

# Africa in the Indian Ocean

*Islands in Ebb and Flow*

**Tor Sellström**

AFRICAN SOCIAL STUDIES SERIES



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# Africa in the Indian Ocean

## *Islands in Ebb and Flow*

By

Tor Sellström



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Africa in the Indian Ocean

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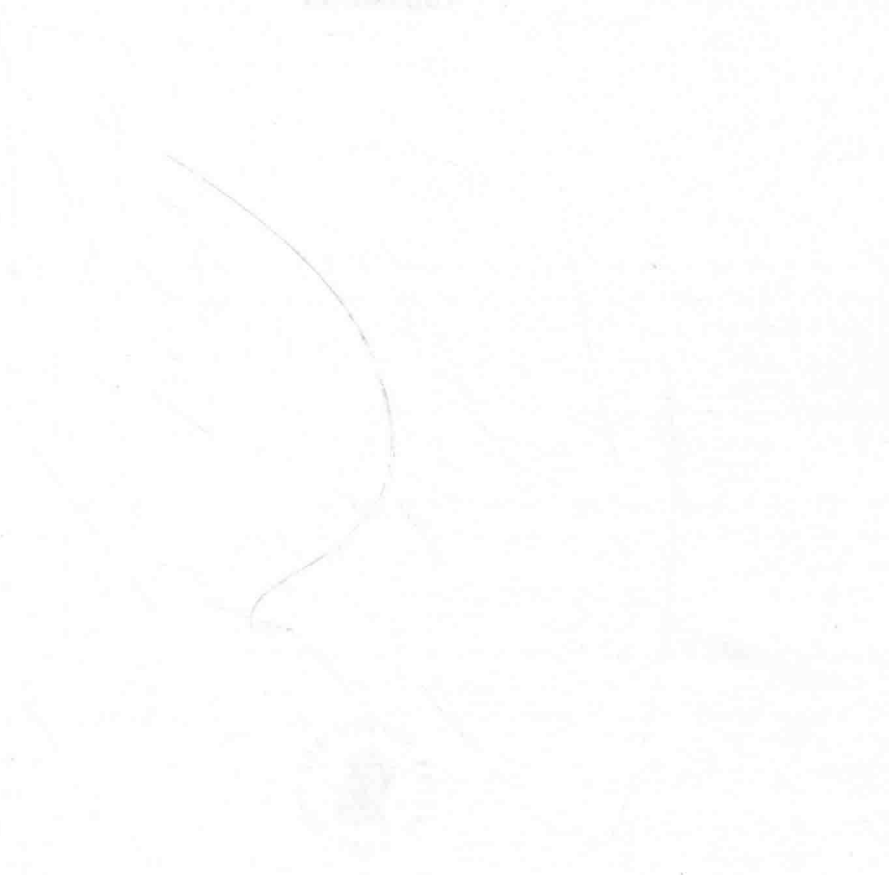
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# Contents

Preface	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
List of Maps	xv
Chapter 1	1
Chapter 2	17
Chapter 3	31
Chapter 4	45
Chapter 5	59
Chapter 6	73
Chapter 7	87
Chapter 8	101
Chapter 9	115
Chapter 10	129
Chapter 11	143
Chapter 12	157
Chapter 13	171
Chapter 14	185
Chapter 15	199
Chapter 16	213
Chapter 17	227
Chapter 18	241
Chapter 19	255
Chapter 20	269
Chapter 21	283
Chapter 22	297
Chapter 23	311
Chapter 24	325
Chapter 25	339
Chapter 26	353
Chapter 27	367
Chapter 28	381
Chapter 29	395
Chapter 30	409
Chapter 31	423
Chapter 32	437
Chapter 33	451
Chapter 34	465
Chapter 35	479
Chapter 36	493
Chapter 37	507
Chapter 38	521
Chapter 39	535
Chapter 40	549
Chapter 41	563
Chapter 42	577
Chapter 43	591
Chapter 44	605
Chapter 45	619
Chapter 46	633
Chapter 47	647
Chapter 48	661
Chapter 49	675
Chapter 50	689
Chapter 51	703
Chapter 52	717
Chapter 53	731
Chapter 54	745
Chapter 55	759
Chapter 56	773
Chapter 57	787
Chapter 58	801
Chapter 59	815
Chapter 60	829
Chapter 61	843
Chapter 62	857
Chapter 63	871
Chapter 64	885
Chapter 65	899
Chapter 66	913
Chapter 67	927
Chapter 68	941
Chapter 69	955
Chapter 70	969
Chapter 71	983
Chapter 72	997
Chapter 73	1011
Chapter 74	1025
Chapter 75	1039
Chapter 76	1053
Chapter 77	1067
Chapter 78	1081
Chapter 79	1095
Chapter 80	1109
Chapter 81	1123
Chapter 82	1137
Chapter 83	1151
Chapter 84	1165
Chapter 85	1179
Chapter 86	1193
Chapter 87	1207
Chapter 88	1221
Chapter 89	1235
Chapter 90	1249
Chapter 91	1263
Chapter 92	1277
Chapter 93	1291
Chapter 94	1305
Chapter 95	1319
Chapter 96	1333
Chapter 97	1347
Chapter 98	1361
Chapter 99	1375
Chapter 100	1389

