon-an-island-diego-garcia/docs-for-sale>.

2020. Six B-52 were dispatched to Diego Garcia amid US-Iran tensions.



Figure 3. Pentagon ordered six B-52s to deploy to Diego Garcia in amid US-Iran tension in January, 2020.⁴

⁴ Franz-Stefan Gady, “US Deploys 6 B-52 Stratofortress Bombers to Indian Ocean Island,” *The Diplomat*, January 8, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/01/us-deploys-6-b-52-stratofortress-bombers-to-indian-ocean-island/>.

1982, 2004, and ongoing. Family in exile in Mauritius.

They almost never see the slums of the exiled people of the Chagos, who are also British citizens. This is a film taken in 1982 of a family of Chagos islanders in exile in Mauritius. Here, all 25 of them sleep in shifts in one squalid room with the baby in the cardboard box. We found the same family living in the same shack, in the same terrible conditions. They still sleep on the floor. The rain still pours in. The toilet is still a hole in the ground. They are still so poor that they often go hungry. What was done to these people is today defined in international law as a crime against humanity.⁵

John Pilger, *Stealing a Nation* (2004)



Figure 4. A family of Chagos islanders was “dumped” in Mauritius in 1982. All 25 of them slept in shifts in one squalid room with the baby in the cardboard box.⁶



Figure 5. The same family lives in the same shack, in the same terrible conditions in 2004.⁷

⁵ John Pilger, Christopher Martin, and Sean Crotty, *Stealing a Nation* (Granada Television, 2004). At around 0:15:32.

⁶ Pilger, Martin, and Crotty.

⁷ Pilger, Martin, and Crotty.

Chagossians experienced double subordination after their expulsion to Mauritius in early 1970s. Jeffrey and Vine details Chagossians' experience of how Mauritian employers discriminate against applicants of African descent in general and against Chagossians in particular.⁸ Chagossians are over-represented at the bottom end of the employment spectrum, with the vast majority in low-wage, low-status and/or insecure jobs, and very small percentage (compared to national averages) in the service industries and the skilled professions.⁹ Therefore, Vine describes them as “the bottom off the bottom”—doubly excluded “first, as Chagossians who gave up their homeland so the rest of Mauritius could have its independence, and second, as members of the minority Afro-Mauritian Creole population.”¹⁰

1957. A benign, undisturbed way of life on Chagos.



Figure 6. This is rare film taken by the missionaries before the Americans came in the 1960s. “In Chagos, there were thriving villages, a school, a hospital, a jail, a church, a railway, and above all, a benign undisturbed way of life.”¹¹

⁸ Laura Jeffery and David Vine, “Sorrow, Sadness, and Impoverishment: The Lives of Chagossians in Mauritius,” in *Eviction from the Chagos Islands: Displacement and Struggle for Identity Against Two World Power*, ed. Sandra J.T.M. Evers and Marry Kooy, African History 1 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2011), 83–103.

⁹ Laura Jeffery, “The Politics of Victimhood among Displaced Chagossians in Mauritius” (PhD Dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2006).

¹⁰ David Vine, “Empire’s Footprint: Expulsion and the US Military Base on Diego Garcia” (PhD Dissertation, City University of New York, 2006), 227, 233.

¹¹ Pilger, Martin, and Crotty, *Stealing a Nation*.



Figure 7. Same as the previous.

Slavery remained the defining feature of life in Chagos from Le Normand's initial settlement in 1783 until the abolition of slavery in Mauritius and its dependencies in 1835.¹² Franco-Mauritian plantation owners brought the enslaved African ancestors of today's Chagossians to work on coconut plantations in the previously uninhabited Chagos Archipelago.¹³ Chagos had all the major features of the plantation world: an enslaved labor force, large-scale capitalist plantations in service of distant markets, European political control, frequent replenishment of enslaved peoples and indentured labors, and elements of feudal labor control.¹⁴ However, unlike other plantations, Chagos' harvest served mainly the Mauritian market instead of the European one. Chagos Archipelago thus depended on that Mauritian sugar cane economy, which was itself a dependent part of the French and, later, British economies.¹⁵ Therefore, David Vine describes Chagos as "a colony of a colony" or "a dependency of a dependency."¹⁶ By the turn of the 20th century, a distinct society was well established in Chagos. The population neared 1,000 and there were six villages on Diego Garcia alone.¹⁷ The diverse workforce—primarily people of African descent mixed with some indentured laborers from India—became collectively known by the Kreol name *Ilois*.¹⁸

¹² David Vine, *Island of Shame: The Secret History of the U.S. Military Base on Diego Garcia* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 24, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt7rw1w>.

¹³ Vine, 72–80.

¹⁴ Vine, 26.

¹⁵ Vine, 26.

¹⁶ Vine, 26.

¹⁷ Vine, 26.

¹⁸ David Vine, Philip Harvey, and S. Wojciech Sokolowski, "Compensating a People for the Loss of Their Homeland: Diego Garcia, the Chagossians, and the Human Rights Standards Damages Model," *Northwestern University Journal of International Human Rights* 11, no. 1 (Fall 2012): 150. The term has fallen out of favor in exile with many Mauritians using it as a derogatory term of abuse. Chagos Kreol, a language related to the Kreols in Mauritius and the Seychelles, emerged among the islanders.

1961. Rear Admiral Grantham visited Diego Garcia.

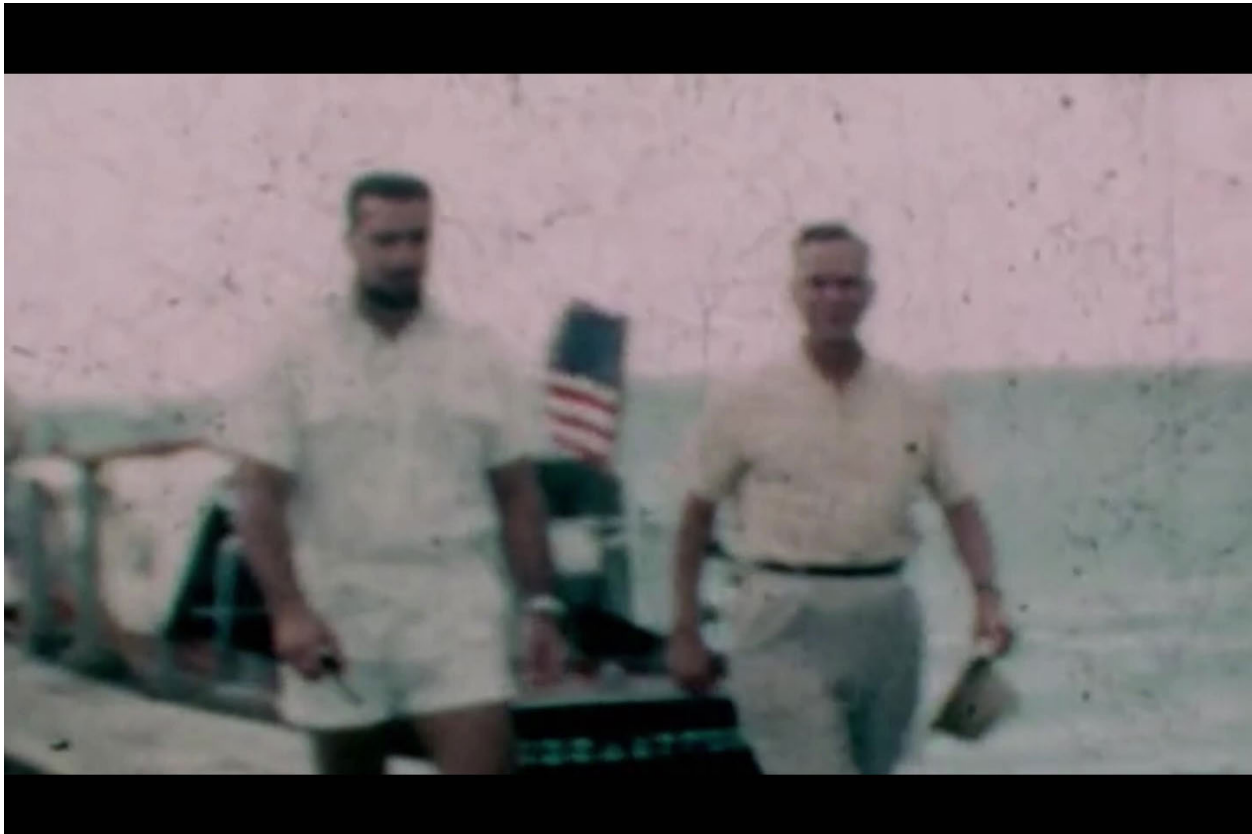


Figure 8. In 1961, by arrangement with the UK Foreign Office, Rear Admiral Grantham (man on the right) of the US Navy visited Diego Garcia to survey its suitability.¹⁹

Jeffrey Coleman Kitchen, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Politico-Military Affairs, initiated talk with the British on strategic island bases in the Indian Ocean on February 25, 1964, and proposed the use of strategically located islands under U.K. control.²⁰ Chagos and Seychelles archipelagos were identified as desired because “they do not appear us to be capable of supporting serious independence movements and are probably too remote and culturally isolated to figure plausibility in the plans of any mainland government.”²¹

For U.S. officials, the plan for Diego Garcia thus had all the advantages and almost none of the disadvantages of an overseas military base. It had all the advantages as a relatively surreptitious way to exercise U.S. power, and was controlled by “a longstanding ally (the United Kingdom)

¹⁹ Pilger, Martin, and Crotty, *Stealing a Nation*.

²⁰ David Vine, *Base Nation: How U.S. Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World*, American Empire Project (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2015), 76.

²¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*, vol. 21: *Near East Region Arabian Peninsula*, ed. N. D. Howland (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2000), 85.

unlikely to toss [the United States] out for governmental changes or U.S. foreign policy initiatives.”²² The Navy therefore called Diego Garcia as “Fantasy Island” because the tight U.K.-U.S. alliance rendered effectively no restrictions on use of the island and also with no need of periodic consultation—free reign over an idyllic and strategically located atoll free from any potentially troublesome population.²³

On the day before New Year’s Eve, 1966, The U.S. Ambassador to Britain, Honorable David K. E. Bruce, and a representative for the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, George Brown, M.P., to “exchange notes”—which essentially accomplished the smashing as a treaty without time-consuming legislative approval before Congress and Parliament.²⁴ The “exchange of notes” innocuously titled, “Availability of Certain Indian Ocean Islands for Defense Purposes,” made all the islands of the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) “available to meet the needs of both Governments for defense” while the United Kingdom would remain sovereign in the territory.²⁵ The United States would have access to the islands for 50 years with an option to extend the agreement for an additional 20 years.²⁶

According to a hearing before the Committee on Armed Services in 1975, the expansion of a military base on Diego Garcia was partly fueled by the increasing Soviet presence in the Indian Ocean.²⁷ It was clear to the Soviets that the oil supplies of the Persian Gulf were of vital importance to the U.S. and its allies. In mid-70s, Japan depended on the gulf for 85 percent of its oil; Europe for well over one-half; and it was estimated that by 1980, US could be importing up to 50 percent of its oil from the region.²⁸ In response this dependency, as early as 1962, the Soviets agreed to assist the Government of Somalia in constructing port facilities in Berbera that overlooked the entrance to the Red Sea.²⁹ What was particularly alarming was that, in late 1973, the U.S.S.R. began initial construction of what has subsequently been identifies as a missile storage and handling facility—far larger than the facility intended at Diego Garcia at the time—suggesting Soviets’ ambition for greater presence in the Indian Ocean even prior to the Yom Kippur War in October 1973.³⁰ The hearing presented a detailed survey of the Soviet build up on Somalia. The U.S. Army estimated the Soviet seawall to be 1,400 feet long with a storage area at the port of around 165,000 square feet.³¹ More importantly, Secretary Schlesinger demonstrated that the airfield under construction at the time had a cleared area amounting to 16,000 to 17,000 feet and the cleared runway area was about 1,650 feet across.³²

²² Vine, *Base Nation: How U.S. Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World*, 79.

²³ Vine, 79.

²⁴ Vine, 86–87.

²⁵ Vine, 86–87.

²⁶ Vine, 86–87.

²⁷ United States of America, “Disapprove Construction Projects on the Island of Diego Garcia Hearing,” § the Committee on Armed Services (1975), <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015076086894>.

²⁸ United States of America, “Briefings on Diego Garcia and Patrol Frigate Hearings with Adm. Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., U.S. Navy, Chief of Naval Operations,” § the Committee on Foreign Relations (1974), <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015077936501>.

²⁹ United States of America, Disapprove construction projects on the Island of Diego Garcia hearing.

³⁰ United States of America, 7.

³¹ United States of America, 15.

³² United States of America, 19.

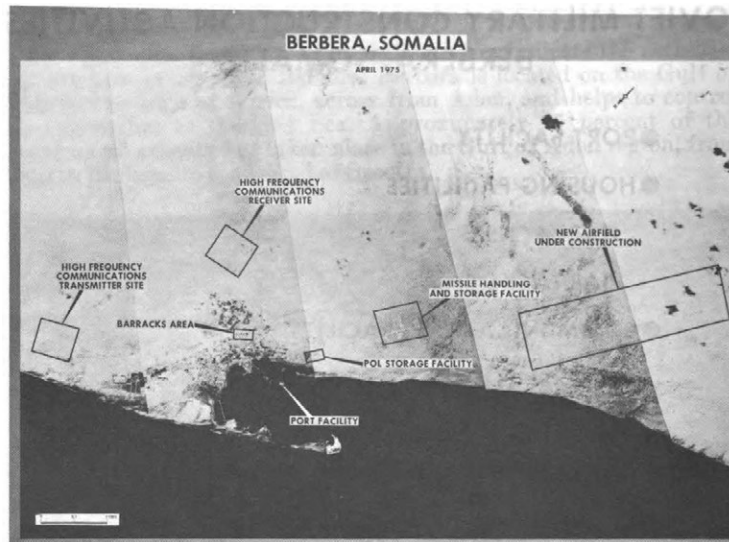


Figure 9. A photograph taken toward the end of April of 1957 indicates the general layout of the Berbera area, Somalia.³³



Figure 10. The missile handling and storage facility, a fenced, secured area in Berbera, Somalia.³⁴

³³ United States of America, 14.

³⁴ United States of America, Disapprove construction projects on the Island of Diego Garcia hearing.

1992. Chagos Conservation Trust was established.



Figure 11. Chagos Marine Protected Area (MPA) romanticizes a pristine landscape and denies the almost 200 years of Chagossians' inhabitation.³⁵ Video composition by author.



Figure 12. Same source. Video composition by author.

³⁵ Bertarelli Foundation, *The BIOT Marine Protected Area*, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mneARCzIDZE&ab_channel=BertarelliFoundation; Jon Slayer, *Chagos Marine Protected Area: A Precious Natural Heritage for Us All*, n.d., www.jonslayer.net. Pilger, Martin, and Crotty, *Stealing a Nation*.

2007-2008. Chagossian children painted their imagined homeland.

Lilli: You see, this is Chagos. That is the place where my grandparents come from. It is beautiful there. The sun always shines and there are many birds in the sky. They are so free flying around. There is sugar cane, water, fruits on the trees, fish in the sea and always food on the fire. You know people cook with wood there. The houses are made of wood and have grass on the roofs. See that is me looking through the window. I am going to live in Chagos one day. You see, I am all happy there. My father is also happy. Now he is a prisoner and you know, he will be so happy to come with my mother and me to Chagos. You see, ... there are no prisons in Chagos. My mother goes and gets the water and then carries it on her head. That is what my grandmother did there so mum will have to learn that as well. Oh, I guess I will have to practice that also. I have no idea how to do that.³⁶

Eight Chagossian women engaged in a hunger strike in Port Louis in March 1981 to call for attention to the harsh socioeconomic circumstances of the Chagossians living in Mauritius. They were supported in their cause by hundreds of principally female demonstrators.³⁷ These women succeeded in placing the Chagossian fate, both nationally and internationally, on the political agenda by leading demonstrations and playing key roles in court hearings.³⁸ The spirit has been passed onto their grandchildren, as a boy framed it: “Grandfather would like to go back because when he left his island he was crying.”³⁹



Figure 13. Drawing by Lilli, Life in Chagos.⁴⁰

³⁶ Sandra J.T.M. Evers, “Longing and Belonging in Real Time: How Chagossian Children in Mauritius Imagine the Chagos Islands,” in *Eviction from the Chagos Islands: Displacement and Struggle for Identity Against Two World Power*, ed. Sandra J.T.M. Evers and Marry Kooy, African History 1 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2011), 242.

³⁷ Evers, “Longing and Belonging in Real Time: How Chagossian Children in Mauritius Imagine the Chagos Islands.”

³⁸ Evers.

³⁹ Evers, 263.

⁴⁰ Evers, 243.



Figure 14. Drawing by Aurelie, Life in Chagos.⁴¹

Through Evers' fieldwork with the Chagossians living in Mauritius, two key concepts recurred in virtually all conversations with the children: Happiness (*boner*) and Togetherness (*ansam*).⁴² Evers noticed impressively strong sense of kinship among the third-generation children. "The eviction from Chagos is described as the breaking apart of kin groups. The eventual return to Chagos by grand parents, parents, uncles, and aunts (now dispersed between Mauritius, the Seychelles and the UK) is envisaged as a family reunion. In Chagos, they will all live happily together."⁴³ Among the children's drawings collected by Evers, and those of the girls in particular, are permeated with the longing for lost relatives.⁴⁴ They miss their fathers, but also family members who live far away from them: "I have never seen my grandmother from my father's side; she lives in the Seychelles."⁴⁵

⁴¹ Evers, 268.

⁴² Evers, 263.

⁴³ Evers, 263.

⁴⁴ Evers, 264.

⁴⁵ Evers, 264.

Network(s) of powers and extra-territoriality

I borrow different theories around the notion of territory and territoriality to explain the network(s) of powers that has been influencing the Chagos. There is not one suite of coordinated efforts but overlapping complex historical forces. Anselm and Weizman's conceptualization of introvert extra-territorial enclaves can be used to describe the Chagos archipelago not only in a physical and geographical sense but also as part of a territorial patchwork in a legal and jurisdictional sense, governed by super-national and non-localized institutions whose extra-territorial outreach nevertheless depends on territorialized nodes to sustain the operation of its military, political or financial networks: "these shreds are islands—externally alienated and internally homogenized, extraterritorial enclaves—spaces of political void or strategic implants—lying outside the jurisdiction that physically surrounds them."⁴⁶

The mismatch between a territory—as a spatial, physical concept, bounded, introvert, continuous, and implies an interior—and territoriality—as a legal construct that is governed by powers and networks unbound by geographical borders—is best theorized by Sassen.⁴⁷ For Sassen, territoriality marks the state's exclusive authority over its physical territory—a powerful innovation that has worked well to legitimate and cement the power of the modern state over a territory, recognized as the primary basis of an international system.⁴⁸ The notion of a bounded territorial space within a sovereign territoriality turns out to be insufficient to describe the Chagos. Instead, as Sassen and Painter suggest, it is important to foregrounds the human and non-human actors who constant enact and deconstruct the territoriality, or an "entangled matter formation" as Tan describes.⁴⁹

Instead, territory must be interpreted principally as an *effect*: as *explanandum* more than *explanans*. Adapting Bruno Latour, like other enduring and seemingly solid features of our world this effect can best be understood as the outcome of networked socio-technical practices. Moreover, far from refuting or falsifying network theories of spatiality, the contemporary resurgence of territory can be seen as itself a product of relational networks.⁵⁰

Chagossians have since become, in Bauman's words, "superfluous" people as human waste to be disposed—rendered stateless, placeless, functionless and identityless.⁵¹ As they are currently deposited on UK, Seychelles and Mauritius territories, their citizenship is ambiguous, like many

⁴⁶ Anselm Franke and Eyal Weizman, "Islands. The Geography of Extraterritoriality," Volume. Archis., 2003, <http://volumeproject.org/islands-the-geography-of-extraterritoriality/>.

⁴⁷ Saskia Sassen, "When Territory Deborders Territoriality," *Territory, Politics, Governance* 1, no. 1 (2013): 21–45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2013.769895>.

⁴⁸ Sassen, 24.

⁴⁹ Sassen, 29. Pelin Tan, "Surpassing Disaster: Territories, Entanglements and Methods," in *Mediating the Spatiality of Conflicts: International Conference Proceedings* (Mediating the Spatiality of Conflicts, Delft, the Netherlands, 2020), 45–58, <https://books.bk.tudelft.nl/index.php/press/catalog/book/764>.

⁵⁰ Joe Painter, "Rethinking Territory," *Antipode* 42, no. 5 (2010): 1093.

⁵¹ Zygmunt Bauman, "Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts" (Archipelago of exception: Sovereignities of extraterritoriality, Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, Barcelona, 2003), <https://www.cccb.org/en/multimedia/videos/archipelago-of-exception/225684#>.

other refugees mass-produced by our negative globalization. Despite their strong collective identification and deep cultural heritage, from a legal perspective, they reside on outlands, lands that are outside any sovereign realms, and they will have to constantly look for and desire for a sovereignty that accepts them.⁵² While the emerging exceptional global class of individuals at the top of global legal and economic system celebrate the dissolution of borders and international travels, it is saddening to learn that Chagossians are still struggling to gain recognition as UK subjects.⁵³ In some ways, the enhanced mobility of the former groups is only made possible by the socio-political processes that produces the current status of Chagossians.

Similar to Guantanamo Bay and Bagram, Diego Garcia is another extraterritorial military base where the suspension of law as described by Agamben is made most clearly manifest. Beyond the probing eye of public scrutiny, they all have become spaces of transferal and exclusion.⁵⁴ The CIA reportedly runs a system of covert prisons, referred to in classified documents as “black sites,” which have operated at various times in some eight countries.⁵⁵ According to reports, these facilities tend to be used in rotation, with detainees transferred from site to site together, rather than being scattered in different locations. In addition to the abovementioned three, other secret detention centers are operated, or has been operated in Afghanistan, Iraq, Jordan, Pakistan, Thailand, Uzbekistan, and other unknown locations in Europe.⁵⁶

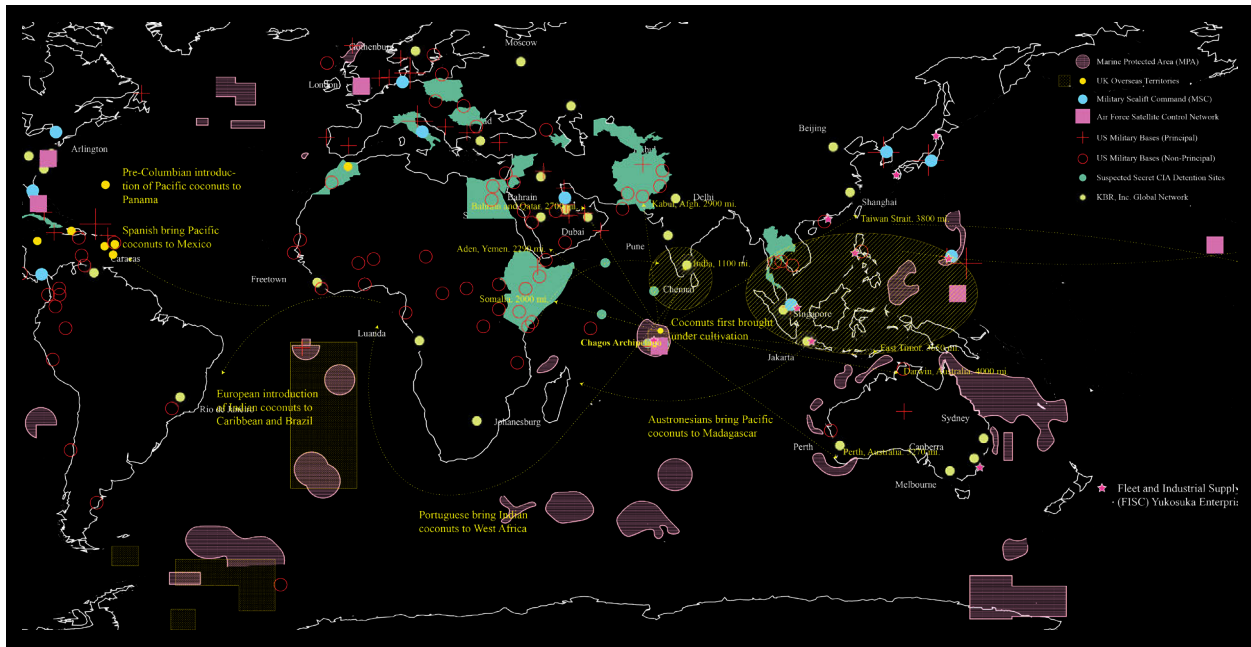


Figure 15. Network of powers and extra-territoriality. Image courtesy of author.

⁵² Bauman.

⁵³ Sassen, “When Territory Deborders Territoriality.”

⁵⁴ Oliver Clemens et al., “Extra-Territorial Spaces and Camps: Judicial and Political Spaces in the ‘War on Terrorism,’” in *Territories* (Köln: Walther König, 2003), 22–28.

⁵⁵ Amrit Singh, “Globalizing Torture: CIA Secret Detention and Extraordinary Rendition,” ed. David Berry (Open Society Foundations, 2013).

⁵⁶ Singh.



Figure 16. Copra plantation and trade network. Image courtesy of author.



Figure 17. Chagossian workers at the copra plantation (left: 1963, right: 1968). Source: Ted. A. Morris.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ All photos from Ted A. Morris, Jr's website. used in this thesis have been permitted and confirmed by him.

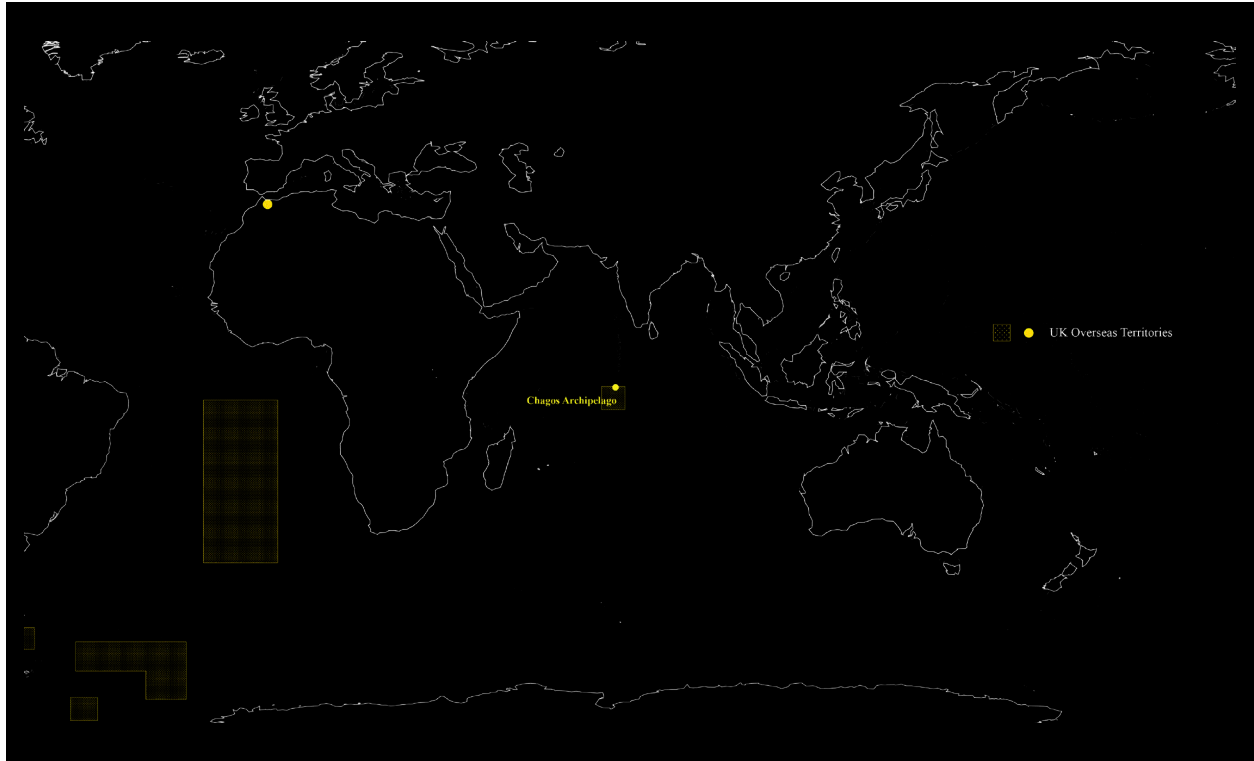


Figure 18. UK overseas territories. Image courtesy of author.

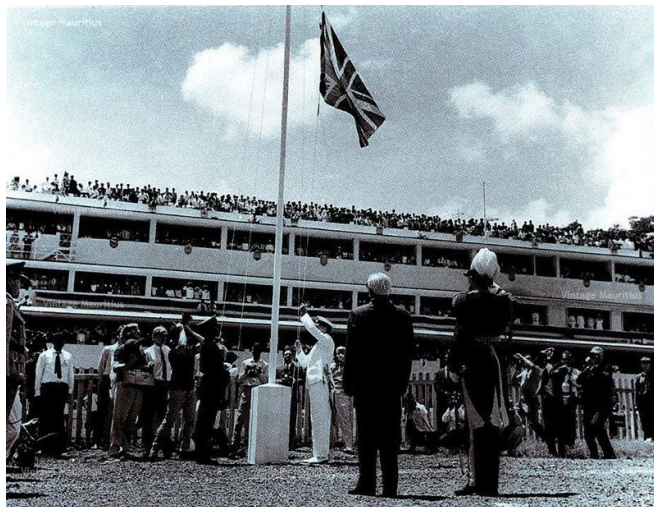


Figure 19. Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam during the flag raising ceremony on the 12th March 1968 when Mauritius gained its independence. The British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) was established on 8 November 1965 which effected the detachment of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Par Anand Moheeputh, "Why Independence Was Irresistible," *lexpress.mu*, March 12, 2014, <https://www.lexpress.mu/idee/why-independence-was-irresistible>.

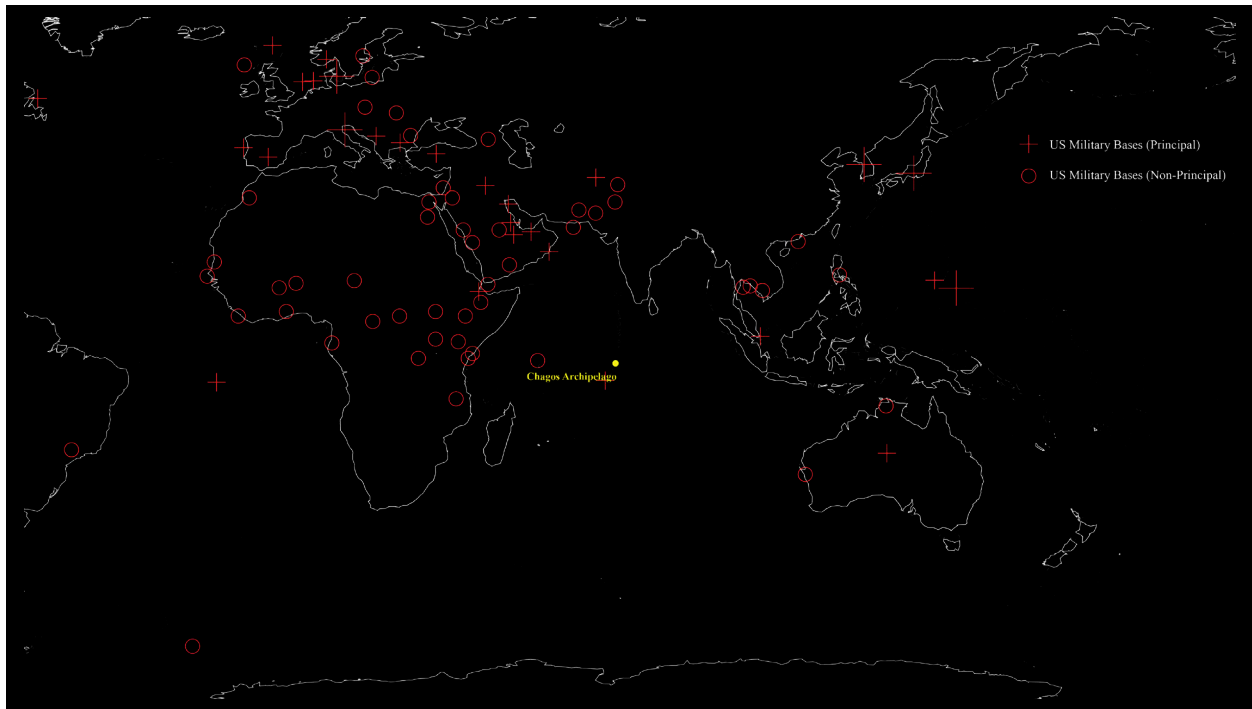


Figure 20. US military bases around the world. Image reproduced from *Island of Shame*.⁵⁹ According to David Vine, there are 179 U.S. base sites in Germany, 109 in Japan, and 83 in South Korea—among scores more dotting the planet in places like Aruba and Australia, Bahrain and Bulgaria, Colombia, Kenya, Qatar, and Yemen. At the height of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the total number of bases outside the fifty states and Washington, D.C. probably numbered around 2000. Today, the total remains around 800.⁶⁰



Figure 21. Image of a US Air Force B-1B Lancer taking off from Diego Garcia as part of Operation Enduring Freedom during October 2001.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Vine, *Island of Shame: The Secret History of the U.S. Military Base on Diego Garcia*.

⁶⁰ Vine.

⁶¹ David Vine, “Diego Garcia: Troubling Past, Uncertain Future: How Disputed Islands, a US Military Base, and an Exiled People’s Fate Reflect a Transforming World.,” *The Diplomat*, July 1, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/diego-garcia-troubling-past-uncertain-future/>.

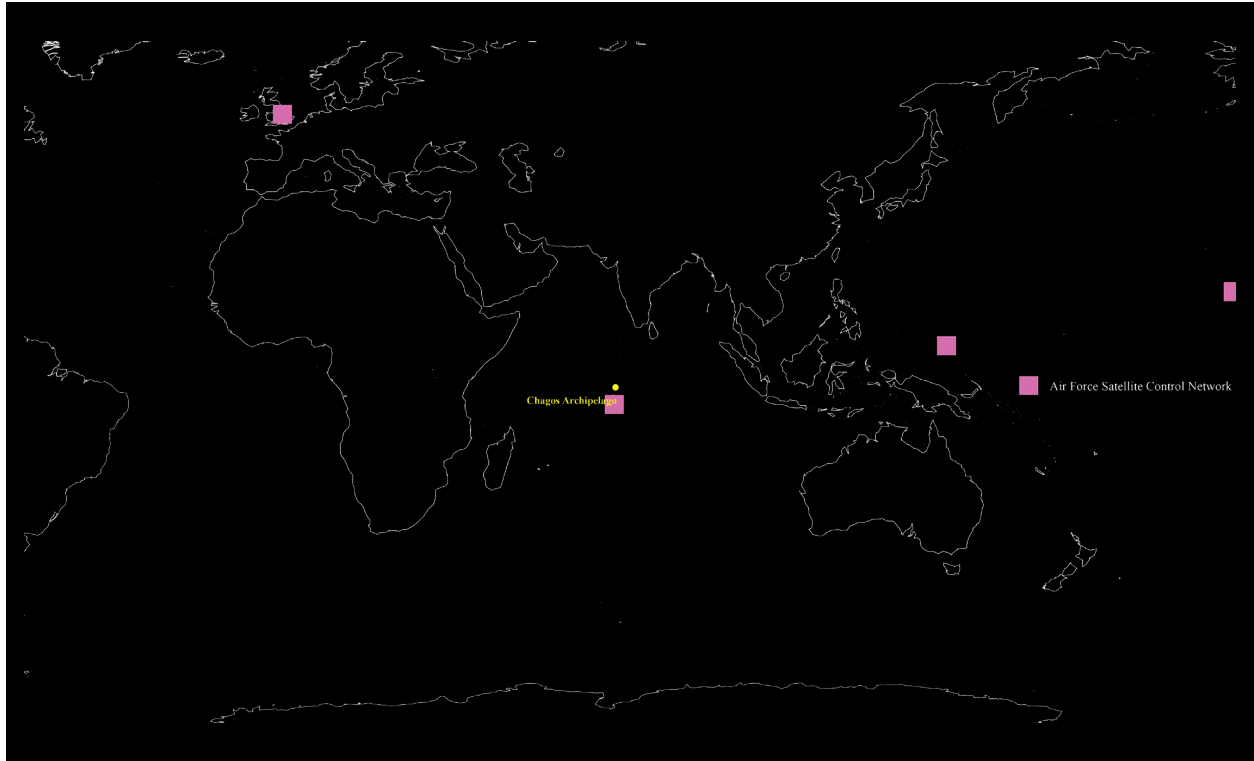


Figure 22. Airforce satellite control network. Image courtesy of author.

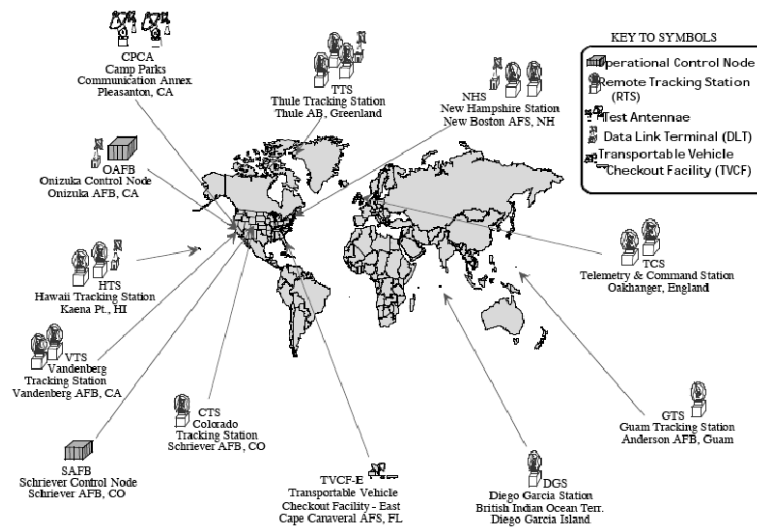


Figure 23. Diego Garcia is one of nine remote tracking stations comprising the Air Force Satellite Control Network, this command provides telemetry, tracking and commanding of DoD satellites.⁶²

⁶² Laura Barbulescu, Adele Howe, and Darrell Whitley, “Understanding Algorithm Performance on an Oversubscribed Scheduling Application,” *J. Artif. Intell. Res. (JAIR)* 27 (2006): 577–615, <https://doi.org/10.1613/jair.2038>.

