



Kent Academic Repository

Nicholls, Peter A. (2018) 'The Door to the Coast of Africa': The Seychelles in the Mascarene Slave Trade, 1770-1830. Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) thesis, University of Kent,.

Downloaded from

<https://kar.kent.ac.uk/67029/> The University of Kent's Academic Repository KAR

The version of record is available from

This document version

UNSPECIFIED

DOI for this version

Licence for this version

UNSPECIFIED

Additional information

Versions of research works

Versions of Record

If this version is the version of record, it is the same as the published version available on the publisher's web site. Cite as the published version.

Author Accepted Manuscripts

If this document is identified as the Author Accepted Manuscript it is the version after peer review but before type setting, copy editing or publisher branding. Cite as Surname, Initial. (Year) 'Title of article'. To be published in *Title of Journal*, Volume and issue numbers [peer-reviewed accepted version]. Available at: DOI or URL (Accessed: date).

Enquiries

If you have questions about this document contact ResearchSupport@kent.ac.uk. Please include the URL of the record in KAR. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our [Take Down policy](https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies) (available from <https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies>).

‘The Door to the Coast of Africa’:

The Seychelles in the Mascarene Slave Trade, 1770-1830

Peter A. Nicholls

PhD History

Submitted to the University of Kent, January 2018

78,000 words

Abstract

Rejecting the customary scholarly distinction between legal and illegal slave trades, this research explores the relationship between the Seychelles islands and the south-western Indian Ocean's slave trade to the Mascarenes from the time of the Seychelles' colonisation in 1770 to the demise of the slave trade in c. 1830. The work begins by locating the French colonisation of the Seychelles within the context of the changing dynamics of the trade, specifically the shift from Madagascar to Mozambique as the primary supplier of slaves for the Mascarenes and the growing slave-exporting role of the Swahili coast at the end of the eighteenth century. When set against this backdrop, the colonisation of the Seychelles appears in a novel light, and the thesis advances the argument that – contrary to what has commonly been assumed – slave trading ambitions and activity were central to the settlement project. Since growing numbers of slaving voyages between East Africa and Mauritius and Réunion made use of the Seychelles in subsequent decades, the dissertation next turns its attention to discussing the socio-economic life of early Seychellois and, specifically, the various services which they provided to slavers. It is here demonstrated that the Seychelles were used as a provisioning station and, most important of all, as a sanatorium for passing slaves. The Seychelles could perform this latter function – and thus impact on slave mortality rates during sea crossings – thanks to the presence of small islands which were employed as quarantine stations, the availability of clean water and the abundance of wild food sources, especially tortoise and turtle meat. The intermediary role of the Seychelles is shown to have increased in the aftermath of the British takeover and the subsequent criminalisation of the slave trade in 1810. Following repressive measures in the 1820s, the Seychelles became the centre of a wide-ranging smuggling network that drew on the outer islands of the archipelago to move East African and Malagasy slaves predominantly to Réunion. The inner islands, for their part, were more central to the large-scale abuse of the so-called 'transfer system', which resulted in thousands of newly purchased slaves being imported into Mauritius following a period of acclimatisation in the Seychelles. The thesis' overarching argument is that the Seychelles were much more significant to the slave trade of the Mascarenes than has been previously assumed and that, were it not for the Seychelles, such trade might not have expanded as rapidly as it did in both geographical and demographic terms.

Acknowledgements

Over the course of this research project I have been very fortunate in receiving support, advice and assistance from a host of generous individuals and institutions to whom I wish to express my sincere gratitude. My utmost thanks go to Giacomo Macola for all his guidance and committed support that has extended far beyond his duty as supervisor of this PhD. For insightful conversations, advice and good company throughout my time at the University of Kent, I would like to thank Andy Cohen, Christine Whyte, John Kegel and Tarryn Gourley. Juliette Pattinson also deserves to be thanked for her advice and feedback, as do Faye Beesely and Rob Brown for their much appreciated assistance.

A special thanks is owed to Richard Allen for his invaluable advice, sharing with me vital unpublished materials and pointing me in the direction of essential archival documents. I am grateful to Vijaya Teelock and the Centre for Research on Slavery and Indenture for accommodating me at the University of Mauritius and providing opportunities to share my research and receive feedback there. I have received much appreciated advice and feedback from Julien Durup and William McAteer. I am grateful to Karine Wigmore for her help in deciphering particularly difficult and damaged documents, and to Tony Mathiot for sharing his extensive knowledge of documents in the Seychelles National Archives. Thanks are extended to Tonio, Maria, Mena, Martha, Brigitte, Janet, Caroline, Anne, Norbert and Mr Lucas at the Seychelles National Archives, and to Mrs Mohun and the Mauritius National Archives for their hospitality and assistance during my visits. For funding this research, I thank the Consortium for the Humanities and the Arts South-east England and the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

Finally I wish to thank my family for all their help, support and encouragement.

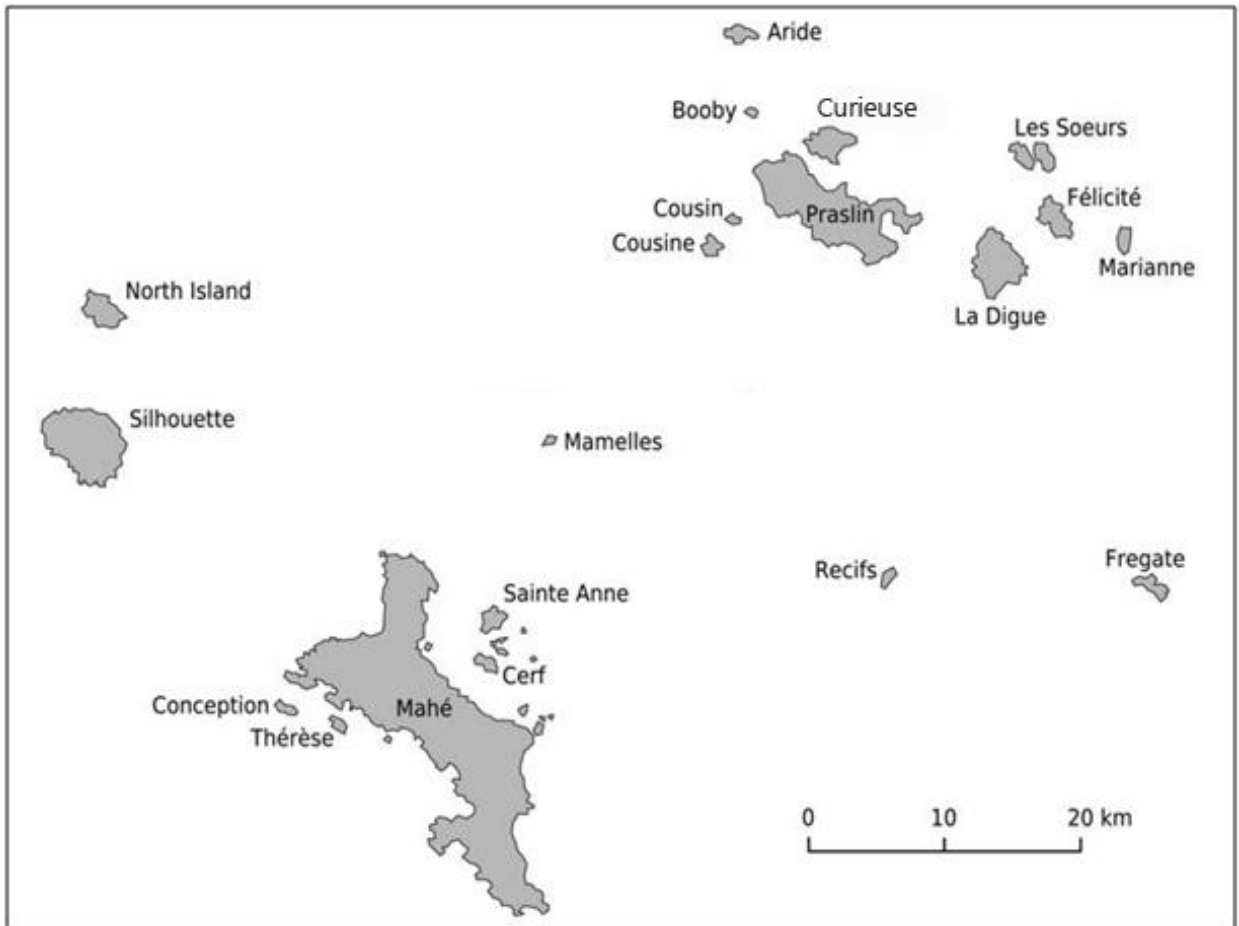
Contents

Introduction	1
The Historiographical Landscape	3
Aims and Structure of the Dissertation	22
Sources and Methodology	26
Chapter 1 Foundations - The Mascarene Slave Trade	32
An Overview of the Mascarene Slave Trade	33
Madagascar	36
Mozambique.....	40
The Swahili Coast	42
A Space for the Seychelles.....	44
The Mascarene Network	46
The Last Years of the Legal Trade.....	50
Chapter 2 The Seychelles Enter the Mascarene Slave Trade.....	52
The Turn of the 1770s.....	52
Enter the Seychelles	57
The Slave Trade and the Growth of the Early Seychelles Colony.....	72
Chapter 3 Slaving Services and the Seychellois	82
The Horrors of Disease	84
Slaves Disembarked.....	88
Provisioning	91
Ship Repair.....	93
The Consumption of Tortoises.....	95
The Fear of Slave Resistance	98
The Slave Trade of the Seychellois.....	99
The Significance of the Slave Recovery Station.....	103

Chapter 4 The Seychelles and the Onset of the Illegal Slave Trade	107
Coming to Terms with Illegality	110
Experienced Concealers of Slaves	114
The Lawlessness of the Early British Seychelles, 1812-1815.....	119
Repressive Measures, 1815-1820.....	123
Chapter 5 The Slave Trade’s Last Stand, 1820-1830	132
The Need for New Methods.....	133
The Manipulation of the Transfer System.....	136
The Role of the Outer Seychelles.....	143
Methods of Supplying the Seychelles and Methods of Acclimatisation.....	154
Epilogue: The Seychelles and the Suppression of the East African Slave Trade	167
Conclusion.....	181
Sources and Bibliography	191



Map 1. The South-western Indian Ocean.



Map 2. The Inner Islands of the Seychelles.