## To Angela

Chapter 1: The History of the World and the History of the World

Chapter 2: The History of the World and the History of the World

Chapter 3: The History of the World and the History of the World

Chapter 4: The History of the World and the History of the World

Chapter 5: The History of the World and the History of the World

Chapter 6: The History of the World and the History of the World

Chapter 7: The History of the World and the History of the World

# Preface

## Neglected No Longer

When Nelson Mandela in January 1995 as South Africa's first democratically elected president paid a state visit to India, he recalled the historical role played in the two countries by Mahatma Gandhi.<sup>1</sup> Underlining the links across the ocean, he suggested that "the natural urge of the facts of history and geography should broaden itself to include the concept of an Indian Ocean rim for socio-economic cooperation," concluding that "[r]ecent changes in the international system demand that the countries of the Indian Ocean shall become a single platform."<sup>2</sup> With South Africa and India among the founding members, two years later an Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation was established. Strategically located in the middle of the ocean – roughly equidistant from Africa, the Middle East and India, and with Australia further to the east – the small African island state of Mauritius was chosen to host its secretariat. In the charter, the members of the new regional organization stated the reasons behind the initiative, declaring that they "with a sense of recovery of history" were

[c]onscious of historical bonds created through millennia among peoples of the Indian Ocean [...]; cognizant of economic transformation and speed of change the world over [...]; realizing that the countries washed by the Indian Ocean in their diversity offer vast opportunities to enhance economic interaction; [and] convinced that the Indian Ocean rim by virtue of past shared experience and geo-economic linkages [...] is poised for the creation of an effective association [...].<sup>3</sup>

- 1 On past and present relations between South Africa and India across the Indian Ocean, see Isabel Hofmeyr and Michelle Williams (eds): *South Africa and India: Shaping the Global South*, Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2011, which includes contributions on Gandhi. Gandhi worked as a lawyer in South Africa (Durban and Johannesburg) from 1893 to 1914. Joseph Lelyveld's *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle with India* (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2011) narrates how his philosophy of non-violent resistance (*satyagraha*) was shaped in South Africa and put to the test in India.
- 2 Mandela quoted in Edward A. Alpers: *The Indian Ocean in World History*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2014, p. 143.
- 3 IOR-ARC: 'Charter of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation', Port Louis, 3 March 1997.

After the Second World War, the Indian Ocean had largely lost its former glory and was relegated to “a relative backwater.”<sup>4</sup> In the beginning of the 21st century, however, the rise of India and China; their rapidly growing exchange with Africa; and the dominance of maritime trade have in addition to the petroleum and gas exports from the Middle East once more turned the ocean into a major global nexus.<sup>5</sup> The sea-lanes of the Indian Ocean roughly carry two thirds of global oil shipments, around half of the container vessels and one third of the bulk cargo traffic. As a physical setting, a medium of transportation and a theater of naval presence, it is, as observed by Berlin, “neglected no longer.”<sup>6</sup> Among others, Berlin has further argued that “no region is likely to play a crucial role as the Indian Ocean, due to its combination of oil, Islam and the likely rivalry between India and China.”<sup>7</sup> According to Kaplan, a senior fellow at the United States Center for a New American Security in Washington, it is a critical arena for global domination and “the essential place to contemplate the future of US power.”<sup>8</sup>

As a result, there has emerged an expanding Indian Ocean security literature, ranging from maritime studies to sea-power and geo-strategy.<sup>9</sup> It is primarily concerned with the leading and emerging nations’ military capabilities and projections, paying scant attention to the presence of weaker coastal and oceanic states. The ocean world is often reduced to a chessboard, where the big naval powers seemingly maneuver in a void and the regional stakeholders – with the notable exception of India – are absent or irrelevant. In 2010, Bremner