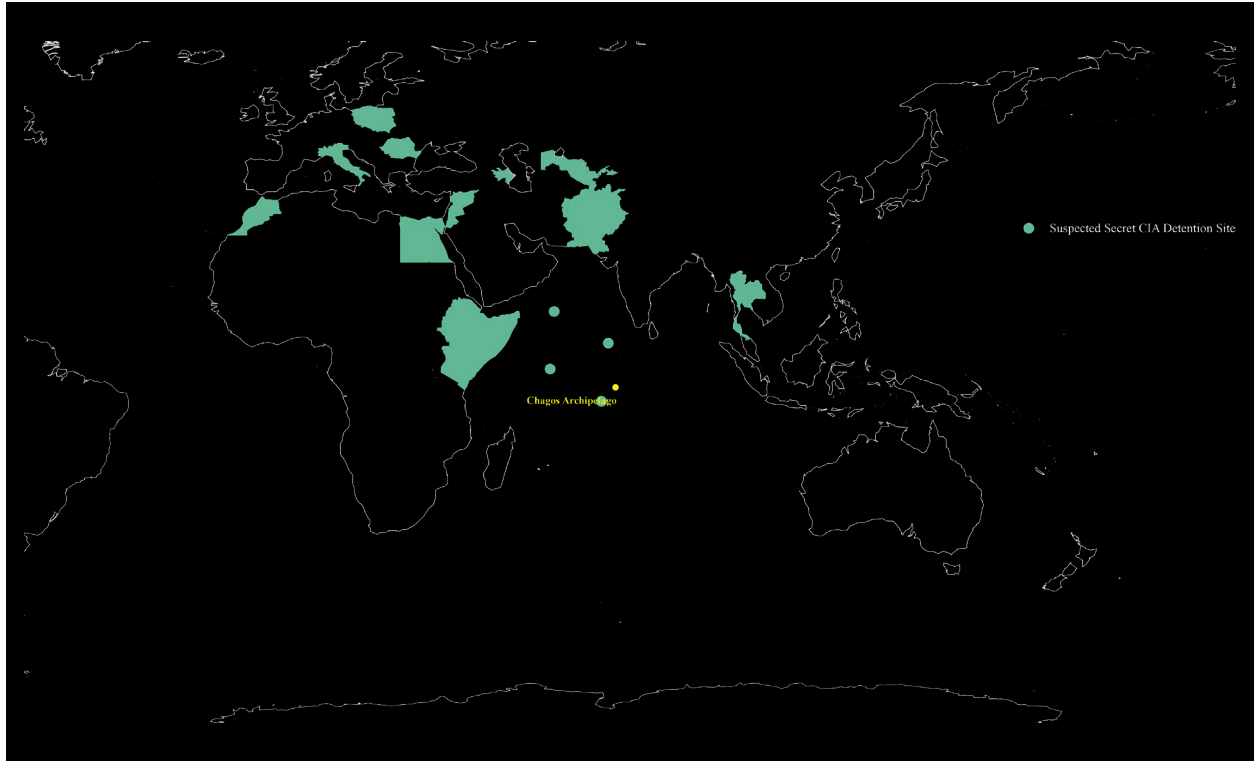


Figure 26. Suspected secret CIA detention sites. Image courtesy of author.

Rendition

This article is more than 5 years old

CIA interrogated suspects on Diego Garcia, says Colin Powell aide

Lawrence Wilkerson is the latest of a number of US officials to say British territory was used in CIA rendition programme

Ian Cobain
Fri 30 Jan 2015 12:11 PST

f t e 527

▲ The British atoll of Diego Garcia. Photograph: Reuters

The UK government is facing renewed pressure to make a full disclosure of its involvement in the CIA's post-9/11 kidnap and torture programme after another leading Bush-era US official said suspects were held and interrogated on the British territory of Diego Garcia.

Lawrence Wilkerson, who was chief of staff to Colin Powell at the US state department, said the Indian Ocean atoll was used by the CIA as "a transit site

Figure 27. Report from Guardian.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Ian Cobain, "CIA Interrogated Suspects on Diego Garcia, Says Colin Powell Aide," The Guardian, January 30, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/30/cia-interrogation-diego-garcia-lawrence-wilkerson>.

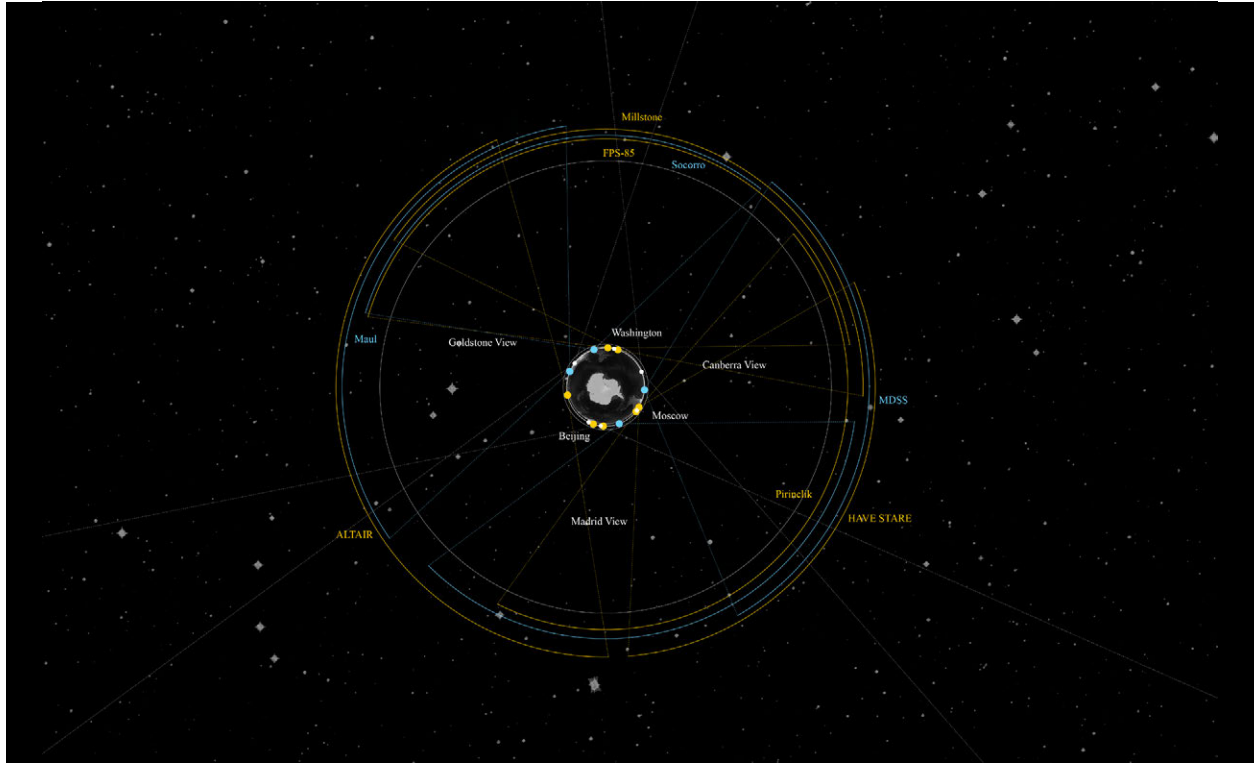


Figure 28. Ground-based Electro Optical Deep Space Surveillance (GEODSS) Air Force Space Command Detachment TWO, 21 Operations Group. Diego Garcia Air Force Space Command unit that conducts deep space surveillance using the only GEODSS in the southern Hemisphere. Image courtesy of author.



Figure 29. Diego Garcia GEODSS (middle) with two other GEODSS stations at Socorro, New Mexico (left) and Maui, Hawaii (right).



Figure 30. Global operation network of Kellogg, Brown & Root (KBR). See appendix for details. Image courtes of author.

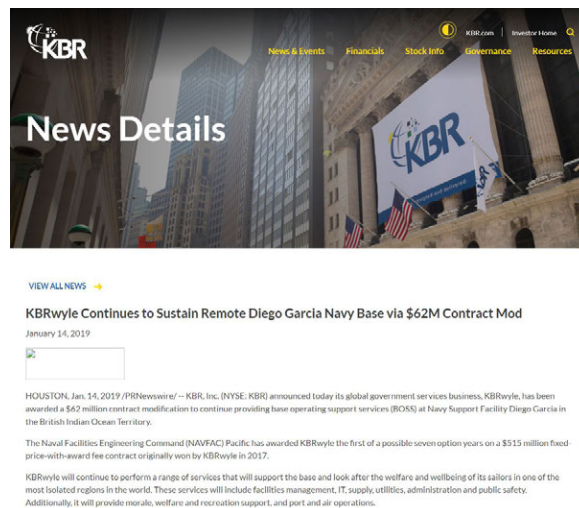


Figure 31. KBRwyle wins contract for construction on Diego Garcia.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ KBR, Inc. Press Release, “KBRwyle Continues to Sustain Remote Diego Garcia Navy Base via \$62M Contract Mod,” January 14, 2019, <https://www.kbr.com/en/insights-events/press-release/kbrwyle-continues-sustain-remote-diego-garcia-navy-base-62m-contract>.

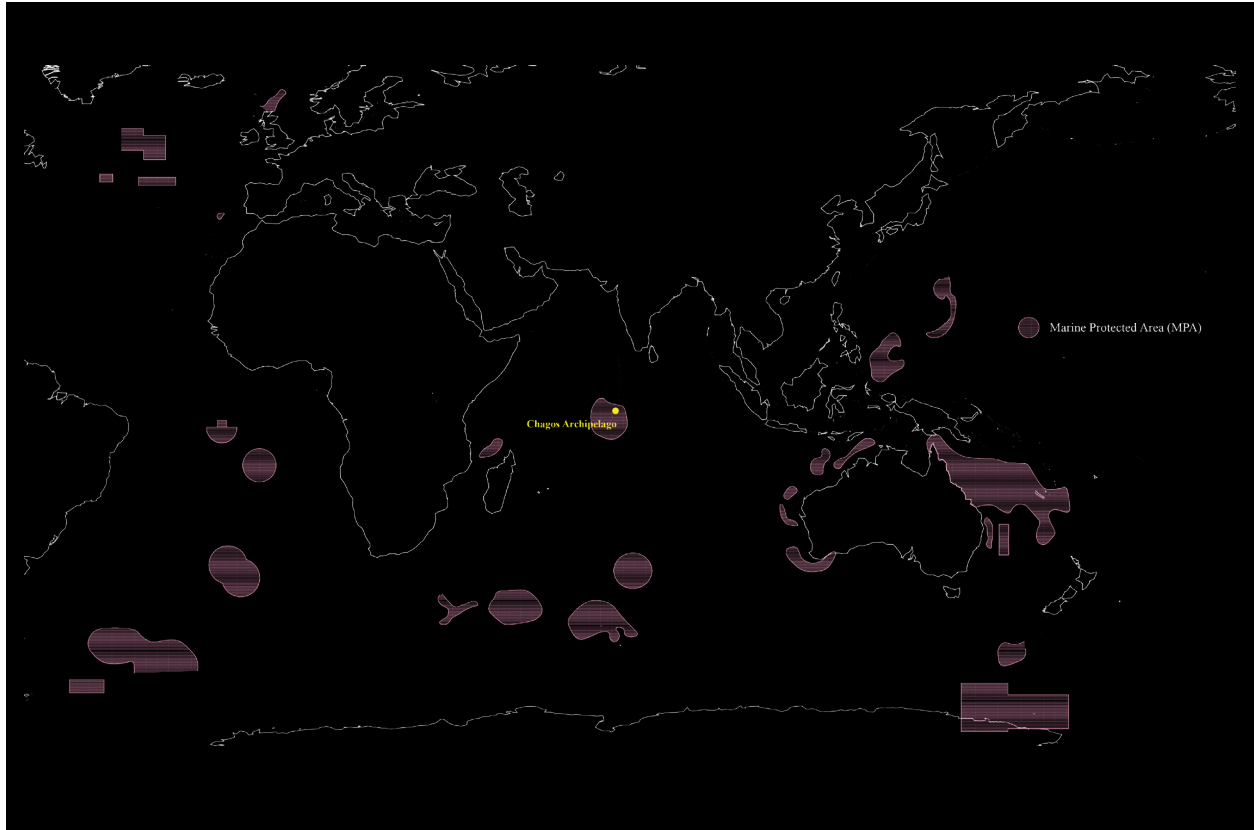


Figure 32. Very large marine protected areas. Image reproduced by author from: MPAtlas.org.



Figure 33. Periodical Newsletter from Chagos Conservation Trust (est. 1992).⁶⁶

⁶⁶ https://issuu.com/chagos-trust/docs/chagos_news__53

Fortress Conservation: Chagos Marine Protected Area (MPA)

On 1 April 2010, the United Kingdom established the Chagos Marine Protected Area (MPA), including a no-take fishing zone, following limited discussion of the subject in bilateral talks with Mauritius.⁶⁷ Chagos MPA follows the shibboleth that, “bigger is better” and “no-take is best.”

“Unpeople”⁶⁸

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

Diplomatic cable sent in August 1966 by the Colonial Office in London
to the British Delegation at the United Nations⁶⁹

The intention is, however, that none of them should be regarded as being permanent inhabitants of the islands...the legal position of the inhabitants would be greatly simplified from our point of view though not necessarily theirs if we decided to treat them as a floating population.⁷⁰

British Foreign Office memorandum. July 1965.

Falls under the terra-nullius discourse that essentializes the naturalism of indigenous cultures but differs in that Chagossians not “as part of the fauna and flora” but rather detrimental to them.⁷¹ Not only are Chagossians dehumanized and sovereignty rejected—common to other settler colonialism alibi—their erasure is even less disguised. Chagossians are *unindigenous*.⁷²

⁶⁷ In the Matter of the Chagos Marine Protected Area Arbitration before an Arbitral Tribunal Constituted under Annex VII of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea between *the Republic of Mauritius v. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*. 18 March, 2015

⁶⁸ Peter Sand, *United States and Britain in Diego Garcia: The Future of a Controversial Base* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 24; M. Curtis, *Web of Deceit: Britain's Role in the World* (London: Vintage, 2003), 421; M. Curtis, *Unpeople: Britain's Secret Human Rights Abuses* (London: Vintage, 2004).

⁶⁹ UNROW Human Rights Impact Litigation Clinic, American University Washington College of Law, Washington, DC, “Diplomatic Cable Signed by D.A. Greenhill, Dated August 24, 1966,” Wikimedia Commons, August 24, 1966,

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Diplomatic_Cable_signed_by_D.A._Greenhill,_dated_August_24,_1966.jpg

⁷⁰ Pilger, Martin, and Crotty, *Stealing a Nation*.

⁷¹ For the terra-nullius discourse, see Yogi Hale Hendlin, “From Terra Nullius to Terra Communis,” *Environmental Philosophy* 11, no. 2 (2014): 141–74, <https://doi.org/10.5840/envirophil20143205>.

⁷² From a conversation with Brittany Lauren Wheeler, PhD candidate at Clark University, January 12, 2021.

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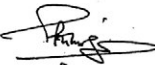
RE
ARC
31 AUG 1966
204/86

Mr. Greenhill

British Indian Ocean Territory

The Permanent Under-Secretary has seen UKMIS New York telegram No. 1761 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)."



(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 washed as to Mauritius etc. When this has been done I agree we must be very tough and a submission is being done accordingly.

PRO

1 Mr du Boulay 24/viii
2 Mr Wright

D.A. Greenhill 24/8
CONFIDENTIAL

Figure 34. Diplomatic Cable signed by D.A. Greenhill, dated August 24, 1966.⁷³



Figure 35. Chagossians celebrated the morning of January 1st with a dance and an accordion player. (1937 or 1938). Source: Ted A. Morris.

⁷³ UNROW Human Rights Impact Litigation Clinic, American University Washington College of Law, Washington, DC, "Diplomatic Cable Signed by D.A. Greenhill, Dated August 24, 1966."

UN Committee of Twenty-Four—established in 1961 and also known as the Special Committee on decolonization—reviews democratic rights in the Non-Self-Governing Territories. In an effort to escape its purview, in 1966, the Colonial Office of the British Indian Ocean Territories (BIOT) avoided the term “permanent inhabitants” in relation to any of the islands in BIOT and, instead, described the Chagossians as “belongers” of Mauritius or the Seychelles and only temporary resident in BIOT.⁷⁴ In preparation of the eviction of the “copra workers”—to borrow the term of UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)—the FCO indicated in 1970 that

We shall continue to say as little as possible to avoid embarrassing the United States Administration... We would not wish it to become general knowledge that some of the inhabitants have lived on Diego Garcia for at least two generations and could therefore be regarded as “belongers.” We shall therefore advise ministers in handling supplementary [parliamentary] questions... to say that there is only a small number of contract laborers from the Seychelles and Mauritius engaged to work on the copra plantations on the island.⁷⁵

The removal of the entire population of the Chagos Archipelago was confirmed by the U.S. government in a secret Resettlement Memorandum in 1971; as one U.S. State Department official had put it, the island was to be “swept and sanitized.”⁷⁶ Although international law on eviction and resettlement did exist, the UK decided that it was not bound by it at the time. Anthony I. Aust, CMG argued that

Even in international law there is no established rule that a citizen has a right to enter or remain in his country of origin/birth/nationality etc. A provision to this effect is contained in Protocol No. 4 to the European Convention on Human Rights but that has not been ratified by us, and thus we do not regard the UK as bound by such a rule. In this respect we are able to make up the rules as we go along and treat the inhabitants of BIOT as not ‘belonging’ to it in any sense.⁷⁷

More recently, on 2 December 2010, *The Guardian* published a copy of a political counsellor Richard Mills at the US embassy in London to the secretary of state in Washington DC, with the subject line ‘HMG floats proposal for marine reserve covering the Chagos Archipelago.’⁷⁸ The cable reported on a meeting between US embassy officials and BIOT administration officials at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) on 12 May 2009, at which—according to Political

⁷⁴ Sand, *United States and Britain in Diego Garcia: The Future of a Controversial Base*, 17. Quoted by Lord Justice Laws in *The Queen (ex-party Bancoult) vs. Foreign Secretary (DC)*, Chapter 1 (note 16) p. 1083.

⁷⁵ Sand, 18.. Letter from Eleanor J. Emery (head of the Pacific and Indian Ocean Department, later British ambassador to South Africa) to Sir Bruce Greatbatch (governor of the Seychelles), HPN 10/1.

⁷⁶ Sand, 18.. Classified memorandum from Jonathan D. Stoddart (Director, Office of International Security Operations, U.S. Department of State)

⁷⁷ Sand, 23.

⁷⁸ “US Embassy Cables: Foreign Office Does Not Regret Evicting Chagos Islanders,” *The Guardian*, December 2, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/207149#:~:text=US%20embassy%20cables%3A%20Foreign%20Office%20does%20not%20regret%20evicting%20Chagos%20islanders,-Thu%202%20Dec&text=1.&text=He%20said%20that%20the%20BIOT's,Archipelago%20were%20a%20marine%20reserve.>

Counselor Richard Mills—the then BIOT Commissioner, Colin Roberts, confirmed that the UK government’s current thinking was 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.⁷⁹ (par. 7; emphasis in original)

Mills concluded that: “Establishing a marine reserve might, indeed, as the FCO's Roberts stated, be the most effective long-term way to prevent any of the Chagos Islands’ former inhabitants or their descendants from resettling in the BIOT.” (par. 15) I acknowledge the complexities around the admissibility of Wikileaks documents for judicial purposes.⁸⁰ What design can best intervene is to disrupt and revert this legal fiction of a pristine uninhabited landscape by re-narrating historical Chagossian establishment and projecting a resettlement given their extraordinary cultural vitality.



Figure 36. Banners at Chagos Refugees Group protest, Royal Courts of Justice, London. 2010.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Laura Jeffery, “Neither Confirm nor Deny: WikiLeaks Evidence and the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations in the Judicial Review of the Chagos Marine Protected Area,” *Anthropology Today* 30, no. 3 (June 2014): 9–10.

⁸⁰ Read Burnton LJ’s preliminary ruling at Jeffery, “Neither Confirm nor Deny: WikiLeaks Evidence and the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations in the Judicial Review of the Chagos Marine Protected Area.”

⁸¹ Jeffery.

State of Exception

The state of exception is not a special kind of law (like the law of war); rather insofar as it is a suspension of the juridical order itself, it defines law's threshold or limit concept.⁸²

Giorgio Agamben

Exception is practiced by excluding Chagossian inhabitation by including defensive uses, de-territorializing Chagos as an inhabited and storied landscape and then re-territorializing it as a military built-up fortified within environmental conservation. On one hand, it is a forbidden land, a no-take marine protected area. On the other hand, it becomes deeply entangled with and wired into the global military apparatus characterized by invisibility and remote control. Operational projects on the atoll include SIGINT (1971)—a joint UK-U.S. signals and intelligence station to monitor naval radio traffic in the Indian Ocean, as part of the global surveillance network (“Echelon”)—and DF (1974)—a direction finding signals interception station, part of a worldwide network code-named “Classic Bull’s Eye.”⁸³ More recently, starting in 1987, the U.S. Air Force operated a site of its ground-Based Electro-Optical Deep Surveillance System (GEODSS) on the atoll for the tracking of man-made space objects.⁸⁴ The Diego Garcia antenna farm also serves as one of the five ground control bases assisting in the operation of the Global Positioning System (GPS, officially “NAVSTAR-GPS”) managed by the U.S. Air Force, operational since 1995.⁸⁵

The military “downtown” on the tip of the Western arm of Diego Garcia betrays the conservation agenda. Sparsely spaced bar buildings of housing are well serviced in proximity with a wide range of amenity needs—Cardiology Center, Mall, University of Diego Garcia, Bijou Laid Theater, and Dodger Stadium. In addition to a typical American suburban landscape, what has also been transplanted are some common consumerist elements—Donkey Burger King, Diego Garcia Hilton, and Tony Roma’s DG—as well as special entertainment facilities.⁸⁶

⁸² Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 4.

⁸³ Sand, *United States and Britain in Diego Garcia: The Future of a Controversial Base*, 43–44.

⁸⁴ Sand, 44.

⁸⁵ Sand, 45.

⁸⁶ Note that it is hard to identify accurately the exact functions and names of “downtown” buildings. Ted A. Morris, Jr. offers some references: see <http://www.zianet.com/tedmorris/dg/downtown.html>. Nevertheless, this can be said to demonstrate the strategic urbanization and transplantation of a typical “American” town on Diego Garcia.

According to Richard P. Dunne et al., from a fisheries perspective, Chagos MPA was preceded by inadequate scientific evidence and rationale. The entire area was already a highly regulated zone which had been subjected to a well-managed fisheries licensing system.⁸⁹ A density map of three tuna species—Bigeye, Skipjack and Yellowfin—illustrated the vast territory of their inhabitation given their migratory nature. They have also marked out areas of intense longline efforts between 2006 and 2010.⁹⁰ The established Chagos MPA reflects neither the areas of intense longline efforts nor territories of high tuna presence. Since the coral reefs and their associated commercial reef fishery were already in a “near pristine” state, Chagos MPA adds no effective additional protection over and above that which already existed under domestic and International law since 2003.⁹¹

What is even more ironic is that while Chagos MPA is largely a no-take marine reserve, recreational fishing is allowed within waters around Diego Garcia so long as the catch stays within “a reasonable amount for personal consumption within 3 days by the person fishing,” according to Section 7(10) of the Fisheries (Conservation and Management) Ordinance 2007.⁹² Unfortunately, compliance with this rule has been very low or nonexistent with numerous photographs demonstrating very sizable catches of tuna and reef fish.⁹³

What is also exempted from MPA protection is the coral reef surrounding Diego Garcia. Chagos atoll’s coral was mined as aggregate material for harbor and airfield construction and as landfill for the draining and filling of large swamp/wetland areas.⁹⁴ The U.S. Navy’s “Seabees” engineers started out in 1971 by dynamiting a larger access channel through the northern reef of Diego Garcia, deep-dredging part of the lagoon and locating sites for “coral harvesting” or relocation of coral “as part of the dredging effort” as the Navy elegantly put it in 2005.⁹⁵ Despite BIOT’s declaration that, “it will be the responsibility of the U.S. Commanding Office to ensure that no dredging or reef blasting is conducted in any area where it would cause irremediable damage,”⁹⁶ by 1983, an area of about 100 acres was land-filled, and a total of more than 150,000 cubic yards of concrete were poured for the construction of airport runways and parking aprons, 18 miles of asphalt road, antenna fields, and support facilities.⁹⁷

The 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity (with 190 member countries the most widely accepted global environmental treaty) does not apply to the British Indian Ocean Territory

⁸⁹ Dunne et al.

⁹⁰ Longlining is a passive type of fishing technique making use of lines with baited hooks as fishing gear.

⁹¹ Dunne et al., “The Creation of the Chagos Marine Protected Area: A Fisheries Perspective,” 119.

⁹² No-take zones are marine protected areas that do not allow any fishing, mining, drilling, or other extractive activities. See the British Indian Ocean Territory. The Fisheries (Conservation and Management) Ordinance 2007.

⁹³ Richard P. Dunne, “Recreational Fishing,” The Chagos Archipelago, October 13, 2018, <https://sites.google.com/site/thechagosarchipelagofacts/diego-garcia/recreational-fishing>.

⁹⁴ Sand, *United States and Britain in Diego Garcia: The Future of a Controversial Base*, 52–54.

⁹⁵ Sand, 52–54.

⁹⁶ Sand, 52–54. See also Naval Support Facility on Diego Garcia: Agreement Supplementing the Agreement of December 30, 1966, December 13, 1982.

⁹⁷ Sand, 53.

(BIOT).⁹⁸ The Convention requires that all member states to “prevent the introduction of, control or eradicate those alien species which threaten ecosystems, habitats or species” (art. 8/h).⁹⁹ Yet, since the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has persistently vetoed an extension of that convention to BIOT, the dramatic increase of invasive plant species introduced by navy operations and construction in Diego Garcia has never been mentioned in any UK national report.¹⁰⁰ As a result, Diego Garcia boasts the world’s longest slipform-paved airport runway built on crushed coral, which served as the principal launch-pad for the bombing of Iraq and Afghanistan.¹⁰¹ Its Pearl Harbor-size lagoon has been deep dredged to accommodate aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines and a large fleet of forward supply vessels, even though it is also listed since 2001 as part of an internationally protected nature reserve under the 1971 Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (No. 1077, 2UK001).¹⁰²

In response to the foregoing criticisms on military destruction of coral reefs, Charles Sheppard—the Chair of the Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT)—presents different scientific evidence.

It is undeniable that the Chagos environment has benefitted hugely from the lack of the human pressures that have impacted almost every other reef in the region. It is probably the largest tract of almost completely undamaged reefs left in the world, certainly in the generally over-exploited and degraded Indian Ocean. This fact makes the MPA an excellent scientific benchmark, and a precious haven for many species, but it does not infer any value judgement on the rights of the people involved.¹⁰³

Sheppard further denies any claimed marriage of scientific and political issues, “blurring these boundaries can risk the future of the Chagos Marine Preservation Area (MPA) and the invaluable protection it affords the many species (including important food species) now thriving in the Chagos Archipelago.”¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Sand, 59. See also UN Office of Legal Affairs, *Multilateral Treaties Deposited with the Secretary-General: Status as at 31 December 2006*, ST/LEG/SER/E.25 (New York: United Nations 2007).

⁹⁹ Sand, 58.

¹⁰⁰ Sand, 58.

¹⁰¹ Peter Sand, “Fortress Conservation Trumps Human Rights? The ‘Marine Protected Area’ in the Chagos Archipelago,” *The Journal of Environment & Development* 21, no. 1 (2012): 36–39.

¹⁰² Sand, *United States and Britain in Diego Garcia: The Future of a Controversial Base*.

¹⁰³ Charles Sheppard, “Response to the Article by Peter Harris: Fortress, Safe Haven or Home? The Chagos MPA in Political Context,” *Marine Policy* 47 (2014): 85–86.

¹⁰⁴ Sheppard.

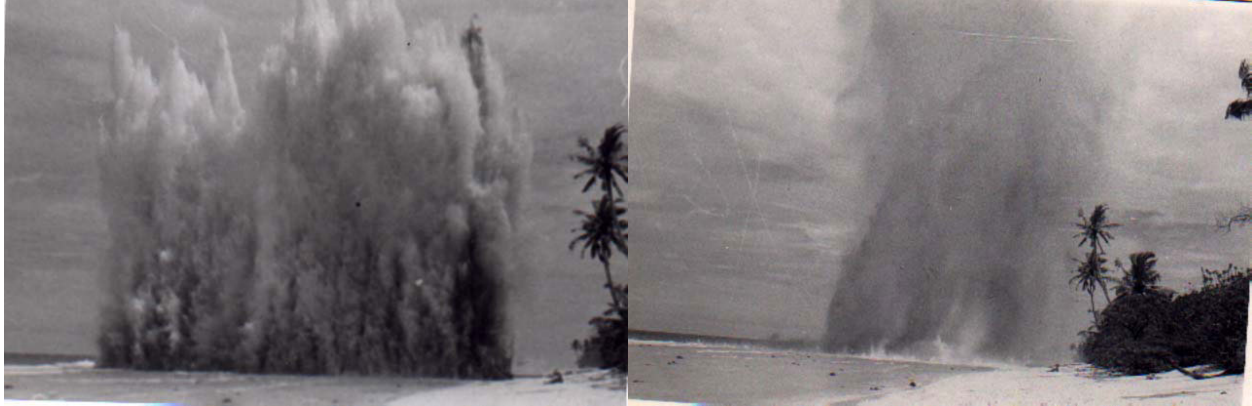


Figure 39. Coral blasting (1974). Source: Ted A. Morris, Jr.



Figure 40. Diagram of the reclaimed land for the construction of military airport in 1983. Redrawn by author.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ United States. National Imagery and Mapping Agency, *Indian Ocean, British Indian Ocean Territory (United Kingdom) Chagos Archipelago, Diego Garcia / Prepared and Published by the National Imagery and Mapping Agency, Map*; Government documents (Riverdale, MD: NOAA Distribution Division, 2000).

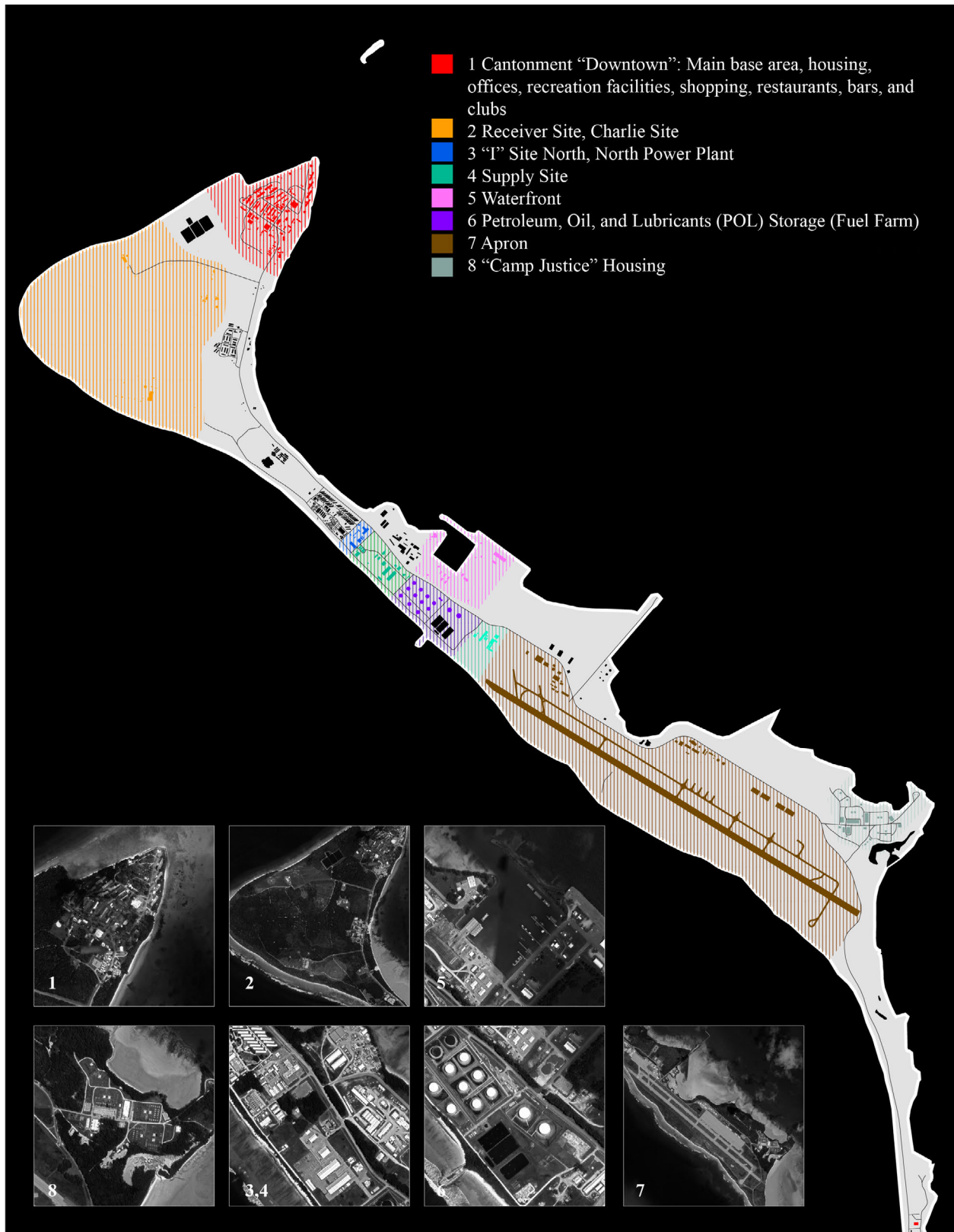


Figure 41. Military programs on the Western arm of Diego Garcia. Image courtesy of author.

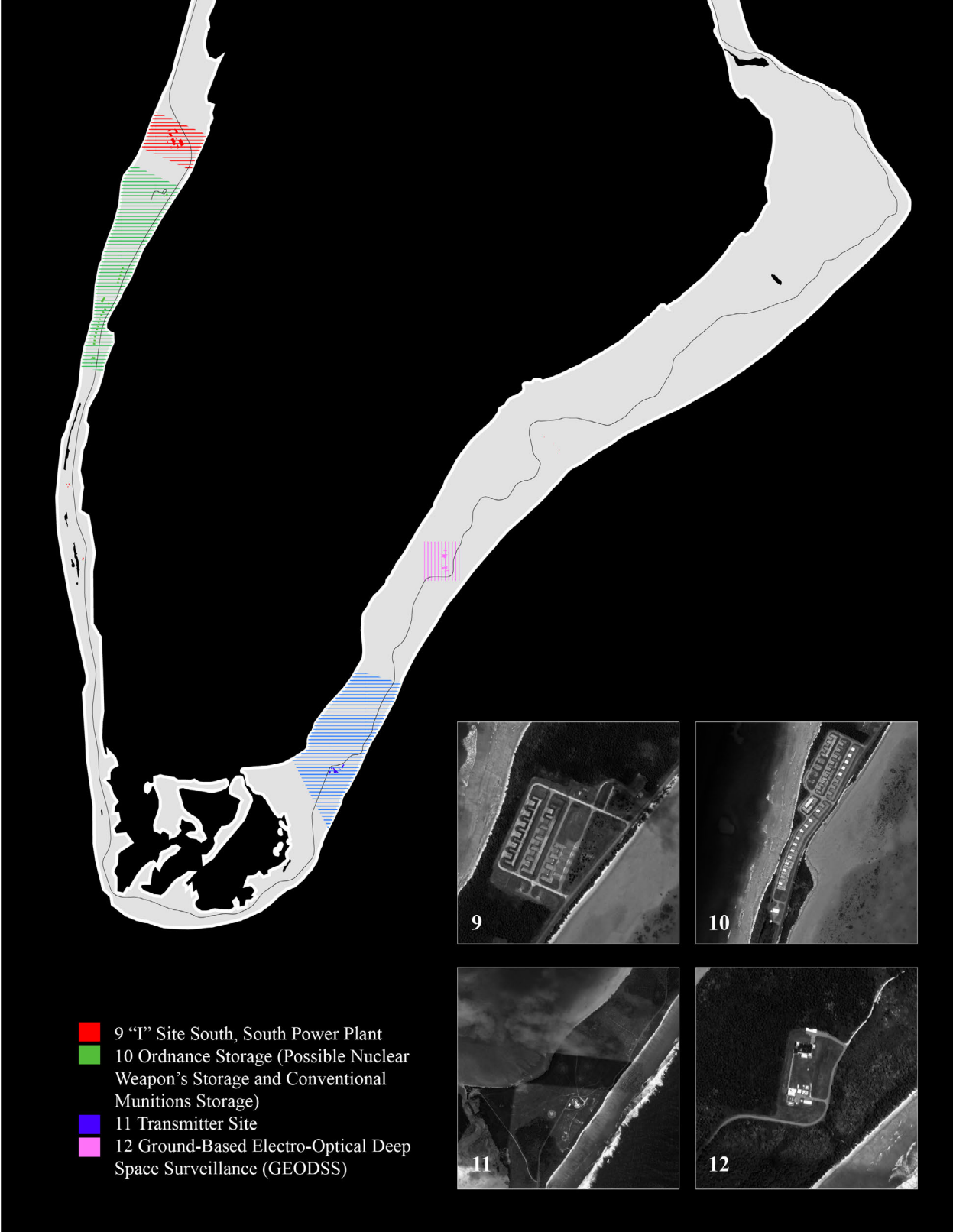


Figure 42. Same as before. Image courtesy of author.

Strategies of innocence

Green- and blue-washing narratives that romanticize a pristine ecology and celebrate a pre-human utopian imagination are common strategies to conceal colonial-military-corporate buildups. Other instances include Guam,¹⁰⁶ Okinawa, Bikini Atoll,¹⁰⁷ Vieques,¹⁰⁸ Hawai'i, the Philippines,¹⁰⁹ all masked with a layer of innocuous tourism. The political dynamics and opportunities behind these establishments are well understood and deployed as the proclamation of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument triggered, since 2006, a “conservation race,” or environmental “territorialization.”¹¹⁰ The Hawaiian case represents new strategies of innocence and legal designs that are far more intricate than the preceding military bases. For example, it allows for some possibilities of international adjudications, at least formally; the monument is inscribed on the list of world heritage sites to institutionalize its global significance.¹¹¹

Challenges to the Chagos MPA

On 1 April 2010, the United Kingdom established the Chagos Marine Protected Area (MPA), including a no-take fishing zone, following limited discussion of the subject in bilateral talks with Mauritius.¹¹² The consequent fortress conservation approach effectively alienates people from nature since local stakeholders were not well engaged and the conflicting objectives of community development and subsistence not addressed. Given the numerous precedents, mostly in Africa, the Access and Benefit Sharing provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) have started to address the exclusion of local people from protected areas while the benefits of conservation are shared within a limited group of remote stakeholders with more established political powers.¹¹³

¹⁰⁶ Pierre Bélanger and Alexander S. Arroyo, *Ecologies of Power: Counter-mapping the Logistical Landscapes & Military Geographies of the U.S. Department of Defense*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 110–26.

¹⁰⁷ Sasha Davis, *The Empires' Edge: Militarization, Resistance, and Transcending Hegemony in the Pacific* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2015).

¹⁰⁸ Javier Arbona, “Vieques, Puerto Rico: From Devastation to Conservation, and Back Again” (Submitted to the Department of Architecture in Partial Fulfillment for the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Architecture Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2004).

¹⁰⁹ Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez, *Securing Paradise: Tourism and Militarism in Hawai'i and the Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

¹¹⁰ Alison Rieser, “The Papahānaumokuākea Precedent: Ecosystem-Scale Marine Protected Areas in the EEZ,” *Asian-Pacific Law & Policy*, 2012, 210–51; Bernard H. Oxman, “The Territorial Temptation: A Siren Song at Sea,” *100 Am. J. Int'l. Law* 830 (2006).