Introduction

For perhaps more than a thousand years, the principal archipelago of the Seychelles – the cluster of islands lying almost centrally in the stretch of ocean bordered by the Swahili coast to the west, northern Madagascar to the south-west and India to the north-east – remained excluded from the trading networks that connected East Africa, Arabia, India and the Far East. What is argued to have been the first global economy¹ – a vast web of exchanges that moved all manner of produce, people and ideas across every stretch of shoreline between South Africa and Southeast Asia – bypassed these mid-oceanic islands as traffic tended not to stray too far from land. Although the islands were known – they had been included in the maps of Arab traders who shipped East African ivory and slaves to the Persian Gulf since the tenth century – they were perhaps only rarely visited by sailors finding themselves far to the east of their usual route. While it is the aim of this thesis to demonstrate that the Seychelles were to eventually become important in the south-western Indian Ocean's long history of multi-directional and interconnected slave trades, it is appropriate to begin by acknowledging that the uninhabited archipelago which the Arabs called the *Zarin* saw little human activity until comparatively recently.²

It was French activity in the closing decades of the eighteenth century that transformed the Seychelles into a significant participant in the network of economic and cultural exchanges that held together the 'Indian Ocean World'. The islands were colonised, following several reconnaissance voyages in previous decades, by inhabitants of Île de France (present-day Mauritius) in 1770. From that point on they were managed as a sub-dependency of Île de France, overseen by one government agent and afforded little resources. While there were many benefits to be gained from hoisting the French flag over the Seychelles, agriculture has commonly been regarded as the single most important reason for their settlement in 1770 and their very existence as a French colony. One of the main arguments of this thesis,

1 Gwyn Campbell, 'Introduction: Slavery and Other Forms of Unfree Labour in the Indian Ocean World', in Gwyn Campbell (ed.), *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (London and New York, 2004), pp. vii-viii.

2 Deryck Scarr, *Seychelles since 1770: History of a Slave and Post-Slave Society* (London, 2000), p. 3.

however, is that the dynamics of the slave trade of the south-western Indian Ocean were no less important a factor in shaping both the early and the later history of the Seychelles. The question of how this trade influenced the colonisation, development and life on the islands forms one line of enquiry throughout the thesis, while the impacts that the Seychelles' various roles had on the Mascarene trade itself and its expanding regional importance forms another. Insofar as it is possible, what can be learned about slaving activity in and around the Seychelles will be located in the broader narrative of the Mascarene trade's growth and development between 1770 and c. 1830, as an increasingly important component of the western Indian Ocean's history of slave trading.

The French slave trade in the south-western Indian Ocean began with France's first small-scale settlements in the region in the mid-seventeenth century but increased in scope and volume in parallel with the economic expansion of the principal Mascarene islands – Île de France and Bourbon (now Réunion) – from the 1730s.³ Drawing primarily on East African and Malagasy slaves – who were employed for plantation work, urban development and shipping services – the Mascarene slave trade experienced a sudden expansion from 1769, the year in which it was liberalised. Already in 1770, the Mascarenes were importing approximately 2,500 slaves per year, twice the number of slaves imported during the previous decade.⁴ This expansion is understood to have had a major impact, not only on trade's volume, but on its modes of functioning as well as the makeup and proportional importance of its suppliers. The emerging Seychelles settlement is to be assessed, in this dissertation, within the context of these major changes resulting from the 1769 liberalisation. Following their colonisation in 1770, the Seychelles became a part of the booming slave trade and acted as a provisioning station and recovery point for Île de France and Bourbonnais slavers, as well as developing a lesser trade for their own labourers. As the first chapters of this thesis will demonstrate, it was because of the ambition of French entrepreneurs already engaged in the Mascarene slave trade that the Seychelles were colonised and became subject to schemes attempting to

3 For the 1730s development of Mauritius, see Auguste Toussaint, *History of Mauritius* (London, 1977), pp. 29-31.

4 Richard B. Allen, 'The Mascarene Slave-Trade and Labor Migration in the Indian Ocean during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', in Campbell, *The Structure of Slavery*, Table 2, Projected Slave Imports into the Mascarenes 1715-1809, p. 39.

transform them into a facilitator of the slave trade, as well as a producer of cash crops.

Positing that slave trading was far more central to the emergence and development of the Seychelles colony than has hitherto been assumed in existing histories of the islands, this thesis will explore the ways in which activity in and around the Seychelles supported an expanding slave trade between, principally, East Africa and the Mascarenes. It will be argued that the enabling role of the Seychelles in the slave trade of the Mascarenes took a variety of forms, responding to changing external conditions from 1770 onwards. Particular emphasis will be placed on the transition from legal to illegal slaving that followed the British conquest of Île de France in 1810 and the manner in which the Seychelles adapted to the needs of the new era. My overarching contention is that it is only by locating the Seychelles into the broader context of the Mascarene slave trade, and its own trajectory within the south-western Indian Ocean's interconnected web of slave trades, that a full picture can be obtained of the history of the islands and their regional significance during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Before turning to the specific questions that this thesis will seek to address, however, it is appropriate to review what has already been ascertained about slave trading activity in and around the Seychelles, and the role of the islands within the Mascarene trade and the wider history of the Indian Ocean.

The Historiographical Landscape

The roles played by the Seychelles in Indian Ocean slave trading, both legal and illegal, still await detailed study. Little more has been established, so far, than the importance of the islands as a way-station in the slave trade between East Africa and north-west Madagascar, on the one hand, and Mauritius and Réunion, on the other, from the second half of the eighteenth century until the 1830s, when slave trading came to a close. The literature to be reviewed here comprise: work on the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century slave trade of the Mascarenes, which encompassed the Seychelles; histories of the Seychelles themselves, which consist

primarily of synoptic accounts that devote little attention to the workings of the slave trade; and a small number of studies which have considered both the Mauritian and Seychellois, or a wider Mascarene, experience of slavery and the illegal slave trade of the nineteenth century. Over the course of this survey, some reasons will be advanced to account for the dearth of scholarly work on the Seychelles' role in slave trading and to defend the contention that the trajectory of the archipelago is critical to forming a thorough understanding of slave trading in the south-western Indian Ocean. The final section of this historiographical survey offers a brief discussion of the emerging scholarship that examines oceanic interactions from a multi-sited, trans-national perspective, teasing out what such perspective can add to our knowledge of the Seychelles' role in slave trading and what this may contribute to our broader understanding of slavery systems and forced migrations in the Indian Ocean and globally.

Scholarship on the Mascarene Slave Trade

Studies of the French slave trade to Île de France and Bourbon, the two largest and most politically significant French territories in the south-western Indian Ocean, emerged simultaneously out of two distinct fields of study. The first – epitomised by Edward Alpers' seminal *Ivory and Slaves* – consisted of research conducted on the east African coast and Madagascar. *Ivory and Slaves* showed that the expansion of the plantation sector in Île de France and Bourbon initiated by the policies of Governor Mahé de La Bourdonnais in the 1730s resulted in a large increase in the number of slaves bought, raided and sold throughout East Africa. Captives were diverted from the dominant routes that had seen them shipped northwards to the Persian Gulf, and were now increasingly sent – via Portuguese, Swahili and Arab coastal settlements – to the French islands.⁵ Alongside a wealth of new Portuguese material, Alpers drew on previous research which had demonstrated the extent of French ambitions to develop a slave trade between the Mascarenes and East Africa. In *The French at Kilwa Island*, G.S.P Freeman-Grenville had discussed negotiations between French traders and east African coastal authorities. Freeman-Grenville, in

⁵ Edward Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves: Changing Pattern of International Trade in East Central Africa to the Later 19th Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1975).

particular, traced the activities of Jean-Vincent Morice, the Île de France-based slave trader who ventured north of Portuguese Mozambique and struck deals with the Swahili rulers of Zanzibar and Kilwa, in present-day southern Tanzania. Following his visits between 1773 and 1776, Morice claimed that the two localities could supply the Mascarenes with 2,000 slaves per year.⁶ On top of this, Abdul Sheriff argued that, by drawing slaves from Kilwa, Morice was bent on breaking Kilwa's dependence on Zanzibar and the 'northern slave trade' to the Arab world.⁷ In 'The French in East Africa', Alpers himself had shown how French slavers from Mauritius and Réunion had come to arrangements with Portuguese settlers and officials in Mozambique Island and Ibo, who were already sending between 800 and 1,000 slaves per year to their Indian strongholds, to purchase slaves, in defiance of Lisbon's ban on trading with other European nations.⁸ Later scholars of East Africa extended the chronological remit of these early studies and demonstrated that slaves were trafficked in multiple directions between Mozambique, the Comoros and north-western Madagascar, and that small-scale slave trading from all these locations had also been carried out to the Arab world long before the emergence of European demand.⁹

Though scholarly investigations into early French commercial activities on the east African coast opened the door to work on the Mascarene slave trade, the origins of the trade itself are seemingly to be found in the exportation of slaves from Madagascar. Alpers pointed out that, with the exception of two cargoes of slaves which the French were permitted to take in 1721 as repayment for assisting the Portuguese Count of Ericeira after an attack by pirates, the first recorded purchase of

6 G.S.P. Freeman-Grenville, *The French at Kilwa Island: An Episode in Eighteenth-Century East African History* (Oxford, 1965), p. 64.

7 Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar, Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770-1873* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 41-48.

8 Edward Alpers, 'The French Slave Trade in East Africa (1721-1810)', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 10, 37 (1970), pp. 80-124.

9 Gill Shepherd, 'The Comorians and the East African Slave Trade', in James L. Watson (ed.), *Asian and African Systems of Slavery* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 73-99; James C. Armstrong, 'Madagascar and the Slave Trade in the Seventeenth Century', *Omalu sy Anio*, 17, 20 (1983), pp. 211-233; Edward Alpers, 'A Complex Relationship: Mozambique and the Comoros Islands in the 19th and 20th Centuries', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 41, 161 (2001), pp. 73-95; Gwyn Campbell, 'Madagascar and Mozambique in the Slave Trade of the Western Indian Ocean 1800-1861', *Slavery and Abolition*, 9, 3 (1988), pp. 166-193.

slaves by the French in Mozambique, in 1733, was the result of a chance opportunity during what was supposed to be a simple reconnaissance trip to Mozambique in the context of a slaving voyage to the Sakalava ports of north-west Madagascar.¹⁰ Subsequent studies of Madagascar have devoted much attention to the slave trade, with a particular focus on the nineteenth century and British efforts to end the slave trade from the island's east coast.¹¹ Other work, however, has explored the trade in the eighteenth century and assessed the pressures exerted on Madagascar from the French Mascarenes. The economic and political aspects of Madagascar's relationship with the Mascarene trade have been addressed by Gwyn Campbell¹² and Pier Larson;¹³ in the case of the latter, much attention has been afforded to the experience and memory of slavery in these contexts. As in the case of the east African coast, the fact that French designs and activities drew upon pre-existing trade networks in Madagascar is key to understanding the context in which the Mascarene slave trade developed and sustained itself. The trade in slaves that expanded on the east coast as a result of Mascarene demand in the eighteenth century has been shown by Campbell to have utilised indigenous over-land networks developed in relation to pre-existing

10 Alpers, 'The French Slave Trade in East Africa', pp. 86-87.

11 Jean Valette, *Etudes sur le règne de Radama Ier* (Antananarivo, 1962); Ludvig Munthe, Charles Ravoajanahary and Simon Ayache, 'Radama Ier et les Anglais: les négociations de 1817 d'après les sources malgaches', *Omalysy Anio*, 3, 4 (1976), pp. 9-104.