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- 4 Lee Cordner: ‘Rethinking Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean Region’ in *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region (JIOR)*, Vol. 6, No. 1, June 2010, p. 67.
  - 5 By volume, more than 90% of world trade is conducted by sea and the share is growing. At the same time, technological innovations, containerization, supertankers and gargantuan container vessels have led to a remarkable concentration of the shipping industry. In 2011, the world economy rested on the activities of some 74,000 merchant ships, their owners, operators and crew (Geoffrey Till: *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century*, Routledge, London and New York, 2013, pp. 8–9).
  - 6 Christian Bouchard and William Crumplin: ‘Neglected No Longer: The Indian Ocean at the Forefront of World Geopolitics and Global Geostrategy’ in *JIOR*, Vol. 6, No. 1, June 2010, pp. 26–51.
  - 7 Donald L. Berlin: ‘Neglected No Longer: Strategic Rivalry in the Indian Ocean’ in *Harvard International Review*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 2002, quoted in *ibid*.
  - 8 Robert D. Kaplan: *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power*, Random House, New York, 2010, p. xiv.
  - 9 Among the international academic publications, the *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* is particularly informative. The French publications *Diplomatie* and *Défense et Sécurité Internationale* (DSI) regularly contain articles on the Indian Ocean.



noted that “the [Indian] ocean is no longer a sea, but [turned into] abstract parcels of exploitable territory to be tendered off to the highest bidder.”<sup>10</sup> There is a need to fill this gap and, as stated by Kaarsholm and Sheriff, begin to “explore how systems of power and approaches to development have shaped the societies of the modern Indian Ocean rim in both the past and the present.”<sup>11</sup>

Four Indian Ocean states are members of the African Union. In this respect too, there is a conspicuous lacuna. Whereas works on Swahili culture, the East African slave trade and other subjects closely related to the Indian Ocean traditionally feature in the field of African studies, more often than not inquiries into contemporary African affairs only mention the Indian Ocean islands in passing, if at all.<sup>12</sup> This is, in particular, the case in the Anglo-American literature. Although Madagascar is a potential regional power; Mauritius and Seychelles are economic success stories; Comoros’ conflicts involve the United Nations; Reunion<sup>13</sup> is an integral part of France; Mayotte has been attached to the European Union; the British Indian Ocean Territory is still a colony; and the indigenous people of Chagos have been forcefully removed in favor of a US naval base, most works on Africa leave them out altogether.<sup>14</sup> To quote but one example, in his *Africa: Altered States, Ordinary Miracles*, Dowden explicitly states that he does not cover Africa’s islands and archipelagos, arguing that Madagascar is “a world apart” and that the other islands too “are different.”<sup>15</sup>

Different and diverse, the islands of the western Indian Ocean are, nonetheless, part of Africa and the outcome of historical processes shared with the continent. As the pendulum of history swings back; the Indian Ocean is neglected no more; and the African Union develops an integrated maritime

10 Lindsay Bremner: ‘Folded Ocean’ (2010), Quoted in Pamila Gupta: ‘Monsoon Fever’ in *Social Dynamics*, Vol. 38, No. 3, September 2012, p. 524.

11 Preben Kaarsholm and Abdul Sheriff: ‘Introduction’ (to a special issue on the Indian Ocean) in *Social Dynamics*, Vol. 38, No. 3, September 2012, p. 360.

12 This is, as a rule, also the case with the Atlantic island republics of Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe. Six out of the 54 African Union members – 11% – are island states.

13 In the text, Reunion (*La Réunion*) is written without an accent.

14 Martin Meredith’s *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence* (Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg and Cape Town, 2005) makes no reference to the Indian Ocean nations. Out of a thousand pages, Guy Arnold’s monumental *Africa: A Modern History* (Atlantic Books, London, 2005) dedicates ten to the indian-oceanic states.

15 Richard Dowden: *Africa: Altered States, Ordinary Miracles*, Portobello Books, London, 2008, p. 9. For a critique of what he describes as a “continent-bound stereotype” of Africa, see ‘The Island Factor’ in Edward A. Alpers (ed): *East Africa and the Indian Ocean*, Markus Wiener Publishers, Princeton, 2009, pp. 39–42.

strategy, it is hoped that the following text will contribute towards a better understanding of the history and the current social, political and economic challenges faced by the African Indian-oceanic countries and peoples, addressing a gap in the broader fields of both Indian Ocean and African studies.