¹¹¹ Rieser, “The Papahānaumokuākea Precedent: Ecosystem-Scale Marine Protected Areas in the EEZ.”

¹¹² In the Matter of the Chagos Marine Protected Area Arbitration before an Arbitral Tribunal Constituted under Annex VII of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea between *the Republic of Mauritius v. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*. 18 March, 2015

¹¹³ E.M. De Santo, P.J.S. Jones, and A.M.M. Miller, “Fortress Conservation at Sea: A Commentary on the Chagos Marine Protected Area,” *Marine Policy* 35 (2011).

Chagos MPA is particularly problematic given that the native Chagossians' right of return and abode remained under dispute when the MPA was established. Although, formally, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) recognized that, "should circumstances change, all the options for a marine protected area may need to be reconsidered," it is self-contradictory because even if Chagossians were allowed to return, their means of livelihoods would be greatly limited with no fishing or marine resource exploration allowed within the MPA.

In 2010, Mauritius filed a claim against the United Kingdom, alleging that the MPA was incompatible with the United Kingdom's substantive and procedural obligations under the Convention and the 1995 Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea Relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory.¹¹⁴

The Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) acted as Registry in this arbitration.¹¹⁵ The Tribunal unanimously found its jurisdiction to consider Mauritius' claim that the United Kingdom's declaration of the MPA was not compatible with the United Kingdom's obligations under the Convention. The Tribunal upheld Mauritius's claim.

As a result of undertakings given by the United Kingdom in 1965 and repeated thereafter, Mauritius *holds* legally binding rights to fish in the waters surrounding the Chagos Archipelago, to the eventual return of the Chagos Archipelago to Mauritius when no longer needed for defense purposes, and to the preservation of the benefit of any minerals or oil discovered in or near the Chagos Archipelago pending its eventual return.¹¹⁶

The Tribunal held that in declaring the MPA, the United Kingdom failed to give due regard to these rights and declared that the United Kingdom had breached its obligations under the Convention. More specifically, the Tribunal declares, unanimously, that the United Kingdom breached its obligations under Articles 2(3), 56(2) on due regard to other states, and 194(4)—which stipulates that "States shall refrain from unjustifiable interference with activities carried out by other States"—of the Convention.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ 1982 United Nations Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS)

¹¹⁵ Chagos Marine Protected Area Arbitration (*Mauritius v. United Kingdom*) (2010-2015)

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

Militarized Environmental Science

Deploying a generalized “insecurity”

The coalition of the military, security institutions, and certain members of the scientific community claims legitimacy in administering the global environment by defining its activity as an “organic rationality” and as a “self-evident practice” of confronting the ecological crisis of climate change.¹¹⁸ In many ways, the military and its war machines act in place of the states and sometimes in opposition to traditional bodies of governments.¹¹⁹

Who is the global guardian?

Pope Francis asks: “How might we acknowledge the sheer scale of the challenges we face while also appreciating the intimate resonance of individual and multi-species communal experience?”¹²⁰ This speaks to the tension between two environmental outlooks—the “globe” versus the “sphere”—outlined by Tim Ingold (1993).¹²¹ On the one hand, the sphere evokes the pre-modern lifeworld of people enmeshed in their own local surroundings: a dwelt-in world, intimate and limited in expanse.¹²² On the other hand, the globe characterizes modern worldview of people detached from their natural environment who imagine themselves on the surface of the globe, conducting “disinterested observation of a world apart.”¹²³ The latter resonates with what I understand to be the administration of the global commons by the few, from the top.

An all-encompassing collaborative network of global environmental administration does not necessarily imply inclusion at the local level. It is oftentimes the very patronizing factor that denies local participation. The relationship between those who invest in the conservation of global commons and those who live on lands and are impacted by such accords is not symmetrical; the latter is omitted from the discussion.¹²⁴ It reproduces and deepens the division between local people dispossessed of their lands for the purpose of global conservation and the small fraction at the economic top of the cosmopolitan citizenry.¹²⁵ Ironically, the sheer scale of the global conservation network makes its top-down agenda more invasive and exclusionist in nature as long as it is the architects of the network who oversee the definitions of conservation and ecological values, design the ends and strategies of protection. Environmental conservation

¹¹⁸ Robert P. Marzec, *Militarizing the Environment: Climate Change and the Security State* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 26.

¹¹⁹ Marzec, 26.

¹²⁰ Joni Adamson, “Introduction,” in *Humanities for the Environment: Integrating Knowledge, Forging New Constellations of Practice*, ed. Joni Adamson and Michael Davis (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 13.

¹²¹ Tim Ingold, “Globes and Spheres: The Topology of Environmentalism,” in *Environmentalism: The View from Anthropology*, ed. K. Milton (London: Routledge, 1993), 31–42.

¹²² Ingold, 40.

¹²³ Ingold, 40.

¹²⁴ Katherine. Farrell, “Freedom to Serve: A Critical Exploration of the Injustices of International Payments for Ecosystem Services” (Lund Conference on Earth System Governance. 18–20 April., Lund, Sweden, 2012).

¹²⁵ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: University Press, 2005). Cited in Hendlin, “From Terra Nullius to Terra Communis.”

as such is particularly vulnerable to other political motivations when lacking discussions on its ethical dimension: what is protected by whom, for whom and for what purposes. Already, widespread popular support for formal conservation measures is confined to industrialized countries, and hence dismissed and challenged as a “Western” neo-colonial preoccupation in the context of non-industrialized countries.¹²⁶

Chief Executive of the Wildlife Conservation Society Steve Sanderson blames the mixed results of conservation on “national governments and the intergovernmental system,” claiming that for more complete conservation and better enforcement, “conservationists must embrace a new agenda, led by a coalition of actors in civil society, including leaders from the global corporate community.”¹²⁷ In the case of Chagos, KPMG did hold consultation workshops with the Chagossian community prior to the final release of its feasibility report in 2015.¹²⁸ However, this can be easily staged instead of genuine efforts to forge dialogues. Several issues arose with regards to its consultation process: insufficient notice given to study participants, delays in monthly updates, UK stakeholders’ influences over KPMG study team as an independent, objective party, misleading commitments to subsequent consultations, inattention to confidentiality of information.^{129 130}

¹²⁶ William M. Adams and Martin Mulligan, “Introduction,” in *Decolonizing Nature: Strategies for Conservation in a Post-Colonial Era*, ed. William M. Adams and Martin Mulligan (London and Sterling, VA: Earthscan, 2003), 9.

¹²⁷ Steven Sanderson, “The Future of Conservation,” *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 5 (2002): 162–73, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/20033275>. Cited in Hendlin, “From Terra Nullius to Terra Communis.”

¹²⁸ KPMG, “Feasibility Study for the Resettlement of the British Indian Ocean Territory,” January 13, 2015.

¹²⁹ Laura Jeffery and Rebecca Rotter, “Comments on the KPMG BIOT Resettlement Feasibility Study Process and Draft Report,” December 19, 2014, <https://reshare.ukdataservice.ac.uk/851735/>.

¹³⁰ For a similar case with the involvement of McKinsey & Company in an exemplary ecological community project in Shanghai, China, see Christina Larson, “China’s Grand Plans for Eco Cities Now Lie Abandoned,” Yale Environment 360 blog, April 6, 2009, <http://www.christina-larson.com/china%e2%80%99s-grand-plans-for-eco-cities-now-lie-abandoned/>.

Proposal: Chagos Institute of Environmental Humanities

Agenda

My proposal targets the military-colonial nature of Chagos MPA. It recognizes and continues the efforts of Chagossians, lawyers, anthropologists, scientist and other civilian actors who have been fighting for Chagossian participation within the militarized and preservationist environmental science. Environmental preservation is understood to be exclusionist in nature; in fetishizing a virgin wild, it seeks to “create vegetation more reminiscent of natural, pre-human colonization conditions.”¹³¹ More specifically, it envisions the followings:

1. Disrupt colonial-imperial orders of history
2. Deconstruct the exclusionist dimension of modern science
3. Reanchor cultural heritage in the historical landscape of inhabitation
4. Reclaim Chagossians’ guardianship of Chagos Archipelago
5. Reinstate Chagossians’ intellectual agency and revive Chagossian epistemologies
6. Reassert the history of Chagossian inhabitation

The new Institute brings back Chagossian knowledge on equal footing as the privileged proper science, along with the social processes and activities that produce Chagossian knowledge and sustain their heritage. I reject the act of “banking” or preaching.¹³² Chagossians are not brought back to be educated. *They educate us*. This is not only about truth-telling. It would be insufficient and insincere if the Institute simply unveil the historical sufferings of Chagossians. “They need no more truth.”¹³³ The Institute is rather future-oriented. I see Chagossians as permanent recreators of knowledge and we need to keep learning constantly—in aspiration for “committed involvement” rather than “pseudo-participation.”¹³⁴

I am deeply moved by Freire when he writes that, “It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their views and ours. We must realize that their view of the world, manifested variously in their action, reflects their situation in the world.”¹³⁵ Nevertheless, I double whether an equal dialogue between Chagossians and Western scientists is sufficient to describe that sense of atonement I am after. Given the inter-generational injustices, should the Trojan Horse become even more aggressive?

¹³¹ C.R.C. Sheppard et al., “The Chagos Archipelago: An Introduction,” in *Ecology of the Chagos Archipelago*, ed. C.R.C. Sheppard and M.R.D. Seaward (London: Linnean Society, n.d.), 15.

¹³² Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 69.

¹³³ Directly from my conversation with Delia.

¹³⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 43.

¹³⁵ Freire, 69.

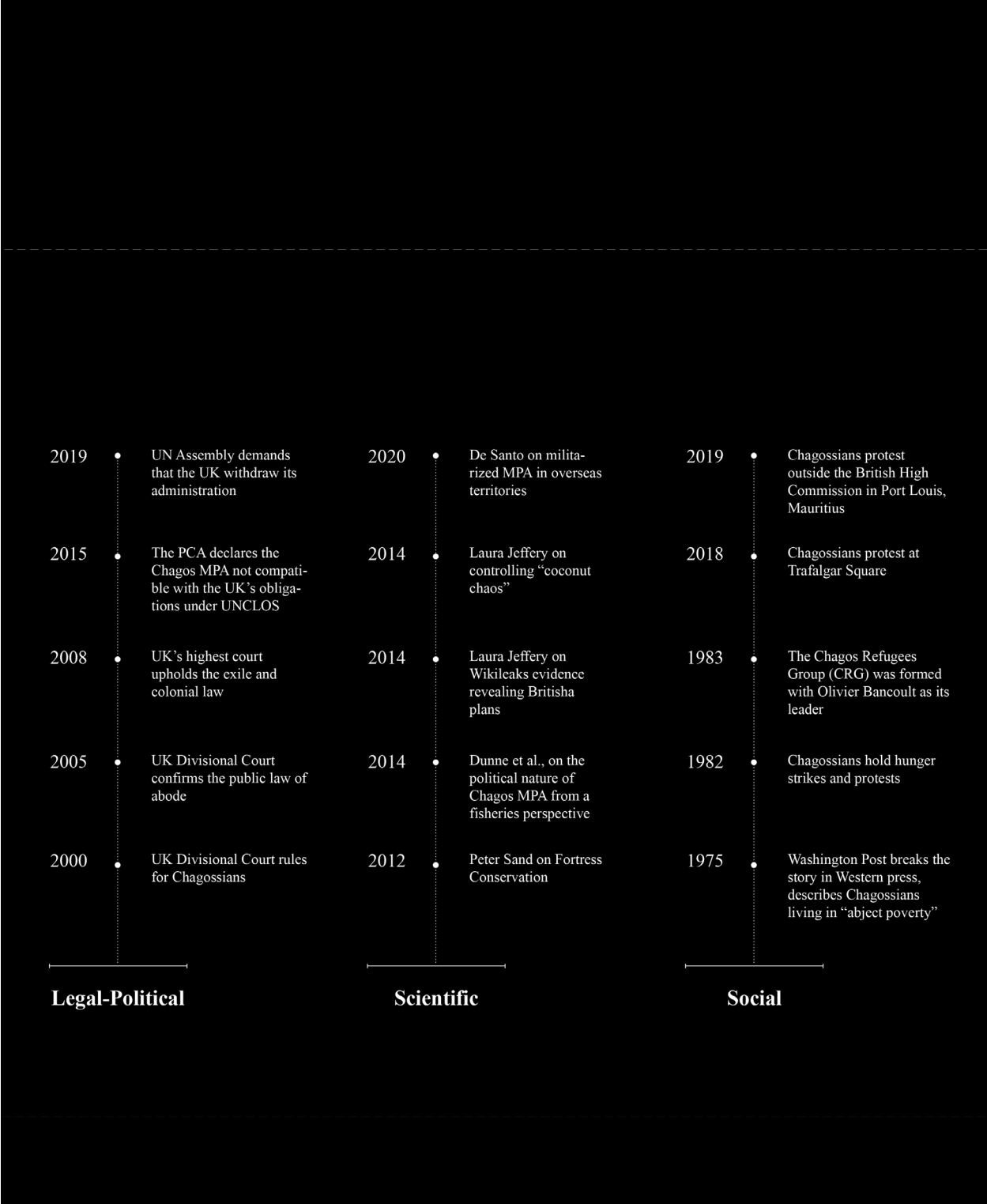


Figure 43. Diagram of the proposed Chagos Institute of Environmental Humanities as a continuation of the resistance movements for the Chagossians in different realms. Image courtesy of author.

Trojan horse

It is important to note the difference between an idealistically exclusionist global perspective and, on the other hand, and ideologically participatory (although still global) perspective.¹³⁶ Environmental scientists distribute different across the spectrum. There is willingness from both parties to collaborate. Some conservationists have already proposed a role for small numbers of resettled Chagossians in assisting the research carried out during scientific expeditions and monitoring.¹³⁷ Some also expressed their satisfaction in discovering that Chagossians hold detailed ecological knowledge and are dedicated to the protection of the Chagos environment.¹³⁸ While this pro-settlement perspective is still constrained by conservationist priorities, some participatory conservationists do attempt to include Chagossians in decision-making about the future of Chagos.¹³⁹ Some Chagossians also declare themselves eager to collaborate with conservationist groups and ecological scientist if they can reach the shared understandings that people form part of the environment, expect environmental conservation to take place in conjunction with sustainable development and human rights, and believe that resettlement of the Chagos Archipelago could be compatible with environmental conservation.¹⁴⁰

It would be misleading to discredit all environmental scientists working on the Chagos to suggest that Chagos MPA performs only a role of fortification and exclusion. There are indeed some utilities of further scientific research on Chagos. Firstly, Chagos coral reef shares biological connections to the Southeast coast of Africa, as well as Seychelles and Madagascar.¹⁴¹ It possibly provides a source of larvae to the west, and acts as a reservoir of unexploited reef species for the western Indian Ocean.¹⁴² Chagos reef is unique given the rapid recovery of coral cover at Chagos following the 1998 thermal anomaly, the stability of the fish assemblages through this event and the exceptionally high reef fish biomass on the reefs.¹⁴³ It therefore provides a useful reference point to compare with other reefs and management strategies globally.¹⁴⁴ Secondly, seabirds are threatened than other comparable birds because of

¹³⁶ Laura Jeffery, “‘We Are the True Guardians of the Environment’: Human-Environment Relations and Debates about the Future of the Chagos Archipelago,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19 (2013): 314.

¹³⁷ Jeffery, 314.

¹³⁸ Laura Jeffery, “Chagos – Sustainable Archipelago: Knowledge Exchange Workshop,” October 7, 2011, <https://reshare.ukdataservice.ac.uk/851735/>.

¹³⁹ Jeffery, “‘We Are the True Guardians of the Environment’: Human-Environment Relations and Debates about the Future of the Chagos Archipelago,” 314.

¹⁴⁰ Jeffery, “Sustainable Resettlement and Environmental Conservation.”

¹⁴¹ David Obura, “The Diversity and Biogeography of Western Indian Ocean Reef-Building Corals,” *PLoS One* 7, no. 9 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0045013>.

¹⁴² Charles R.C. Sheppard et al., “British Indian Ocean Territory (the Chagos Archipelago): Setting, Connections and the Marine Protected Area,” in *Coral Reefs of the United Kingdom Overseas Territories*, ed. Charles R.C. Sheppard, vol. 4, Coral Reefs of the World (Springer Dordrecht Heidelberg New York London, 2013), 227.

¹⁴³ Nicholas A.J. Graham et al., “The Status of Coral Reef Fish Assemblages in the Chagos Archipelago, with Implications for Protected Area Management and Climate Change,” in *Coral Reefs of the United Kingdom Overseas Territories*, ed. Charles R.C. Sheppard, vol. 4, Coral Reefs of the World (Springer Dordrecht Heidelberg New York London, 2013), 268.

¹⁴⁴ Nancy Knowlton and Jeremy B. C Jackson, “Shifting Baselines, Local Impacts, and Global Change on Coral Reefs,” *PLoS Biol* 6, no. 2 (February 26, 2008): e54, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.0060054>.

commercial fishery and marine pollution. MPAs can be part of a suite of tools to combat the rapid depletion of seabirds and other marine megafauna.¹⁴⁵ Several important seabird species who breed on Chagos include: red-footed booby, brown noddy, tropical shearwater, sotty tern, and lesser noddy.¹⁴⁶ Thirdly, the “Seychelles-Chagos thermocline ridge” has dominating effects on the heat and freshwater budgets of the Indian Ocean.¹⁴⁷ One-third of the world’s population live in the rim region of the Indian Ocean, mostly from developing countries with particularly high vulnerability to climate variability.¹⁴⁸ Yet, this thermal ridge has been less studied than those in the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

However, the more critical questions are: *Why do we need to know more about the Chagos environment? Why is more environmental knowledge better?*¹⁴⁹

Research that dives deeper into the abovementioned subjects does not respond to Chagossians’ claim to return nor would it necessarily benefit global ecological administration other than to make up for the falsely constructed perception of Chagos being ecologically fragile and its conservation imperative. Nevertheless, the alibi of scientific field trips could open up rare opportunities for Chagossians to access the Chagos. This thesis does not challenge the fact that there will continue to be access restrictions, and limits on where one can stay and for how long. It is also likely that Chagossians cannot visit their land without the companion of some Western research teams. However, what can be argued and revised is the subject of scientific research. Still operating under the restrictions imposed by the UK-US authorities, I propose to capitalize on the opportunity of continued scientific activities not to perpetuate the production of highly specific scientific facts that demarcate the skilled and professional from unschooled Chagossians but to promote environmental humanities that seek to bridge dialogues and disrupt the colonial-imperial root of modern sciences. I have learnt this sense of duplicity and dual-agency mentality from Amílcar Cabral.

Cabral played double agencies as a political activist alongside his concurrent activity as agronomist between 1948 and 1960.¹⁵⁰ Cabral’s submission to the colonial power of the Portuguese state as an agronomist was subversive.¹⁵¹ Moving freely between the colonies and the “metropole,” Cabral gained strategic data about Portugal’s economic dependence on overseas

¹⁴⁵ Graham et al., “The Status of Coral Reef Fish Assemblages in the Chagos Archipelago, with Implications for Protected Area Management and Climate Change,” 2.

¹⁴⁶ Peter Carr et al., “Status and Phenology of Breeding Seabirds and a Review of Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas in the British Indian Ocean Territory,” *Bird Conservation International*, Cambridge University Press on behalf of BirdLife International, 2020, 14–15, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0959270920000295>.

¹⁴⁷ Weiqing Han et al., “Indian Ocean Decadal Variability: A Review,” *Bull. Amer. Meteor. Soc.* 95, no. 11 (November 2014): 1679–1703, <https://doi.org/10.1175/BAMS-D-13-00028.1>; F. A. Schott, S. P. Xie, and J. P. McCreary, “Indian Ocean Circulation and Climate Variability,” *Rev. Geophys.*, 2009, <https://doi.org/10.1029/2007RG000245>.

¹⁴⁸ Han et al., “Indian Ocean Decadal Variability: A Review.”

¹⁴⁹ Comments from Nasser Rabbat and Delia Wendel during one of my review sessions.

¹⁵⁰ Filipa César, “Meteorisations: Reading Amílcar Cabral’s Agronomy of Liberation,” *Third Text* 32, no. 2–3 (2018): 266, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2018.1492073>.

¹⁵¹ César, 266.

products and colonial trade economy—information that he forwarded to various anti-colonial parties in Angola and Mozambique.¹⁵² With a similar mentality, my proposal also prepares for revolutionary ends quietly and subversively by refashioning environmental science in service of decolonization and empowerment—turning the very tools of military-imperial powers against them.¹⁵³

The proposal separates its official agenda from the undercover one.¹⁵⁴ On appearance, the Institute still operates under the shield of “proper” environmental science and stages an apparent compliance to UK-US restrictions and regulations, but this performed compliance is not submission. It recognizes and continues the efforts of Chagossians, lawyers, anthropologists, scientists and other civilian actors who have been fighting for Chagossian participation within the militarized and exclusionist environmental science. It quietly but resolutely supports the gradual and undercover defiance of environmental fortification and cultivates the longer-term project of decolonization and empowerment.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² César, 266.

¹⁵³ César, 267.

¹⁵⁴ Phrases of the official vs. the undercover are borrowed from: Socrates Stratis, “Critical Urban Practices for Conflict Transformation,” in *Mediating the Spatiality of Conflicts: International Conference Proceedings* (Mediating the Spatiality of Conflicts, Delft, the Netherlands, 2020),

<https://books.bk.tudelft.nl/index.php/press/catalog/book/764>.

¹⁵⁵ Stratis.

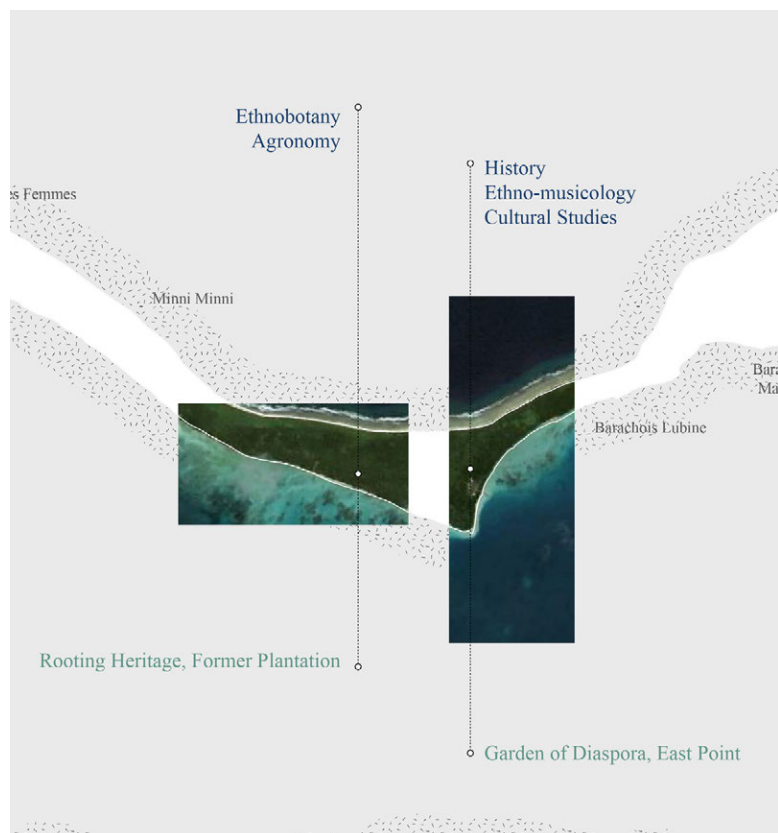
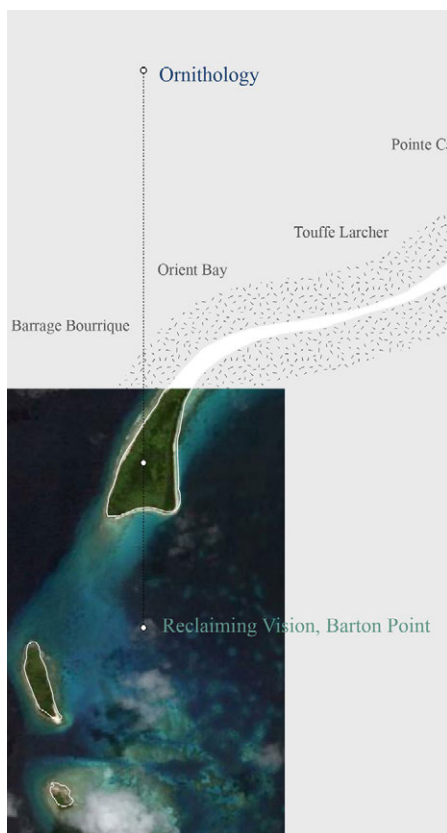


Figure 44. The official and the undercover agenda of each site. Image courtesy of author.

In addition to the legal challenges targeting the Chagos Marine Protected Area, a series of more general legal fight, led by Louis Olivier Bancoult, culminated in a 2019 UNGA resolution demanding the United Kingdom unconditionally withdraw its colonial administration from the Chagos Archipelago within six months.¹⁵⁶ This followed a 25 February 2019 International Court of Justice advisory opinion in favor of the Chagossians. The International Court of Justice firstly concludes that, as a result of the Chagos Archipelago’s unlawful detachment and its incorporation into a new colony, known as the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), the process of decolonization of Mauritius was not lawfully completed when Mauritius acceded to independence in 1968. The decision primarily draws from *resolution 1514 (XV)* which affirms that “[a]ll peoples have the right to self-determination.” Its preamble proclaims “the necessity of bringing to a speedy and unconditional end colonialism in all its forms and manifestations” and its first paragraph states that “[t]he subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights [and] is contrary to the Charter of the United Nations.” Decolonization of Mauritius was unlawful because, at the time the Chagos Archipelago was detached and ceded to the United Kingdom, representatives of the people concerned were not allowed to exercise legislative or executive powers and therefore no talk of an international agreement was possible. (UN doc. A/5800/Rev.1 (1964-1965), p. 352, para. 154)

Secondly, the Court concludes that the United Kingdom has an obligation to bring to an end its administration of the Chagos Archipelago as rapidly as possible, and that all Member States must co-operate with the United Nations to complete the decolonization of Mauritius. The decision primarily relies on *resolution 2625 (XXV)*, that provides “every State has the duty to promote...realization of the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples...” In particular, the Court has found that the United Kingdom’s continued administration of the Chagos Archipelago constitutes a wrongful act entailing the respect for the right to self-determination. Further, since respect for the right to self-determination is an obligation *erga omnes*, all States have a legal interest in protecting that right.

Prior to the ICJ opinion, within the United Kingdom, there has been three *Bancoult*¹⁵⁷ litigations—in 2000, 2005 and 2018 respectively. In *Bancoult 1*, the Divisional Court found the exile of the Chagossian people to be unlawful and ruled on their public law right of abode in the Chagos Islands (except for Diego Garcia). In 2007, in *Bancoult 2*, the Divisional Court confirmed the public law right of abode despite the government’s appeal. It also ruled the 2004

¹⁵⁶ United Nations General Assembly, “Delegates Call upon United Kingdom to Comply with Ruling by International Court of Justice That Chagos Archipelago’s Decolonization Was Never Lawfully Completed,” United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, October 15, 2019, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/gaspd696.doc.htm>.

¹⁵⁷ R (on the application of Bancoult) (Appellant) v. Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Respondent). Louis Olivier Bancoult (son of Rita Bancoult) is currently the highest-profile activist leading the Chagossian cause.

Orders were an abuse of power. Unfortunately, the latest litigation in 2018, the Chagossians were defeated.

The compensation that Chagossians are entitled to is not a small number but should not present any significant fiscal difficulties. According to David Vine's work on compensation for Chagossians using the Human Rights Standards Damages Model, the present value of the uncompensated damages suffered by the Chagossians from 1970 through 2008 totaled between \$5.4 billion and \$13.2 billion in 2008 international dollars.¹⁵⁸ Even if one considers compensation only based on military destruction of coral resources, at a 3% assumed real rate of interest, Chagossians will be entitled to \$100 million to \$600 million worth of compensation.¹⁵⁹

In light of the preceding movements for Chagossians, the Trojan Horse is an imperative and conceivable solution. The proposed Institute's reception by the US and UK might be positive because the expected democratization of research activities by inviting Chagossian participation can help to address the controversies around political influences on scientific research. Nevertheless, as I will explain later, to return or resettle is not the primary purpose. The Trojan Horse does not relocate Chagossians from Mauritius and the UK and re-lock them in a plantation-era community on a remote misconceived "homeland." It seeks but to epistemologically and ontologically broaden both Chagossians and Western science.

¹⁵⁸ Vine, Harvey, and Sokolowski, "Compensating a People for the Loss of Their Homeland: Diego Garcia, the Chagossians, and the Human Rights Standards Damages Model," 171–72.

¹⁵⁹ Vine, Harvey, and Sokolowski, 171–72.

Not another Environmental Institute

NOT a binocular vision.

The new Institute does not perpetuate the interdisciplinary rhizome by creating a Chagossian parallel. Instead of a binocular with a Western glass and another Chagossian lens, the two visions transform each other. I do not claim to replay the science versus spiritualism trope that turns a blind eye to indigenous authority and sovereignty.¹⁶⁰ Rather than dismissing Chagossian knowledge as unintellectual on the basis that they are unschooled, I expect that Chagossians have a lot to contribute as geographers, folklorists, curators, activists, botanists, historian—expertise and knowledge not yet defined within the Western academic framework. This does not mean that their observation and experience are “unscientific” and therefore secondary anecdotes in service of “proper” science. To reject a binocular vision does not exclude the possibility of a common ground, which, nevertheless, requires great nuances and prudence in merging the Chagossian and Western perspectives.

Not reconciliation.

The new Institute does not reconcile Chagossian knowledge with Western science. Decolonization unsettles. Genuine efforts to repatriate inter-generational injustices require not to rescue oppressor normalcy but to relinquish oppressor futurity, abandoning the hope that the military-colonial powers may be one day commensurable to Chagossian people.¹⁶¹

To borrow from Patrick Wolfe, scientific colonialism over the Chagos manifests itself beyond the MPA, the Important Bird and Biodiversity Area or the Barton Point Restoration Project; it is a structure and not an event.¹⁶² What is particularly savage about it is that it not only disrupts Chagossian epistemological, ontological and cosmological relationships to land but also excludes alternatives. Beyond the exploitation of enslaved labor, and eviction and displacement in the 70s, the continued denial of an inhabited history and flourishing civilization deter possibilities to even think about the repatriation of land, even in a symbolic form.¹⁶³

The duplicity embedded within the trojan horse design borrows the shield of “proper” environmental science but not to diminish or undermine Chagossian knowledge, nor does it suggest to complement and “adorn” Western science with Chagossian touches. It is just a special mechanism designed to carve out a space for Chagossian knowledge to prosper and flourish under the restrictive political reality.

¹⁶⁰ Tsim D. Schneider and Katherine Hayes, “Epistemic Colonialism: Is It Possible to Decolonize Archaeology?,” *American Indian Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (Spring 2020): 139–41.

¹⁶¹ Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.

¹⁶² Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (London: Cassell, 1999). Cited in Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” 5.

¹⁶³ Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” 7.

NOT self-enslavement-autocolonization.

Es'kia Mphahlele, a South African writer, professor, and political activist, critiqued the self-enslavement-autocolonization underpinning the Négritude Movement led by Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor in the 1930s.¹⁶⁴ He rejects the romanticization of Africa as a symbol of innocence, purity, and artless primitiveness.¹⁶⁵

an image of Africa that glosses over or dismisses these things [violence, turmoil, dictatorship] is not a faithfully-conceived one; it restricts or emotional and intellectual response. An image of Africa that only glorifies our ancestors and celebrates our “purity” and “innocence” is an image of a continent lying in state.¹⁶⁶

The Chagossian practices can be equally “violent.” Their engagement with the land can be predatory, brutal, aggressive, in a nutshell, environmental-unfriendly. A committed and faithful decolonization embraces all of the above not only because our current remote custodianship of environmental administration is already equally if not more abusive but also because a fetishized protection mentality toward cultural heritage is dangerous as it risks becoming paternalistic.

NOT to perform indigenous.

Decolonization does not perform or play indigenous and, in this case, Chagossian. Philip Deloria (1998) describes how playing Indian used to be a powerful U.S. pastime, from the Boston Tea Party to fraternal organizations: “from the colonial period to the present, the Indian has skulked in and out of the most important stories various Americans have told about themselves.”¹⁶⁷ The Institute does not want to be more “Chagossian” and to inflict further pains of cultural assimilation and appropriation. The Institute does not simply dress up the scientific colonialism with a thatch roof, calling it “Chagossian” or “environmental.” Chagossians have already expressed concerns over the commercialization and appropriation of their cultural heritage that can be exploited for financial benefits other than highlighting their cultural distinctiveness.¹⁶⁸ The worst is to romanticize an aboriginal being in the woods the rejects Chagossians’ social experience and connections critical to their relationship to land.¹⁶⁹ The Institute allows Chagossians to reestablish connections with their homeland without “locking” them physically in the forest or a plantation mindset. Chagossian culture is distinct but not homogenous. I reject the quest to describe cultural “authenticity,” which easily runs the risks of imposition, manipulation,

¹⁶⁴ Es'kia Mphahlele, “On Négritude in Literature” (Johannesburg, South Africa, June 1963).

¹⁶⁵ Mphahlele.

¹⁶⁶ Mphahlele.

¹⁶⁷ Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 5.

¹⁶⁸ Laura Jeffery and Rebecca Rotter, “Safeguarding Sega: Transmission, Inscription, and Appropriation of Chagossian Intangible Cultural Heritage,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 25, no. 10 (2019): 1028–30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2018.1555671>.

¹⁶⁹ Tracy L. Friedel, “Looking for Learning in All the Wrong Places: Urban Native Youths’ Cultured Response to Western-Oriented Place-Based Learning,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 24, no. 5 (2011): 534.

domestication and “slogанизation.”¹⁷⁰ It is more important to acknowledge Chagossian knowledge as not just cultural but intellectual, ever-evolving and non-determinant.¹⁷¹

NOT a savior project.

As Tuck and Yang put it, decolonization is not a metonym for social justice: “it is not a philanthropic process of ‘helping’ the at-risk and alleviating suffering; it is not a generic term for struggle against oppressive conditions and outcomes.”¹⁷² We do not liberate the Chagossians. *We are to be liberated.* Chagossians’ cultural vitality and resilience grown out of the conditions of insecurity, exile and agony give them every reason to feel equal if not superior to us and to liberate Western science from the dictatorship of military-colonial powers.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 141.

¹⁷¹ Megan Bang et al., “Muskrat Theories, Tobacco in the Streets, and Living Chicago as Indigenous Land,” *Environmental Education Research* 20, no. 1 (2012): 37–55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2013.865113>; La Paperson, “A Ghetto Land Pedagogy: An Antidote for Settler Environmentalism,” *Environmental Education Research* 20, no. 1 (2014): 115–30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2013.865115>; Sandra Styres, Celia Haig-Brown, and Melissa Blimkie, “Toward a Pedagogy of Land: The Urban Context,” *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue Canadienne de l’éducation* 36, no. 2 (2013): 188–221.

¹⁷² Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” 21.

¹⁷³ Mphahlele, “On Negritude in Literature.”

Environmental Humanities

Environmental humanities were first institutionalized in late 1990s when an innovative cluster of Australian researchers adopted the name “ecological humanities.”¹⁷⁴ Between 1991 and 1995, MIT MacArthur Workshop on Humanistic Studies of the Environment sought to transcend the common nature-culture duality by locating ecological problems in the behavior of human institutions, beliefs, and practices.¹⁷⁵ Its early roots and inspirations include: Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854); George Perkins Marsh’s *Man and Nature* (1864); Alexander von Humboldt and Aimé Bonpland’s advocacy in *Essay on the Geography of Plants* (1807) for an integrated, planetary study of nature; William Stanley Jevons’s writing on the question of coal supply, consumption, and the British Empire (1865); and Vladimir Vernadsky’s concept of the biosphere (1926).¹⁷⁶

Central to environmental humanities are the rejection of the nature-culture dichotomy and a reflection on the anthropocentric bias and colonialist root of dominant ethical political theories that privilege humans as standing outside of and controlling the passive and feminized natural world.¹⁷⁷ Current studies around the Chagos ecology has covered coral ecology, ornithology, botany, geology, and anthropology. However, this all-encompassing interdisciplinary rhizome is more ambiguous than inclusive. It does not necessarily imply a diversity of perspectives, epistemologies or ontologies. The cultural-natural ecology remains subject to the intrusive gaze from colonial-imperial powers. At its very best, Chagossian knowledge is seen as an anecdote in service of modern science. Mapping the complex dynamics between the Chagossians and their environment is not sufficient as a decolonization project, however exhaustive it is. It is even less satisfactory as the 200-year inhabited history of Chagossians on the archipelago has been denied by the Chagos Conservation Trust, the so-called legitimate steward of the region. Also repressed and rejected is Chagossian knowledge, dismissed as traditional, un-experimental and emotional. This fabricated amnesia inflicts the greatest violence. It rather romanticizes the image of a pristine ecology prior to 1786 as worthy of preservation from 1992 onwards.

¹⁷⁴ Robert S. Emmett and David E. Nye, *The Environmental Humanities: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2017), 3–4.

¹⁷⁵ Emmett and Nye, 3–4.

¹⁷⁶ Emmett and Nye, 3–4.

¹⁷⁷ Emmett and Nye, 9–11.

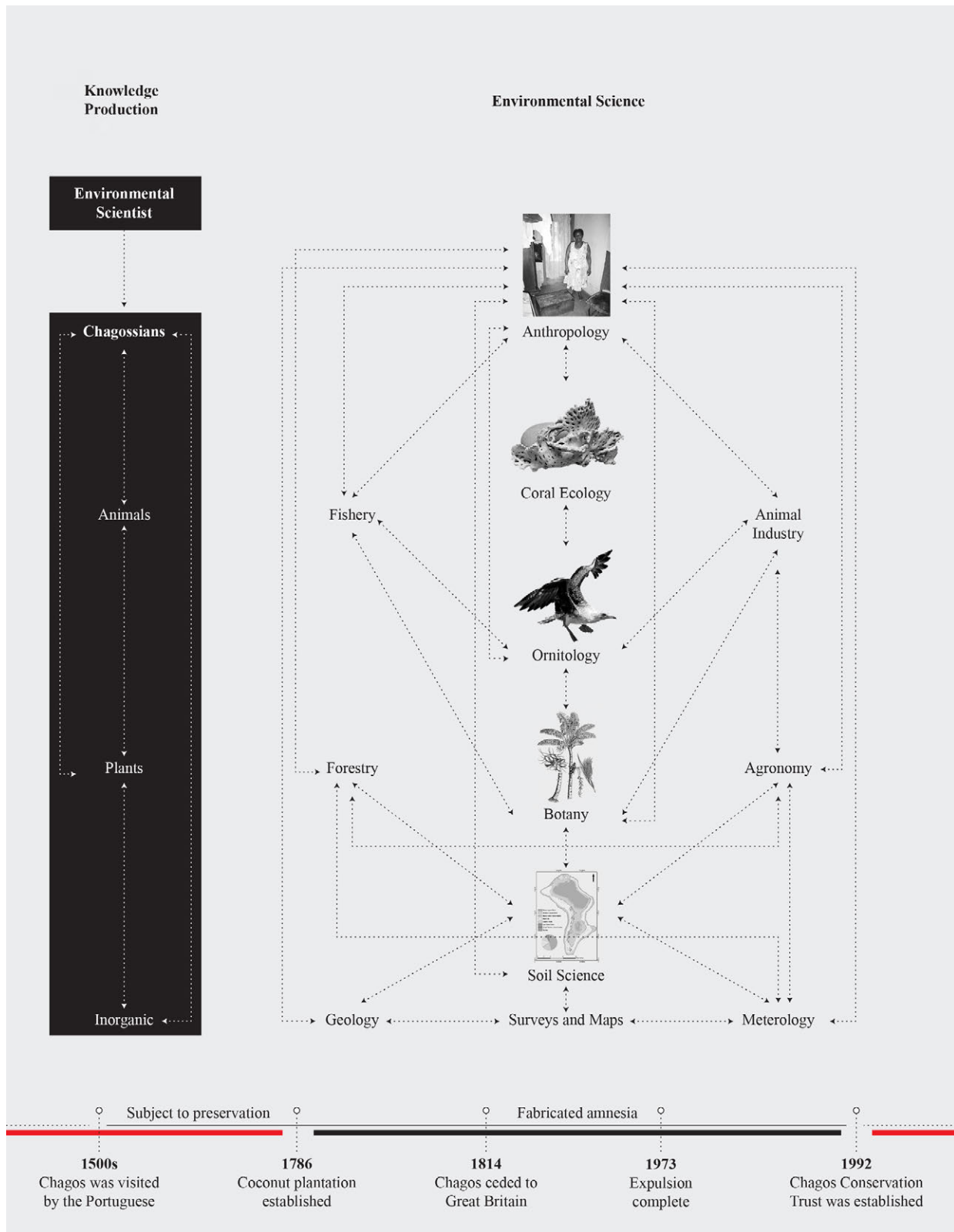


Figure 45. An interdisciplinary rhizome underpins the current environmental research framework. Image courtesy of author.