12 Gwyn Campbell, 'Introduction: Slavery and Other Forms of Unfree Labour in the Indian Ocean World', *Slavery & Abolition*, 24, 2 (2003), pp. ix-xxxii; 'Madagascar and the Slave Trade 1810-1895', *Journal of African History*, 22, 2 (1981), pp. 203-227; *An Economic History of Imperial Madagascar, 1750-1895: The Rise and Fall of an Island Empire* (Cambridge, 2005); 'Madagascar and Mozambique in the Slave Trade of the Western Indian Ocean 1800-1861'; 'The Structure of Trade in Madagascar, 1750-1810', *International Journal of African Studies*, 26, 1 (1993), pp. 111-148.

13 Pier Larson, 'The Origins of Malagasy Arriving in Mauritius and Réunion: Expanding the Mascarene Slavery', in Vijaya Teelock and Edward Alpers (eds), *History, Memory and Identity* (Port Louis, 2001), pp. 195-236; *History and Memory in the Age of Enslavement: Becoming Merina in Highland Madagascar, 1770-1822* (Portsmouth NH, 2000); 'A Census of Slaves Exported from Central Madagascar to the Mascarenes between 1769 and 1820', in Ignace Rakoto (ed.), *L'esclavage à Madagascar. Aspects historiques et résurgences contemporaines* (Antananarivo 1997), pp. 131-145; 'The Route of the Slave from Highland Madagascar to the Mascarenes: Commercial Organization, 1770-1820', in Ignace Rakoto (ed.), *La Route des esclaves. Système servile et traite dans l'est malgache* (Paris, 2000), pp. 119-180.

trades dominated by Arab and Sakalava dealers in the north-west of the island.¹⁴ This much older trade had seen previous participation by the Portuguese, Dutch and English in the seventeenth century, but, as has been demonstrated by James C. Armstrong, it had mainly catered for Arab and Swahili demand until such demand was superseded by that of the French from the Mascarenes in the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁵ Thus, the work undertaken on both East Africa and Madagascar has made it possible to argue that the Mascarene slave trade tacked itself onto, and rapidly expanded, pre-existing slave trades between East Africa, the Comoros, Madagascar, India and the Arab world.

While most of these works on the trade of East Africa and Madagascar show some awareness of the Seychelles' importance as a way-station for ships carrying slaves to Mauritius and Réunion – and even though Alpers noted in passing that the islands had later played a part in the illegal slave trade that followed the British conquest of the Mascarenes in 1810¹⁶ – the Seychelles were not deemed worthy of specific scholarly investigation at this stage. Even recent work which examines connections which directly involved the Seychelles has not sought to explore latter's role. For instance, in his study of French relations with Zanzibar, Thomas Vernet argues that the aforementioned Morice was but one in a line of French businessmen going to East Africa for slave trading purposes, and that, before him, deals had already been made to supply thousands of slaves to the Mascarenes from Mombasa and Pate, along the coast of present-day Kenya, in the early 1770s.¹⁷ Lying outside the scope of Vernet's study, however, is a discussion of how these trading arrangements between various localities on the coast of East Africa and the Mascarenes were predicated on French ships carrying their trade through the newly settled Seychelles, whose funding and expansion were being considered by the French Government and Mauritian authorities at the time.¹⁸

14 Campbell, 'The Structure of Trade in Madagascar, 1750-1810'.

15 Armstrong, 'Madagascar and the Slave Trade in the Seventeenth Century'.

16 Alpers, 'The French Slave Trade in East Africa', p. 84.

17 Thomas Vernet, 'La première traite française à Zanzibar: le journal de bord du vaisseau l'Espérance, 1774-1775', in Chantal Radimilahy and Narivelo Rajaonarimanana (eds), *Civilisations des mondes insulaires (Madagascar, canal de Mozambique, Mascareignes, Polynésie, Guyanes)* (Paris, 2011), pp. 482-483.

18 Archives Nationales de France (henceforth ANF) C4/145 Brayer du Barré to Ministre de la Marine, 25 January 1774.

The second mainspring of work on the Mascarene slave trade was research on the history of the islands themselves. An important contribution to our knowledge of Mascarenian commerce was made by Mauritian archivist and historian, Auguste Toussaint. In *La route des îles*, Toussaint compiled a series of tables showing the number of slaves imported between 1773 and 1810 by just over 500 ships from various locations, as well as indicating mortality rates on these voyages.¹⁹ Toussaint used the records of shipping imports to Île de France, and other sources available in Mauritian and Réunionnais archives, to provide the earliest mappings of the trade's structure. Toussaint's work – along with that of Jean-Michel Filliot, who had made a more significant attempt to tally the total number of slaves imported – demonstrated that the slave trade to Île de France and Bourbon involved numbers of slaves that reached well into the hundreds of thousands, and from locations as varied as Madagascar, East Africa, India, China, south-east Asia, the Persian Gulf and West Africa.²⁰

In the context of the present discussion, *La route des îles* is especially important for including a brief, annexed chapter on trade to Île de France and Bourbon from, or through, the Seychelles.²¹ While concerning itself with all Seychellois trade, and acknowledging that the question of the archipelago's use as a refreshment stop in the slave trade required specific study, Toussaint offered that over 10% of Mascarenian slaving voyages taking place during the first decade of the nineteenth century can be traced to the Seychelles as the location of purchase, or as a depot used by Seychellois traders themselves.²² The actual percentage was undoubtedly higher, since – as Toussaint himself remarked – record-keeping in Mauritius at the time was far from

19 Auguste Toussaint, *La route des îles. Contribution à l'histoire maritime des Mascareignes* (Paris, 1967).

20 Jean-Michel Filliot, *La traite des esclaves vers les Mascareignes au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1974), p. 54. Filliot estimated that the number of slaves imported into the Mascarenes before 1810 was 160,000.

21 Toussaint, *La route des îles*, Annexe III, pp. 458-485. Also published separately as 'Le trafic commercial des Seychelles de 1773 à 1810', *Journal of the Seychelles Society*, 4 (1965), pp. 20–61.

22 Toussaint, *La route des îles*, p. 465.

punctual, making the available documentation fragmentary and incomplete.²³ Unlike most of the studies centred on East Africa and Madagascar, Toussaint's chapter makes brief mention of the fact that the Seychelles, too, were a destination for slaves, who were transported to the islands in order to work on plantations established there from the time they were first settled in the 1770s. This annex to Toussaint's book remains the only study to have attempted to place the Seychelles in the context of the Mascarene slave trade in the closing decades of the eighteenth century. Since Toussaint only used records housed in Mauritian and Réunionnais archives, his piece is essentially a note on the Seychelles that ought to have opened the door to further examination.

Studies of the Mascarenes, however, have not followed Toussaint's promising leads on the Seychelles' position in the slave trade. Naturally, Île de France/Mauritius, the political headquarters of the group of islands, has attracted the bulk of scholarly attention. A great deal has thus been written on the experience of slavery on the island by such historians as Anthony Barker, Vijaya Teelock and Megan Vaughan.²⁴ French and Réunionnais historians, such as J.V. Payet and Sudel Fuma, have likewise uncovered much of the nature of slavery on Bourbon/Réunion.²⁵

The slave trade itself, especially to Île de France/Mauritius, has been investigated most thoroughly by Richard B. Allen, whose large body of work has focused on the scale and reaches of the trade, its economic organisation and its overlaps with indentured labour, the illegal slave trade and global systems of un-free labour

23 Trade through the Seychelles, Toussaint wrote, represented, 'it is true, a small part of the "route des isles" but it should not be regarded as negligible.' Ibid., p. 467.

24 Anthony J. Barker, *Slavery and Antislavery in Mauritius, 1810-1833: The Conflict between Economic Expansion and Humanitarian Reform under British Rule* (London and New York, 1996); Vijaya Teelock, *Bitter Sugar: Sugar and Slavery in 19th Century Mauritius* (Moka, 1998); Megan Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island: Slavery in 18th-Century Mauritius* (Durham and London, 2005).

25 J.V. Payet, *Histoire de l'esclavage à l'Île Bourbon* (Paris, 1990); Sudel Fuma, *L'esclavagisme à La Réunion, 1794-1848* (Paris, 1992). See also Jean Barassin, 'La révolte des esclaves à l'Île Bourbon (Réunion) au XVIIIe siècle', in Catherine Méhaud (ed.), *Mouvement de populations dans l'Océan Indien* (Paris, 1979), pp. 357-391.

migration.²⁶ Allen's research thus provides an indispensable backdrop to work on any aspect of the Mascarene trade. Of special significance to the present study, however, is his contribution to our understanding of changing patterns of trade after 1770. Allen's findings, substantiating and expanding on the dynamics first revealed by Toussaint, show that Malagasy slaves made up the majority of imports from the 1730s and that their number kept increasing until the late 1760s, when the Mascarenes witnessed a shift to East African slaves.²⁷ Allen himself suggested in passing that this visible shift in primary slave sources may well have been a factor in the decision to settle the Seychelles.²⁸ This makes the question of the Seychelles' colonisation and early history even more critical to forming a holistic understanding of the changing dynamics of the Mascarene slave trade at the end of the eighteenth century.

Allen's work has culminated in *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean*,²⁹ a recent monograph that offers a comprehensive overview of the Mascarene trade and other European slaving activity in the Indian Ocean. Based on wider archival evidence than *La route des îles*, Allen's book supersedes the data originally provided by Toussaint, increasing the latter's 515 documented slaving voyages to over 950. Allen's is now the most accurate estimate of the scale and reach of European slave trading in the Indian Ocean, showing that the French Mascarenes consumed between 334,936 and 384,040 slaves between 1665 and 1810.³⁰ *European*

26 Richard B. Allen, 'The Constant Demand of the French: The Mascarene Slave Trade and the Worlds of the Indian Ocean and Atlantic during the 18th and 19th Centuries', *Journal of African History*, 49, 1 (2008), pp. 43-72; Richard B. Allen, 'The Mascarene Slave-Trade and Labour Migration'; *Slaves, Freedmen, and Indentured Labourers in Colonial Mauritius* (Cambridge, 1999); Richard B. Allen, 'Satisfying the "Want for Labouring People": European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500-1850', *Journal of World History*, 21, 1 (2010), pp. 45-73; Richard B. Allen, 'A Traffic Repugnant to Humanity: Children, the Mascarene Slave Trade and British Abolitionism', *Slavery & Abolition*, 27, 2 (2006), pp. 219-236; Richard B. Allen, 'Suppressing a Nefarious Traffic: Britain and the Abolition of Slave Trading in India and the Western Indian Ocean, 1770-1830', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 66, 4 (2009), pp. 873-894.