### Intentions, Sources and Structure

The book is not the outcome of original research, nor does it claim to break new theoretical ground. Mainly drawing on acknowledged scholarly work and with an inter-disciplinary approach, the principal objective is to offer an accessible overview of the African island states and territories in the western Indian Ocean. By empirically presenting developments, events and data and exploring the ebb and flow of the countries and territories in their setting of a changing ocean, the text is primarily intended as a general introduction for students of African affairs, as well as for non-academic practitioners in international organizations, the diplomatic service and the NGO sector with an interest in the Indian Ocean world. Scholars in specific areas of expertise may find the narrative wanting. It is, nevertheless, hoped that it will be useful also to students of history, political science, development studies, conflict resolution or international relations. While history and external contexts play prominent parts, the focus on Madagascar, Comoros, Reunion, Mauritius, Seychelles, Mayotte and Chagos is on contemporary domestic affairs, achievements and shortcomings, challenges and threats. As they form part of Africa, the profiles include their relations with the continent and, in particular, the African Union.

In addition to monographs and edited volumes, the text relies on academic articles and papers, as well as on official documents and reports. Media accounts are used to illustrate recent events. Several boxes accompany the text for background information, additional explanation or contextualization. For the benefit of those unfamiliar with the colonial history of France, some of them summarize significant issues and events. To facilitate macro- and socio-economic comparisons between the sovereign Indian Ocean nations, data in US Dollars from the World Bank, IMF, UNDP and other international organizations refer to 2010–12. For Reunion and Mayotte – which are departments of France and do not appear in global indexes – the corresponding information is sourced from the French official statistical agency INSEE and given in Euros. References are recorded in footnotes, perhaps too strictly and excessively. However, in the cases of quotations and quantitative data, as well as where the views expressed may appear controversial, transparency requires that the

sources are properly accounted for. Important works on various subject matters are further noted with a view to assist the interested reader.

To frame the individual island presentations, the introduction outlines the physical environment, salient historical events and processes, contemporary challenges, external powers and regional organizations in the African part of the Indian Ocean. Written in a similar format, the following chapters on Madagascar, Comoros and the creole islands of Reunion, Mauritius and Seychelles explore their history, demography and insular commonality. Above all, they focus on the islands' post-colonial socio-political and economic developments and, therefore, also on their diversity. Finally, the concluding chapter discusses the situation with regard to Mayotte and Chagos, territories which in breach of international law respectively remain under French and Anglo-American administration.

The narrative covers events until 2013. Where relevant, it goes further. In the case of Madagascar, it includes a preliminary assessment of the December 2013 presidential and parliamentary elections, which brought a formal end to the country's prolonged constitutional crisis.

Somali piracy is discussed in the opening chapter and again in the text on Seychelles. By 2013, the threat had dramatically decreased and some could argue that it has been given too much attention. While the situation has improved, it remains, however, that piracy has had profound effects on the island states and societies, Seychelles in particular, and that the international counter-piracy operations have led to growing militarization, as well as to the appearance of new external actors on the Indian Ocean stage.

Selection, sequencing and presentation of facts, figures and ideas are never truly comprehensive or objective. As noted by Munslow on the writing of history, "knowledge [bears] the fingerprints of its interpreters."<sup>16</sup> That said, this book on the Indian Ocean nations and territories aims at providing a fair, updated and intelligible presentation of a little known region of Africa.

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16 Alun Munslow: *Deconstructing History*, Routledge, London and New York, 1997, p. 8.

## Acknowledgements

As this book goes to the printer, I would like to express my appreciation to those who made it possible and supported me during the writing process. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency generously seconded me to the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala, where Carin Norberg and her staff made me feel warmly welcome and Mats Utas encouraged me to turn various papers and ideas into a coherent manuscript. Among the many readers of the draft text, I am grateful to Preben Kaarsholm for his general comments and much indebted to Iain Walker and Peter Sand for their expertise on Comoros and Chagos. Although they remain anonymous, deep thanks go to the Brill reviewers for their insightful and constructive observations. At Brill in Leiden, Franca de Kort extended invaluable assistance.