Figure 46. The proposed framework of environmental humanities centers a philosophy of relations. Image courtesy of author.

The new Institute understands that the apparent apolitical environmental science rather inserts a new political, rendering everything as equal, or rather equally unimportant. It brings back Chagossian knowledge on equal footing as the privileged Western science, along with the social processes and activities that produce their knowledge and sustain their heritage. The proposed Institute covers the entire inhabited history of the Chagos Archipelago, with a particular emphasis between 1786 and 1973. However, this is not to further complicating the already rhizomatic inter-marriage among scientific disciplines nor to voyage into unknown or undiscovered territories, but simply to reclaim what has been made forgotten.

The act of collaging is not only about Chagossian memories but for us to learn the complex set of relations embedded in their land. Many environmentally minded philosophers reject the idea of “the thing in itself” (Immanuel Kant’s *das Ding an sich*) by asserting that a “thing” or object does not and cannot exist disconnected and isolated from its networks and surroundings.¹⁷⁸ Further disciplinary divisions would not bring a multitude of connections as long as they operate within a homogenous epistemologies and moralities. I believe that Chagossians can provide for us, as Édouard Glissant describes, a “renewed perception,” a network of relationality specific to their land of inhabitation.¹⁷⁹ This does not even need to go as far as to the animism paradigm or the trope of science versus spiritualism that seek to communicate non-human sentient beings.¹⁸⁰ We just need to listen to Chagossians, recognizing them not as anthropological objects but as political, affective and intellectual subjects bearing forms of knowledge and epistemologies unknown to us.

The envisioned environmental humanities is contextualized and situated within specific places of Chagos, rooted in their ecology and history, and contingent upon the memory and culture of Chagossian people, both as individuals and as a collective. They would include Chagossian culinary, musical and agricultural traditions that are unknown to other cultures. There can be more beyond beyond technology as the only end to environmental science. The envisioned research will be inevitably subjective and incomplete, but this is precisely what affords its discursive functions and dialogical actions, through which the sameness and difference between Western science and Chagossian knowledge are recognized and articulated, not for the purpose of demarcating new boundaries of specialization and authority, but for the purpose of mutual understanding and decolonizing Western science. Here, decolonization does not fall within a savior mentality as to achieve equity and justice in indigenous politics. I expect Chagossians to inspire us. By truly embracing Chagossian knowledge on an equal footing, it can be a rare opportunity for us to gain refreshing perspectives.

This newly framed environmental humanities have a different utility. It distinguishes itself from the broad literature on integrating indigenous knowledge with Western science and humanities

¹⁷⁸ Emmett and Nye, 9.

¹⁷⁹ Macarena Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives*, Dissident Acts (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 2.

¹⁸⁰ Angela Roothann, *Indigenous, Modern and Postcolonial Relations to Nature: Negotiating the Environment*, Routledge Environmental Humanities (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 29; D. B. Rose, “Val Plumwood’s Philosophical Animism: Attentive Interactions in the Sentient World,” *Environmental Humanities* 3 (2013): 95; Schneider and Hayes, “Epistemic Colonialism: Is It Possible to Decolonize Archaeology?,” 139–40.

for the purpose of “better” or more efficient and effective management of ecological resources and biodiversity. Chagossians are not brought in for us to gain legitimacy in Western preoccupations. This is not at about social justice and political engagement, nor just about procedures and organizations. It challenges the end of environmental humanities and its underlying morality. The new framework does not produce new knowledge but reclaims the forgotten and the neglected one. It seeks not to innovate but to empower. Environmental humanities is only one example, the most realistic one given the current situation.

Sites, modes of operation, and relational representation

1. Sites: un-disciplining academic departments

I reject traditional academic departments and propose to an organization of the Institute around places, both actual and imagined. In lieu of anthropocentrism that constructs land as an inconsequential or inanimate material backdrop for human privileged activities, place is understood as storied through land-human interactions—cultivation, care, maintenance, stewardship—a respectful reciprocal subject-subject relationship.¹⁸¹ Many indigenous scholars propose an ethnical, cultural and historical reading of humans’ (moral and spiritual) dependence on land. Oscar Kawagley, a Yup’ik anthropologist, teacher and actor from Alaska, asserts that, “We know that Mother Nature has a culture, and it is a Native culture.”¹⁸² Goeman describes land as “more than a site upon which humans make history or as a location that accumulates history.”¹⁸³ It would be unrealistic to undo, in a spatial physical sense, the dispossession of Chagossian island given the political reality, but, with the proposed research Trojan horse, it is at least possible to think about how to compensate for the epistemic violence of dislocation.¹⁸⁴ Nevertheless, simply storying the land and re-narrating its relationship to Chagossians can be more gestural or symbolic than really re-enacting Chagossian agency. The key conceptual distinction here is that we do not learn about the land, but we learn from the land.¹⁸⁵ We do not accrue further scientific nor anthropological facts about what happened to Chagossians on their homeland. What I call for is a self-reflection on *our* relationship to *their* land and what epistemological reflections our disciplines can gain *from* their land.

¹⁸¹ Bang et al., “Muskrat Theories, Tobacco in the Streets, and Living Chicago as Indigenous Land,” 8.

¹⁸² Oscar Kawagley, “Foreward,” in *Alaska Native Education: Views from Within*, ed. R. Barnhardt and A. O. Kawagley (Fairbanks, AK: Alaska Native Knowledge Network, University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2010), xiii.

¹⁸³ M. Goeman, “From Place to Territories and Back Again: Centering Storied Land in the Discussion of Indigenous Nation-Building,” *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008): 24.

¹⁸⁴ D. R. Wildcat, *Red Alert. Saving the Planet with Indigenous Knowledge* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Press, 2009); M. Marker, “After the Makah Whale Hunt,” *Urban Education* 41, no. 5 (2006): 482–505; Bang et al., “Muskrat Theories, Tobacco in the Streets, and Living Chicago as Indigenous Land,” 8.

¹⁸⁵ Manulani Aluli Meyer, “Indigenous and Authentic: Hawaiian Epistemology and the Triangulation of Meaning,” in *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, ed. Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (London: Sage, 2008), 217–32; Matthew Wildcat et al., “Learning from the Land: Indigenous Land Based Pedagogy and Decolonization,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 3 (2014): I–XV.



Figure 47. Protesters outside the Court of Justice in London, UK.¹⁸⁶

On limits and constraints: The selected three sites of design actions sit on the eastern arm of Diego Garcia that is not leased to the US military. It remains much as it was in the late 1800s and early 1900s. A pass is required from the British Representative to visit and explore the plantation ruins.¹⁸⁷ Scientific field trips, however, are allowed on the eastern arm of Diego Garcia and other atolls of the Chagos archipelago.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Martina Schwikowski, “Chagos Islands: The Fight over Africa’s Last British Colony,” DW, November 22, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/chagos-islands-the-fight-over-africas-last-british-colony/a-51372316>.

¹⁸⁷ Richard C. Stacey, “Welcome to Branch Health Clinic, Diego Garcia,” 2015, <https://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nhyoko/Documents/DiegoGarcia/DiegoWelcome.pdf>.

¹⁸⁸ For examples of scientific expeditions, see Sara Barrios and Timothy Wilkinson, “Mapping the Vegetation of Diego Garcia Island, British Indian Ocean Territory. November 2018.,” Field report (Richmond, Surrey, U.K.: Royal Botanic Gardens, KEW, 2018); Carr et al., “Status and Phenology of Breeding Seabirds and a Review of Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas in the British Indian Ocean Territory”; Charles Sheppard, “Atoll Rim Expansion or Erosion in Diego Garcia Atoll, Indian Ocean? Comment on Hamylton, S.; East, H. A Geospatial



Figure 48. Site 1: East Point. Garden of Diaspora. Google Satellite Image.

Appraisal of Ecological and Geomorphic Change on Diego Garcia Atoll, Chagos Islands (British Indian Ocean Territory). *Remote Sens.* 2012, 4, 3444–3461,” *Remote Sens* 6 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rs6032463>; A. W. Bruckner, “Global Reef Expedition: British Indian Ocean Territory. Field Report 19.” (Khaled bin Sultan Living Oceans Foundation, Annapolis, MD., 2015).

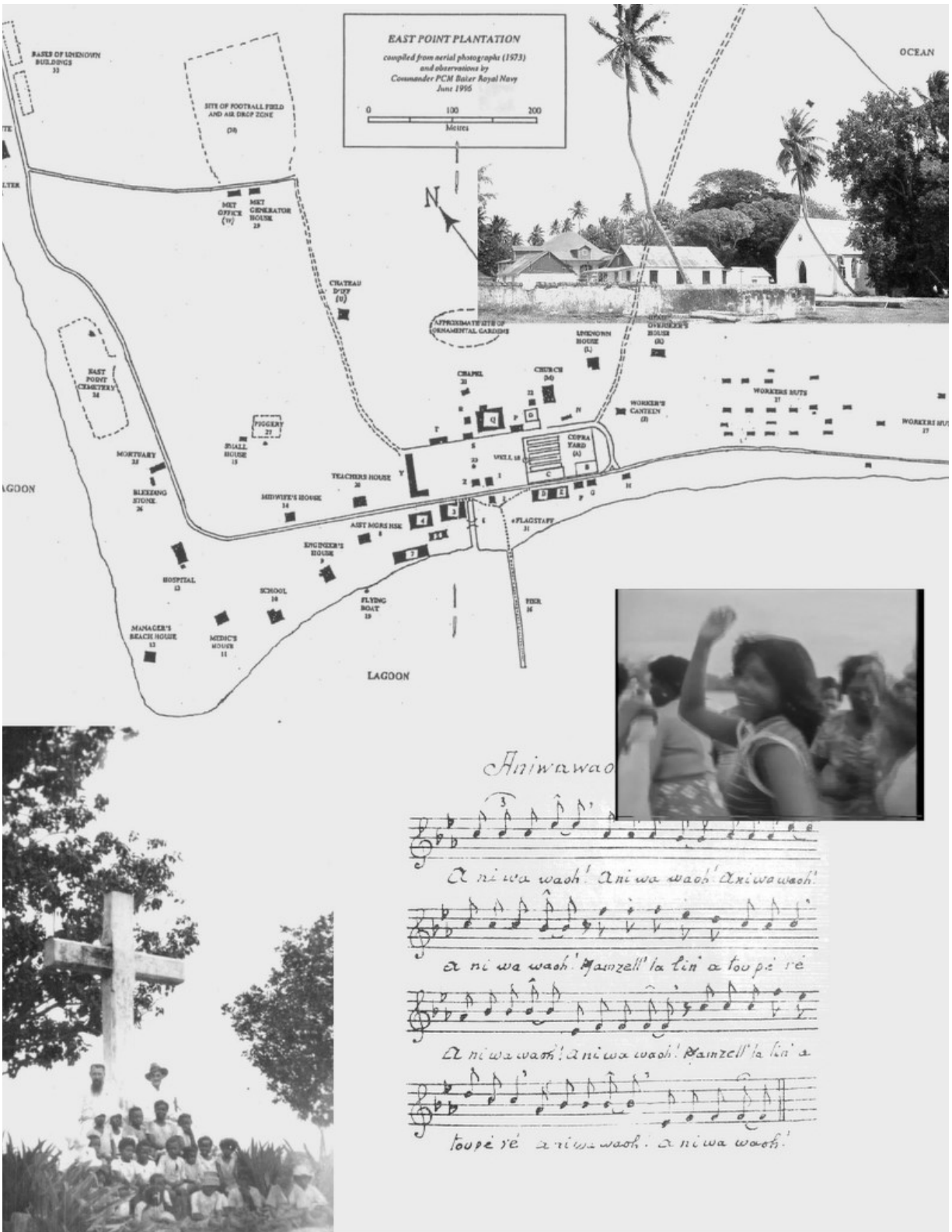


Figure 49. Site 1: East Point. Garden of Diaspora. Image courtesy of author.

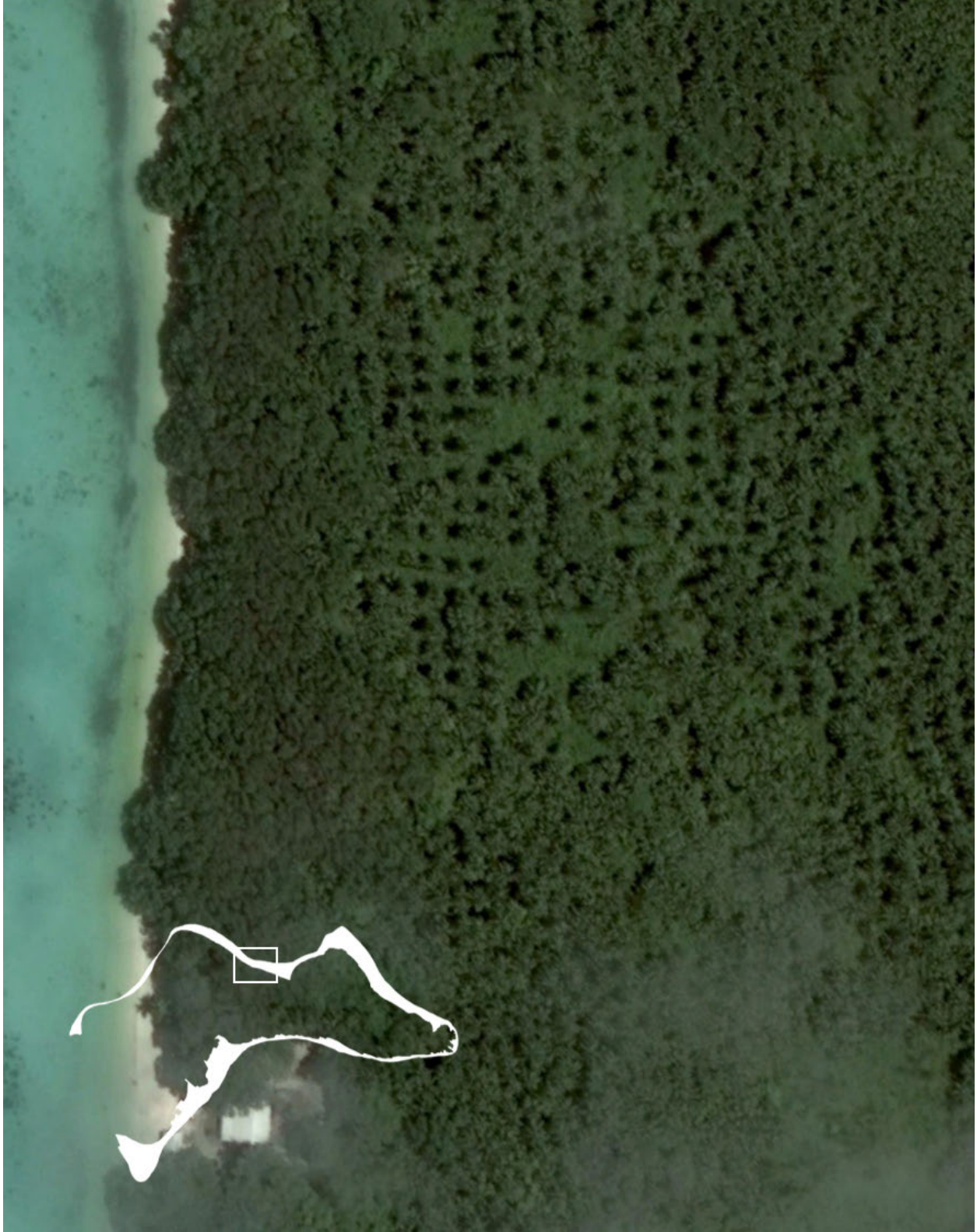


Figure 50. Site 2: Former Plantation. Rooting Heritage. Google Satellite Image.



Figure 51. Site 2: Former Plantation. Rooting Heritage. Image courtesy of author.



Figure 52. Site 3: Barton Point. Reclaiming Vision. Google Satellite Image.

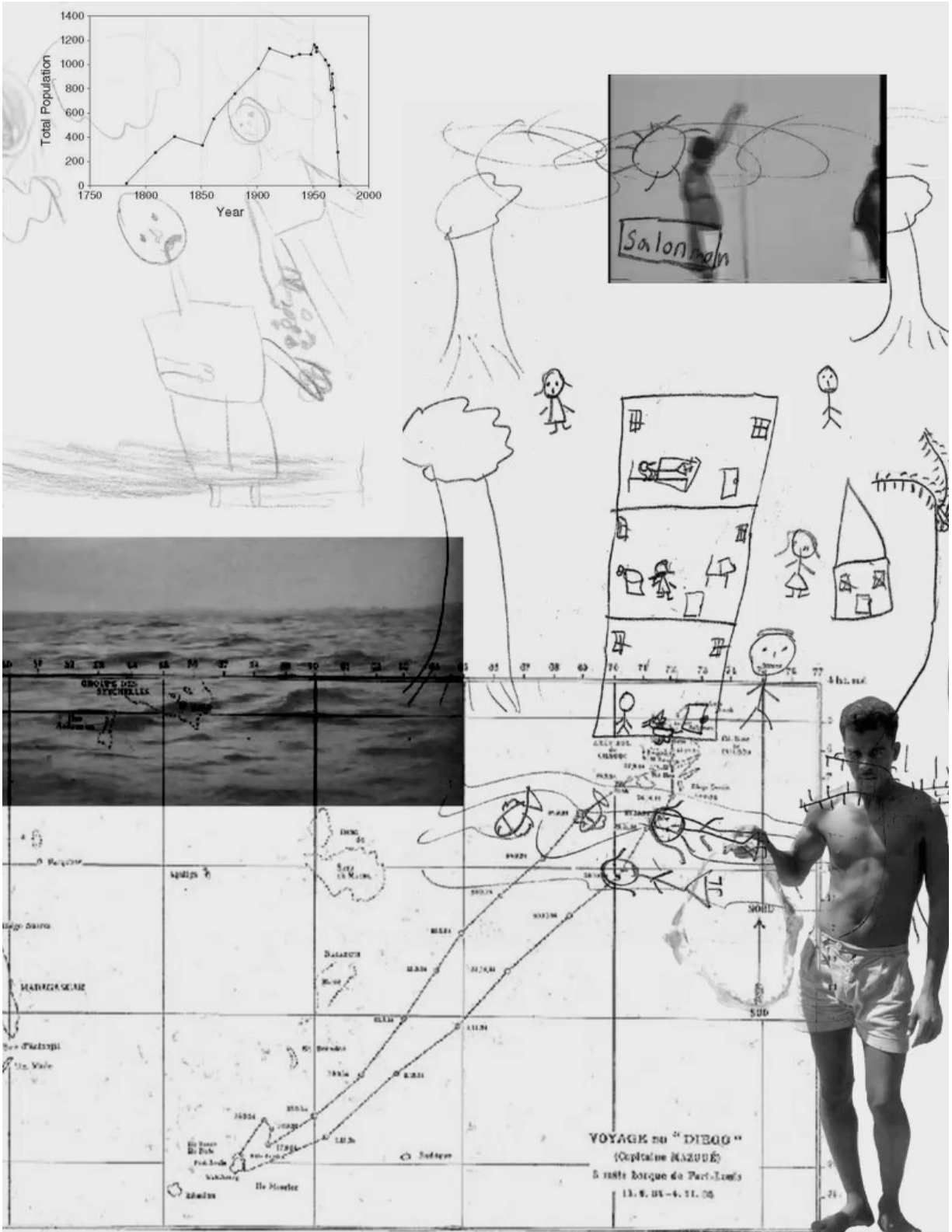


Figure 53. Site 3: Barton Point. Reclaiming Vision. Image courtesy of author.

2. Modes of operation

To make themselves the master of memory and forgetfulness is one of the great preoccupations of the classes, groups, and individuals who have dominated and continue to dominate historical societies. The things forgotten or not mentioned by history reveal these mechanisms for the manipulation of collective memory.¹⁸⁹

Jacques LeGoff (1992, 54)

Nothing is as likely to ensure that humans will assert (or invent) their differences than being made aware [...] of the indifference of the state to their predicament. It could not, if I may be allowed the pun, be Otherwise. Nor is it hard to understand why, when faced with such indifference, subordinated groups should stress their cultural distinctiveness in agitating against disempowerment.¹⁹⁰

John L. Comaroff (1996, 174)

A pilgrimage is a return to a place. [...] While tombstones are mostly signs of absence, and mostly silent, at times of pilgrimage they are noisy with the sounds of many presences. Movement makes all the difference. We cannot understand the grave, the destination, without paying attention to the journey beyond it.¹⁹¹

Engseng Ho (2006, 7-8)

The design and its narration experiment with different modes of operation as described by Wendel in her theorization of a spatial epistemology of politics.¹⁹² Chagossians collective imagination of an idealized homeland calls for a nuanced analysis drawing from both actual spaces and conceptual imagined ones.¹⁹³ This subjectivity—of both Chagossians and me, as a product of Western academic attempting to understand Chagossians—is valued and foregrounded because it reveals the distinct political and historical circumstances that underly such perceptions.

¹⁸⁹ Jacques LeGoff, *History and Memory* (New York: Columbia Press, 1992), 54. These three quotes are borrowed from Steffen Fagernes Johannessen, “Sacralising the Contested: The Chagossian Diaspora and Their First Pilgrimage to the Homeland” (Dissertation to obtain the doctoral degree of Philosophy (Dr. Phil), Halle, Germany, Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg, 2015).

¹⁹⁰ Chagossians have been emphasizing that Chagossian Creole is different from the Mauritian one and Chagossian *sega* dancing follows a different tempo than that performed by other Indian Ocean populations. John L. Comaroff, Edwin N. Wilmsen, and Patrick McAllister, “Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Politics of Difference in an Age of Revolution,” in *The Politics of Difference: Ethnic Premises in a World of Power* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 174.

¹⁹¹ Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 7–8.

¹⁹² For detailed theorization and precise definitions, see Delia Duong Ba Wendel, “Introduction: Toward a Spatial Epistemology of Politics,” in *Spatializing Politics: Essays on Power and Place*, ed. Delia Duong Ba Wendel and Fallon Samuels Aidoo (Cambridge, MA: GSD/Harvard U. Press, 2015), 2–13.

¹⁹³ Wendel, 4.

Deductive. Despite the inability to visit the site in person given military restrictions, a lot is learnt through a forensic reading of the anthropological studies done primarily by Laura Jeffery and David Vine and an archaeological mining of the atoll landscape (mainly virtually with Google satellite images). While few buildings remain on Diego Garcia, there are traces of other built forms, including path, forest clearings and plantation grids, that are richly storied and allow us to discern the military and political processes that shaped them.

Transpositional. I attended the Chagossian Voices Webinar on December 5th, 2020 and interviewed Stefan, a volunteer at UK Chagos Support Association on October 11th, 2020 in attempts to see myself in the place of Chagossians. However, the connection is not intimate enough to forge a more effective transpositional thinking.

Scalar. The tension between a global view of environmental politics and a local perspective of land-people relationship plays out strongly throughout the course of my research. The Western conception of a collaborative guardianship of the global commons represses Chagossian epistemologies. I understand the boundaries of knowledge demarcated not at a spatial or temporal scale but an epistemic level. Combing research on global environment with attention to local specifics does not suffice as a scalar operation as long as the local intellectual agents—in my case, Chagossians—and the social processes and activities that produce their knowledge remain dismissed.

Experiential. I attempt to understand Chagossians' experiences of eviction, displacement, exile and diaspora through films, interviews, novel, and their own drawings and paintings in addition to secondary academic literature. Their *sagren* (extreme sadness or homesickness) becomes extremely touching as well as their persistence and resilience as a community.¹⁹⁴

Imaginative. In this thesis, “imagination” orients toward both the past and the future. The final design is presented as a process of self-decolonization. Its narration works both projectively by conjuring alternative or future conditions and retroactively or nostalgically by remembering the history of Chagossian inhabitation on Chagos as well as their social practices and cultural traditions. Both the past and the future deserve and necessitate imagination in this case because Chagossian history is rendered as non-existent by UK-US authorities while their claims for abode and struggle for return also rejected. If the construction of forgetfulness is the weapon of the dominant, the deployment of collective nostalgia can be a tool of the dispossessed Chagossians to reassert their rightful claims to their land and history.

¹⁹⁴ For the description of *sagren*, see Vine's section on *dying of sagren*, Chapter Ten of Vine, *Island of Shame: The Secret History of the U.S. Military Base on Diego Garcia*, 157–63.

3. Relational representation

Drawings and paintings, as the reproduction of spatial memories, are consciously deployed for the imagination of a collective homeland and for garnishing support and unity for Chagossian social movements. While himself remaining on the periphery of the Chagossian socio-political organizations, the artwork of Clement Siatous has often taken center stage in the Chagossian political and legal struggle for compensation and the right to return to Chagos.¹⁹⁵ Siatous was born in 1947 to Chagossian parents living on Ile du Coin in the Peros Banhos atoll. Like other Chagossian families, the Siatous family struggled with life in Mauritius. After arriving in Mauritius, Clement began systematically to record his memories of the Chagos Archipelago, motivated by the resentment he held against authorities responsible for his marginalized condition in exile: ‘I started portraying my memories from Chagos because the British government said that there never existed any population in Chagos.’¹⁹⁶ Having never been taught to paint—“I didn’t learn it in school; I simply can paint”—he interpreted his artistic skills as a gift from God, a sign of his mission ‘to tell the story of Chagos.’¹⁹⁷

Even more remarkable are the Chagossian children who piece together the core elements of the socio-economic position of their kin, drawing from the personal memories and narratives of their grandparents, great-grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, parents, brothers, and sisters.¹⁹⁸ From a representation’s perspective, the Chagossian children’s drawings encourage us to reflect the insufficiency of traditional architectural representations based on a Cartesian projection to describe the full richness of processes, interactions, multiple temporalities, beyond an object-oriented gaze. The decolonization of Western inventions of perspective, plan and section is also part of the agenda of this thesis. Across the children’s drawings, houses—that take many forms in different imaginations—is often centered in a composition with family members living together: often three members but, in some instances, there is also mention of deceased members and others of the larger Chagossian community.¹⁹⁹ Life is in general portrayed as idyllic, surrounded by ocean and trees and birds.

I have drawn my grandmother, my grandfather and mother. The house has a bathroom, and flowers, the sun is there and some clouds, there is a coconut pie and a vegetable garden ... Chagos is the place of my grandmother. She is dead now. I want to go to Chagos to see the house of my grandmother. Lianne also imagines Chagos to be a perfect place where houses are comfortable and people are happy. The vegetable garden represents the secure idea that there is no hunger in Chagos.²⁰⁰

Using Lianne’s drawing as an example, what is particularly revealing and refreshing is how the Chagossian children collage together different scales, disrupt the inside and outside, curate subjects in close relation to each other and use colorful plants to signal a sense of happiness.

¹⁹⁵ Laura Jeffery and Steffen Johannessen, “Reflections on the Life and Art of the Chagossian Painter Clément Siatous,” *Wasafiri* 26, no. 2 (2011): 72–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02690055.2011.557553>.

¹⁹⁶ Jeffery and Johannessen, 73–74. Based on the interview by Johannessen.

¹⁹⁷ Jeffery and Johannessen, 73–74. Based on the interview by Johannessen.

¹⁹⁸ Evers, “Longing and Belonging in Real Time: How Chagossian Children in Mauritius Imagine the Chagos Islands.”

¹⁹⁹ For all drawings, see Evers.

²⁰⁰ Evers, 259.

House is only part of the larger environment of inhabitation. People seem to feel free and at ease outside and garden the common ground.

The introduction to each site starts with two collages that conflate and collage visuals of different scales and medium (vector drawings, archival materials, perspectives) as an attempt to “unlearn the violence of drawing architecture,” and to foreground the narrative nature of the design, not as a finished product but as a process of learning and discovering. Horizontality, non-hierarchy and instability are prized. They acknowledge relations as ever existent and shifting, meshing together the imagined and the actual, the nostalgic and the conjectural, the designed and the forgotten, the analytical and the experiential. I see the design as an access into Chagossians’ labyrinthine library of history, ideas, artefacts and images that is constantly being recomposed, rearranged, and redesigned in efforts to counter the mentality of scientific inquires keen on discovering the truth. These collages, as intellectual assemblages, intend to facilitate the process of “re-territorialization” of Chagossian knowledge.²⁰¹ It is unfortunate that my engagement with the Chagossians has not reached a deep enough level to create multiple and dissolved authorships—this would be the task of the future.²⁰²

Long testimonies are quoted without unpacking those words. The purpose is to keep as much as possible Chagossian memories and voices intact while giving the center stage to their knowledge in this thesis. This use of long quotations borrows from Sónia Vaz Borges in hopes of bringing readers closer to Chagossians.²⁰³ I understand that some narrations are constructed and biased themselves. I embrace and celebrate them equally as Chagossian motivations that enrich the thesis.

²⁰¹ Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 12.

²⁰² Rebecca Kosick, “Assembling La Nueva Novela: Juan Luis Martínez and a Material Poetics of Relation,” *Latin American Research Review* 52, no. 5 (2017): 860, <https://doi.org/10.25222/larr.217>; Deleuze Gilles and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 3–4.

²⁰³ Sónia Vaz Borges, *Militant Education, Liberation Struggle, Consciousness: The PAIGC Education in Guinea Bissau 1963-1978*, Kindle Edition, *Studia Educationis Historica* Book 4 (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2019).



Figure 54. Salamon Bordero pilsen coco fam la batin 1945, 2015. Photograph: Simon Preston Gallery. Painting by Clement Siatous.²⁰⁴



Figure 55. Drawing by Lianne (9 years old), Life in Chagos (2007-2008).²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Jason Farago, "Clement Siatous: Sagren Review - an Evocation of a Past Erased," The Guardian, October 10, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/oct/10/clement-siatous-sagren-review-chagos-islands>.

²⁰⁵ Evers, "Longing and Belonging in Real Time: How Chagossian Children in Mauritius Imagine the Chagos Islands."

Garden of Diaspora
East Point

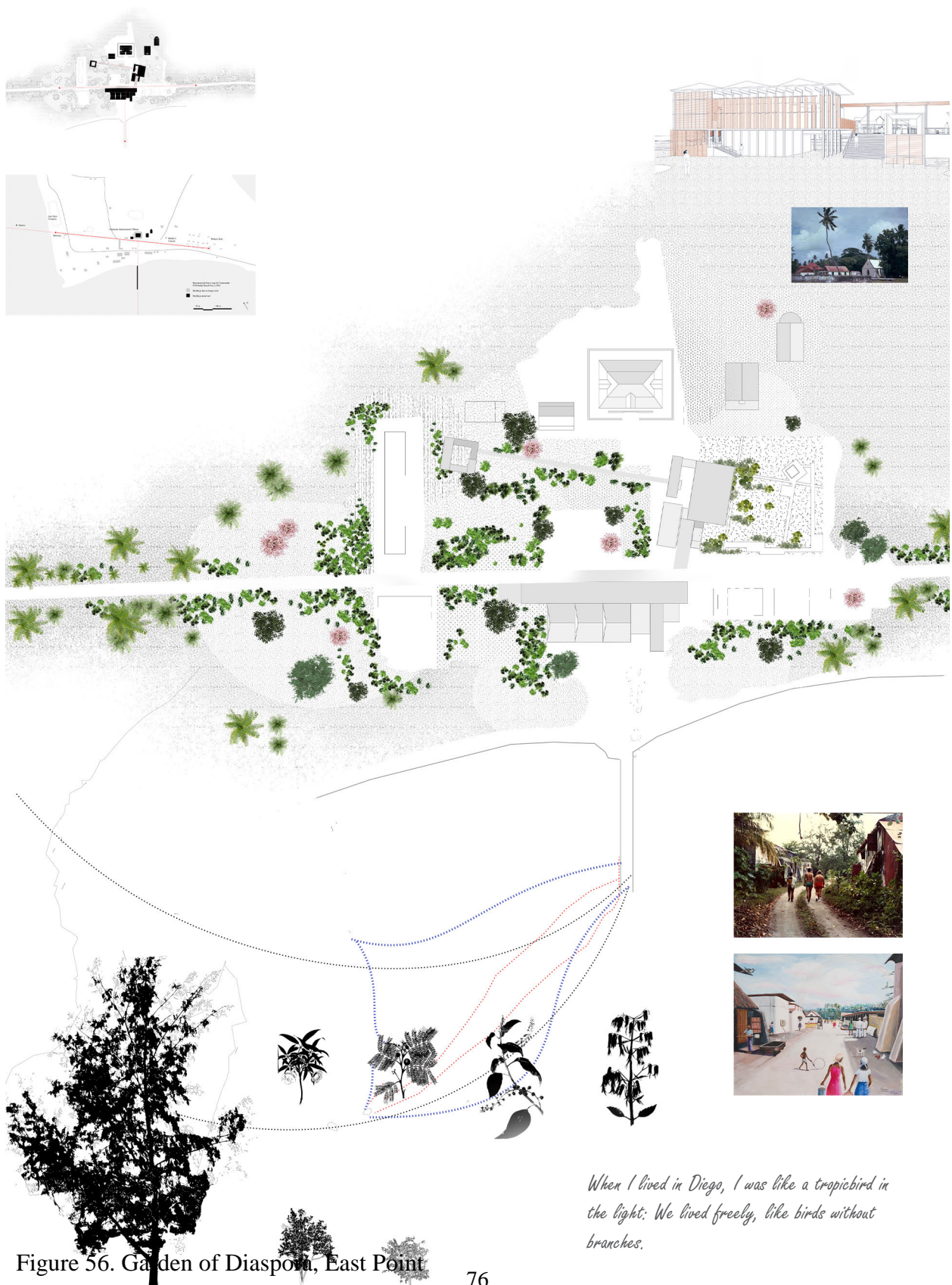


Figure 56. Garden of Diaspora, East Point

When I lived in Diego, I was like a tropicbird in the light. We lived freely, like birds without branches.

*They had to go.
There. Now. Right away.
It was an order. No explanation.
No discussion. One hour.
They had one hour. Not a minute more.*

Patel, Sheraz.



Figure 57. Garden of Diaspora, East Point

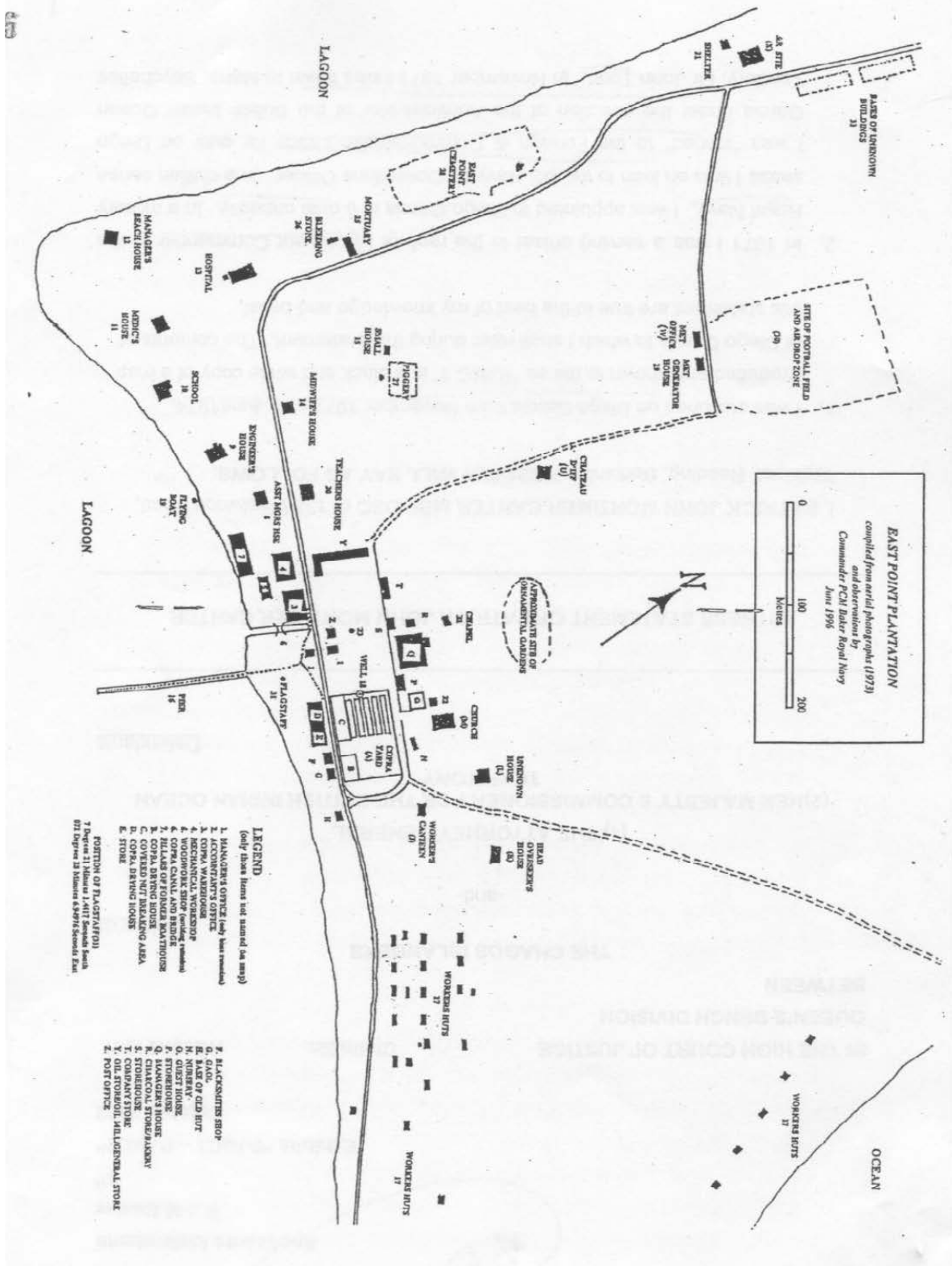


Figure 58. Map of East Point (1966)

Garden of Diaspora, East Point

Stories of East Point

East Point Plantation map, compiled from aerial photographs (1973) and observations by Commander PCM Baker Royal Navy in June 1996 indicates a fully established society with all kinds of socio-cultural amenities: a hospital, a medic's house, a nursery, a school, a piggery, ornamental gardens, a football field, an air drop zone, a chapel, a church, a chateau d'If, a mortuary, a cemetery, a bleeding stone, a blacksmiths shop, a charcoal store, a bakery, a company store, a post office, a general store, a copra warehouse, a copra canal and a bridge, a copra drying house, a covered nut breaking area, an oil store, an oil mill, a manager's office, an accountant's office, workers' huts, a worker's canteen, and individual houses for the midwife, engineer, assistant managers, teachers, medic, head overseer and guests.