27 Allen, 'The Mascarene Slave-Trade and Labour Migration', p. 40.

28 Richard B. Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500-1850* (Athens OH, 2014), p. 100.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., Table 1, European Transoceanic Slave Shipments to Indian Ocean Destinations, pp. 16-18.

Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean also explores the exchanges between the Indian Ocean and Atlantic slave trades and argues against conceptualizing the two oceanic basins as entirely discrete trading areas. The Seychelles features frequently in the book, in both charts and discussion, indicating a higher level of involvement in the trade of the Indian Ocean than has previously been acknowledged. However, Allen also clarifies that much work still remains to be done on the Seychelles' specific position and role in the slave trade of the region.³¹

Scholarship on the Seychelles

The general histories which make up the bulk of the literature on the Seychelles have neglected to consider in sufficient depth the position of the islands in the Mascarene slave trade. While these works have acknowledged the link between the Seychelles and Mauritius and Réunion and repeated the notion that the Seychelles served primarily as a refreshment point for slavers, their focus has been on the development of the islands' social and political structures. The ways in which the Seychelles fitted into, and shaped, the Mascarene trade – in terms of developing new routes and exploiting newly discovered winds, facilitating the emergence of enhanced connections between East Africa and the Mascarenes, and enabling the establishment of quarantine and repair facilities for ships engaged in the slave trade – have remained by and large unexplored.

The first attempt to chronicle the Seychelles' history was carried out by John T. Bradley in 1940.³² It was followed by the work of 'the Seychelles' answer' to Toussaint: the archivist and historian A.W.T. Webb, who wrote *The Story of Seychelles* in the mid-1960s.³³ Both syntheses focused on the history of political leadership on the islands and made little reference to the largely ungoverned activities of slavers and their links to Mauritius and Réunion. The Seychelles next featured in an article by Réunionnais historian Claude Wanquet. Wanquet's 1979 study of the archipelago's initial colonisation offers very little discussion on the

31 Ibid., p. 100.

32 J.T. Bradley, *The History of the Seychelles* (Victoria, 1940).

33 A.W.T. Webb, *The Story of Seychelles* (Victoria, 1964).

slave trade, however, foregrounding instead the strategic position of the Seychelles as a military base and a provisioning post for ships travelling to and from India.³⁴

Presented as ‘the first definitive scholarly history of the Seychelles’, Deryck Scarr’s *Seychelles since 1770: History of a Slave and Post-Slavery Society* followed in the footsteps of Bradley and Webb, attempting to chronicle the story of the islands, from the first settlement in 1770 to the late 1990s. Much of the book, however, is devoted to the events leading to independence in the 1970s and the establishment of a multi-party political dispensation in the 1990s.³⁵ Because the position of the Seychelles in the slave trade of the western Indian Ocean is barely mentioned, Scarr’s work leaves many questions unanswered about the way in which the islands absorbed slaves and how they coped with transient populations of passing slaves and slavers bound for Île de France and Bourbon. Although aware of Toussaint’s work and the questions it posed, Scarr makes only anecdotal mention of some of the slave ships that Toussaint had identified as having passed through the Seychelles or delivered slaves there in the closing decades of the eighteenth century and does not discuss the significance of their activity for piecing together the dynamics of the Mascarene trade. Scarr does, however, engage more enthusiastically with the question of the illegal slave trade that followed the implementation of the British ban in 1811. But his main interest lies in how illegal slave trading affected the Seychelles’ governance and society; there is no sustained investigation into how activity in the Seychelles shaped the trade itself.

Insofar as the topic of slavery is concerned, the achievements of some popular histories of the islands are more noteworthy. William McAteer’s three-part *History of the Seychelles* explores past human activity on the islands more thoroughly than any other work and thus reveals much about the distinctive aspects of Seychellois slavery. McAteer also goes further than Scarr in outlining the political and economic conditions that dictated the comparatively lenient nature of the agricultural work performed by slaves. At the same time, he does not shy away from highlighting the

34 Claude Wanquet, ‘Le peuplement des Seychelles sous l’occupation française. Une expérience de colonisation à la fin du XVIIIe siècle’, in Méhaud, *Mouvements de populations*, pp. 187-208.

35 Scarr, *Seychelles since 1770*.

brutal abuses meted out to large numbers of domestic slaves by masters uncontrolled by effective authorities.³⁶ Making use of eyewitnesses' accounts and coeval published works, Denise Johnstone, too, has been able to offer a powerful depiction of the daily lives of Seychellois slaves in her popular *Reveil Seychellois*.³⁷ Seychellois historians Guy Lionnet and Julien Durup have also tackled the issue of slavery and provided a more humane perspective by examining the lives of specific Seychellois slaves.³⁸ However, neither their works nor those of McAteer or Johnstone have sought systematically to explore the workings of the slave trade to, or through, the Seychelles in late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.³⁹

The one obvious reason why the slave trade has been skimmed over in Seychellois history has to do with the dearth of sources available for study. The nature of the primary material on the Seychelles is reflected in the gaps in the historical literature. This material mostly deals with the institution of slavery, while largely ignoring the trade. There were a considerable number of nineteenth-century visitors to the Seychelles who wrote on the nature of slavery on the islands without delving into the issue of the slaves' origins.⁴⁰ One of the few accounts which does is the Baron d'Unienville's 1838 *Statistique de Île Maurice et ses dépendances*, which provides a rare register of the specific ethnic identities of Mauritian and Seychellois slaves, breaking away from the Mascarene tradition of labelling all east African slaves as

36 William McAteer, *Rivals in Eden: The History of the Seychelles 1742–1827* (Victoria, 2008); *Hard Times in Paradise: The History of the Seychelles 1827–1919* (Victoria 2008); *To Be a Nation: The History of the Seychelles 1920-1976* (Victoria, 2008).

37 Denise Johnstone, *Reveil Seychellois: Life in Seychelles 1770-1903* (Victoria, 2009).

38 Guy Lionnet, 'Castor', *Seychelles Culture*, 19 (1974), p. 2; 'Figures du passé: Castor', *L'Echo des Iles* (November 1991), p. 21; 'Les Premiers Marrons', *L'Echo des Iles* (August 1979), p. 6; *The Seychelles* (Newport, 1972); Julien Durup, 'Slavery in Seychelles 1770-1976', paper presented at the conference 'L'esclavage et ses séquelles: mémoire et vécu d'hier et d'aujourd'hui', Port-Louis, 1998.

39 McAteer's work does, however, include an important discussion of the illegal slave trade as it affected some aspects of Seychellois life in the nineteenth century. See *Rivals in Eden*, pp. 238-242.

40 James Prior, *Narrative of a Voyage in the Indian Seas in the Nisus Frigate during the years 1810 and 1811* (London, 1820); James Holman, *A Voyage around the World, Including Travels in Africa, Asia, Australia America etc etc from MDCCCXXVII to MDCCCXXXII* (London, 1835); Charles Grant, *The History of Mauritius, or the Isle of France, and the Neighbouring Islands; from Their First Discovery to the Present Time* (London, 1801).

‘Mozambiques’ and stripping those from Madagascar of their specific identities to become simply ‘Malgaches’.⁴¹ There were many writers of the same period who published accounts of their travels through the waters of the south-western Indian Ocean, such as William Owen and Thomas Boteler, whose stories demonstrate the omnipresence of the illegal Mascarene trade in the region.⁴² These works supplement a large body of government and abolitionist papers concerning the suppression of the illegal trade.

There is perhaps only one substantive, but seemingly never published, piece of writing by a direct protagonist of the slave trade to, and through, the Seychelles during the years when such trade was legal under French rule. Constant Dupont called upon his own experiences of voyages to East Africa, and to Île de France and Bourbon, to write his *Instruction du plan de la côte d’Afrique*. This 1811 work reads like a practical guide to slave voyages on the African coast, offering the coordinates of trading locations, information on slave prices and availability, watering locations as well as a French-Swahili phrase book.⁴³ Surprisingly, Dupont’s account has been overlooked by Scarr and the popular historians of the Seychelles. It is, nonetheless, a key record dating to a time when documentation of any kind relating to slave trading in the Seychelles was the exception rather than the rule. In sum, the (admittedly sporadic) sources that do exist have not been analysed in sufficient depth, where they have been considered at all, and the data they provide have not been set against the wider trading patterns revealed by Mauritius- and Réunion-based studies. Neither have these sources been deployed to investigate such related phenomena as the development of quarantine facilities on the islands, or the tendency to accept slaves as payment for services to passing ships.

41 Baron M. d’Unienville, *Statistique de Île Maurice et ses Dépendances* (Paris, 1838). On the ethnic identities of slaves, see Edward Alpers, ‘Becoming “Mozambique”: Diaspora and Identity in Mauritius’, in Vijaya Teelock and Edward Alpers (eds), *History, Memory and Identity* (Port Louis, 2001), pp. 117-155.

42 William Owen, *Narrative of Voyages to Explore the Shores of Africa, Arabia and Madagascar* (London, 1835); Thomas Boteler, *Narrative of a Voyage of Discovery to Africa and Arabia* (London, 1835).

43 Seychelles National Archives (henceforth SNA) A11, Constant Dupont, *Instruction du plan de la côte d’Afrique*, 1811.

The reluctance of Seychellois historians to pore over the islands' involvement in the movement of slaves in the south-western Indian Ocean is thus only partly attributable to evidentiary limitations. Equally – if not more – important has been the parochial and/or nationalist frame of reference underpinning much of this work. This has resulted in the islands being detached from such oceanic connections and patterns as had nonetheless characterised much of their history. A further problem has to do with the compartmentalisation of historical knowledge about Indian Ocean slave trading. Due to the politically distinct status of the Mauritius, Réunion and the Seychelles (which were separated at various points in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries), and the island-centric or British/French-centric histories that followed, many studies of Mascarene slavery are typically disaggregated into studies of particular islands, artificially isolated from the broader networks to which they belonged.