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*Knivsta/Uppsala, Sweden*

15 October 2014

# List of Maps

- 1 Western Indian Ocean 2
- 2 Shipping in the western Indian Ocean 5
- 3 Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) 23
- 4 Extension of Somali piracy 2005–2011 29
- 5 Madagascar 50
- 6 Comoros 136
- 7 Reunion 200
- 8 Mauritius 224
- 9 Seychelles 262
- 10 Mayotte 310
- 11 British Indian Ocean Territory (Chagos) 337
- 12 Diego Garcia 352

# List of Boxes

## **Introduction: From Zanj to Maersk**

- Socotra, Lakshadweep and Maldives 3
- Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* 11
- Somali piracy 28
- Blue-water capability 35
- The South African navy 41

## **Madagascar: Old Cultures, Contemporary Crises**

- Slavery and stigma 56
- Code de l'indigénat* 75
- Communauté française* and decolonization in French Africa 81
- AGOA, the Cotonou Agreement and the Multi-Fiber Arrangement 125
- Piracy off Madagascar 132
- Rural violence 134

## **Comoros: Legacies of Monsoon Trade and Un-Finished Independence**

- AU Border Programme 141
- Mozambique Island 151
- Zanzibar and Mozambique 158
- Denard and *Françafrique* 169

## **Reunion, Mauritius and Seychelles: Creole Islands in Development**

- A modern university 214
- Agalega, Cargados Carajos and Tromelin 223
- Dynastic families 237
- Sustainability of tourism 252
- Deportation and exile 270

## **Mayotte and Chagos: Colonialism Continued**

- Searching for a US base 338

## Reference Tables

The following tables are for general comparisons, with figures referring to 2009–12. For updates, trends and sources, see the main text.

Data for the French overseas departments of Mayotte and Reunion are not included in international tables by the UNDP, the World Bank and similar organizations.

### A) Physical

	COM	MAD	MAU	MAY	REU	SEY
Land area (in km <sup>2</sup> )	1,644	587,000	2,040	374	2,512	457
Population	754,000	20,700,000	1,300,000	213,000	840,000	91,000
Density (per km <sup>2</sup> )	459	35	637	570	334	199/448
EEZ (in km <sup>2</sup> )	164,000	1,225,000	1,285,000	63,000	315,000	1,336,000
International tourists	2,000	260,000	930,000	4,000	60,000	210,000
As % of population	0.3	1.3	71.5	1.9	7.1	231

In Seychelles, 99% of the population lives on the islands of Mahé, Praslin and La Digue, where the density is 448 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>.

The category 'international tourists' does not include French citizens to Comoros, Mayotte or Reunion.

The land area of the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT)/Chagos is 60 square kilometers and the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) 639,000 km<sup>2</sup>. There is no resident population in BIOT.

## B) Socio-Economic

	COM	MAD	MAU	MAY	REU	SEY
GDP/capita (in USD)	740	427	7,577	6,575	17,700	11,249
				<i>Euros</i>	<i>Euros</i>	
Gini coefficient	0.64	0.44	0.38	0.49	0.39	0.66
Poverty rate in %	44.8	76.5	2	28	50	0.5
Human Dev:t Index	0.429	0.483	0.737	0.75	0.881	0.806
HDI rank world	169	151	80	n.a.	n.a.	46
HDI rank Africa	35	21	3	n.a.	n.a.	1
IIAG rank Africa	31	35	1	n.a.	n.a.	4
CPI rank world	133	118	43	n.a.	n.a.	51

Data for Mayotte and Reunion are from the French statistical agency INSEE and in Euros. Poverty refers to the monetary rate of France, i.e. before social transfers.

GDP/per capita in USD refer to 2010 and the Gini coefficients to 2009–12.

Figures and ranks for the Human Development Index (HDI), the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) and the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) refer to 2012.



# List of Acronyms

AFD	French Development Agency
AfDB	African Development Bank
AFRICOM	United States Africa Command
AGOA	African Growth and Opportunity Act (of United States)
AIM	African Integrated Maritime Strategy
AKFM	Party for Madagascar's Independence
AMISOM	African Union Military Mission to Somalia
AMU	African and Malagasy Union
ANC	African National Congress (of South Africa)
APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
APS	Africa Partnership Station (of United States)
AREMA	Vanguard of the Malagasy Revolution
ASEC	Association of Comorian Apprentices and Students
ASF	African Standby Force
AU	African Union
BIOT	British Indian Ocean Territory
BNP	Federal Intelligence Service (of Germany)
CAM	Muslim Committee of Action (of Mauritius)
CENIT	Independent National Electoral Commission for the Transition (of Madagascar)
CFV	Committee of Living Forces (of Madagascar)
CGPCS	Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (of United States)
COI	<i>Commission de l'Océan Indien</i>
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
CPI	Corruption Perception Index
CRG	Chagos Refugees Group
DGSE	General Directorate for External Security (of France)
DOM	Overseas Department (of France)
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
EEC	European Economic Community
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EPA	Economic Partnership Agreement
EPZ	Export Processing Zone
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
EU	European Union