Chagossians' accounts of the colonial plantation life are largely romanticized in comparison to the experience of exile in Mauritius, Seychelles and the UK. Jeffery describes their narratives as mythico-historical that order and try to make sense of the past and the present within a moral scheme by starkly comparing the idealized abundance, sharing and simplicity of life enjoyed on Chagos with the unemployment, poverty and social exclusion faced by Chagossians in Mauritius.²⁰⁶

In her song 'Dan Diego' (On Diego), composed in Mauritius, Chagos Tambour Group member Léonide Jaffar, who was born on Salomon in 1945 and left Chagos aged 22 in 1967, describes Diego Garcia's natural heritage as follows:

Over on Diego there are pretty colours,
I want to return there with all my heart ...
When you see the sea, the beach and the shells,
You'll want to return there with all your heart.²⁰⁷

In 'Payanke dan lizur' (Tropicbird in the light), Jessy Marcelin, who was born on Diego Garcia in 1934 and left Chagos aged 36 in 1970, sings:

When I lived in Diego, I was like a tropicbird in the light:
We lived freely, like birds without branches.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Laura Jeffery, "How a Plantation Became Paradise: Changing Representations of the Homeland among Displaced Chagos Islanders," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13 (2007): 953.

²⁰⁷ "Dan Diego" by Léonide Jaffar: "Dan Diego laba, zoli zoli koloriye, mo leker demann turne / Kan u get so lamer, kan u get so laplaz, kan u get so kokiyaz, u leker demann turne." See Jeffery, 958.

²⁰⁸ "Payanke dan lizu" by Jessy Marcelin: "Letan mo ti viv dan Diego, mo kuma payanke dan lizur / La nu ti viv partu, nu pare en zwazo pena brans." The Chagossian activist Charlesia Alexis sings a very similar song in the John Pilger documentary "Stealing a nation." Jessy Marcelin lives in Seychelles and is not a member of the Mauritius-based Chagos Tambour Group, although she has been active in the Chagos Refugees Group's partner organization in Seychelles, the Seychelles Chagossian Committee. See Jeffery, 958.



Figure 59. Photo of East Point by the very “first Americans” on Diego Garcia (1968). Source: Ted A. Morris, Jr.



Figure 60. The refurbished chapel at East Point (2002). Source: Ted A. Morris, Jr.

The architecture, the touches of old-fashioned ostentation in the *château* and its relation to the church; the disposition of trees and flowering shrubs across the ample green...the association of East Point with a synthesis of small French villages, visited or seen on canvas, was strengthened by the warm welcome of the islanders, since their clothes and merry bearing,... were wholly appropriate to a *fête* in a village so devised.²⁰⁹

Chagos Governor Robert Scott (1961)

While most structures of East Point have become degraded after Chagossians left, the administrator's house and the church have been preserved by the US military, prizing a colonial vista over Chagossians' perspective. The French-Creole style colonial house, with its attic and green shutters, stands out among the tiny scrap-metal huts scattered throughout the flat, palm-shaded plantation landscape.²¹⁰ This is where work was assigned to people every morning. Most were assigned to the coconut plantations, to the drying work, or to the convectors.

At five thirty, the usual small crowd clustered around the administrator's office. He showed up right on time, in knee-length shorts and thick calf-length socks, and a helmetlike hat under his arm. More pleasantries were exchanged. The two deputies divided everybody up for the thirty-six types of work on the island. Some were sent to the administrator's house, where his wife would decide whether they'd help with cleaning or with cooking; others would do upkeep in particular parts of the island; a few others would go to plant seeds or feed animals. But most of them were assigned to the coconut plantations, to the drying work, or to the convectors.²¹¹

The jetty and boat *Nordvaer* carry different layers of memory of Chagossians. Prior to arrival of the US military in late 1960s, the sight of *Nordvaer* in the distance, carrying living supply to the Chagos, foretold celebrations.

All the same, the ship's arrival always aroused excitement: it foretold celebrations. This morning, the administrator's deputy had chosen the men who would handle the unloading, and they milled around in smaller groups, ready to shoulder the crates and bundles that would comprise the bulk of their provisions for the next three months. The sun pounded down, oiling their bare torsos with gleaming sweat that outlined the firm muscles beneath their dark skin. For two hours they moved like ants in a three-hundred-yard file between the boat's hold and the warehouse, all while joking around and bursting out in laughter.²¹²

Usually the plantation administrator (deputy, as called by Shenaz Patel) would let the men when boat *Nordvaer* would come.

²⁰⁹ Robert Scott, *Limuria, The Lesser Dependencies of Mauritius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 242, 266–67.

²¹⁰ Shenaz Patel, *Silence of the Chagos: A Novel*, trans. Jeffrey Zuckerman, Kindle Edition (Brooklyn, New York: Restless Books, 2019).

²¹¹ Patel.

²¹² Patel.

They would perch atop the trees, at the island's edge, watching for the moment when a dot would appear on the horizon, off the end of the channel, and they would trumpet it as soon as they could see it coming. "Ship ahoy! Ship ahoy!"²¹³

This was not the case when boat *Nordvaer* came to evict Chagossians in 1968.

They had to go. There. Now. Right away. It was an order. No explanation. No discussion. No ifs, ands, or buts. They had to go. The *Nordvaer* hadn't moved from the dock, its white mass huddled at the end of the jetty like the head of a hammer. Maybe that was why it had come so quietly, so treacherously. It wouldn't be waiting. They were saying this would be its final trip. And they all had to get on. Every last one of them... One hour. They had one hour. Not a minute more.²¹⁴

Boat *Nordvaer* carried more than living supplies to the Chagossians but also a sense of hope and a connection to the world. It has now become the very symbol of transiency and displacement. Désiré asks why his aunts call him a *Nordvaer*:

"It's *Nordvaer*."

"*Nordvaer*?"

"It's a boat."

How absurd of his aunts to call him a boat, another one of their notions. Like the little girl next door who had clipped her eyebrows to look like her mother, they'd decided her nickname was *Sosouris* because it meant *Bat* and that was what everyone called her from then on. So *Nordvaer* was some sort of joke about a boat he didn't remember.

"The *Nordvaer* is a boat," she repeated in a disjointed voice that barely seemed to be speaking to him.

"What about it?"

"The boat where you were born."

It took him a minute to understand what she had just said, in a subdued voice that he didn't recognize at all.

"Born? I was born on a boat? Where was it? Here? On the beach? How? Didn't we have a house?"

He watched his mother's back as she sighed.

"At sea. You were born on a boat at sea. The open sea. And no, we didn't have a house anymore. Or a land. Or anything."²¹⁵

²¹³ Patel.

²¹⁴ Patel.

²¹⁵ Patel.



Figure 61. Nordvaer preparing to depart Diego Garcia (1968). Photo by Kirby Crawford. Source: Ted A. Morris, Jr.



Figure 62. Clement Siatous. "Diego Garcia Katalina sur zil". 2015. Acrylic on linen.²¹⁶

²¹⁶ Joseph Underwood, "Memory, between Nostalgia and Archive," Africa Is a Country, October 5, 2015, <https://africasacountry.com/2015/10/memory-between-nostalgia-and-archive-a-review-of-clement-siatous-sagren-exhibition>.

The preceding retelling of stories around the jetty and Nordvaer from Shenaz Patel's fictional novel in 2004 was critiqued by Antje Ziethen that Patel mimics their discourse and ends up caricaturing Chagossians and Mauritians. The text turns the Chagossians themselves into docile Blacks [who] serve white Europeans and lead a simple but happy life on a tropical island.²¹⁷

It is important to note that the re-imagining of homeland developed in a context of political and legal struggle of Chagossians for compensation and the right to return to Chagos. Jeffery has demonstrated how this encouraged the romanticized and standardized portrayals of Chagos homeland to convey shared experience of displacement, dislocation from native land, loss of cultural heritage, and suffering in exile in order to elicit political, legal, financial, institutional, and moral support from diverse outsiders.²¹⁸ The high degree of concurrence among Chagossians' accounts of displacement actually produces a generalized description of how "we" lived in Chagos. While the sense of coalition is encouraging, the lack of individual variations posed difficulties in advancing their legal claims.²¹⁹

In his judgment, Mr Justice Ouseley ruled against the Chagossians (*Chagos Islanders v Her Majesty's BIOT Commissioner* [2003]), and three appeal court judges concurred with his decision (*Chagos Islanders v Her Majesty's BIOT Commissioner* [2004]). Ouseley was particularly critical of the Chagossians' witness evidence, noting that "evidence was... given, as if at first hand, about events which the witness could not have seen or heard," on the basis of which he dismissed several Chagossian witnesses as unreliable and inconsistent because their eyewitness evidence have based not on individual experience but reproduced from "collective memory." (*Chagos Islanders* 2003: para. 161.)

It is dangerous to romanticize plantation work life. St Cricq, a French naval officer, describes Diego Garcia as "a place of pain" when visiting it in 1811.²²⁰ Maurits Ver Huell, the commander of a Dutch warship, describes the daily routine of enslaved Chagossian workers who worked on the collection of coconuts and their conversion to oil:

Early in the morning, after the slaves have been woken by the crack of a whip they went out into the woods to pick the ripe coconuts and take off the outer husk by skillful use of the pointed end of a large shell. Towards midday, each brought his collection to the headquarters. Here the nuts were broken up and left for 4–5 days in the sunshine until the flesh became separated from the hard shell, and was thenceforth called copra, and left another 4–5 days. It was then ready for pressing and a special kind of mill is used, consisting of a hollow cylinder five or six feet high and about two feet in diameter, narrowing into a skittle shape at the bottom and provided with a hole through which the oil dripped. The cylinder was filled with copra, a round pole like a rolling pin put into it, squashing the

²¹⁷ Antje Ziethen, "Shifting Geo/Graphies: Between Production and Reception of Imagined Spaces," in *Perspectives on Space and Place*, ed. G. Everson (Oxford: Interdisciplinary Press, 2013), 11–16.

²¹⁸ Jeffery, "How a Plantation Became Paradise: Changing Representations of the Homeland among Displaced Chagos Islanders," 961–62.

²¹⁹ Jeffery, 963.

²²⁰ Marina Carter, "Towards a Workers' History of the Chagos Archipelago," *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 13, no. 2 (2017): 218, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19480881.2017.1326707>. See also R. Lepelley, *Croisieres Dans La Mer Des Indes 1810–1811* (Spezet: Keltia Graphic, 1992).

contents against the sides of the cylinder, by means of a lever 10–12 feet long attached to the top end of the ‘rolling pin’ which was in turn chained to a horizontal beam turning in a groove at the bottom of the cylinder. At the end of this ‘boom’, on which a weight is placed to increase the pressure and to rub the ‘rolling pin’ with force against the side of the skittle-shaped inside of the cylinder, ran a negro, or sometimes a donkey, at a steady pace.²²¹

Père Roger Dussercle, a French Catholic missionary who chronicled the Chagos islands in the 1930s, describes Chagossian homes:

rooms separated by partitions made of matted palm leaves and furnished in much the same way as those of the poorest Creoles – at least those living in rural areas – back home in Mauritius: a straw pallet [for a bed], clothing in tumbled heaps or hung up by string...knick-knacks fight for space with purely ornamental containers and, occasionally, a common-or-garden wind-up gramophone. Drums, covered in tightly tensioned goatskin and so essential to setting a séga going, are usually tucked away under the rafters.²²²

Jeffery also documents some marginalized and isolated Chagossian voices that are critical of the romanticization of plantation homeland.

Chagossians conceal information ... there are Chagossians who say Chagos is paradise, but that’s not true ... for a true history you have to tell the bad as well as the good: we were dominated by the colonial power; when you cut coconuts you have to be careful [because it’s dangerous]; we didn’t have the right to do lots of things, and if you didn’t work, you didn’t eat ... There was a lot of voodoo, which is a serious matter and is kept secret, and there were struggles for leadership amongst islanders, in which those who were weak had to stay quiet because they had no power, whereas those who were dominant could take others’ women.²²³

The re-creation of an idealized vision of a lost homeland for a diasporic community creates inevitable disjuncture with the lived history of Chagossians as plantation workers. While instrumentalizing it for the purpose of mobilizing support is necessary, its over-simplification could do a disservice to their cause.²²⁴

²²¹ Carter, “Towards a Workers’ History of the Chagos Archipelago,” 218. See also Lepelley, R. (1992), *Croisieres dans la Mer des Indes 1810–1811*, Spezet: Keltia Graphic, p.142-144. Fraassen, V. C., & Klapwijk, P. J. (2008). *Herinneringaaneen reis naar Oost-Indië*, Linschoten-Vereeniging.

²²² Carter, 224. See also Dussercle, R. (1934). *Archipel de Chagos: En mission Novembre 1933 – Janvier 1934*. Port-Louis: General Printing & Stationery. 56.

²²³ Jeffery, “How a Plantation Became Paradise: Changing Representations of the Homeland among Displaced Chagos Islanders,” 959.

²²⁴ Carter, “Towards a Workers’ History of the Chagos Archipelago,” 229.



Figure 63. The path in front of the administrator's house at East Point, Diego Garcia before Chagossians' eviction in the early 1970s. Painting by Clement Siatous.



Figure 64. The same path in front of the administrator's house overtaken by vegetation (1982). Source: Ted A. Morris, Jr.



Figure 65. The dominant vista of the plantation administrator's house signals a command of the sea and a connection to the world. Photo by Kirby Crawford (1968). Source: Ted A. Morris, Jr.

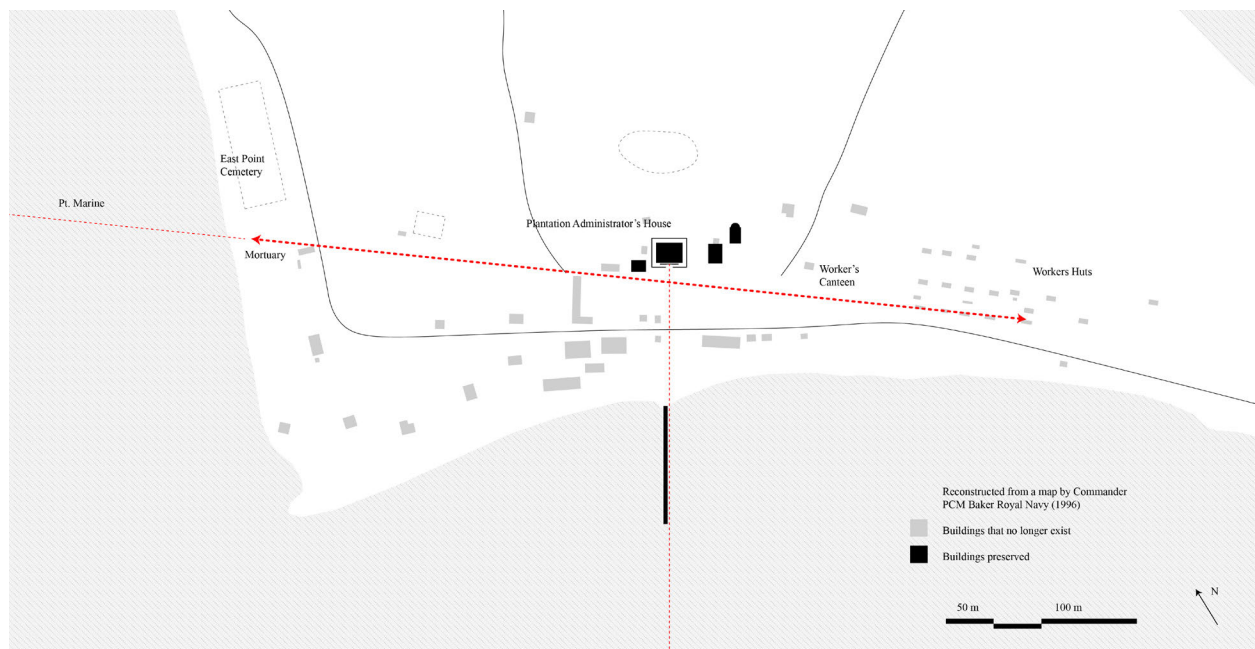


Figure 66. Shift in axis in orientation toward Chagossian workers' history. Image courtesy of author.

Design: garden of diaspora

The proposed garden of diaspora highlights and responds to nuances in Chagossians' memories—both personal and collective, narrated, reproduced and constructed—of the colonial plantation. Instead of attempting to disentangle layers of construction of a coordinated imagination in vision of a truthful representation of history, design actions embrace its all of its contradictions and imperfections. It brings attention to the underrepresented workers' history by disrupting the colonial order: shifting the lagoon-ward orientation to the North-South path, connecting to the cemetery and workers' huts.

1. Invasive Species

While most buildings from the plantation era are no longer existent, some “alien” species, most likely introduced by slavery migration and copra trading, remain as physical evidence of Chagossians' history as enslaved labors. Main introduced plant species are documented by Bárrios & Wilkinson (2018): *casuarina equisetifolia* L., native to Australia and to Asia; *tabebuia heterophylla* (DC.) Britton, native to the Caribbean; *bryophyllum pinnatum* (Lam.) Oken, native to Madagascar and Cook Islands; *rivina humilis* L., native to tropical and subtropical America; and *leucaena leucocephala* (Lam.) de Wit, native to Central America and Mexico.²²⁵ In Bárrios & Wilkinson's report, the ambiguities around the notion of “invasive species” already reveal a need to understand them in relation to Chagossian inhabitation. Indeed, Jeffery has demonstrated that restoration ecology is less about the removal of alien species per se than it is about the removal of harmful ones that threaten biodiversity over time.²²⁶ The latter is tricky to predict given uncertainties around anthropogenic and environmental factors. Therefore, gardening invasive species is not a wild revolution but offers also a critical reflection on the practice of environmental science.

²²⁵ Barrios and Wilkinson, “Mapping the Vegetation of Diego Garcia Island, British Indian Ocean Territory. November 2018.”

²²⁶ Laura Rebecca Jeffery, “Ecological Restoration in a Cultural Landscape: Conservationist and Chagossian Approaches to Controlling the ‘Coconut Chaos’ on the Chagos Archipelago,” *Hum Ecol*, no. 42 (August 23, 2014): 999–1006, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10745-014-9696-y>.

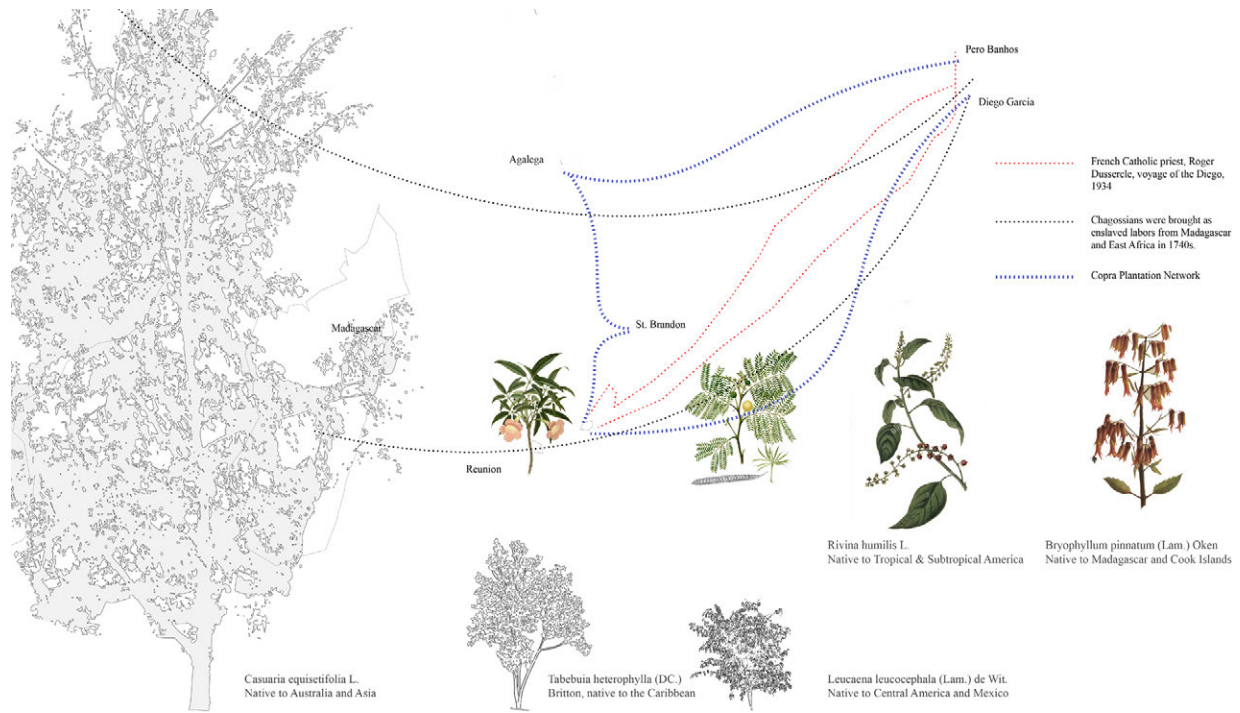


Figure 67. Main introduced species to Chagos. Image courtesy of author.



Figure 68. Imagining, enacting and reclaiming Chagossians' cultural landscape. Image courtesy of author.

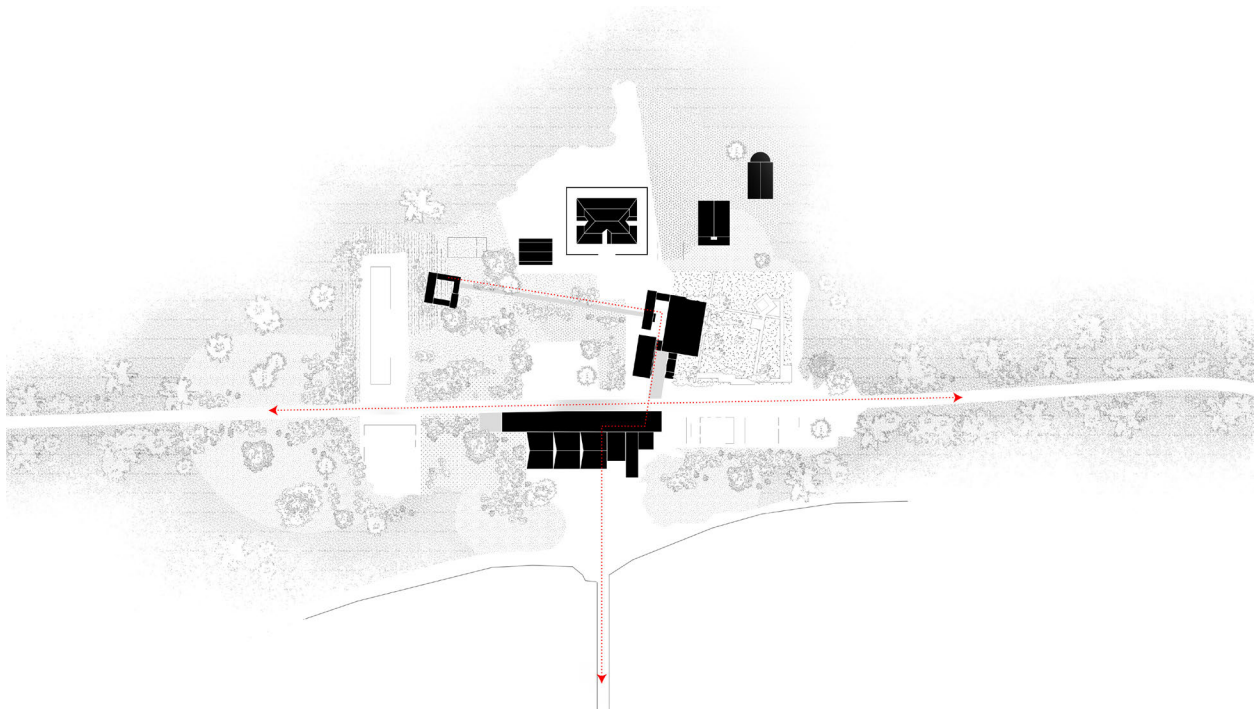


Figure 69. Disrupting the colonial order. Image courtesy of author.

2. Sega Tambour

Chagossian music is of particular cultural significance. Chagossian Tambour Sega music was inscribed in 2019 (14.COM) on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding.²²⁷ The word *sega* likely derives from Mozambican *tschiéga* and the Madagascan *chéga*.²²⁸ *Sega* is a syncretic Indian Ocean musical genre that emerged on the colonial plantations of the 17th and 18th centuries through encounters between enslaved laborers with diverse ancestral origins, who played music, danced, and sang lamentation and protest songs to resist their everyday hardship and domination.²²⁹ The performing of *sega* is rooted in a

²²⁷ Ministry of Arts and Culture, National Heritage Fund and Mauritius Film Development Corporation, “Sega Tambour Chagos,” UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, March 2018, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/USL/sega-tambour-chagos-01490>.

²²⁸ Jeffery and Rotter, “Safeguarding Sega: Transmission, Inscription, and Appropriation of Chagossian Intangible Cultural Heritage,” 1025.

²²⁹ Jeffery and Rotter, 1025.

resistance spirit. As Jeffery describes, Creole plantation workers used sega to “sing back to the white, oppressive ideals of ‘high’ culture, propriety and chastness.”²³⁰

From a less academic source, Patrick Allen describes his experience as a public-school music teacher in Crawley, home to 2,000 Chagossians. Allen was amazed by the intelligence, sophistication, creativity, organizational powers, self-discipline and wisdom expressed by Chagossian students’ musical achievement while noting that this “living and breathing” culture lacks the proper social context for its nourishment and is rather undermined by the prevalent discrimination that Chagossians are subject to in the UK.²³¹ He describes how “astonishingly good” these students from the year-nine class (ages 13-14) are: in one year-9 class (ages 13-14):

Over the following weeks, I let the Chagossians in the class follow their own pathway. I brought them whatever they needed. Exciting developments included the turning of a drum on its side to become a ravanne and the revelation that one student was a virtuoso ravanne player. "I learned from my uncle," he said. One day a member of the class came running to say that "the Mauritians are singing!" It had taken four weeks for them to feel secure enough about their environment to start performing their own songs in their own language. As time has gone on, they have revealed a vast repertoire of songs - and compose their own.²³²

3. Not to museumize²³³

East Point does not restage the past. This is to memorialize a painful history but to inscribe a future that needs Chagossian participation. The garden of diaspora does not only choreograph a spatial process that curates a story of Chagossian plantation history. With the shift in orientation, the new buildings, the plants and the pond, it actively modifies the landscape in aspiration for a trigger for memory rather than a curatorial reproduction. The newly designed actions disrupt a common museumizing tendency of Chagossian workers frozen in their 18th and 19th century plantation by operating within the interstitial space between history and future, enable and encouraging Chagossians to constantly remake and design the future with a strong awareness of their history and heritage. As Sinha and Lynch note, since “to preserve all the past would be life-denying”, a “temporal collage” with the “juxtaposition of old and new that speaks of the passage of time and occasionally the contrast” is a better design strategy.²³⁴

²³⁰ Jeffery and Rotter, 1025. See also R. Boswell, “Sega as Voice-Work in the Indian Ocean Region,” *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 13, no. 1 (2017): 99, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19480881.2016.1270010>.

²³¹ Koko Jones et al., “Unmasking Homophobia, Colonialism, and Racism,” in *Counterpoints. Constructing Critical Consciousness: Narratives That Unmask Hegemony and Ideas for Creating Greater Equity in Education*, vol. 414 (Peter Lang AG, 2014), 132–35.

²³² Jones et al., 133.

²³³ This reflection is drawn largely from the conversation with my thesis committee at the penultimate review on December 18, 2020. See also the case of Lifta. Sigal Barnir and Liat Savin Ben Shoshan, “Save Lifta? Mediating the Architectural Imag(e)ination of a Conflictual Space,” in *Mediating the Spatiality of Conflicts: International Conference Proceedings* (Mediating the Spatiality of Conflicts, Delft, the Netherlands, 2020), <https://books.bk.tudelft.nl/index.php/press/catalog/book/764>.

²³⁴ K. Lynch, *What Time Is This Place* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972), 168; Amita Sinha and Yuthika Sharma, “Urban Design as a Frame for Site Readings of Heritage Landscapes: A Case Study of Champaner-Pavagadh, Gujarat, India,” *Journal of Urban Design* 14, no. 2 (2009): 205, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13574800802670440>.

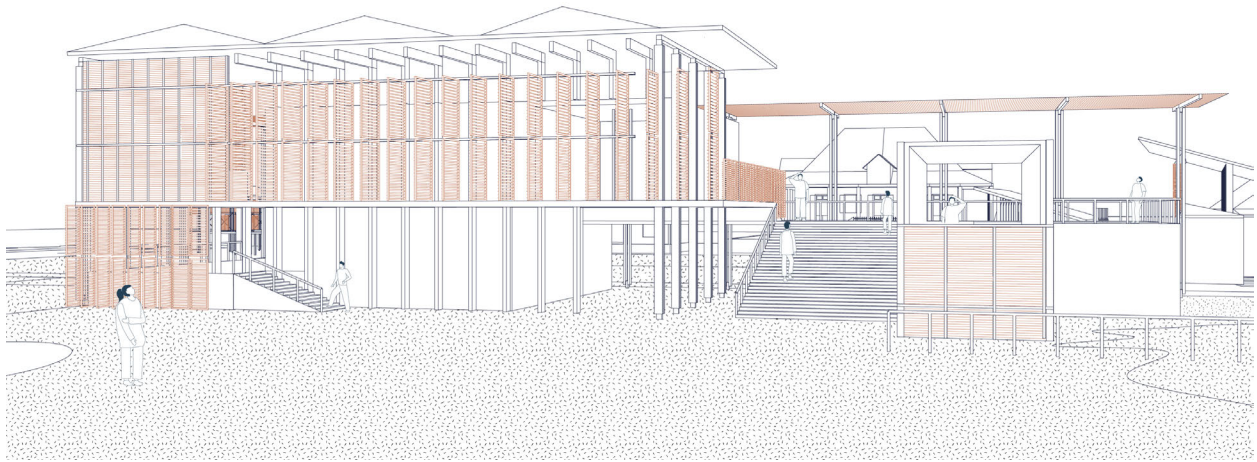


Figure 70. Narrative place marker: Sega Tambour performance hall. Image courtesy of author.



Figure 71. *Sega Tambour* Chagos was inscribed in 2019 (14.COM) on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding.²³⁵

²³⁵ Ministry of Arts and Culture, National Heritage Fund and Mauritius Film Development Corporation, “Sega Tambour Chagos.”

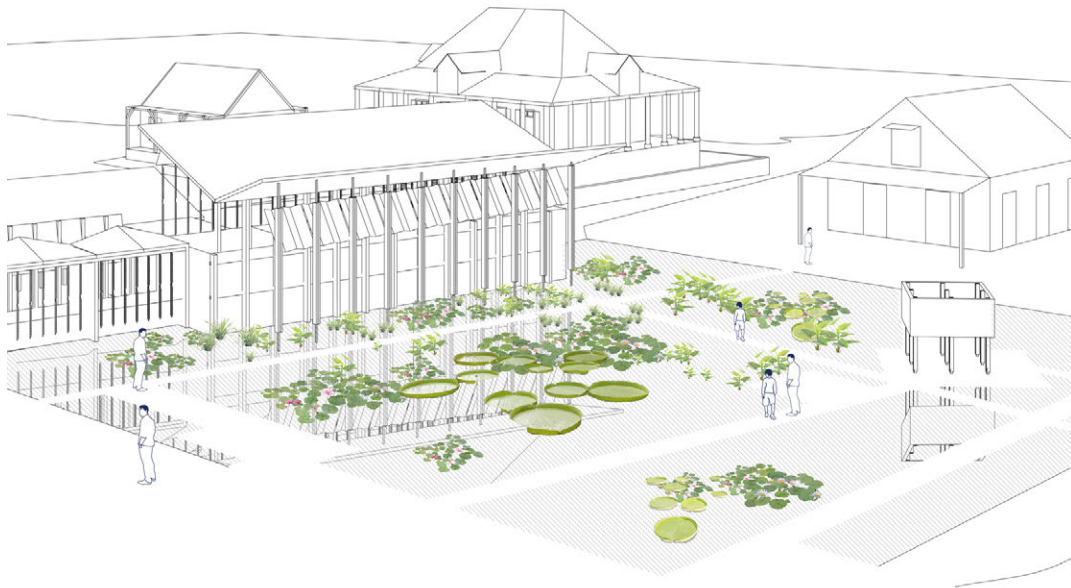


Figure 72. Lily pond, with the library in the background, remembers the copra drying yard. Image courtesy of author.



Figure 73. Copra drying yard in the 1940s.²³⁶

²³⁶ John Loader, *Footage of Diego Garcia in the 1940's*, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IN7cYTSnohA&ab_channel=parislavillette.

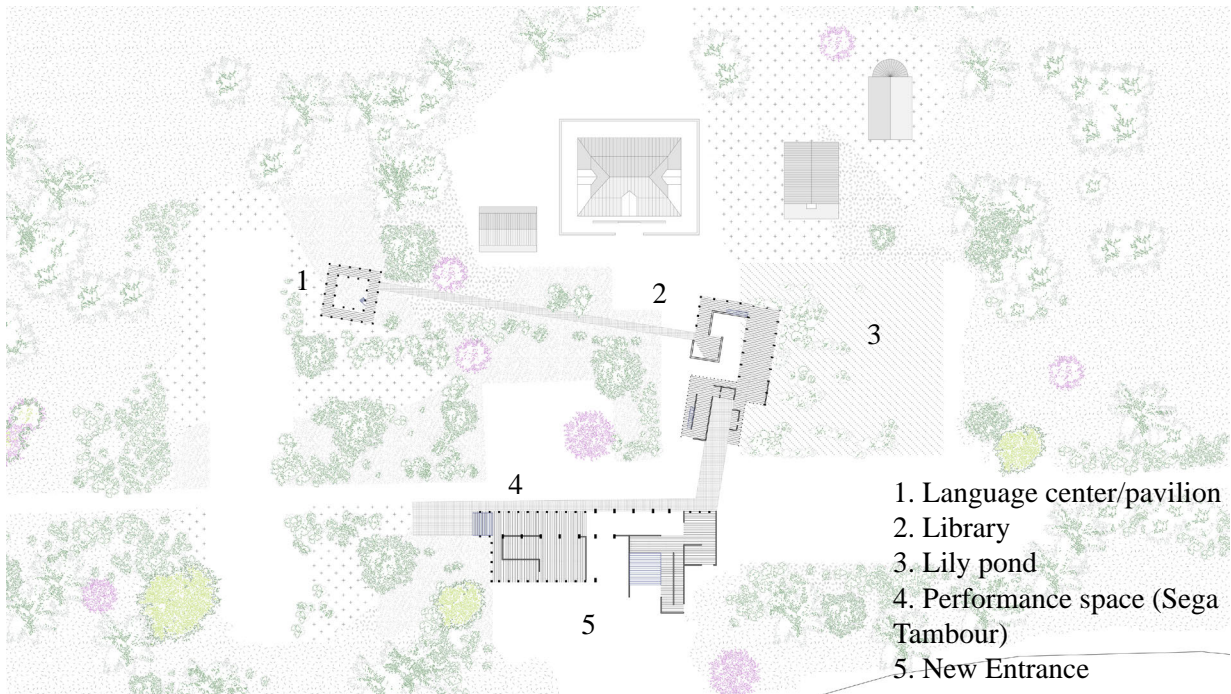


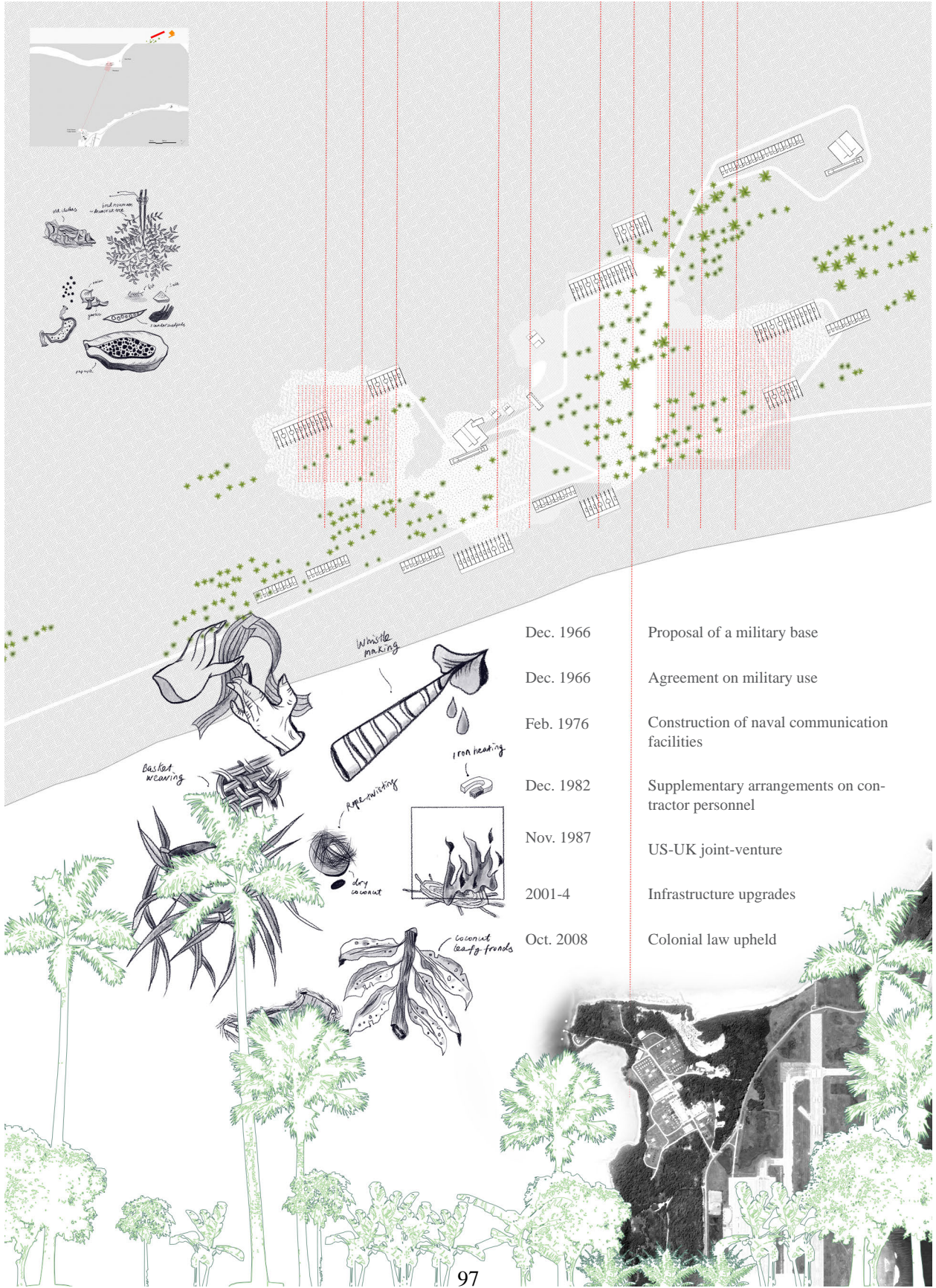
Figure 74. Main architectural plan. Image courtesy of author.