Mauritian and Seychellois Studies Combined and Works on the Illegal Trade

Although the Seychelles were the most important sub-dependency of British Mauritius in terms of trade and traffic to India and East Africa, few studies of the latter have sought to include the former to any meaningful degree. This is most likely due to the demographic, political and commercial disparity between Mauritius and the Seychelles. Still, a small number of works did address the histories of Mauritius and Seychelles within a single analytical frame. The most notable examples are Burton Benedict's 'Slavery and Indenture in Mauritius and Seychelles',⁴⁴ and Moses Nwulia's *History of Slavery in Mauritius and Seychelles*.⁴⁵ While Mauritius still occupies centre-stage, these studies of both Mauritius and the Seychelles provide uniquely valid insights into the history of slavery in the Seychelles and, in the case of Nwulia's volume, an engagement with some aspects of the trade in slaves to the Seychelles themselves and an acknowledgement of their role in forwarding slaves to Mauritius or Réunion. Benedict's anthropologically-informed discussion of Seychellois slave society goes much further than Scarr's and McAteer's works, not

44 Burton Benedict, 'Slavery and Indenture in Mauritius and Seychelles', in Watson, *Asian and African Systems of Slavery*, pp. 135-168. See also Marion Benedict and Burton Benedict, *Men, Women and Money in Seychelles* (London, 1982), pp. 115-148.

45 Moses D.E. Nwulia, *The History of Slavery in Mauritius and the Seychelles 1810-1875* (Rutherford, NJ, 1981).

least because of its emphasis on the cultural influences – language, religion, expression and customs – imported into the islands by slaves.

Nwulia's discussion of Seychellois slave trading is limited to the illegal trade of the early decades of the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, it provides a valuable overview of some of the known instances of illegal slavers captured on the islands and some analysis of the overall workings of the Seychellois illegal trade. By discussing the examples of specific captured ships operating between the Seychelles and Mauritius, Nwulia adds substance and detail to the commonly repeated assertion that slaves were frequently smuggled through the Seychelles. Nwulia, in particular, shows how newly imported slaves were disguised as long-standing domestics on arrival at Mauritius, exploiting the laws governing the permitted transportation of domestic slaves for personal use.⁴⁶

The Seychelles' role in the illegal slave trade has been considered more extensively than any other aspect of their slaving history, largely in works concerning the illegal trade to Mauritius, Réunion or, in fewer cases, across the Mascarenes. The volume and structures of the illegal trade have been revealed by Hubert Gerbeau, with regards to Réunion,⁴⁷ and Richard Allen, who has focused on Mauritius and Seychelles.⁴⁸ Allen's work devotes more attention to the Seychelles for its closer connection to Mauritius in the British period, though Gerbeau also acknowledges the Seychelles' importance in conveying illegal slaves to that island. In later work, Allen assessed the illegal trade to the Mascarenes more broadly and estimated the number of slaves introduced into Mauritius, Réunion and the Seychelles after 1811 at

46 Ibid., pp. 38-55.

47 Hubert Gerbeau, 'Quelques aspects de la traite illégale des esclaves à l'Île Bourbon au XIXe siècle', in Méhaud, *Mouvements de Populations*, pp. 273-308; 'L'océan Indien n'est pas l'Atlantique. La traite illégale d'esclaves à Bourbon au XIXe siècle', *Outre-mers. Revue d'histoire*, 89, 336-337 (2002), pp. 79-108; 'La traite illégale aux Mascareignes des années 1810 aux années 1840. Le cas de l'Île Bourbon', in Vijaya Teelock and Thomas Vernet (eds), *Traites, esclavage et transition vers l'engagisme. Perspectives nouvelles sur les Mascareignes et le sud-ouest de l'océan Indien* (Réduit, Mauritius, 2015), pp. 46-57.

48 Richard B. Allen, 'Licentious and Unbridled Proceedings: The Illegal Slave Trade to Mauritius and the Seychelles During the Early Nineteenth Century', *Journal of African History*, 42, 1 (2001), pp. 91-116.

between 122,000 and 149,000.⁴⁹ This figure forcefully suggests that the illegal slave trade in the Western Indian Ocean was far more vigorous than previously supposed.

Besides Allen and Gerbeau's studies, a wealth of information on the dynamics of the illegal trade can also be found scattered in other works by Moses Nwulia, Deryck Scarr, Vijaya Teelock, Anthony Barker and Claude Wanquet.⁵⁰ These studies provide the necessary framework within which to place the Seychelles' role in absorbing and transferring mostly East African slaves. While no study has so far focused entirely on the Seychelles' role within illegal slave trading networks, Allen's work affords considerable attention to the islands, suggesting that the demographic growth that they experienced should be regarded as an indication of the size of slave imports during the early years of the illegal trade. Allen also hints at some of the islands' supplementary functions in servicing the trade to Mauritius and Réunion. Nwulia's book goes some way towards outlining the ineffectiveness of policing in the Seychelles, and, like Scarr's *Slaving and Slavery in the Indian Ocean*, it provides further assessment of the suspicious population increase on the islands in the post-abolition period. Scarr's book provides new detail on slave imports into the Seychelles, but does not make these the subject of in-depth analysis.⁵¹ While discussing the Mauritian practice of disguising newly imported illegal slaves as pre-existing, and therefore legal, slaves from the Seychelles in the 1820s, Barker's *Slavery and Anti-Slavery in Mauritius* stops short of addressing the Seychelles' overall position in the illegal trade.⁵² Altogether, these works, valuable as they are, still treat the Seychelles as an adjunct to a more sustained line of questioning into Mauritian, or overall Mascarenian, circumstances.

The separation between legal and illegal trade – I argue – has so far prevented a full understanding of the roles played by the Seychelles throughout their roughly sixty-year-long history of slave trading. This is because many of the smuggling practices

49 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, p. 175.

50 Nwulia, *The History of Slavery*; Deryck Scarr, *Slaving and Slavery in the Indian Ocean* (London, 1998); Teelock, *Bitter Sugar*; Barker, *Slavery and Antislavery*; Claude Wanquet, 'La traite illégale à Maurice à l'époque anglaise (1810-1835)', in Serge Daget (ed.), *De la traite à l'esclavage. Actes du colloque international sur la traite des noirs, Nantes 1985* (Paris, 1988), pp. 451-466.

51 Scarr, *Slaving and Slavery*.

52 Barker, *Slavery and Antislavery*, pp. 35-37.

identified in works concerning the illegal trade had their origins in the earlier period – not least during the years of open warfare between Britain and France, when slavers were sometimes induced to operate defensively or covertly. A rigid separation between the two phases obfuscates these continuities and the distant roots of illegal trading practices. This problem is further compounded by the fragmented nature of scholarship, as studies tend to deal with either Mauritius or Réunion, or with the French or British periods in one or more of the islands. These exclusions are unhelpful in understanding the trade as a whole, or the Seychelles' role within it, since Mascarenes-based slave traders continued to operate across all of the islands, with little regard as to whether the government in place on any particular island was French or British at any particular time. The exploration of the specific practices which held together the trade between the different Mascarene islands helps to emphasise the hitherto underestimated and under-researched interconnectedness between Mauritius, Réunion, the Seychelles and other minor sub-dependencies within the Mascarene network.

The Indian Ocean and Global Contexts

A more suitable approach to the slave trades of the Indian Ocean – trades which not only overlapped shifting European imperial systems, but also contributed to the merging of littoral societies and to the formation of new ones – is to examine oceanic interactions and exchanges from a multi-sited, global perspective. Dealing with trade as a web of relationships – one which, in the case of the Mascarenes, involved the Seychelles, Mauritius and Réunion and the slaves' places of origin or embarkation, most commonly Madagascar, East Africa, and South and South-East Asia – enables the historian to consider all of its features without being constrained by assumptions about the importance of any one particular locality, nation or government. The advances made possible by the adoption of this approach have created a veritable paradigm shift in Indian Ocean studies in recent decades.

As early as 1961, Toussaint stressed the need to examine the Indian Ocean as a cohesive sphere of activity, in much the same way as Ferdinand Braudel had

presented the Mediterranean and its shores as a united historical entity.⁵³ It was not, however, until the 1980s that work by Kenneth McPherson, Gwyn Campbell, Satish Chandra and Kirti Chaudhuri began to develop in this direction.⁵⁴ Research had previously sought to analyse discrete portions of the Ocean or specific activities that took place within it, sometimes tying them to such broad themes as European colonialism, the African Diaspora, Indian or Chinese maritime activity, or the rise and spread of Islam. Much less attention had been paid to the factors that permeated all of these phenomena and bound them together as part of a series of interconnected operations. One of the major examples of the conceptual shift under discussion is Michael Pearson's *Indian Ocean*, which cemented the notion that the Indian Ocean is best understood as a series of interrelated systems of commerce and exchanges, connecting together a string of littoral societies.⁵⁵

Thus, in the past decade, the most valuable studies of these littoral societies and specific trades, particularly those focusing on the western part of the ocean, have all been characterised by the insertion of their findings into the so-called 'Indian Ocean World' paradigm. First proposed by Gwyn Campbell, the term serves to denote the ancient networks of economic, cultural and political relationships that developed between East Africa, Arabia, South and South-east Asia, and the plethora of islands

53 Auguste Toussaint, *Histoire de l'océan Indien* (Paris 1961), pp. 1-2.

54 Kenneth McPherson, 'Cultural Exchange in the Indian Ocean Region', *Westerly*, 29, 4 (1984), pp. 5-16; 'Processes of Cultural Interaction in the Indian Ocean: An Historical Perspective', *The Great Circle*, 6, 2 (1984), pp. 78-92; Campbell, 'Madagascar and Mozambique in the Slave Trade'; Satish Chandra (ed.), *The Indian Ocean: Explorations in History, Commerce and Politics* (New Delhi and Newbury Park, 1987); Kirti N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge and New York, 1985). See also Kenneth McPherson, *The Indian Ocean: A History of People and the Sea* (Delhi, 1998).

55 Michael Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* (London and New York, 2008), p. 13.

in the oceanic space between them, between the seventh and tenth centuries.⁵⁶ When seen from this perspective, the involvement of European actors in the Indian Ocean from the sixteenth century onwards merely consolidated the region's position as an arena of what Hopkins calls 'archaic globalisation'.⁵⁷ This scholarship warns us against treating slavery in the Mascarenes and the Mascarene slave trade in isolation. This problem affects much of the work that deals with the Seychelles. Scarr's *Slaving and Slavery in the Indian Ocean*, for example, succeeds in describing important features of slavery in the Seychelles, Mauritius and Réunion, and some of the links between them during both the British and French periods. It does not, however, engage with the scholarship on East Africa and Madagascar, thereby leaving its findings largely disconnected from the setting to which they belonged historically.⁵⁸ Focusing solely on the Mascarenes, the book assumes their experiences to have been representative of Indian Ocean slavery and slave trading as a whole. Yet, even though Mascarenian slave traders participated in distinctly Indian Ocean systems to acquire slaves, once they were deposited in the Mascarenes, slaves were subjected to a form of slavery which was in essence a European import and thus atypical. The burgeoning scholarship on Indian Ocean slavery has revealed the phenomenon to have been characterised by a variety of models of slavery, some of

56 Gwyn Campbell, 'Africa, the Indian Ocean World and the "Early Modern": Historiographical Conventions and Problems', in Toyin Falola and Emily Brownell (eds), *Africa, Empire and Globalization: Essays in Honour of AG Hopkins* (Durham, NC, 2011), pp. 82-83. See also Abdul Sheriff 'Introduction' and 'Globalization with a Difference', in Abdul Sheriff and Engseng Ho (eds), *The Indian Ocean: Oceanic Connections and the Creation of New Societies* (London, 2014), pp. 1-31; Edward Alpers, *The Indian Ocean in World History* (Oxford 2014); Markus Vink, 'Indian Ocean Studies and the "New Thalassology"', *Journal of Global History*, 2, 1 (2007), pp. 41-62.