Figure 75. Narrative place marker: the garden messes up with the beloved French Creole artefacts in the background. Image courtesy of author.

Rooting Heritage
Former Plantation





- Dec. 1966 Proposal of a military base
- Dec. 1966 Agreement on military use
- Feb. 1976 Construction of naval communication facilities
- Dec. 1982 Supplementary arrangements on contractor personnel
- Nov. 1987 US-UK joint-venture
- 2001-4 Infrastructure upgrades
- Oct. 2008 Colonial law upheld



Figure 78. Medicinal decoction by boiling lemongrass (*sitronel*) with sugar and ginger. See Chagos.online. Chagossian cultural heritage across generations.

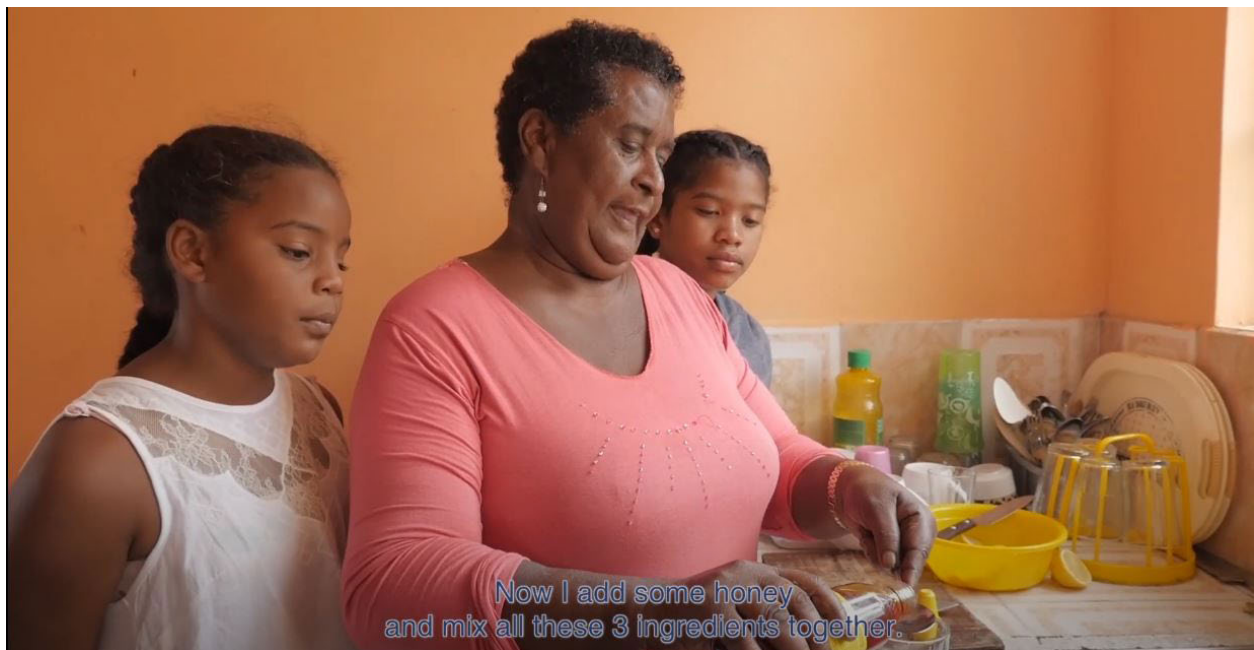


Figure 79. In this film, recorded in Mauritius, Maudea Saminaden demonstrates how to prepare a cough mixture made out of the juice of Madagascar Spur Flower (*Bom di Perou*) mixed with lemon and honey. See Chagos.online.

Rooting Heritage, Former Plantation

Stories of Plantation

Jeffery (2016) describes three functions of plants as living cultural heritage for dispersed Chagossians in Mauritius, Seychelles, and the UK.²³⁷ First, knowledge about the medicinal and culinary uses of plants helps to sustain collective knowledge in new environmental conditions and social settings.²³⁸ Second, plant exchange nourishes kinship and other social relationships within the extended community.²³⁹ Third, plant symbolism and materiality cultivate nostalgic links to idealized homeland in the context of community dispersal.²⁴⁰

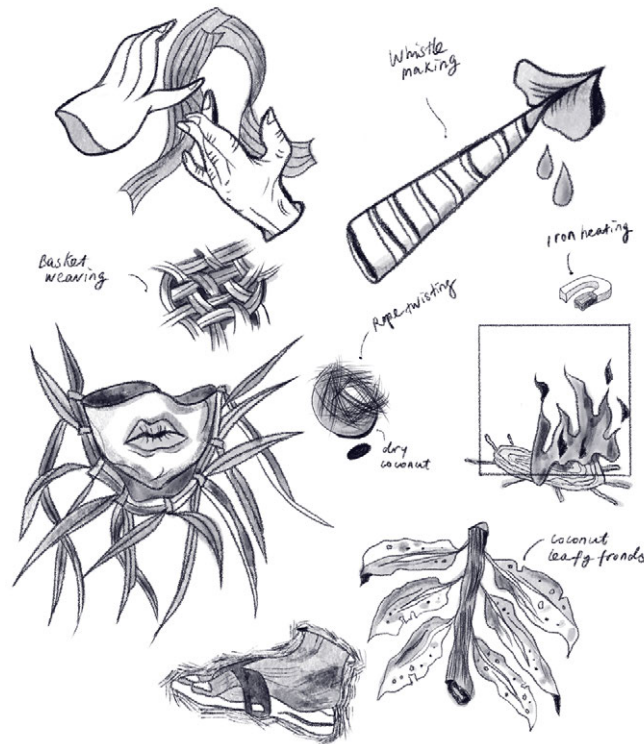


Figure 80. My notes on learning Chagossian coconut crafts. See also chagos.online.²⁴¹

²³⁷ Laura Jeffery and Rebecca Rotter, "Sustenance, Nourishment, and Cultivation: Plants as Living Cultural Heritage for Dispersed Chagossians in Mauritius, Seychelles, and the UK," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 22 (2016): 296–313.

²³⁸ Jeffery and Rotter, 299–303.

²³⁹ Jeffery and Rotter, 303–6.

²⁴⁰ Jeffery and Rotter, 306–9.

²⁴¹ With help, support and inspiration from Yue Wu.

Coconut plantations are parts of Chagossian cultural landscapes.²⁴² Conservation-driven environmental scientists, however, are keen on replacing coconut trees with endemic hardwoods to restore a pre-human landscape. What is rejected and repressed is the social significance of coconuts in the human history of the islands. Coconuts were a major part of Chagossians' diet:

Chagossians extracted the sap to make an alcoholic coconut toddy called *kalu*; they drank the water of unripe coconuts; they made rich *seraz* dishes out of octopus, fish, fowl, green sea turtle, lentils, fruit or vegetables cooked in the milk extracted from ripe coconut flesh; and they used grated coconut flakes to make coconut chutney and sweetmeats such as coconut crunch.²⁴³

Chagossians repeatedly emphasize that all parts of the coconut plant could be used, and nothing should be thrown away:

dried coconut flesh (copra) was pressed to produce coconut oil (for consumption, in cosmetics, and as fuel), and the remaining fibrous copra meal could be used as animal feed; coconut shells could be heated and used for ironing; coconut husks were burned as a cooking fuel, and the ashes could be mixed with coconut oil to produce soap; coir from the husks was made into mattresses and pillows; and coconut fronds were used for roofing, woven into brooms, bags, and baskets, or twisted into rope.²⁴⁴

Jeffery's analysis²⁴⁵ has made clear that the current debate around whether coconut is native is politicized as it challenges the argument with which the UK and US government displaced the Chagossian population in the 1970s. The proposed erasure of coconut trees aligns with the "green-washing" political narrative that denied any human inhabitation by describing Chagossians as a "floating population" and "temporary contract workers."²⁴⁶ Peter Carr, a British military officer on Diego Garcia, described coconuts and Chagossians as if they should be treated similarly with regard to their falsely perceived damage to the environment:

... the reversion of the monoculture of coconut *Cocos nucifera* stands back into what stood before the days of the plantations. On all islands where coconut was cultivated as a crop, the relict stands have formed dense, overgrown areas that have become virtually uninhabitable for any other flora. As a result, these anthropogenic suppressors of biodiversity have earned their description of 'coconut chaos.'²⁴⁷

²⁴² Jeffery, "Ecological Restoration in a Cultural Landscape: Conservationist and Chagossian Approaches to Controlling the 'Coconut Chaos' on the Chagos Archipelago."

²⁴³ Jeffery, 1004.

²⁴⁴ Jeffery, 1004.

²⁴⁵ Jeffery, "Ecological Restoration in a Cultural Landscape: Conservationist and Chagossian Approaches to Controlling the 'Coconut Chaos' on the Chagos Archipelago."

²⁴⁶ UK Foreign Office memorandum July 1965 as described in Pilger, Martin, and Crotty, *Stealing a Nation*.

²⁴⁷ Peter Carr, "Working towards Atoll Restoration," *Chagos News*, no. 35 (2010): 16.

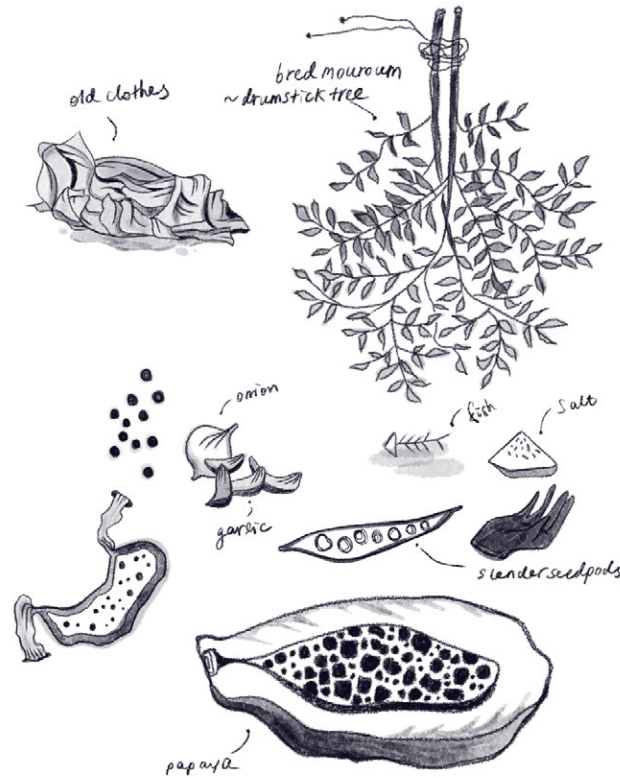


Figure 81. My notes on learning about *bred mouroum*, the tiny leaves of *Moringa oleifera* that recall extreme poverty suffered by Chagossians upon arrival in Mauritius.²⁴⁸

Bred mouroum is another interesting example. It refers to the tiny leaves of the drumstick tree (*Moringa oleifera*), which have to be laboriously plucked individually from sprigs. *Bred mouroum* grows wild and plentifully in Mauritius and Seychelles alike and is thus freely available.²⁴⁹ It becomes associated extreme poverty in Chagossian cuisine because Chagossians were heavily dependent on them upon arrival in Mauritius.²⁵⁰ Jeffery documents a recollection by a Chagossian woman in her fifties,

Bred mouroum and papaya are the only reason that we did not die, because there was nothing else to eat, and we did not have to pay for *bred mouroum* and papaya. We lived in mizer mizer, we had a tin shack but rain came through the roof and we did not have any spare clothes when we got wet . . . we had left all of our things behind [on Chagos]. Sometimes we managed to get food, some *bred mouroum*, but we had no oil or salt to cook it in, and even if you have food, you need to have something to cook it on, so sometimes we had to use old clothes and set them on fire.²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ With help, support and inspiration from Yue Wu.

²⁴⁹ Jeffery and Rotter, "Sustenance, Nourishment, and Cultivation: Plants as Living Cultural Heritage for Dispersed Chagossians in Mauritius, Seychelles, and the UK," 308.

²⁵⁰ Jeffery and Rotter, 308.

²⁵¹ Jeffery and Rotter, 308.

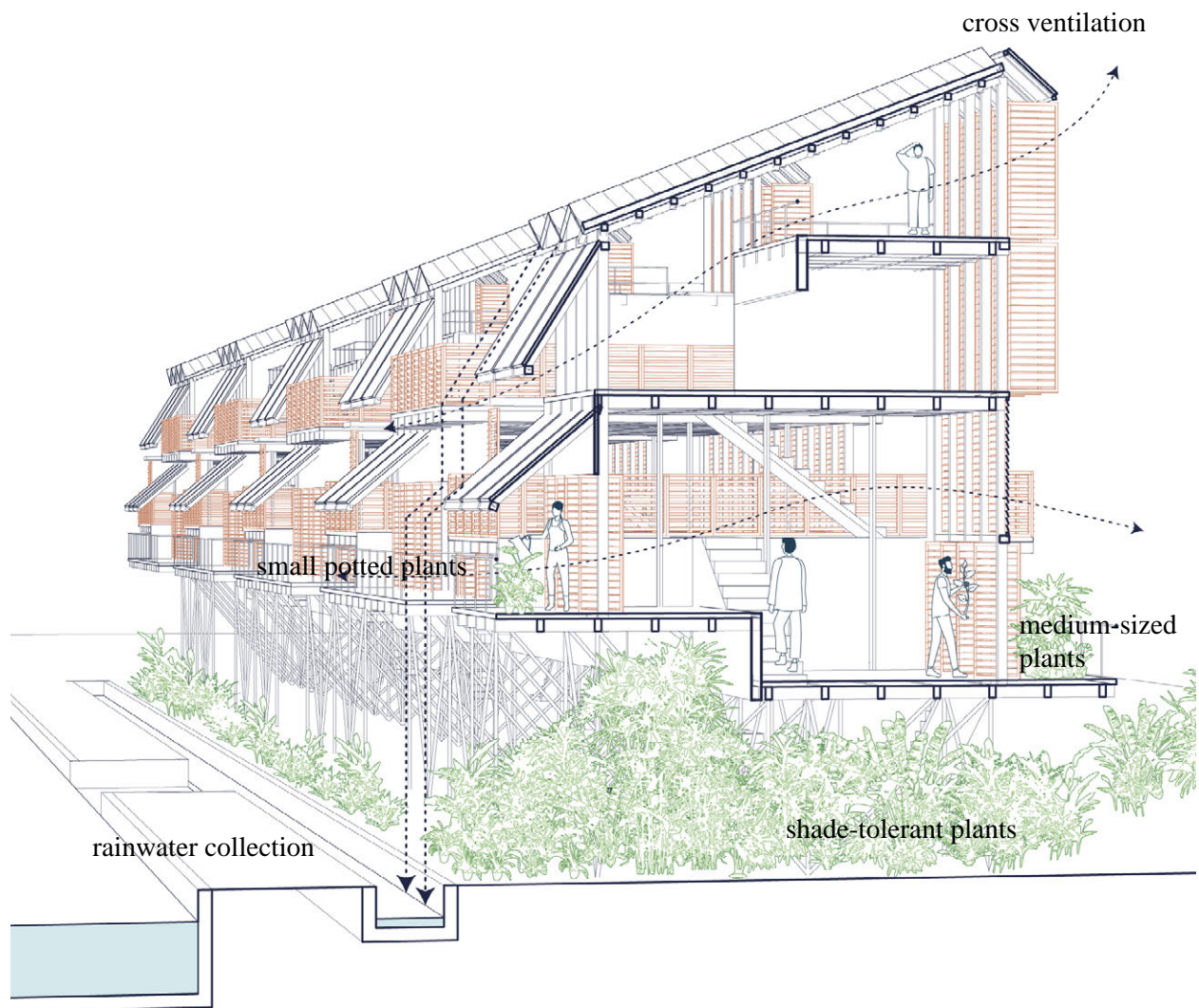


Figure 82. Typical housing unit section. Image courtesy of author.

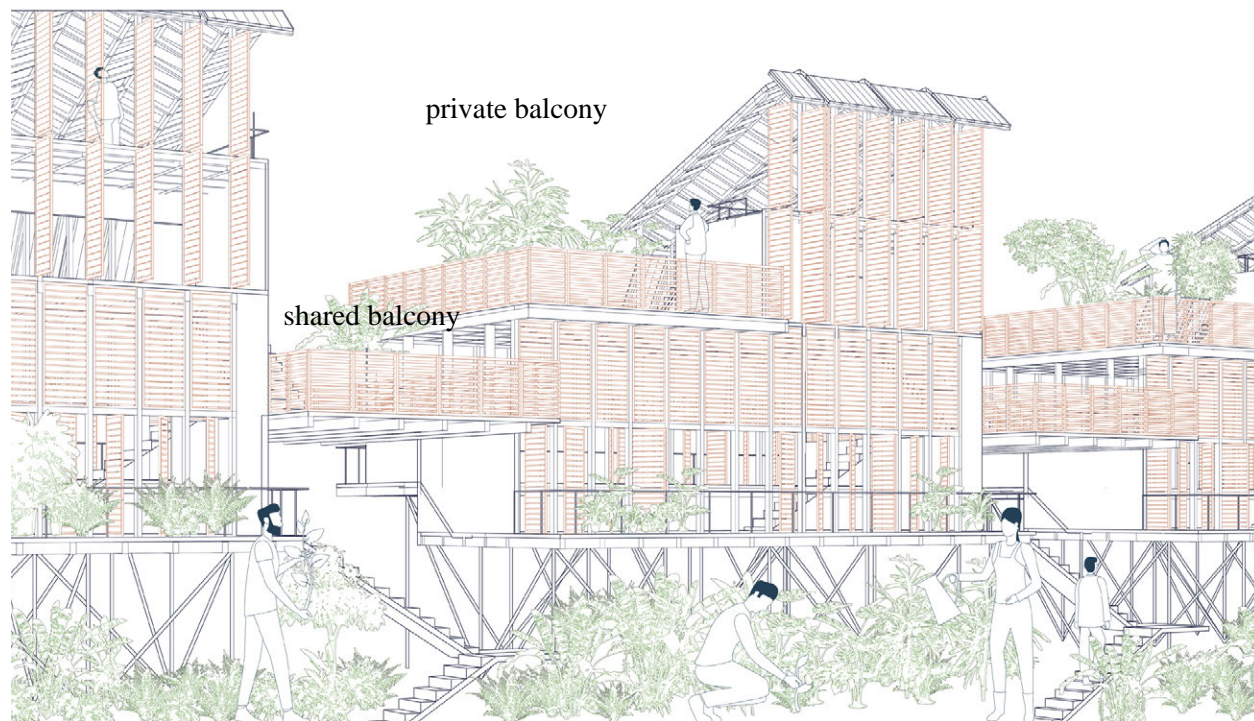


Figure 83. Typical housing unit perspective. Image courtesy of author.



Figure 84. Chagos islanders correlated the proximity of living quarters and the abundance of freely available food on Chagos with a community spirit of sharing.²⁵² Painting by Clement Siatous. Undated.

²⁵² Jeffery and Rotter, “Sustenance, Nourishment, and Cultivation: Plants as Living Cultural Heritage for Dispersed Chagossians in Mauritius, Seychelles, and the UK.”

Design: rooting heritage

The design of housing for Chagossian and Western researchers revives a “spirit of sharing” (*lespri partaz*) that Chagossians associate with the proximity of historical living quarter. Even in exile in Mauritius, Chagossians who live in houses (rather than apartment blocks) often have small gardens where they grow edible plants that they share generously amongst neighbors, friends and relatives in the knowledge that they would later receive produce from others.²⁵³

The design resists the tendency to “perform” Chagossian or to follow the salvage paradigm that rescues only tangible objects perceived to have inherent values.²⁵⁴ It invites attention to the intangible processes and activities enabling the production of social connections and cultural heritage. More specifically the creation of balconies at different levels seeks to recreate the spatial context that nourishes the social practice of exchanging plants and knowledge. Unlike cultural artefacts, these plants are privileged and displayed as evidence of the social interactions sustaining them.

I cherish the remaining gridded field of palm trees as an organizational paradigm for the site. These palm trees do not contaminate the Chagos. Historically, under careful care and maintenance from the Chagossians, these trees formed a healthy reciprocity between the people. It is rather the current absence of human settlement that led to the coconut chaos as of now. Moreover, coconut intercropping brings several practical advantages, including improved soil conditions, field resilience to natural disasters and additional value than monoculture.²⁵⁵ A recent study in Indonesia also demonstrates its role in emergency rescue in storm, hurricane and even tsunami.²⁵⁶ Therefore, rather than purging the island of coconuts or reducing their population, a more calibrated attitude, as expressed by many Chagossians, is to better manage them for social reasons: firstly to make visible the human history on the islands, secondly to improve the accessibility of the islands for humans, and thirdly in preparation for the potential reopening of the plantations in the event of resettlement.²⁵⁷ Each plant has its own history, its specific mission. The land is stratified to compose a social history of these plants as much as a natural history of us humans.²⁵⁸ Edible plants suitable to be intercropped with coconuts include: pumpkin, banana, pineapple and yam, all of which were grown by Chagos islanders before.²⁵⁹

²⁵³ Jeffery and Rotter, 305.

²⁵⁴ C. Bortolotti, “From Objects to Processes: UNESCO’s ‘Intangible Cultural Heritage,’” *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 19 (2007): 21–33.

²⁵⁵ JICA, Department of Agriculture, and Philippine Coconut Authority, “The Urgent Development Study on the Project on Rehabilitation and Recovery from Typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines. Final Report (II) Appendix Technical Supporting Report 3 (Volume 2),” n.d.

²⁵⁶ Anom Rajendra and Ayu Rai Sumariati, “The Role of Coconut Plants in Relation to Disaster Management in the Tropical Coastal Regions,” vol. 229 (ICDM, MATEC Web of Conferences, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1051/mateconf/201822901012>.

²⁵⁷ Jeffery, “Ecological Restoration in a Cultural Landscape: Conservationist and Chagossian Approaches to Controlling the ‘Coconut Chaos’ on the Chagos Archipelago.”

²⁵⁸ Michael Pollan, *The Botany of Desire: A Plant’s-Eye View of the World* (New York: Random House, 2001), xviii.

²⁵⁹ Jeffery and Rotter, “Sustenance, Nourishment, and Cultivation: Plants as Living Cultural Heritage for Dispersed Chagossians in Mauritius, Seychelles, and the UK,” 298.



Figure 85. Land stratification. See before for full image.

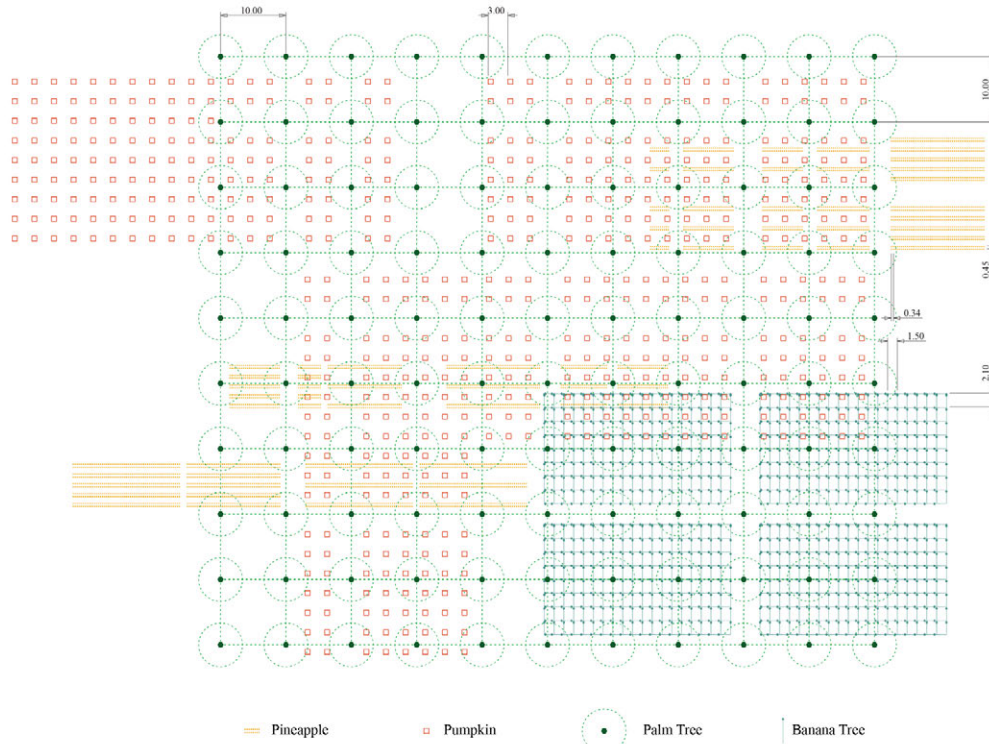


Figure 86. Plants as living cultural heritage: diagram of companion cultivation. Image courtesy of author.

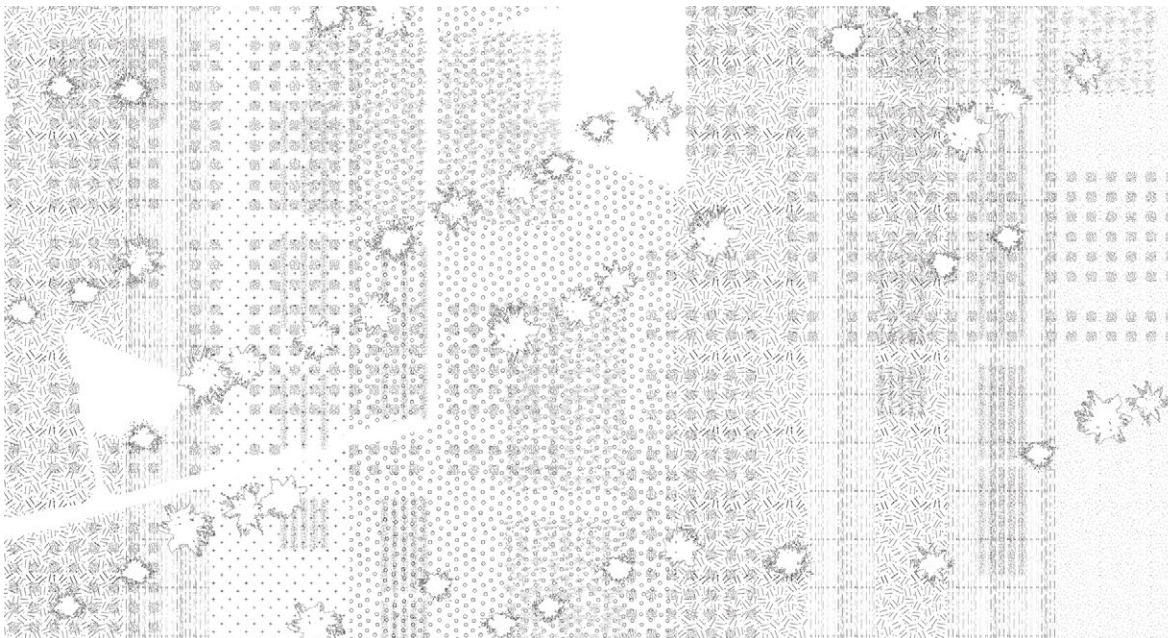


Figure 87. Chagos islanders grew a wide range of edible plants, including cabbage, sweet potato, yam, pumpkin, grapefruit, custard apple, pineapple and seven varieties of banana. Site plan of proposed companion cultivation. Image courtesy of author.

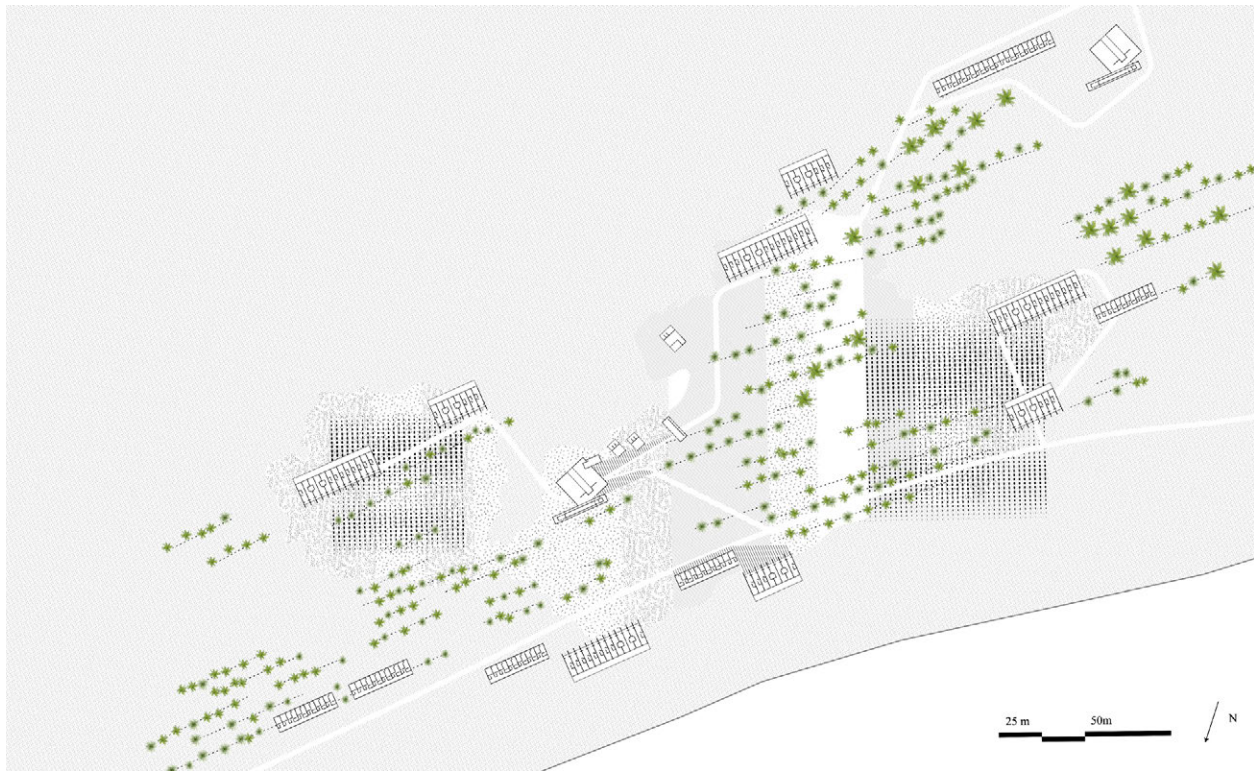


Figure 88. Site plan. Image courtesy of author.

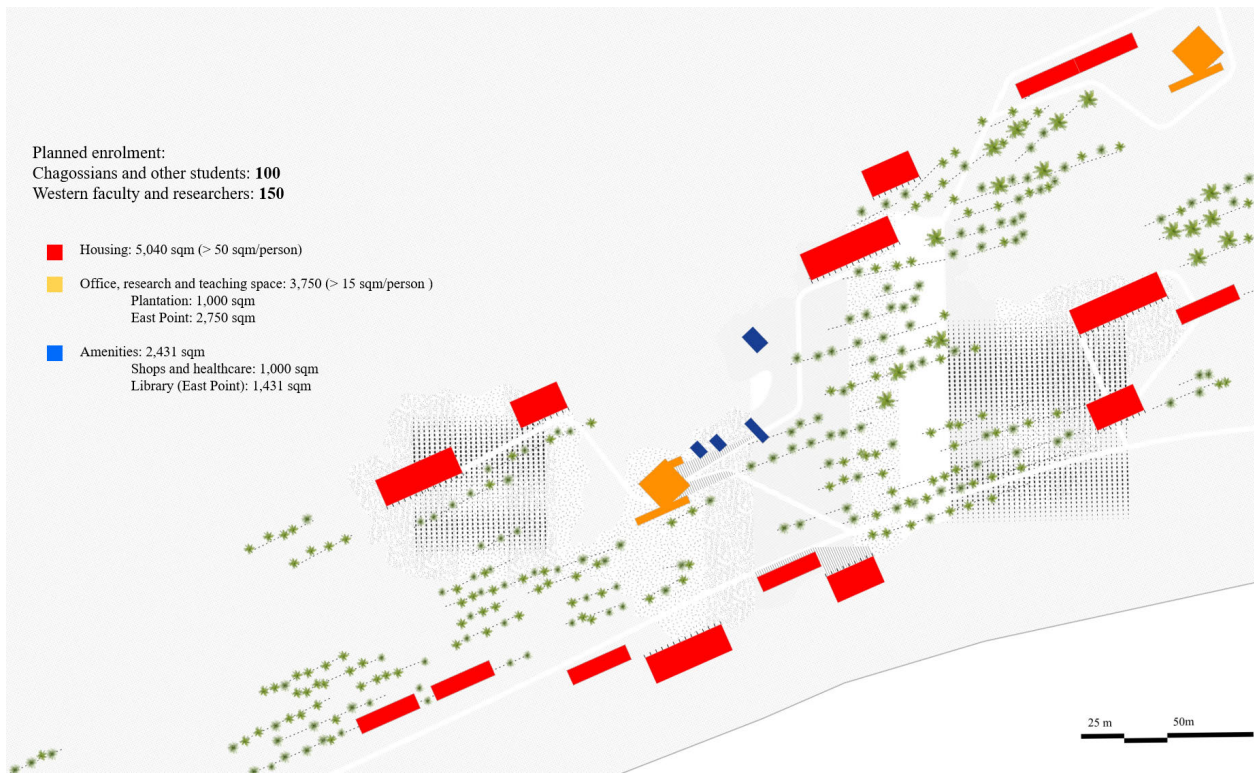


Figure 89. Program areas. Image courtesy of author.



Figure 90. Chagossians have long been deploying plants nostalgically to cultivate their connections to their Chagos homeland as an idealized imagination. Photos: William Jean Louis leads a demonstration of the preparation and uses of medicinal plants in Mauritius. Source: chagos.online.

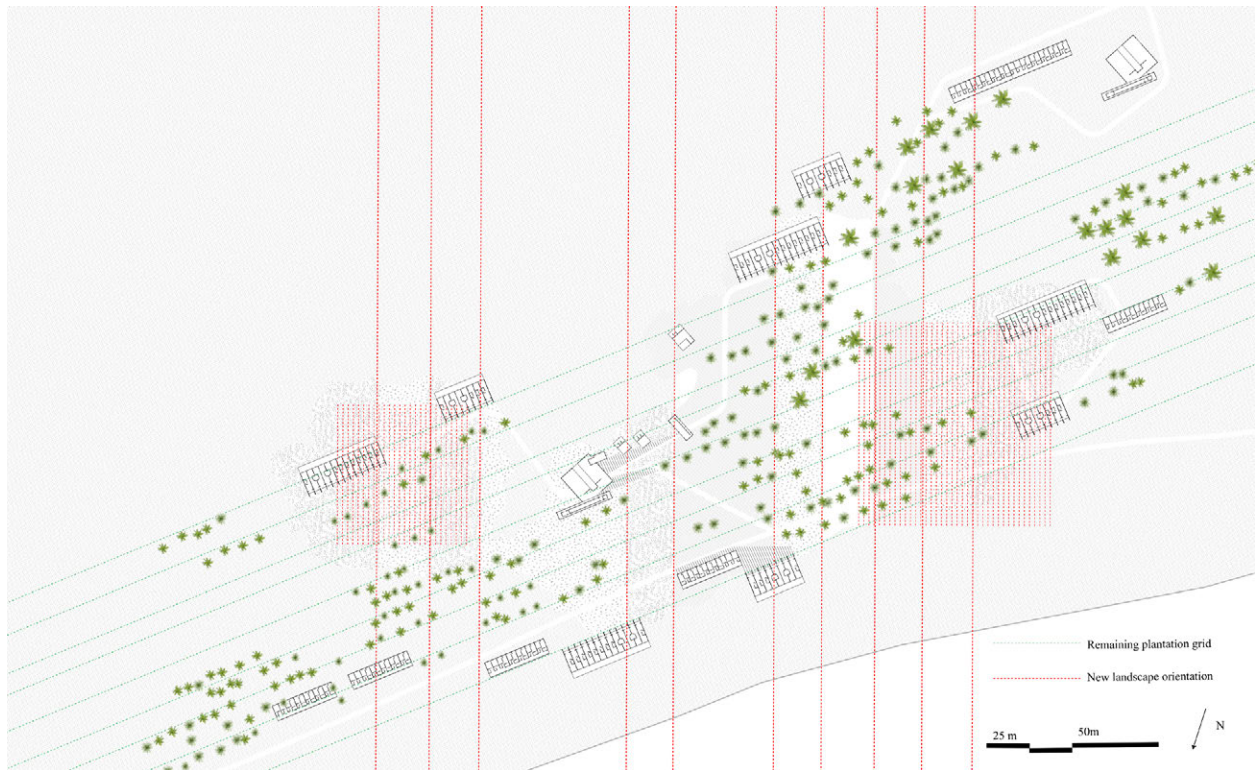


Figure 91. New orientations. Image courtesy of author.

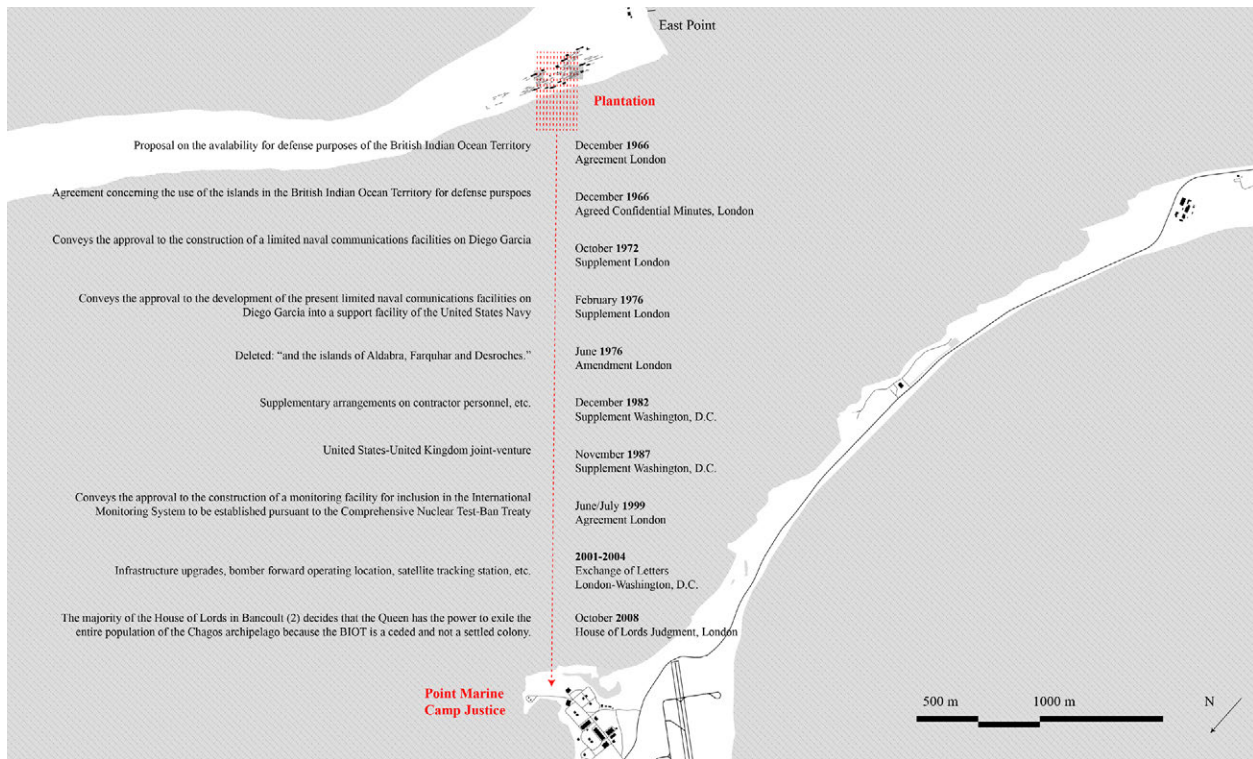
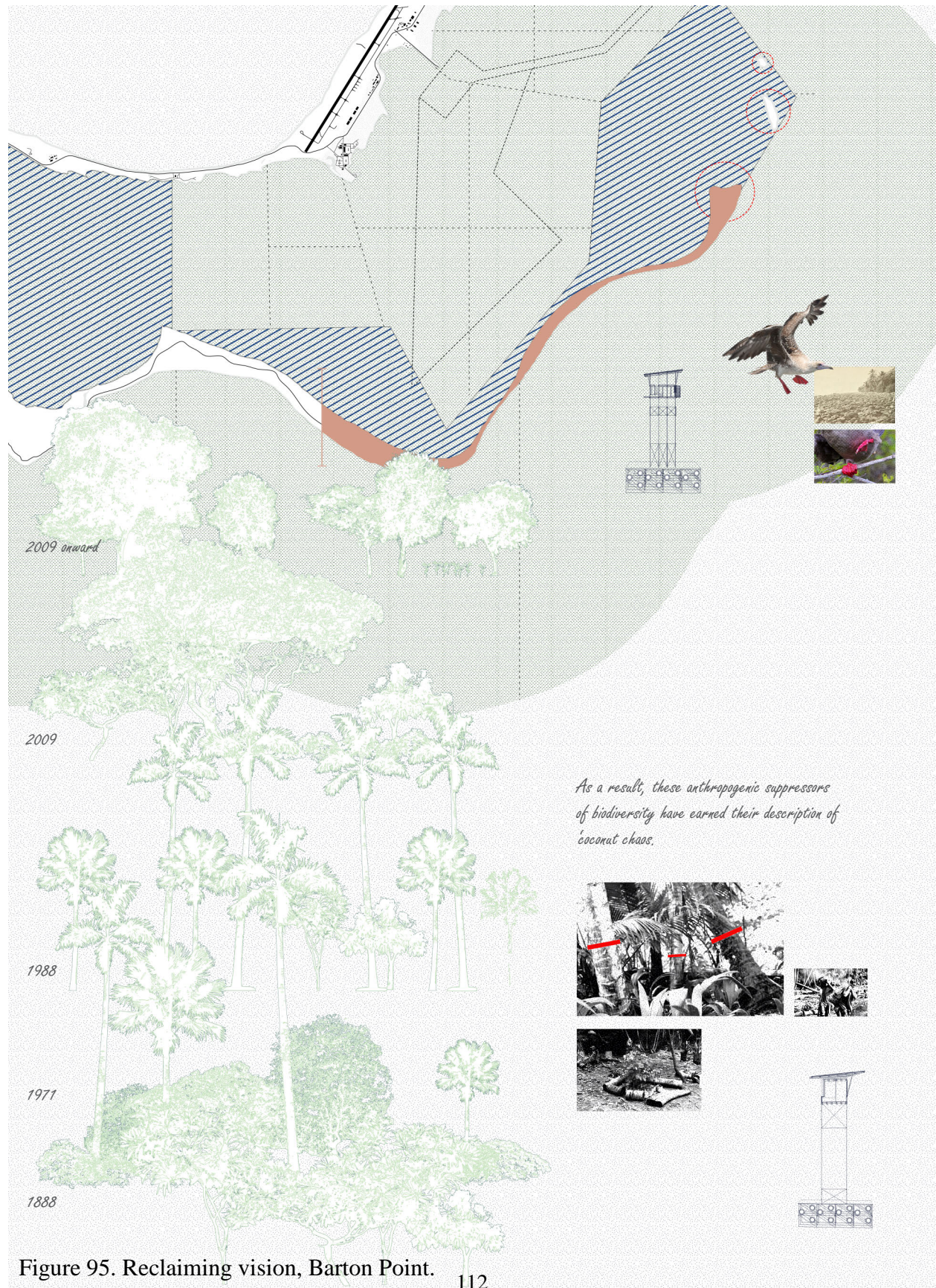


Figure 92. Territorial orientation and timeline of military construction on Diego Garcia. Image courtesy of author.



Figure 93. Camp Justice or Tent City, with the airfield in the background (2005). Source: Ted A. Morris, Jr.

Reclaiming Vision
Barton Point



2009 onward

2009

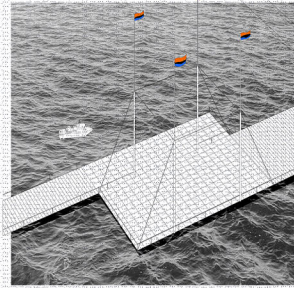
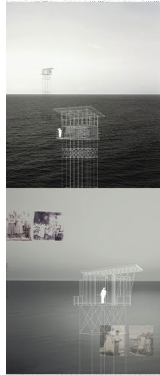
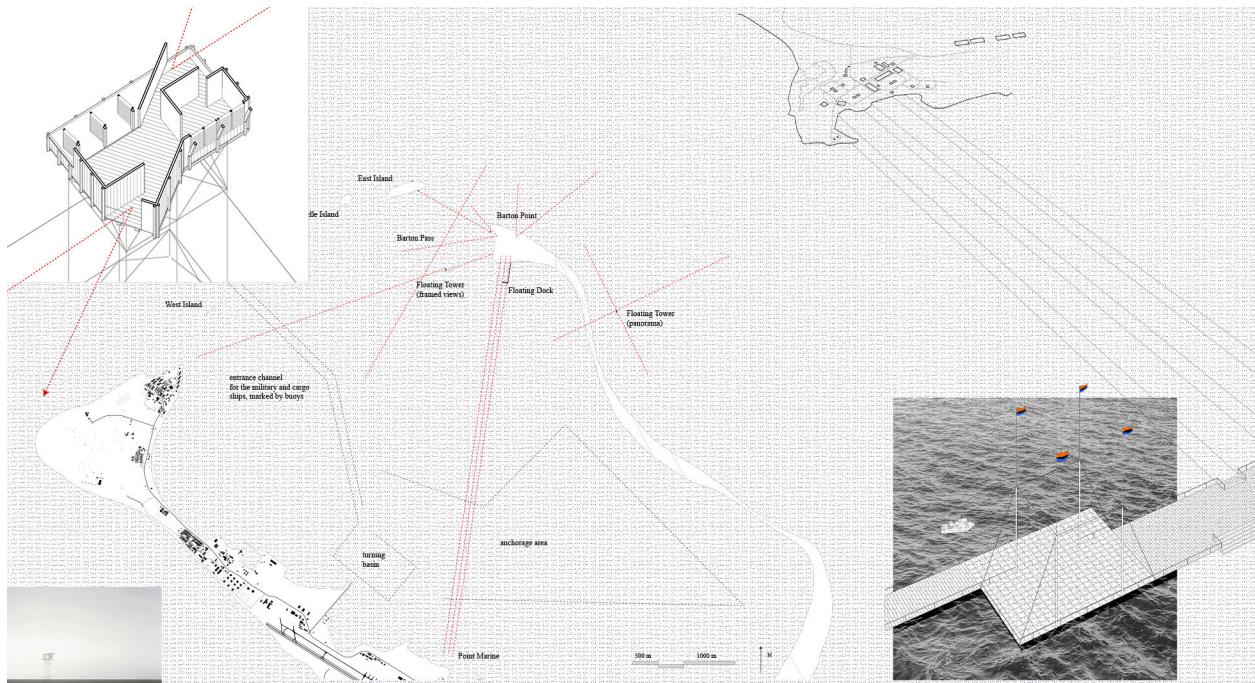
1988

1971

1888

As a result, these anthropogenic suppressors of biodiversity have earned their description of "coconut chaos."

Figure 95. Reclaiming vision, Barton Point.



*When the Commander cries: 'Passengers, embark!'
 The husband leaves, the wife stays behind.
 Stop crying, woman, your tears will flood the Mauritius's passenger list,
 Captain Yone won't come back to collect you.*

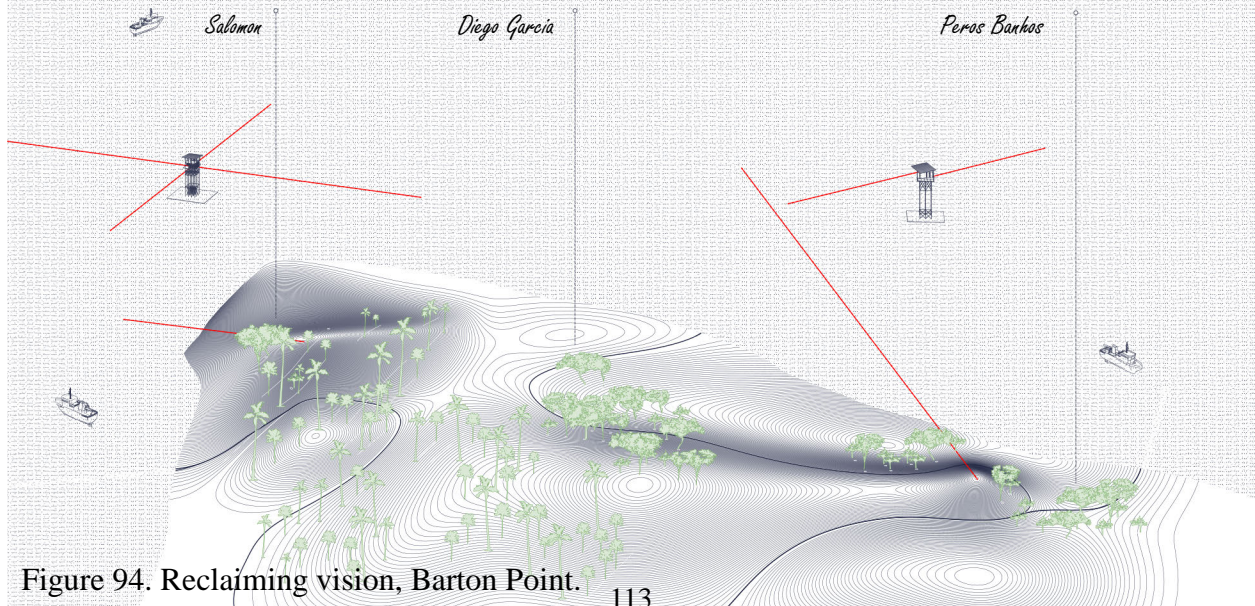


Figure 94. Reclaiming vision, Barton Point. 113

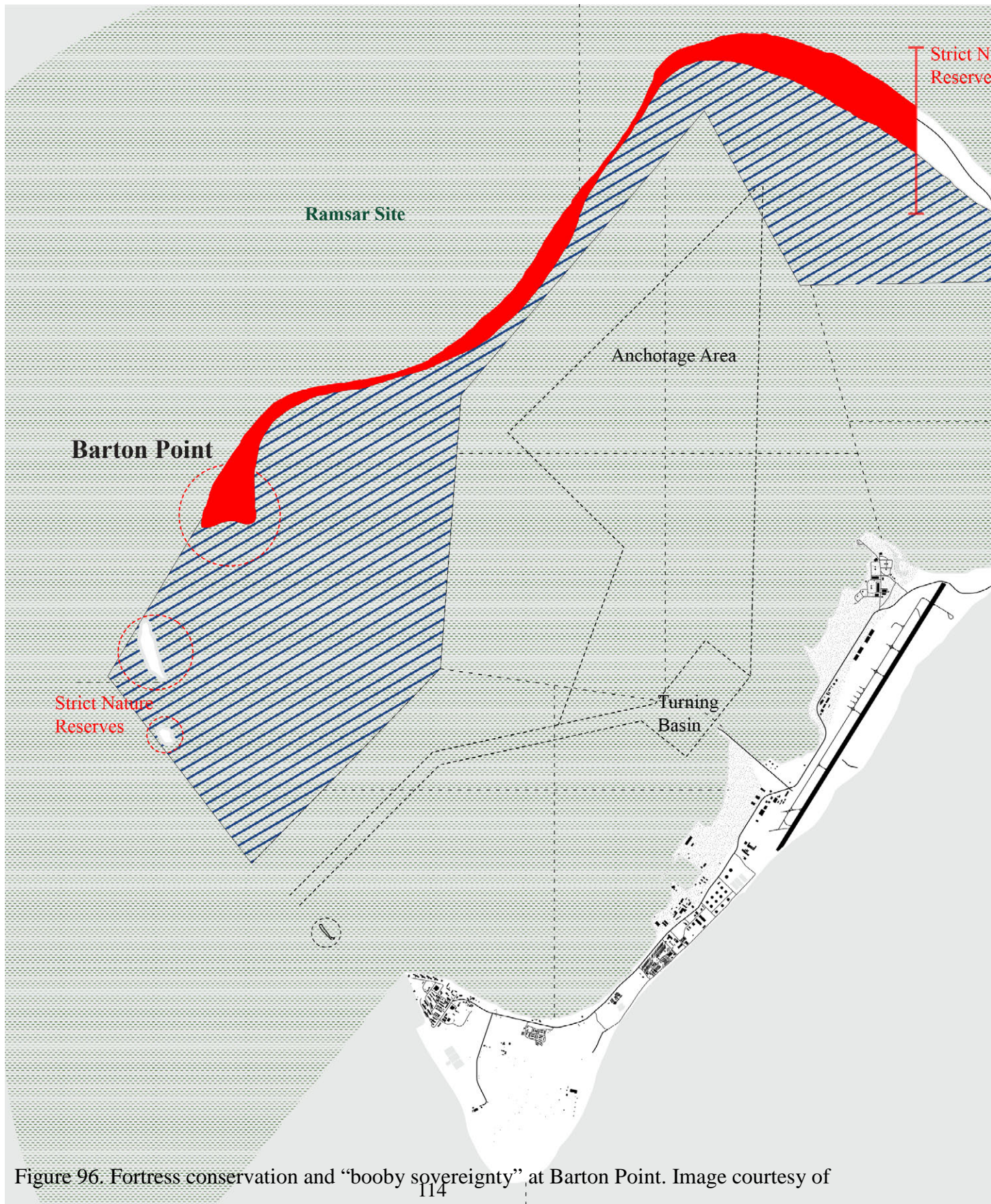
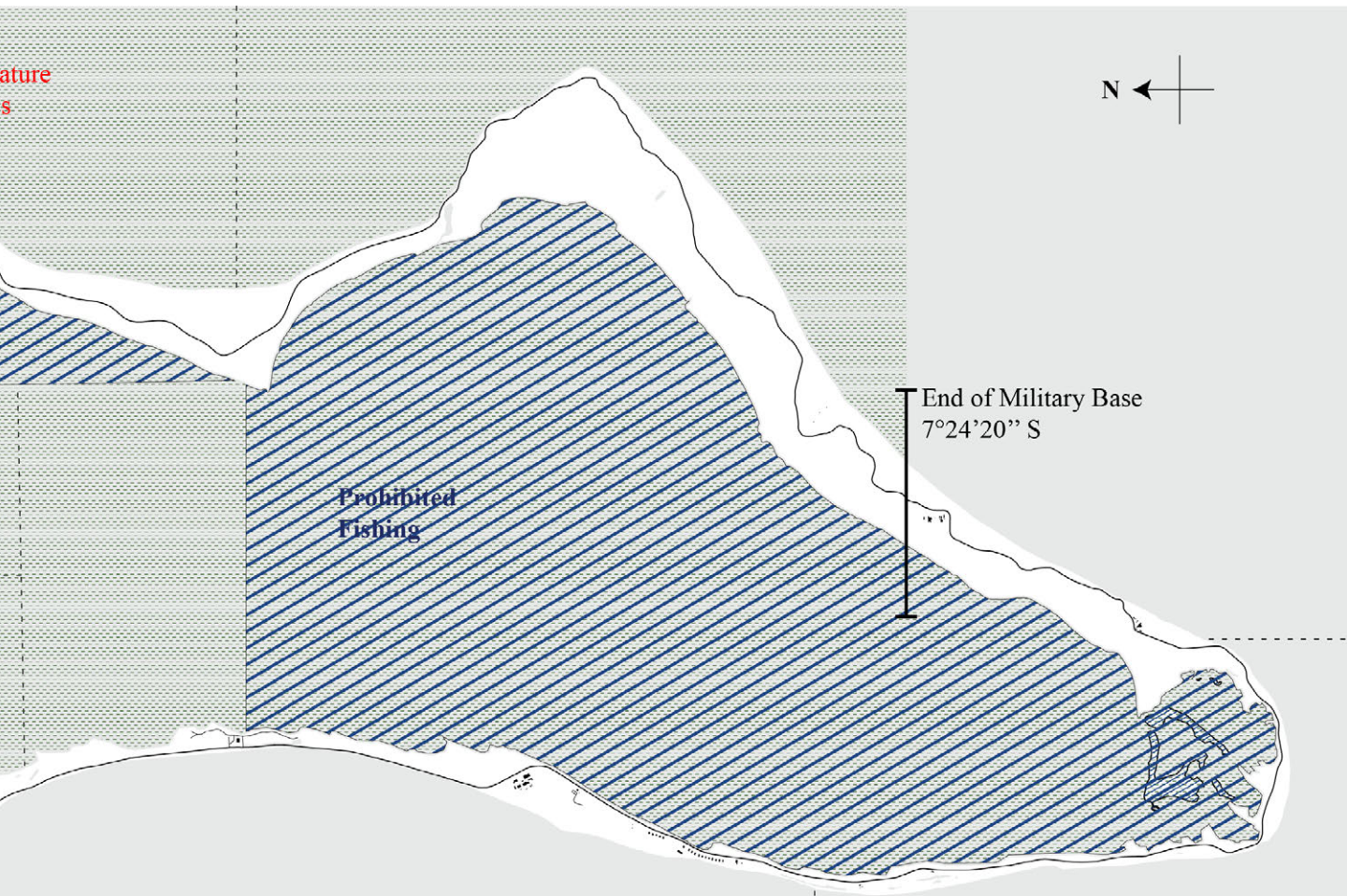






Figure 96. Fortress conservation and “booby sovereignty” at Barton Point. Image courtesy of



-  Ramsar site
-  No-take zone (fishing prohibited), military zone excluded
-  Strict nature reserve
-  Land reclamation



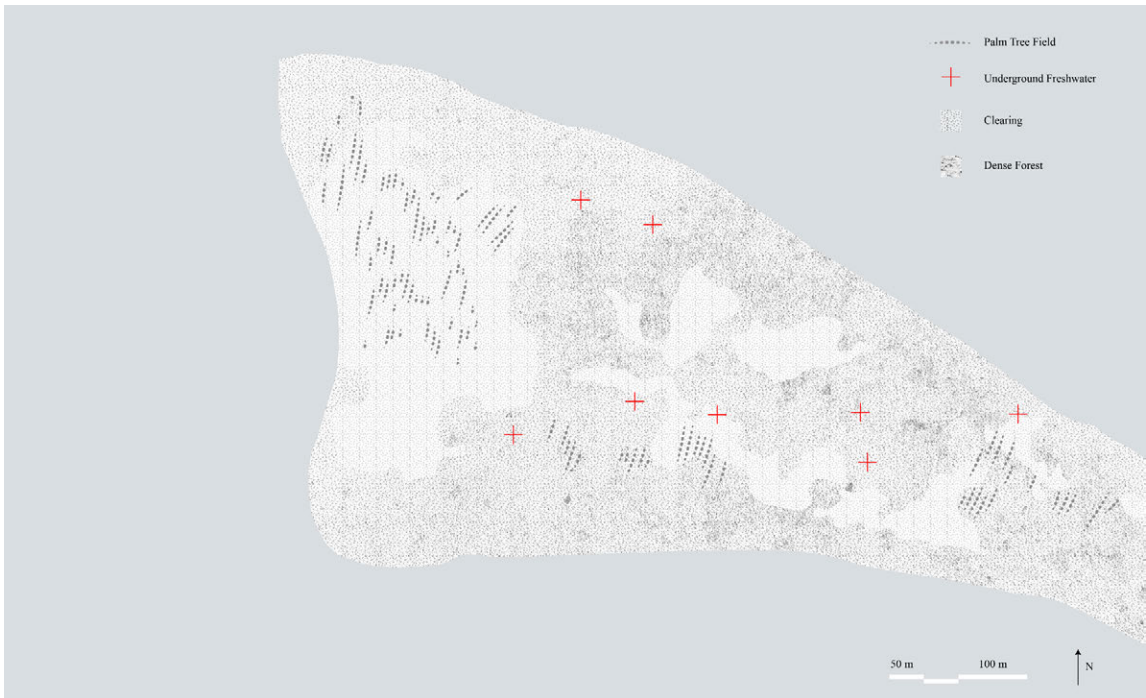


Figure 97. Archaeo-botany: map of Barton Point reconstructed from Google Satellite image (2005).



Figure 98. Same as the previous (2019).



Figure 99. Tree marking for felling. Within the plot site, (coconut) trees selected for felling are marked by tape. Shade trees are left standing and trees that would damage potential native hardwood colonists remain—for the time being.²⁶⁰



Figure 100. Volunteers removing sacks of fallen coconuts out of predetermined areas to “coconut dumps.”²⁶¹



Figure 101. Archaeo-botany: map of Barton Point reconstructed from Google Satellite Image (comparison between 2005 and 2019).

²⁶⁰ Carr, “Working towards Atoll Restoration.”

²⁶¹ Carr.

Reclaiming Vision, Barton Point

Stories of Barton Point

In addition to Barton Point, the West, Middle and East Islands at the North entrance into the inner lagoon are all suggested for Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs).²⁶² Vegetation dynamics at East Island (across Barton Pass from Barton Point) evidence Chagossians' long engagement with the landscape—a temporal collage intermingling memories beyond physical boundaries. Between 1888 and 1971, *Pisonia grandis* were replaced by coconut thicket with *Hernandia* in the western half of East Island.²⁶³ In 2009, *Pisonia grandis* reclaimed dominance and *Tournefortia* comprised a strong woodland fringe at the upper NE beach crest.²⁶⁴ From 2009 onward, under the hardwood restoration project, *Pisonia grandis*, *Morinda citrifolia* and *Intsia Bijuga* are replanted to replace coconut trees.

Barton Point Hardwood Restoration Project is an ambitious pilot scheme initiated in 2009 to remove coconut trees and replant native hardwood species. People from the military and civilian community on Diego Garcia volunteer on local “Brit-Op” days to remove coconut saplings, nuts and leaves to clear sites where large coconut palms have already been cut down by trained chainsaw operators.²⁶⁵ Effects of the project are clear through a comparison of the 2005 and 2019 satellite images of Barton Point. In 2005, the grids of coconut plantation were visible along with fresh water pools. The cleared areas became much more reduced in 2019 and most coconut trees to the South of the site were cut down. The process is extremely labor intensive. According to Carr, the physical exertion required to work in often rough seas with strong current, coupled with inclement wet or hot weather, requires a robust, well-disciplined, experienced and trained work-force.²⁶⁶ The logistical complications involved in working in remote oceanic islands brings with it both supply and medical challenges.²⁶⁷ I intend not to discredit Carr's initiative, whose dedication and investment I deeply appreciate. I would just like to call attention to understand conceptually, all these historical and contemporary human forces on Barton Point, which deserves full attention in future restoration works.²⁶⁸

²⁶² See Table 5 of Carr et al., “Status and Phenology of Breeding Seabirds and a Review of Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas in the British Indian Ocean Territory,” 17.

²⁶³ Peter Carr et al., “Coral Islands of the British Indian Ocean Territory (Chagos Archipelago),” in *Coral Reefs of the United Kingdom Overseas Territories*, ed. Charles R.C. Sheppard, vol. 4, Coral Reefs of the World (Springer Dordrecht Heidelberg New York London, 2013), 276.

²⁶⁴ Carr et al., 276.

²⁶⁵ M.A. Hamilton and S. Barrios, “UKOTs Team (2020). UKOTs Online Herbarium - British Indian Ocean Territory. Facilitated by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.,” accessed December 11, 2020, <http://brahmsonline.kew.org/biot/>.

²⁶⁶ Carr, “Working towards Atoll Restoration,” 15.

²⁶⁷ Carr, 15.

²⁶⁸ On the non-human side, Barton Point is not only about trees and birds, either. For example, Barton Point reef flat was covered with boulders measuring 0.7-1m in diameter for a distance of several hundred meters—unusual on Diego Garcia, and may have resulted from the effects of a single storm. See D. R. Stoddart, “Geomorphology of Diego Garcia Atoll,” *Atoll Research Bulletin* 149 (1971): 13–14.

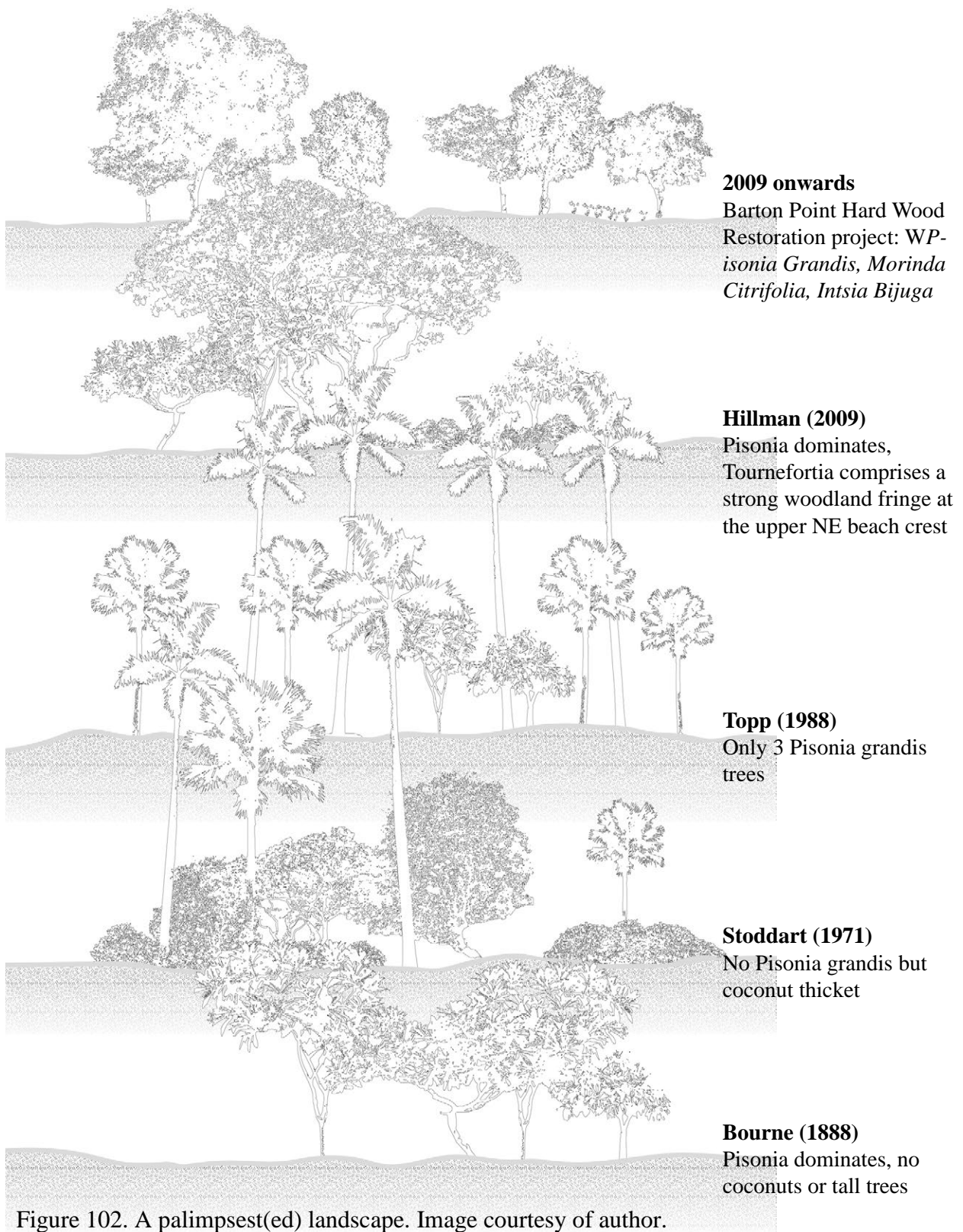


Figure 102. A palimpsest(ed) landscape. Image courtesy of author.

My understanding of the ocean as a mnemonic device as a vehicle that connects to the dream world is indebted to the works of Francisco Huichaqueo, Karin Amimoto Ingersoll and Sonja Boon.²⁶⁹ In describing submerged perspectives and renewed perceptions, Ingersoll coins the term *seascape epistemology* as

an approach to knowing through a visual, spiritual, intellectual, and embodied literacy of the ‘*āina* (land) and *kai* (sea): birds, the colors of the clouds, the flows of the currents, fish and seaweed, the timing of ocean swells, depths, tides, and celestial bodies all circulating and flowing with rhythms and pulsations, which is used both theoretically and applicably by Kānaka Maoli today for mobility, flexibility, and dignity within a Western-dominant reality.²⁷⁰

What is particularly beautiful about Ingersoll’s conceptualization of the seascape is how it is moored in historical dynamics. For Ingersoll, as the only chemical compound found as a solid, a liquid, and a gas, water is evoked as a place of adaptation, representing change, process and events.²⁷¹ Water is similarly evoked as in this thesis’ telling of Chagossians’ migration and diaspora, that despite its transient/ephemeral/unstable nature retains its cultural roots and identity centers amidst the intangible vectors of extra-territorial political reality.

Unfortunately, I am not giving full credits to the richness of Chagossian perspectives given the lack of contact but nor am I proposing to generalize a Hawaiian epistemology and ontology as an abstract indigenous approach to counter the Western version. What I would like to bring into the design is this particular sensibility of non-Western approaches in deciphering the metaphysical, spiritual and sensational codes of our environment.²⁷² The proposed environmental humanities see the ocean as subject—greater than us. The reading and writing of the ocean as a living archive require a literacy unknown to the analysis-driven Western science. As Ingersoll suggests, researchers at the Chagos Institute of Environmental Humanities are invited “to ride upon the ocean, to (re)discover islands, to hear the fish and he‘e (octopus) in the hunt, and to see our genealogical and historical connections to the seascape”—an engagement both affective and intellectual.²⁷³

²⁶⁹ Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives*, 1–2; Karin Amimoto Ingersoll, *Waves of Knowing: A Seascape Epistemology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Sonja Boon, *What the Oceans Remember: Searching for Belonging and Home* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2019).

²⁷⁰ Ingersoll, *Waves of Knowing: A Seascape Epistemology*, 5.

²⁷¹ Ingersoll, 15–16; Thomas Farber, *On Water* (Hopewell, New Jersey: Ecco Press, 1994).

²⁷² Ingersoll, *Waves of Knowing: A Seascape Epistemology*, 15–16.

²⁷³ Ingersoll, 26, 38.



Figure 103. Eroded upper beach on the seaward coast at East Point. The sediments are not cemented, but otherwise they closely resemble in caliber and composition the conglomerates exposed nearby.²⁷⁴



Figure 104. Massive bedded calcarenites, dipping to the south, exposed on the southeast coast of East Island.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ Plate 22 of Stoddart, "Geomorphology of Diego Garcia Atoll."

²⁷⁵ Plate 31 of Stoddart.



Figure 105. Karin Amimoto Ingersoll, “Becoming,” 2009.²⁷⁶ Photograph by R. J. Amimoto.



Figure 106. Francisco Huichaqueo, *Mencer: Ni Pewma*, 2011, film still.

²⁷⁶ Ingersoll, *Waves of Knowing: A Seascape Epistemology*, 2.

Design: reclaiming vision

The sapling field has exactly sixty trees, each named after the sixty small islands of the Chagos Archipelago, among them, Peros Banhos, Diego Garcia and Salomon—the most important islands of former Chagossian inhabitation. Species include *Pisonia Grandis*, *Morinda Citrifolia*, and *Intsia Bijuga*, as suggested by the Barton Point Restoration Project. Chagossians agree with the conservation scientists for the end of managing overgrown coconuts, as long as it is seen as an act of care, not exclusion, and for inscribing a human future on the land.

Some Chagossians are indeed willing to get involved in the Restoration Project. For instance, Allen Vincatassin in 2011, together with two young men of Chagossian parentage, visited Diego Garcia on what he described as a ‘conservation mission.’²⁷⁷ In addition to bringing back “endemic” plants back to restore an ecological balance, Vincatassin also describes the social dimension of the act of clearing and replanting—that the clearing of the land will make the area “more alive: we will be able to see the old houses which we can’t see now because of the forest, and in three years people will say “that’s the plantation I knew.”²⁷⁸

This is in line with the practice of older Chagos islanders: *labati* (weeding) and *netwayz* (cleaning, tidying, weeding).²⁷⁹ The coconut trees are not intrinsically valued. Their socio-cultural significance is enacted through cutting down and clearing coconut trees and other overgrown vegetation for simultaneously commemorating the human past and inscribing a human future on islands.²⁸⁰ Processes matter to demonstrate that Chagos needs its inhabitants to keep its environment tidy and usable.²⁸¹

Design actions challenge the naturalized and historically stable conceptions of stasis and locatedness underpinning the false utopia of a pristine Barton Point. The floating towers and floating dock favors ontologies of becoming, connection, mobility and betweenness.²⁸² Beyond the sapling field, the floating devices call attention to the ocean that remembers the routes of migration, displacement, copra trade, capitals, goods, powers and information—not as external to the geographical borders of Barton Point but bearing the extra-territorial forces that has been shaping its formation and transformation.

Indeed, a perpetual transiency is what best characterizes the Chagossians. Jeffery documents songs that describe how dislocation from the “homeland” and separation from family members

²⁷⁷ Jeffery, “Ecological Restoration in a Cultural Landscape: Conservationist and Chagossian Approaches to Controlling the ‘Coconut Chaos’ on the Chagos Archipelago,” 1005.

²⁷⁸ Jeffery, 1005.

²⁷⁹ Jeffery, 1004–5.

²⁸⁰ S. F. Johannessen, “Cleaning for the Dead: The Chagossian Pilgrimage to Their Homeland,” in *Eviction from the Chagos Islands: Displacement and Struggle for Identity Against Two World Power*, ed. Sandra J.T.M. Evers and Marry Kooy, African History 1 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2011), 202.

²⁸¹ Johannessen, 205.

²⁸² Philip E. Steinberg, “Sovereignty, Territory, and the Mapping of Mobility: A View from the Outside,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 99, no. 3 (2009): 467–95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00045600902931702>.

have always been a central part of life for Chagos islanders and their ancestors.²⁸³ For instance, in “Serin rose” (Pink canary), the singer laments that:

The Second-in-Command Mr Talbot sends out his roll-call,
My pink canary goes into exile,
He’ll return in two or three months.²⁸⁴

The “pink canary” is the narrator’s fisherman partner, and “exile” refers to him being stationed on a distant Chagos island for a period of two to three months. In “Ferlevenn” (Make mischief), the singer observes that:

When the Commander cries: ‘Passengers, embark!’
The husband leaves, the wife stays behind.
Stop crying, woman, your tears will flood the Mauritius’s passenger list,
Captain Yone won’t come back to collect you.²⁸⁵

²⁸³ Jeffery, “How a Plantation Became Paradise: Changing Representations of the Homeland among Displaced Chagos Islanders,” 957.

²⁸⁴ “Serin rose,” composed by the late Elégie Jaffar; recorded by her granddaughter Léonide Jaffar: “Segonn Talbot fann so lapel / Mo serin rose al eksile / Dan de-twa mwa li ava turne.” See Jeffery, 957.

²⁸⁵ “Ferlevenn,” composed by Rita Elysée; recorded by her daughter Mimose Furcy: “Kumander letan kriye ‘Lapay passaze! Ambark passaze!’ / Madam-la so mari ale, li reste / Ase plore madam, to larm lizye pu kuver lalis Mauritius / Kapiten Yone li pa pu vire ramass twa.” See Jeffery, 957.