57 Anthony Hopkins (ed.), *Globalization in World History* (London, 2002).

58 Scarr, *Slaving and Slavery*.

which overlapped with debt bondage and ‘open’ forms of servitude.⁵⁹ To the extent that it was dominated by Europeans and that it treated slaves as chattel, the Mascarene slave trade had much in common with the Atlantic model. However, because it overlapped and intersected Indian Ocean models of slave trading driven by indigenous operators on the east African and Malagasy coasts, the Mascarene slave trade is best understood as a hybrid: a European creation which, first, adapted to and incorporated autochthonous Indian Ocean influences and, later, became large and influential enough to shape pre-existing indigenous models to meet its demands.

Several of the findings of Indian Ocean scholars are relevant to the present study of the slave trade to, and through, the Seychelles, beginning with the complex relationships between the Swahili coast, Mozambique, Madagascar and the Comoros. In his work on East Africa and the Mozambique Channel, Edward Alpers has argued that the spread of Busaidi dominance from Zanzibar to the rest of the Swahili coast during the eighteenth century reduced the role of northwest Madagascar as an exporter of slaves to Arabia, further requiring Mascarene dealers to look to East Africa.⁶⁰ The work of Gwyn Campbell, Pier Larson and Mervin Brown explain this in conjunction with the increasing exploits of the rising Merina Empire in eighteenth-century Madagascar, which saw the northwest become an

59 For discussions of Indian Ocean slavery, see Gwyn Campbell, ‘The Question of Slavery’, in Sheriff and Ho, *The Indian Ocean*, pp. 123-149; James L. Watson, ‘Slavery as an Institution, Open and Closed Systems’, in Watson, *Asian and African Systems of Slavery*, pp. 1-15; Gwyn Campbell and Edward Alpers, ‘Introduction: Slavery, Forced Labour and Resistance in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia’, in Edward Alpers, Gwyn Campbell, and Michael Salman (eds), *Slavery and Resistance in Africa and Asia* (London and New York, 2005), pp.1-19; Gwyn Campbell, ‘Introduction: Slavery and Other Forms of Unfree Labour in the Indian Ocean World’, *Slavery & Abolition*, 24, 2 (2003), pp. ix-xxxii; Robert Harms, ‘Introduction: Indian Ocean Slavery in the Age of Abolition’, in Robert Harms, Bernard K. Freamon, and David W. Blight (eds), *Indian Ocean Slavery in the Age of Abolition* (New Haven and London, 2013), pp. 1-19; Suzanne Miers, ‘Slavery: A Question of Definition’, in Campbell, *The Structure of Slavery*, pp. 1-16; William G. Clarence-Smith, ‘The Economics of the Indian Ocean and Red Sea Slave Trades in the 19th Century: An Overview’, in William G. Clarence-Smith (ed.), *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (London and New York, 1989).

60 Edward Alpers, *East Africa and the Indian Ocean* (Princeton, 2009), p. 176.

importer of slaves from Mozambique.⁶¹ This movement of Mozambican slaves can be traced through the Comoros to the west coast of Madagascar, and Alpers notes that transshipments of slaves from both of these localities were also sent to the Seychelles and to Île de France and Bourbon as the Mascarene trade sought more slaves than could be sourced from its original stores on the eastern coast of Madagascar.⁶²

While developments within East Africa and Madagascar will be shown to have driven the incorporation of the Seychelles into the Mascarene trade – for example, the greater need for a provisioning point in the Seychelles can partly be understood as a response to ports on the east African coast becoming increasingly significant suppliers of slaves over the course of the second half of the eighteenth century – these east African localities were, in turn, affected by the Seychelles’ ability to channel growing Mascarene demand in their direction. By providing a range of new opportunities, the emergence of the Seychelles as a way station can be argued to have magnified the impact of the Mascarene slave trade on East Africa and Madagascar. By discussing the ways in which the Seychelles shaped the movement of tens of thousands of slaves across the south-western Indian Ocean, this dissertation locates the significance of the archipelago’s slave trading experience, not just within its national borders, nor necessarily within those of Mauritius or the Mascarenes in general, but rather within a wide-ranging system which can be described, using Edward Alpers’ terminology, as a ‘tightly interwoven commercial nexus’.⁶³

Aims and Structure of the Dissertation

The principal aim of this research is to further our understanding of the Seychelles’ relevance to slave trading in the western Indian Ocean. Central questions to be addressed include how and why the Seychelles entered the Mascarene slave trade;

61 Campbell, *An Economic History of Imperial Madagascar*; Larson, *History and Memory in the Age of Enslavement*; Mervin Brown, *A History of Madagascar* (Cambridge, 2000).

62 Alpers, *East Africa*, p. 177.

63 *Ibid.*

the ways in which slave trading activities in the Seychelles evolved between 1770 and c. 1830; and the conditions under which the islands were utilised by traders based in Mauritius, Réunion and the Seychelles themselves. The discussion surrounding these questions will provide an opportunity to assess the ultimate regional significance of the Seychelles and to advance the general contention that, by enabling the Mascarene trade to more effectively extend its already expanding reach in East Africa and areas of northern Madagascar, the islands played a far greater role in oceanic slaving networks than has hitherto been recognised. Particular emphasis will be placed on the various logistical roles performed by the Seychelles and the manner in which they contributed to the geographical and quantitative expansion of the slave trade after 1769. The argument will be made that the services provided by the Seychelles as a mid-way station for slavers were partly responsible for enabling Mascarenian slave imports to increase from 1,200 slaves per year in the 1760s to almost 5,500 per year by the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century.⁶⁴ It will be demonstrated that after the trade was criminalised and went underground in 1810, the Seychelles' regional importance grew even further, as the archipelago's numerous uninhabited islands and the state of lawlessness that prevailed in its principal ones proved perfectly suited to the exigencies of slave smuggling. Where possible, broader questions of how slaving practices unfolded within the unique circumstances of the distant, and often uncontrolled, Seychelles will be tackled together with a discussion of the range of motivations and experiences of those involved in the Mascarene slave trade.

My discussion of the roles and significance of the Seychelles in the slave trade of the western Indian Ocean between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century is broken down into five roughly chronological chapters, which correspond to distinct phases in the Seychelles' slaving history.

Chapter 1 explores the trajectory of the French Mascarene slave trade, from its origins in the mid-seventeenth century to 1770. Its main objective is to lay the foundations upon which any discussion of the Seychelles' entry into the trade must

⁶⁴ Allen, 'The Mascarene Slave-Trade and Labor Migration', Table 2, Projected Slave Imports into the Mascarenes, 1715-1809, p. 39.

necessarily rest. Drawing on a growing body of studies of the slave trade of the south-western Indian Ocean, the chapter foregrounds the importance of developments within East Africa and Madagascar in shaping the structure of the Mascarene trade. Alongside Malagasy and East African influences, the chapter also touches upon the collapse of the *Compagnie des Indes* and assesses the effects of the ensuing liberalisation in driving the aforementioned increase in the slave trade from 1770, as well as encouraging the spread of engagements between Mascarene slavers and coastal dealers throughout East Africa. The mapping of these changes within the Mascarene trade provides the necessary backdrop against which to understand the rise of the Seychelles as a way station on the increasingly popular shipping lanes between Île de France and Bourbon, on the one hand, and East Africa, on the other.

The relationship between the Mascarene slave trade at the time of the 1769 liberalisation and the colonisation of the Seychelles forms the subject of chapter 2. Departing from previous understandings of the colonisation of the Seychelles, the chapter argues that the process was deeply informed by the changing needs of the Mascarene slave trade. By stressing the distinction between official and private aims, the chapter demonstrates that while agricultural concerns were foremost in the minds of government officials, the eyes of private businessmen interested in the Seychelles were firmly set on the slave trade. Tracing the east African interests and plans of these traders casts some light on their pre-existing involvement in slave-trading ventures and how they expected the Seychelles to help them expand such activities.

Covering the period between the colonisation of the Seychelles in 1770 and the demise of the slave trade in c. 1830, the next three chapters examine three distinct phases in slave-trading activity in and around the Seychelles. Having argued in chapter 2 that the slave trade is likely to have borne more heavily on the decision to colonise the Seychelles than has been hitherto assumed, chapter 3 examines the slave trade of the archipelago throughout its French period, between 1770 and 1810. The chapter explores the ways in which Île de France and Bourbon slavers made use of the Seychelles and how the slave trade impacted on the economic, social and political life of the inhabitants of the Seychelles. The broader regional context is important to this chapter, too. Specifically, the chapter teases out the extent to which

the Seychelles might have contributed to the changes that East Africa is known to have experienced during the last four decades of the legal slave trade.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the role of the Seychelles after the criminalisation of the slave trade which followed the British conquest of the Mascarenes in 1810. Concentrating on the first decade of British rule, chapter 4 shows how the existence of the Seychelles and the set of practices obtaining therein weakened abolitionist efforts throughout the Mascarenes. The chapter also examines the attempts to suppress the trade by British authorities, and asks when and how these attempts began to impact on the Seychelles. By offering a detailed picture of slave-trading activities in and around the Seychelles in the early phase of the illegal slave trade, the chapter aims to supplement what is already understood about the functions attributed the archipelago in the 1820s.

The dissertation's final chapter focuses on the 1820s and the unique opportunities that the Seychelles afforded Mascarenian operators to conduct an indirect slave trade with considerably lower chances of detection and interference. The abuse of the so-called 'transfer system' from the Seychelles will be shown to have been particularly important. Although this facet of the illegal trade has been at least identified and deemed significant by previous scholars, there is no in-depth study of its practical workings. Chapter 5 aims to rectify this omission and, in so doing, to demonstrate that the 'transfer trade' was a well-thought-out scheme – one which brought slavers from the Seychelles, Mauritius and Bourbon into a web of co-operation and which depended both on the use of the outermost islands of the Seychelles and on long periods of acclimatisation in the main islands of the archipelago. The chapter also deals with the possible scope and scale of the transfer trade, as well as with the authorities' attempts to curb it.