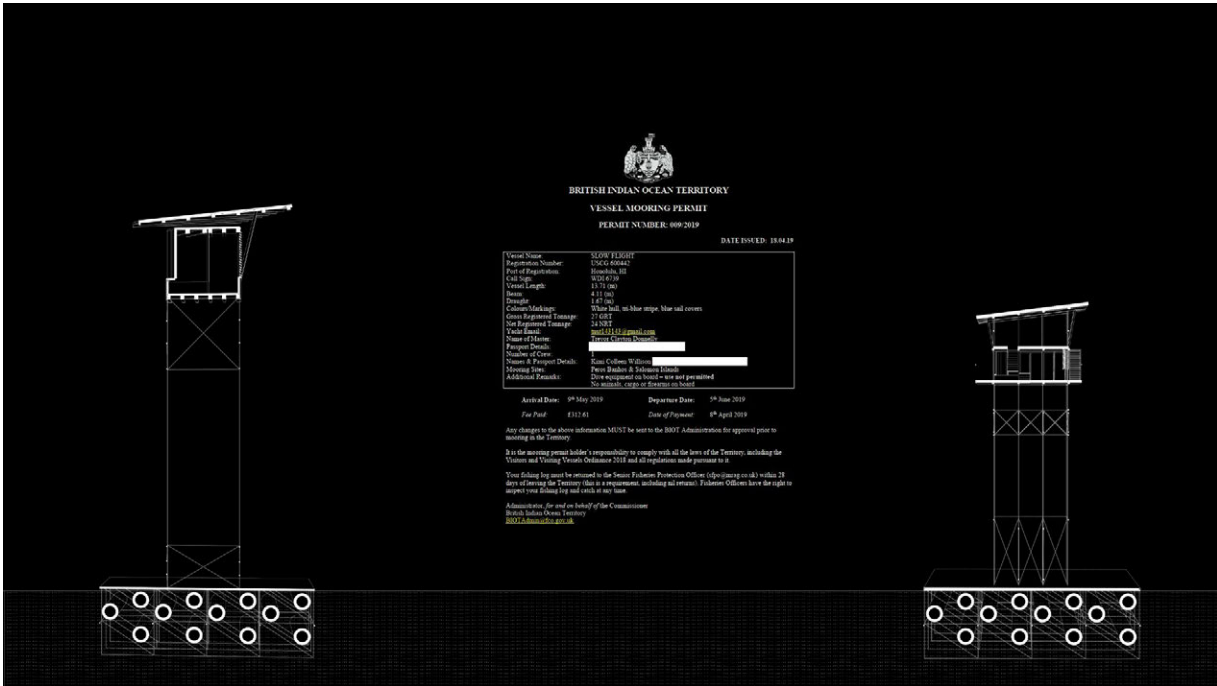


Figure 107. Visiting yachts can apply for mooring permits to stay at restricted mooring sites for up to 28 days. The charges for a permit are £100 per week. Sample mooring permit from Trevor Donnelly, a sailing blogger from London, UK.²⁸⁶

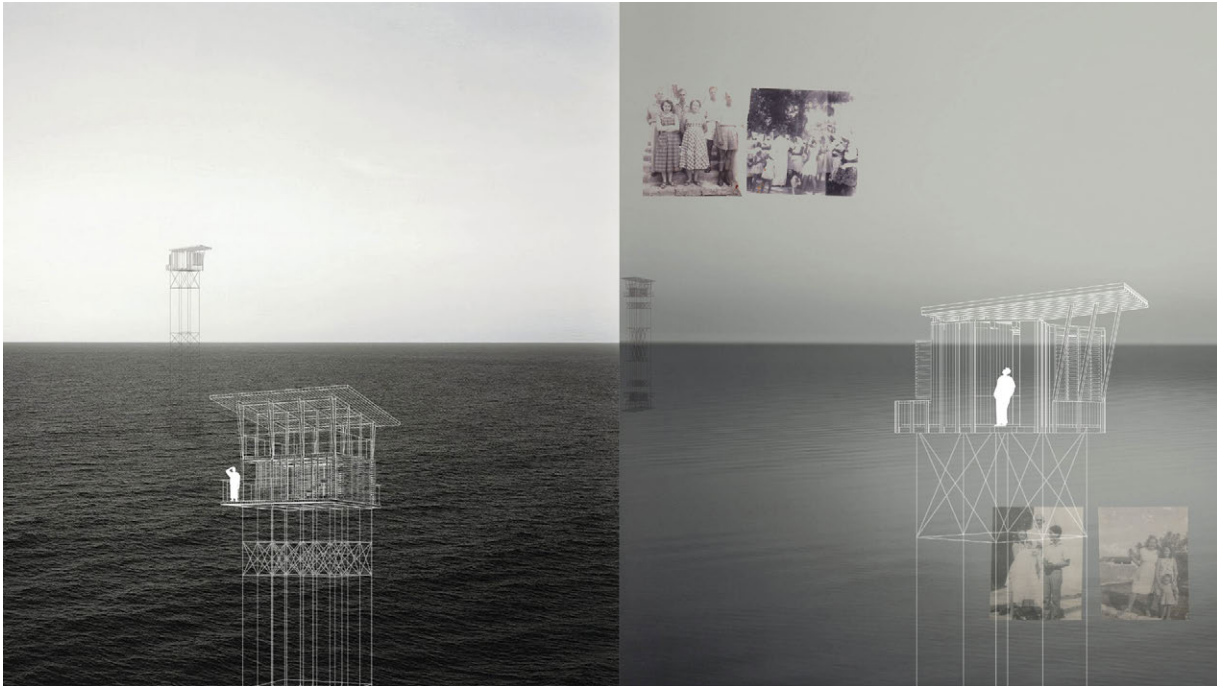


Figure 108. Bird observatory as a mnemonic device. Image courtesy of author.

²⁸⁶ See <https://svslowflight.com/index.php/2019/05/07/unplugging-headed-to-chagos/>

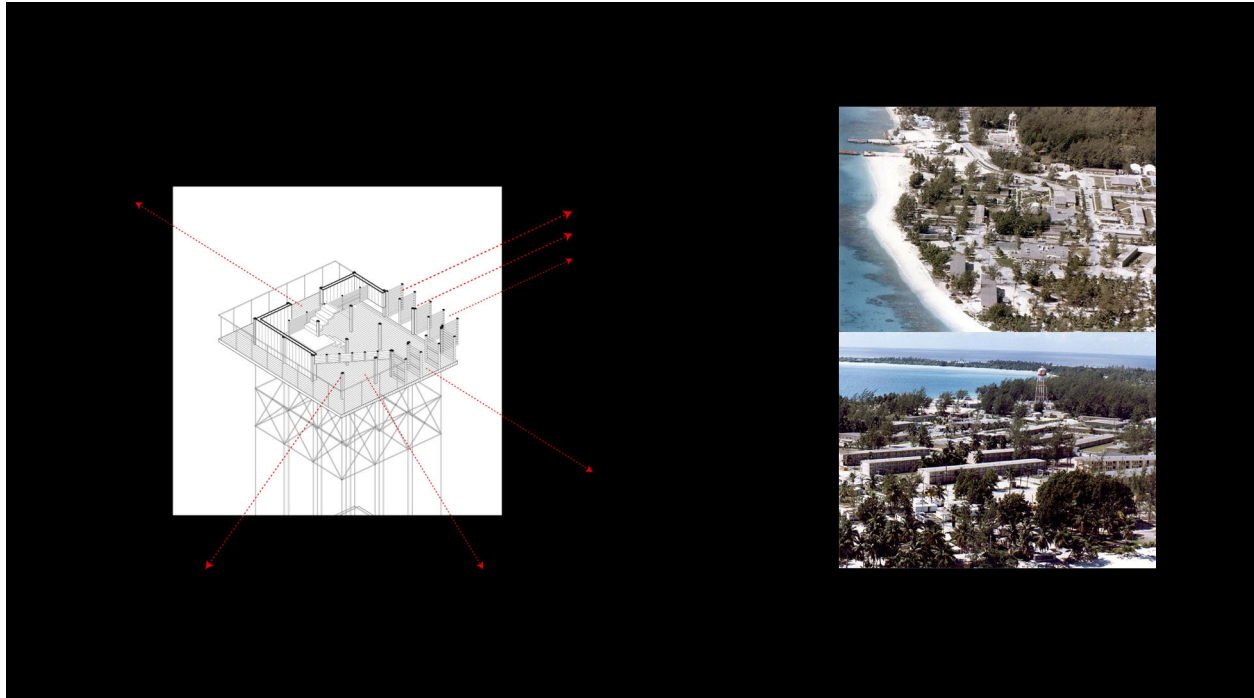


Figure 109. Bird observatory as a mnemonic device. Image courtesy of author. Right: Diego Garcia “downtown.” (1984) Source: Ted A. Morris, Jr. Photo: Cathy Hines.



Figure 110. Bird observatory as a mnemonic device. Image courtesy of author. Right: Massive bedded calcarenites, dipping to the south, exposed on the southeast coast of East Island.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁷ Stoddart, “Geomorphology of Diego Garcia Atoll.”

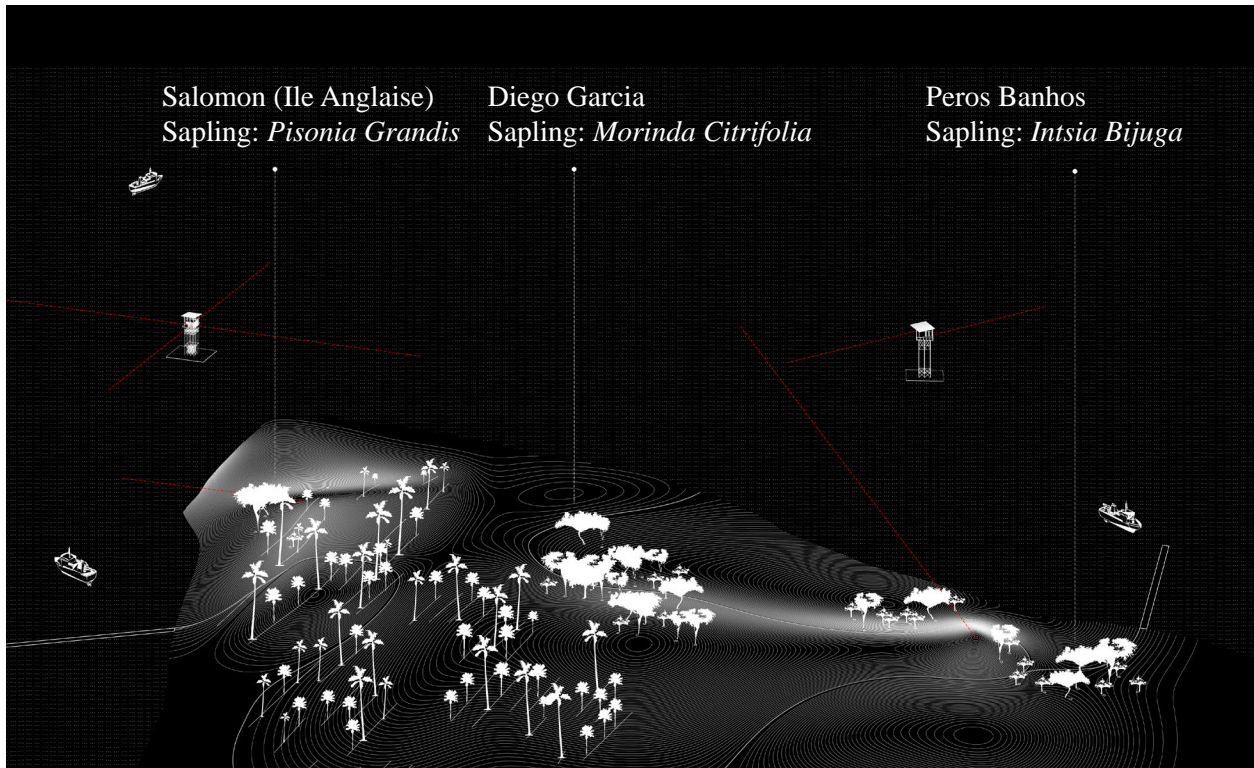


Figure 111. Sapling field, Barton Point. Image courtesy of author.

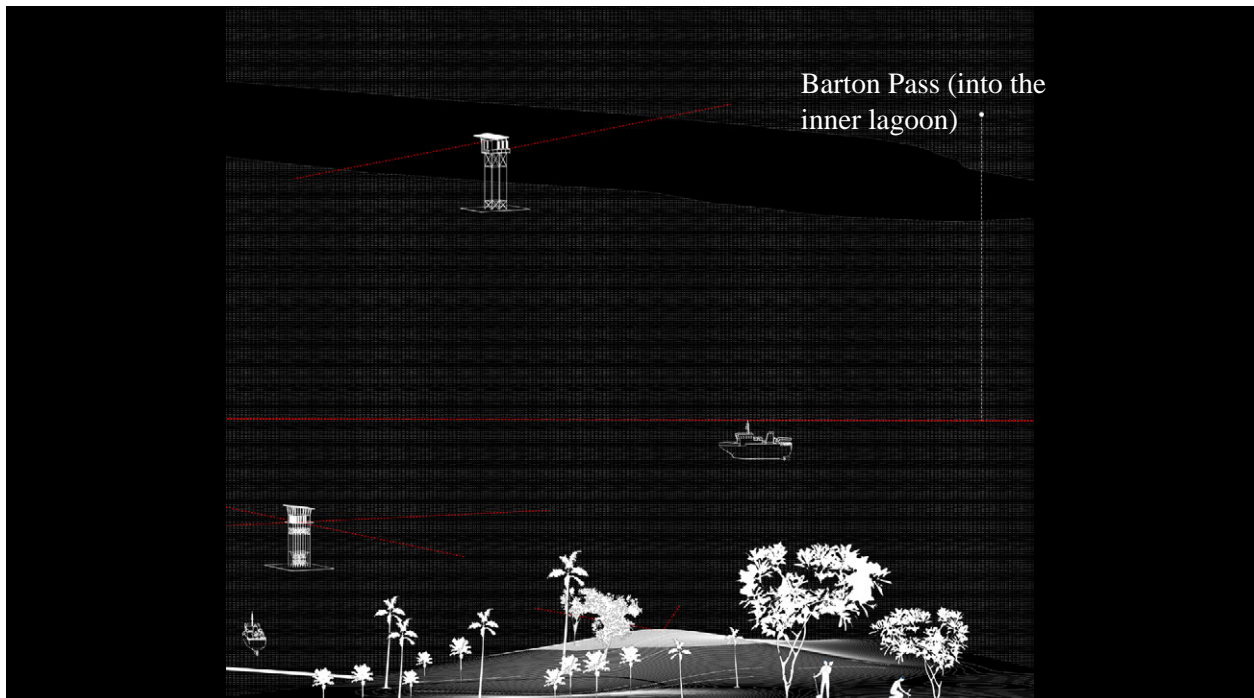


Figure 112. Sapling field overlooks Barton pass into the inner lagoon. Image courtesy of author.



Figure 113. Flag of the Chagossian community. Orang stripe: the (closed) plantation on Chagos. Black stripe: struggle and eviction experienced by the people. Blue stripe: the lagoons of the Chagos and the future.²⁸⁸

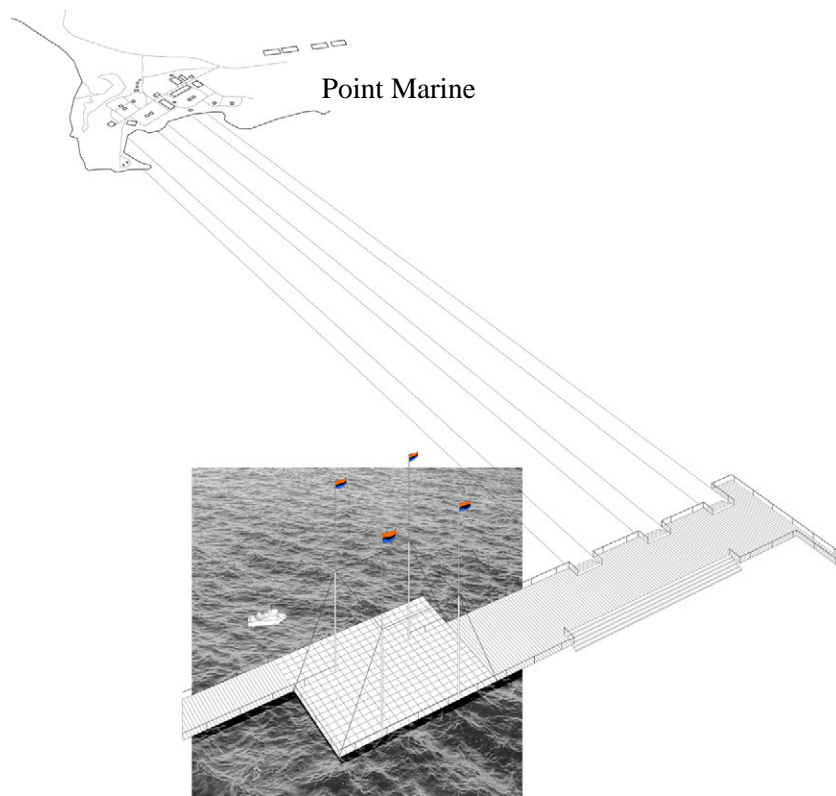


Figure 114. A floating dock and constant transiency. Image courtesy of author.

²⁸⁸ Zoran Vukojevic, “Chagossians (British Indian Ocean Territory),” 2002, <https://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/io-chago.html#terr>.

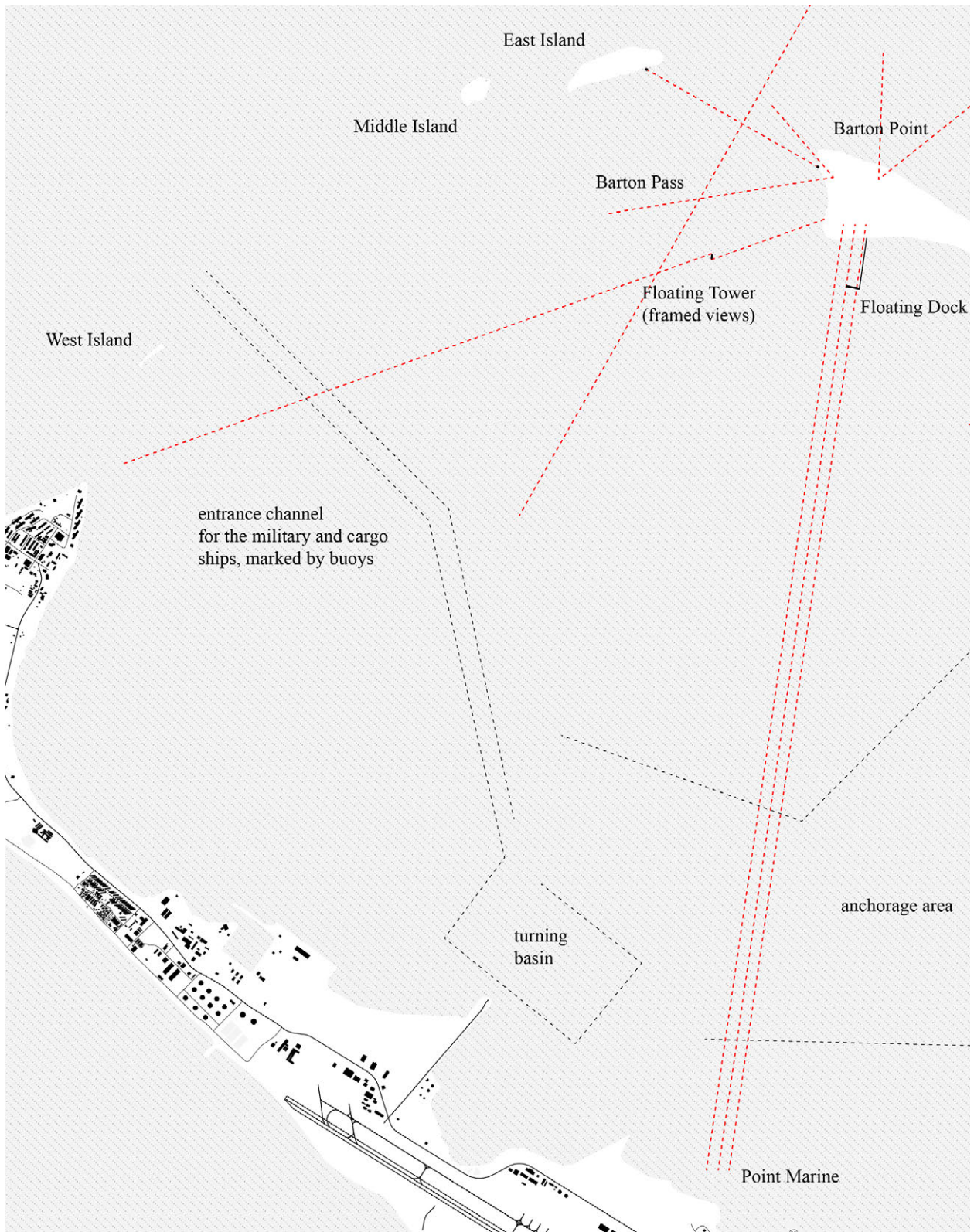
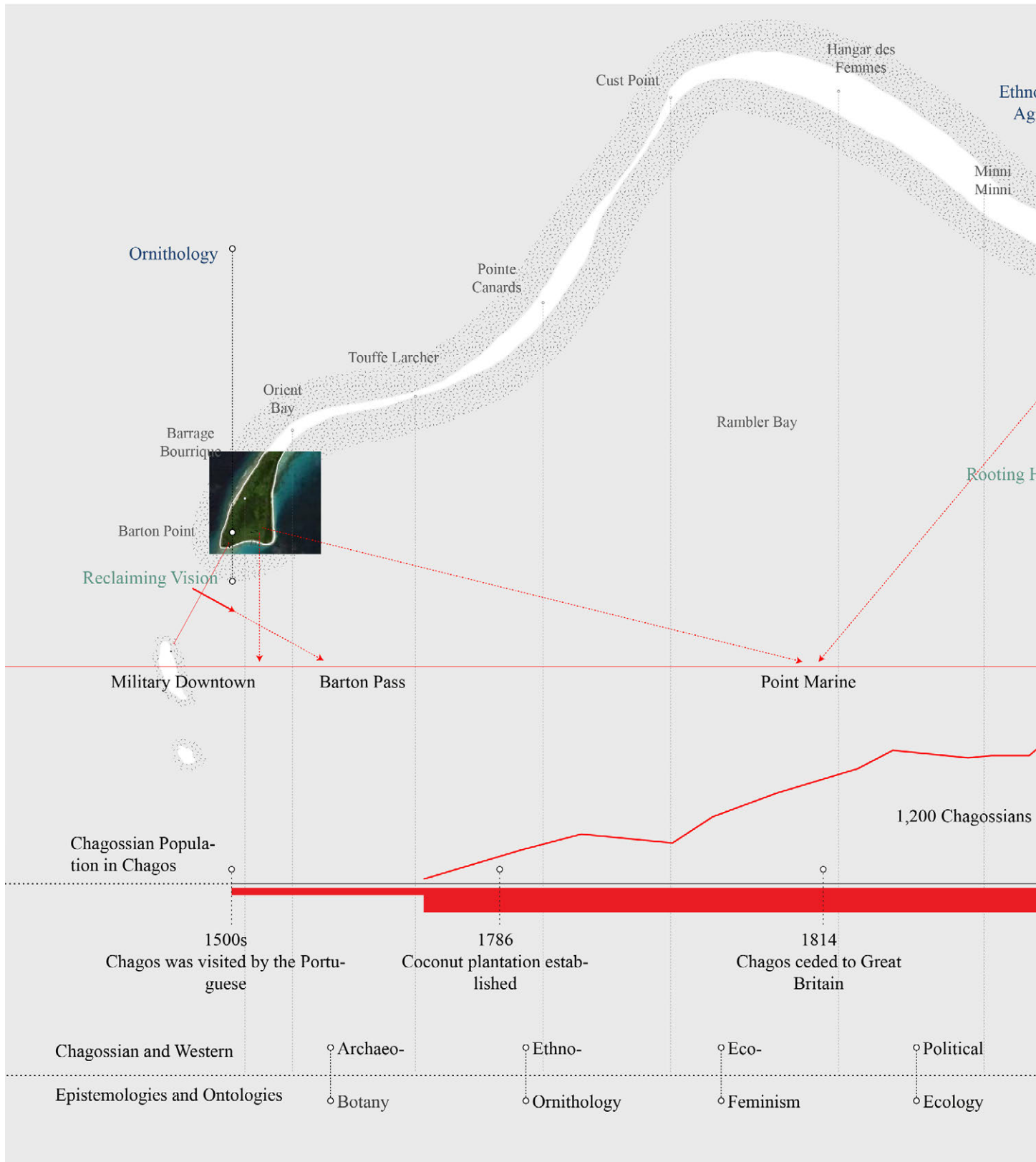
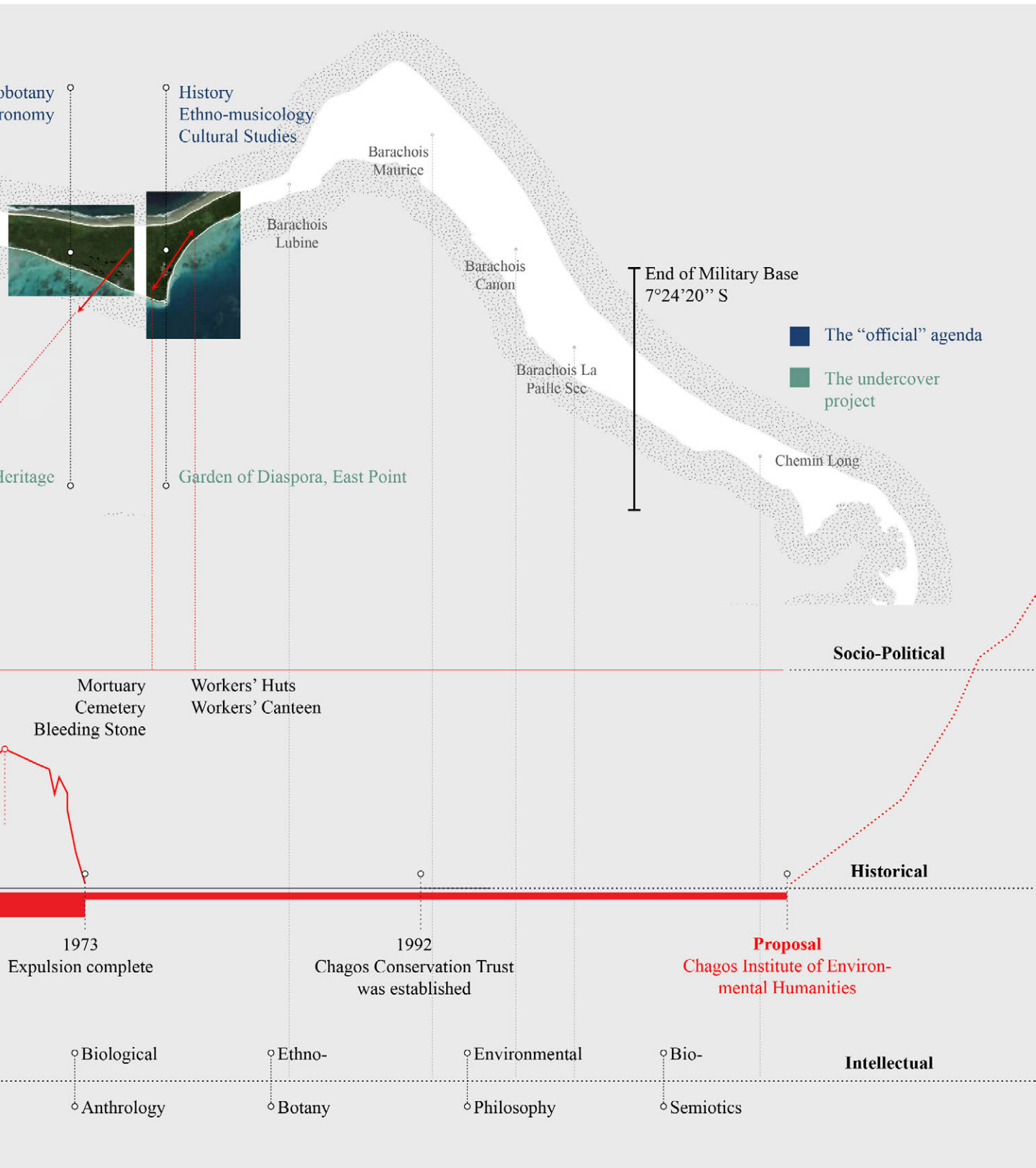


Figure 115. Territorial orientation at Barton Point (cropped). Image courtesy of author.





Conclusion

To know is to reclaim. Beyond physical resettlement, socio-politically, the Institute recognizes Chagossians' sustained efforts in resisting colonialism and militarism. Historically, it remembers and foregrounds the forgotten 200 years of Chagossian inhabitation. To know is to empower. The new system of environmental humanities rejects the nature-culture dichotomy. In problematizing the anthropocentric bias within our production of knowledge, it reveals the racist and colonialist othering of non-Western epistemologies.

There is not a deficit of knowledge, in a quantitative sense, but a deficiency at the epistemic level. Rather than anxiously producing more, it is urgent that we reclaim prior Chagossian knowledge in the formation of the future. But not futuristic, the proposed Environmental Humanities is rooted in Chagossians' past. We need the pluralist conviction that allows us to treat Chagossian and Western epistemologies equally and to merge them in a nuanced way. This is not an inconceivable revolution, as long as we have Chagossians with us through the journey.

This is not a savior project. Chagossians have already demonstrated superb capabilities in advancing legal and political claims. Across generations, even in exile, they know deeply their heritage and memory, painful and sweet. They are just not heard by us, and we just need to listen.

Appendices

Military contractors

It would be dangerous to downplay corporate stakeholders in the physical and rhetorical construction of Diego Garcia. David Vine describes the self-perpetuating businesses around military construction as a “self-licking ice cream cone”—a recent phenomenon with its roots in the ties between Brown & Root and President Lyndon Johnson in the 1930s.²⁸⁹ Although corporate involvement is not explored in this thesis, I do not intend to ignore it and would hope it be addressed and discussed properly in the future, in particular, with regards to compensation, resettlement costs and accountability to beneficiaries.²⁹⁰ Below are recent military contracts involving Diego Garcia, compiled from public information available on the website of US Department of Defense.

2020. Jacobs/B&M JV, Pasadena, California, is awarded a \$99,000,000 maximum amount, indefinite-delivery/indefinite-quantity, architect-engineer contract for architect-engineer services.²⁹¹ This includes the design, engineering, specification writing, cost estimating and related services at various locations under the cognizance of then Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) Pacific. No task orders are being issued at this time. Work will be performed at various Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and other government facilities within the NAVFAC Pacific area of operations, including but not limited to, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands (75%); Australia (15%); Hawaii (5%); and Diego Garcia (5%).

2020. Black Construction/Mace International JV,* Harmon, Guam, is awarded three firm-fixed-price task orders (N40084-20-F-4180, N40084-20-F-4149, N40084-20-F-4148) under a design-build, indefinite-delivery/indefinite-quantity, unrestricted, multiple awarded construction contract for commercial and institutional building construction.²⁹² The work includes the construction of the 34-meter antenna facility and support infrastructure; 13-meter diameter, new Radome No. 2 with reinforced concrete antenna footings, internal concrete room, ring wall, heating, ventilation and air conditioning unit, electrical and communication lines at communication site facility; a 13-meter diameter, new Radome No. 1 with reinforced concrete antenna footings, internal concrete room, ring wall, heating, ventilation and air conditioning unit, electrical and communication lines at communication site facility. Three orders total \$27,850,577.

2019. Black Construction/MACE International JV, Harmon, Guam, is awarded a \$29,877,000 firm-fixed-price contract for the construction of a three-megawatt photovoltaic electrical generation system

²⁸⁹ Vine, *Base Nation: How U.S. Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World*. Part IV, Chapter 12 “We’re profiteers.”

²⁹⁰ Huma Gupta, “Accountable to Beneficiaries? The Modern Development Enterprise & Its Contractors at War: Lessons on Accountability from Afghanistan to Inform the Contracting Reform Agenda” (Thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in City Planning, Cambridge, MA, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2011).

²⁹¹ US DEPT OF DEFENSE, “Contracts For July 6, 2020,” July 6, 2020, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Contracts/Contract/Article/2261436/>.

²⁹² US DEPT OF DEFENSE, “Contracts For Feb. 21, 2020,” February 21, 2020, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Contracts/Contract/Article/2091020//>.

at Naval Support Facility (NSF) Diego Garcia.²⁹³ The work to be performed provides for the construction (design-bid-build) of a three-megawatt photovoltaic electrical generation system and the supporting electrical distribution system upgrades required to interconnect the photovoltaic array with the existing NSF Diego Garcia. The project will also include site preparation, fencing, perimeter lighting and a ground cover system.

2019. SJC-BVIL,* Montrose Colorado, was awarded an \$11,487,876 firm-fixed-price task order under a previously awarded design-build indefinite-delivery/indefinite-quantity unrestricted multiple awarded construction contract (N40084-19-F-4319) for commercial and institutional building construction contract to repair receiver site building Facility 201 at U.S. Naval Support Facility, Diego Garcia, British Indian Ocean Territory.²⁹⁴

KBR is the latest incarnation of Brown & Root. Dick Cheney helped significantly increase the Pentagon's reliance on private contractors when he was President George H. W. Bush's secretary of defense.²⁹⁵ According to the latest information, among the total population of 2,500 on the island, only around 360 of them are military personnel, and 1,800 of the 2,180 civilians are Base Operation Services Contractors (BOSC).²⁹⁶ Below are example contracts involving KBR at Diego Garcia.

On May 11, 2017, KBR, Inc. announced that the Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) Pacific awarded a \$514.9 million fixed price with award fee contract to KBR Diego Garcia LLC.²⁹⁷ On October 5, 2017, KBR, Inc. announced that the award of a \$515 million fixed price with award fee contract to KBR Diego Garcia, LLC will stand; the work on the contract will begin in November 2017.²⁹⁸ On January 14, 2019, KBR, Inc. announced that its global government services business, KBRwyle, has been awarded a \$62 million contract modification to continue providing base operating support services (BOSS) at the Naval Support Facility Diego Garcia in the British Indian Ocean Territory.²⁹⁹

²⁹³ US DEPT OF DEFENSE, "Contracts For May 7, 2019," May 7, 2019, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Contracts/Contract/Article/1840893/source/GovDelivery/>.

²⁹⁴ US DEPT OF DEFENSE, "Contracts For April 1, 2019," April 1, 2019, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Contracts/Contract/Article/1802502/>.

²⁹⁵ Vine, *Base Nation: How U.S. Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World*. Chapter 12 "We're profiteers."

²⁹⁶ Given that some descriptions are unclear to me, please double calculate the exact numbers. Navy Region Japan Commander, "Naval Support Facility Diego Garcia: About Diego Garcia," accessed October 18, 2020, https://www.cnic.navy.mil/regions/cnrj/installations/nsf_diego_garcia/about.html.

²⁹⁷ KBR, Inc. Press Release, "KBR Diego Garcia, LLC to Support Diego Garcia Navy Base Ops, Boost Sailor Morale," May 11, 2017, <https://investors.kbr.com/news-and-events/news/news-details/2017/KBR-Diego-Garcia-LLC-to-Support-Diego-Garcia-Navy-Base-Ops-Boost-Sailor-Morale/default.aspx>.

²⁹⁸ KBR, Inc. Press Release, "KBR Diego Garcia LLC to Support Diego Garcia Navy Base Ops after GAO Protest Resolved," October 5, 2017, <https://investors.kbr.com/news-and-events/news/news-details/2017/KBR-Diego-Garcia-LLC-to-Support-Diego-Garcia-Navy-Base-Ops-after-GAO-Protest-Resolved/default.aspx>. See also US DEPT OF DEFENSE, "Contracts For May 2, 2017," May 2, 2017, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Contracts/Contract/Article/1170276/>.

²⁹⁹ KBR, Inc. Press Release, "KBRwyle Continues to Sustain Remote Diego Garcia Navy Base via \$62M Contract Mod."

Notes from Chagossian Voices Webinar

Below are some of my notes from a webinar hosted by Chagossian Voices on the 5th of December, 2020.³⁰⁰

On immigration:

Technically, Chagossians used to be BIOT i.e., British, citizens. However, they were *treated* as British subjects only during the plantation era. This is no longer the case. Immigration is their most pressing concern. So many people currently living in Manchester and Crawley cannot bring their families from Mauritius (given the cost of immigration). They do not want to go to the UK, they want to go back home. But they can't go back home.

On education:

There used to be schools on Chagos. Children have to be working to help parents on Mauritius instead of going to school. (They have) no qualification and certification to work in the UK, therefore have to work low-paid jobs. FCDO (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office of the UK Government) (requires) this and that courses, (but) Chagossians need special courses for their culture. Language barrier is also unsurmountable.

Despite the feasibility study (2015), promise/hope was broken in 2016 when government rejected resettlement because of taxpayer money and security. Now 4 years later, not the blame game, but the decision makers they have to know the people, they just need to listen to us.

On the need of a cultural center:

Request of two cultural centers in the UK. A cultural center would help elders to pass knowledge to the youngsters. (Chagossians are proud as) good musicians, to promote culture, to teach students music. We don't have a place for that kind of culture. Knowledge of fish net, growing coconuts, etc. will be good for the wellbeing and mental health of the elders.

On tension with Mauritius:

No one seems to be listening to them. (Chagossians) were even not represented in the ICJ case. They say the island should go back to the Mauritius, but Chagossians are not consulted. Chagossians did not come from Mauritius; they were born on Chagos. They came from Africa, Seychelles, Mauritius, Madagascar, etc.; they are not Mauritian. Rather there's tension with the Mauritius, who tries to get a hold of Chagos.

Below are some selected notes from the chat room that are worth attention.³⁰¹

From James Ellsmoor to Everyone: 07:37 PM

³⁰⁰ My notes are edited and paraphrased. For direct quotations, please find refer to the conference recording on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/117875596796502/videos/443522123312450/>

³⁰¹ There are typos, misspellings and grammar issues. However, given the informal nature of the chat room, I have decided to not edit them. Please find the full recording at the abovementioned Facebook link.

We run an international network of island stakeholders. Perhaps there could be an opportunity to raise awareness with our members in UKOTs, the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean. If anyone is interested in participating from Chagos diaspora I would be happy to discuss: <https://islandinnovation.co/apply-to-the-island-innovation-ambassador-program-2021/>

From Pamela Gabriel to Everyone: 07:49 PM

@spenser. Not all Chagossians or Chagossian descendants want to return, we should all get a share or the money be allocated to improve the lives of Chagossian wherever they choose to live.

From Spencer to Everyone: 07:52 PM

yes I am not against that those who want to stay in Europe it s their choice but me and my whole family we want to return and live on our islands...that s our main target and fight...There is future risk in UK especially imposing covid 19 vaccine.

From Jean-noel Bajeet to Everyone: 07:52 PM

Shameful role of Mauritius.. I feel very ashamed and apologise to the community.. definitely sovereignty should Chagossian not Mauritius.. Frankie is right we are about to lose Agelaga seems to be going a similar way..

From Ludovic Gabriel to Everyone: 08:12 PM

I just copied my previous messages as they were sent privately to the panelists. It is hard breaking how we are still suffering today while we just want our rights. All the generations should be given British citizenship - and not a pathway to citizenship like the Hong Kong nationals. I also believe the spouse of the Chagossians who have been married for more than 5years should be given the same rights as they would have qualified for naturalisation if they were in the uk. My parents are married for more than 30 years and the only way my dad can join his wife in the uk is through a spouse visa and it is really unfair. myself and all my brothers over 18 years can't even join our family there.. there is just no option for us. we need to have the right to access free education and training programs and should be given some kind of governmental grants so that we can manage to survive once in the UK otherwise we would not be able to even afford coming to the UK

A Manifesto from thesis-prep (Spring 2020)

Recall the mega-mall-CBD-waterfront-public-private-partnership recipe which was charged for raping cities worldwide by the distressed and depressed architects who have been complicit in the new wave of neoliberal imperialism with its heightened control and cathartic consumerism. The bourgeoisie paintbrush writes only anachronism. In fetishizing its own melancholy, it becomes so ill-equipped in face of the scripted world of weaponized capitals and military-corporate logistics. Among the political antagonism that is recasting the geography of law and violence, the puny sugary nostalgia of the Arcadian nature and communitarian life reverberates faintly. Entrenched in the rhetoric of “complexity,” “the everyday,” and the “trans- or inter-disciplinarity,” the academic left conceals its disillusioned pursuit of agency and strategically capitulate to the planetary-scale military-business alliances.

Those “wild” mega-utopian visions—including that polypod walking city—are midgets in face of violent economies of spaces and the deadly life of logistics—or what Mark Duffield coins as a “total war” on the securitization of the “inter-legality” of global trade. When was architecture still the new frontier of freedom nor instigator of progress? Now reduced to means or medium but not an end in itself—architecture serves as a minuscule taste of entertainment for those staffed on overseas outposts—only one of the kits that build up the global logistical network and military infrastructure. It completes the machinery of globalization—the dream that perpetuates the stratification of the globalized, unglobalized and the non-globalizable.

What about a hacker-entrepreneur-architect? Architect-martyr or whatever form of heroism is either drowned in hypocrisy or dwarfed by the complex ecologies of political and military alliances within which architects have no interlocutor. What about a disobedient playboy who commits nothing but at least disrupts it from within? In a similar way that space is the very operating system to manipulate and overwrite economic dependencies, the new Trojan horse of “neo-neoliberal” architecture, to survive, may seek new alliances to destabilize and disintegrate the system.

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