Ultimately, it is hoped that this exploration of the Seychelles' various roles within the legal and illegal slave trades of the Mascarenes will show that the islands' relationship with the slave trade was more foundational than has been previously understood. Not only did the Seychelles owe their existence as a colony, in no small part, to the slave trade, but the logistical assistance that the islands and their inhabitants provided to slavers were instrumental in enabling the Mascarene trade to

extend its reach and influence and, of course, the numbers of slaves it consumed. The enabling role of the Seychelles, moreover, will be shown to have become more significant over time, booming during the years of the slave trade's repression. With the 'transfer trade' of the 1820s, the Seychelles may well have provided a final boost for the Mascarene trade – the last major slave trade within Britain's slave colonies.

Sources and Methodology

In the study of Indian Ocean slave trading, the Mascarene trade is often considered an exception to the general rule that written documentation is limited. For example, besides the observations of occasional outsiders whose accounts have been preserved, both the 'northern trade' from East Africa to the Arab world and the 'southern trade' between Mozambique, the Comoros and Madagascar have left behind almost no direct written records of exports, imports and sales of slaves. On the contrary, the French slave trade to the Mascarenes appears to be more amply documented. Sadly, what is true of the Mascarenes as a whole is not true of the Seychelles, the records pertaining to whose trade are not only comparatively scarce, but also scattered among archives in Mauritius, France, Britain and the Seychelles themselves. The absence of substantive source material pertaining to Seychellois trade, shipping and slavery is undoubtedly partly responsible for the perfunctory treatment of these subjects to be found in studies of the islands. This means that many of the questions to be asked in this dissertation can only be answered in tentative terms, with possibilities and likelihoods being more common staples than hard certainties. The importance of the questions themselves, however, renders the effort worthwhile. It is appropriate, therefore, to provide an overview of the sources which will inform the present discussion.

The colonisation of the Seychelles – the subject of chapter 2 – is best documented in the proposals put forward by the entrepreneur who devised the plan for the settlement of the islands and their inclusion in Mascarene commerce, Charles Henri Brayer du Barré. These proposals, housed mostly in the Archives Nationales de France and the National Archives of Mauritius, consist of several letters addressed to metropolitan and Mauritian authorities through which Barré sought funds and

support for the inauguration of a settlement in the Seychelles, as well as a series of memoirs and requests for further resources following the approval of the original plan. These records must be approached with awareness of the fact that they were tailored to the values of those with the power to grant or refuse funding, and that Barré himself was a conman, who participated in insurance scams, knowingly lied about supposed silver reserves in the Seychelles and, possibly, even faked his own death. These considerations make it especially difficult to tease out the real motivations behind the colonisation of the islands, especially with regards to such private interests as slave trading. Even so, Barré's letters and the responses that they elicited still provide the best available insight into the circumstances surrounding the Seychelles' initial settlement and early development.

Except for a few notes made by the captains of passing naval ships, almost no other record of any activity in the Seychelles comes to light until the 1780s, when lengthy reports on the general state of the islands were compiled by the then *Commandant* Antoine Gillot. Focusing primarily on the failure of agricultural pursuits and Gillot's own difficult position, these reports have comparatively little to say about slave trading and, more in general, shipping. Gillot's reports still cast light on the slave trade's importance to the daily lives of the inhabitants and the local economy, as well as provide some details about interactions between settlers and slavers. It must be stressed, however, that these details only came to the surface as a result of open confrontations or other problems which directly affected Gillot. To this extent, they illuminate one of the major problems involved in working with official Seychellois records. During the first few months of their stays in the Seychelles, both Gillot and his successors expected a degree of assistance from faraway Mauritius. Faced with lack of cooperation from Mauritius, this naivety soon wore off. Thereafter, communications became extremely sparse, and only the extraordinary or problematic was ever reported. Once this pattern was in place, even Mauritian authorities found it difficult to break away from it. Thus, the Seychelles archives are replete with complaints over the failure on the part of Seychellois authorities to provide information on such topics as taxes and revenue, numbers of slaves and maroons, births and deaths on the islands and the state of natural resources. An exception is found in the detailed reports produced by *Commandant* Malavois in the mid- and late 1780s, which contain some important information relative to slave trading. This was

a consequence of the fact that, at this point, Malavois had the attention of the Mauritian government, which was then deciding whether to defend the Seychelles against potential interference by the British. After a negative decision was taken, communication between Mauritius and the Seychelles became infrequent once more.

There were other factors working towards reducing the intensity and depth of communications between the Seychelles and Mauritius throughout the French period. The regulations dictating that Seychellois produce could only be sold through Mauritius caused disdain for the mother-isle, and if Seychellois planters ever hoped to taste the greater profits to be obtained from smuggling their cotton or spices directly onto European or Asian markets, then it was certainly in their interests to conceal as much information as they could from Mauritius. Lack of transparency was also a consequence of administrative corruption. This was especially the case in 1793-1811, during the long reign of Governor Jean-Baptiste Quéau de Quinssy, who established his own council with prominent landowners and extracted taxes based on heads of slaves and income. Mauritius, despite its occasional complaint letters, was far more concerned with its internal affairs and never gave the Seychelles sufficient attention to ensure that any meaningful record-keeping took place.

Given this set of pressures and the prevailing institutional culture which favoured lax record keeping, it is hardly surprising that the slave trade and its appurtenances went almost entirely undocumented in the Seychelles. There is no log of arrivals or departures, nor any records of transactions for provisions or other services. Most references to slave-trading activity in Seychellois records are incidental and require careful unwrapping from such other, more pressing, issues as generated the documents concerned. Alternatively, they amount to passing comments in general reports on the state of the colony. These serious limitations result in a particularly fragmented and incomplete picture of slave trading in the French period. What can be said about the place of slaving in the late-eighteenth-century Seychellois society, and particularly the direct trade between East Africa and the Seychelles, as opposed to that which used the Seychelles as a way station prior to landing at Mauritius or Réunion, is therefore largely a matter of speculation.

Malavois's reports, along with Barré's letters and other documents relating to the French period, are located in archives in Mauritius and France. Many of these have been transcribed and printed in a collection produced by Albert-Auguste Fauvel for the Seychelles government in 1909.⁶⁵ All of Gillot's correspondence and most of Quinssy's are housed in the Mauritius Archives. Instructions to these Seychellois authorities from Mauritius, where they have survived, are to be found in the Seychelles archives.

As for the documentation originating from the slavers themselves, we are fortunate that record keeping in Mauritius, though far from ideal, was more formal than in the Seychelles. Upon arrival on the island, all trade ships, including slavers, were required to complete a *déclaration d'arrivée* – a statement indicating what or who, and from where, was being imported into the island. The *déclarations d'arrivée*, held at the National Archives of Mauritius, are the sources to which most of our knowledge of the Mascarene trade can be traced, having informed much of Toussaint and Allen's respective reconstructions of the trade. This body of sources, essential as they are, come with significant problems that need to be taken into consideration. While not all captains made such statements, many of the surviving entries consist of only a couple of sentences indicating the name of the ship, its date of arrival and type of cargo. In some cases, however, entries contain a considerable level of detail on slave voyages and make mention of stop-overs in the Seychelles, including the reasons for calling at the islands and the services that were obtained there. While these few detailed entries are insufficient to address important quantitative questions about the number of ships that called at the Seychelles, or about the purposes of these stop-overs and their effects on slave mortality rates, they do offer crucial glimpses into the workings of the slave trade in the islands and permit the drawing of some conclusions about the importance of the services that the islanders provided. Unfortunately, no such body of records exists for Bourbon, and the documents relating to ships arriving from the Seychelles to that island constitute, according to Toussaint, only a very small number. Toussaint himself was only able to point to four brief notes which indicate slave ships having arrived at Bourbon from the

65 Albert-Auguste Fauvel, *Unpublished Documents on the History of the Seychelles Islands anterior to 1810* (Victoria, 1909).

Seychelles.⁶⁶ The Mauritian *déclarations d'arrivée* are thus indispensable to the study of the Seychelles' role within the Mascarene slave trade and lie at the heart of chapter 3.

Somewhat paradoxically, sources concerning the illegal (and therefore concealed) slave trade offer more scope than earlier sources to expose some of the details that made up the lived experiences of the protagonists. Once slave trading began to be treated as a criminal offence, and after the French administration was replaced by the British in 1811, records become significantly more abundant and comprehensive as a result of the growing number of investigations into the illegal proceedings and of cases being brought to trial. In addition, the 1820s saw an abolitionist-driven parliamentary enquiry into the continuing slave trade of Mauritius and its dependencies which produced an abundance of detailed reports relating to specific events and the trade in general. Besides enabling an overview of the Seychelles' contribution to the illegal trade, these investigations permit to examine specific incidents dating to the 1810s and 1820s in much more detail than was possible in the case of the legal slave voyages accounted for in the *déclarations d'arrivée*. By approaching the sources in this way, my aim is to paint an accurate picture of the specific activities that came to define the Seychelles' participation in the illegal trade.

Like the records pertaining to the legal trade, these sources are not free from problems either. The temptation for Mauritian authorities to blame the problem of illegal slave trading on their sub-dependency and its administration's failures was undoubtedly high. It is possible, therefore, that the extent to which the Seychelles enabled traffickers to smuggle east African slaves into Mauritius and Réunion was being wilfully exaggerated. Chapters 4 and 5 seek to overcome this potential bias by supplementing Mauritian material with the few reports available hailing from the Seychelles themselves. These provide a degree of balance to Mauritian records, since it was in the interests of the Seychelles' administrators to play down both the involvement of their own citizens in the illegal trade and the extent to which their islands were being exploited by traffickers.

66 Toussaint, *La route des îles*, Table 9, List des arrivages de Seychelles à Bourbon, p. 485.

On the other hand, other factors may have contributed to enhancing the veracity and comprehensiveness of Seychellois material. Accusations of involvement in the slave trade went back and forth between the French and British factions of the administration – factions that, while never truly working in unison, were nonetheless being forced to at least appear to cooperate under the leadership of the British civil agent. As a result, the most thoroughly documented cases of slave trading are ones which are wrapped up in political controversy and where leading members of the administration stood accused of varying degrees of involvement in the traffic. Former governor Quinssy, now acting as the *juge de paix* under the British administration, was arrested in one such case and sent off to Mauritius for questioning. Cases such as this naturally generated a significant paper trail – one that can be followed in the National Archives of the UK. Conversely, comparatively little attention was afforded to the more common traffickers; and where no political gains could be expected, it was perhaps less desirable to report suspicions to Mauritius. Additionally, since the illegal trade was necessarily shrouded in secrecy, it is also possible that only such methods of smuggling as were unsuccessful, and thus resulted in capture, were ever recorded. The existence of undetected – and, ipso facto, completely unknown – smuggling strategies cannot be ruled out. A final consideration pertaining to Seychellois sources must be made. The ineffective policing of slavers within the archipelago meant that, while it was frequently recorded in general terms that the islands were rife with slavers, there are only a handful of occasions in which slavers were actually apprehended by Seychellois officials in their territory. Because of this, much of our knowledge is the fruit of speculation on the part of the authorities or fragments of other evidence, such as shipwrecks on the islands. Despite the few extant descriptions of specific ordeals suffered by slaves, the overall picture to emerge from the above records is one which largely obscures the experience of the slaves themselves. Regrettably, the sparse documentation which informs this dissertation affords little opportunity to chart the enormous human suffering which underlay slave trading practices in and around the Seychelles. Still, wherever possible, the attempt will be carried out to move the discussion away from the economic ambitions of colonial actors and to describe some at least of the human consequences of the patterns of trade and migration on which this dissertation focuses.

Chapter 1 Foundations - The Mascarene Slave Trade

When, on All Saints' Day of 1756, Captain Corneille Nicolas Morphey, of the *Compagnie des Indes*, laid down a large stone slab carved with the arms of France at the foot of a makeshift flagstaff on Mahé, the archipelago to which the latter island belonged, the Seychelles, became the northernmost outpost of the French Mascarenes.¹ The Mascarenes were a collection of previously uninhabited island territories in the south-western Indian Ocean, which had been sporadically visited and settled by the Dutch and the French between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Dutch abandoned their stakes in the Mascarenes in the early eighteenth century, and this led to the islands forming a unified possession under French rule. The Mascarenes were to become centres of a trading network that not only encompassed the Indian Ocean littoral, but also reached as far as Europe, the Far East, the Americas and Australasia. They also turned into important military bases and producers of cash crops, entirely dependent on slave labour. The islands thrived under French rule, especially from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, until their headquarters, Île de France (present-day Mauritius), was conquered by the British in 1810.

The French Mascarenes consisted of the twin islands, Île de France and Bourbon (present-day Réunion), and their much smaller satellite dependencies: the Seychelles, Rodrigues, Saint Brandon, Agaléga, Coëtivy, the Chagos Archipelago, Providence and small outposts on the eastern coast of Madagascar. Of these dependencies, the Seychelles were to become the most important provisioning station for ships travelling to and from the twin islands, and a trading post in their own right. The bulk of the traffic that passed through the Seychelles islands consisted of ships ferrying enslaved people, hailing primarily from East Africa, to the plantations, construction sites, quarries, salt pans and bustling harbours of Île de France and Bourbon. This trade in human beings and the plethora of routes which it encompassed had been established long before the settlement of the Seychelles in 1770. From the time of their inception as a colony, then, the Seychelles were

¹ McAteer, *Rivals in Eden*, p. 26.

absorbed into the Mascarene slave trade. The opportunities afforded to slavers by the islands as a provisioning point became increasingly important with the expansion of the trade and its growing reliance on northern Mozambique and the Swahili coast at the end of the eighteenth century. These changes led to the Seychelles becoming an essential component of the Mascarene slave trade, providing slavers not only with food and freshwater, but also quarantine and medical facilities, ship-repairs services and additional trading opportunities. However, before exploring the entry of the Seychelles into the trade and the specific roles allocated to the archipelago within it (addressed in chapters 2 and 3, respectively), the general structure and dynamics of the trade itself will be briefly outlined in the present chapter.

An Overview of the Mascarene Slave Trade

The Mascarene slave trade was the largest and most wide-reaching European slave trade in the Indian Ocean arena. Although slaves had been imported into Bourbon and Île de France since they were settled by the French in 1665 and 1721, respectively (and even prior to that, during the Dutch occupation of Mauritius from 1638 to 1710), it was not until the 1730s – a time of agricultural expansion and urban development under the stewardship of Governor Bertrand François Mahé de la Bourdonnais – that the two islands became key participants in the Indian Ocean slave trade. La Bourdonnais injected new life into the sugar plantation system that the Dutch had abandoned, making it the economic driver of Île de France, now the dominant island, and organised the construction of urban infrastructures, including bridges, an aqueduct, a hospital and salt pans.²

The labour of slaves, primarily imported from Madagascar and East Africa, became increasingly necessary for the realisation of La Bourdonnais's plans. By 1765, the slave population of Île de France, which had totalled a mere 648 in 1735, had increased to roughly 15,000.³ Over the same period, the slave population of Bourbon

² Auguste Toussaint, *A History of the Indian Ocean* (London, 1966), pp. 154-155.

³ Michael Mann, *Sahibs, Sklaven und Soldaten: Geschichte des Menschenhandels rund um den Indischen Ozean* (Darmstadt, 2012), p. 54.

grew from 6,573 to 21,150.⁴ The growth of the Mascarenes as a trading and production centre caused the demand for slaves to continue to grow well into the nineteenth century; theoretically abolished following the British takeover in 1810, the slave trade did not truly end until the 1830s. Richard Allen's dataset, the most complete to date, puts the total number of slaves imported into the Mascarenes by the French at between 334,936 and 384,040,⁵ although evidentiary gaps mean the actual number was probably higher. To put this figure in perspective, Allen notes that it constituted up to 29% of all French slave trading worldwide.⁶

The vast majority of this trade took place after 1767, the year of the collapse of the *Compagnie des Indes*, which had previously held a monopoly on all trade to and from the Mascarenes. Its collapse spurred the opening of the Mascarenes to free trading for all French nationals in 1769. This allowed commerce in Île de France and Bourbon to expand unimpeded, forcefully driven forward by competing businessmen. In response to the success of open French trading, and to benefit from the multinational web of transactions that characterised trade in the south-western Indian Ocean in the late eighteenth century, free trading was then extended to all nationals in 1784. These changes increased not only the volume of the trade but also its geographical reach, resulting in large numbers of slaves being imported from a particularly wide catchment area. Studies of the ethnic composition of the slave populations of Mauritius and Réunion reveal not only a wide variety of Malagasy and East African ethnic groups, but also a host of Indian identities, including Malabars and Bengalis, and even 'Malays' from Southeast Asia and China. Arabs and Persians were also represented, alongside West Africans, Comorians, Anjouanis and Abyssians.⁷ The distant and diverse origins of these slaves foreground the centrality of the Mascarenes to a complex network of political, cultural and economic exchanges in the Indian Ocean world. The benefits to be derived from using the Seychelles as a linchpin in this network become clear when one observes

4 Payet, *Histoire de l'esclavage à l'Île Bourbon*, p. 17.

5 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, p. 18.

6 Ibid., p. 102.

7 See Alpers, 'Becoming "Mozambique"'; Pier Larson, 'La diaspora malgache aux Mascareignes (XVIIIe et XIXe siècles). Notes sur la démographie et la langue', *Revue Historique de l'Océan Indien*, 1 (2005), pp. 143-155, and 'The Origins of Malagasy'; Allen, *European Slave Trading*, pp. 73-74.

the archipelago's geographical location, centred as it is between East Africa, India and Mauritius and Réunion. However, a sharper understanding of the factors that led to the settling of the Seychelles depends on an examination of the changes that the Mascarene slave trade was undergoing in the closing decades of the eighteenth century, especially following the expansion occurring after the liberalisation of trade in 1769.

French demand for slaves in the Mascarenes has long been recognised as the key reason for the remarkable expansion of slave trading on the Mozambican and Swahili coasts from the mid-eighteenth century. More recently, however, it has also become clear that the mass movement of forced labourers to the French Mascarenes was built upon such foundations as had been laid by pre-existing, multi-directional and overlapping slave trading networks that connected Madagascar, the Comoros, Mozambique, the Swahili coast, the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf.⁸ While the trade to the Mascarenes significantly re-shaped the workings of these earlier networks, it is important to note that the shifting patterns of these regional slave trades, which witnessed alternations of periods of expansion and decline throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in turn influenced the trajectory of the Mascarene trade by opening and closing sources of slaves to the French. Michael Pearson has noted that before the Mascarene slave trade came to prominence in the mid-eighteenth century, European slaving in the Indian Ocean was minimal.⁹ However, as we shall see, Portuguese activity in Mozambique played a significant part in shaping French trade routes, while instances of small-scale slave trading by the Dutch and the English throughout the Indian Ocean in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries can, in some cases, be regarded as having provided the launch pads for later French partnerships with littoral communities.

⁸ See Thomas Vernet, 'Slave Trade and Slavery on the Swahili Coast, 1500-1750', in P. Lovejoy, B.A. Mirzai and I.M. Montana (eds), *Slavery, Islam and Diaspora* (Trenton, NJ, 2009), pp. 37-76.

⁹ Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, p. 113.

Madagascar

Slavery within Madagascar, and the sale of slaves to both visiting and settled foreigners, were well established long before the French came seeking slaves for the Mascarenes late in the seventeenth century. James C. Armstrong, in particular, has shown that overseas slave trading, organised by Arabs, Swahili and Europeans, was a long running feature of seventeenth-century Madagascar, especially in the northwest of the island.¹⁰ In the seventeenth century, Massily (now Nosy Antsoheribory, an island in the Bay of Boina) reportedly housed a settlement of between 6,000 and 7,000 Arabs or Swahili. Established in the northwest of the island since the ninth century, these traders supplied Malagasy slaves to, primarily, the Persian Gulf, where they were used as construction workers, domestic servants, concubines, artisans and agricultural workers.¹¹ Thomas Vernet has demonstrated the importance of Swahili operators to this trade, noting that from the sixteenth to the early eighteenth century, perhaps 3,000-4,000 slaves hailing mainly from northwest Madagascar were transported each year by Swahili traders to Arabian markets. Other Malagasy slaves were used as labourers in the Comoros and the Swahili cities.¹² According to Vernet, merchants from Pate Island were particularly heavily involved, sailing each year to bring 2,000-3,000 Malagasy slaves, often via the Comoros and their own island, to Muscat.¹³ Slaves from East Africa were also transported in the opposite direction to meet the demand of dominant Malagasy groups, like the Sakalava, or of the settled Arabs and Swahili communities themselves.

Malagasy slaves were delivered to Massily by the Hova and Sakalava, and the trade drew on captives from across the entire breadth of the island. As Armstrong pointed out, Dutch ships calling on the east coast in the seventeenth century were at times unable to purchase slaves, since all of the local captives were being transported to the other side of the island. This relaying of slaves across Madagascar must have laid the foundations for the overland networks that supplied the east coast with thousands

10 Armstrong, 'Madagascar and the Slave Trade in the Seventeenth Century'.

11 Ibid., pp. 213-214.

12 Vernet, 'Slave Trade and Slavery on the Swahili Coast', p. 60.

13 Ibid., p. 54.

of inland slaves for the Mascarenes when the latter's increased demand could no longer be satisfied by eastern Malagasy slaves alone.¹⁴

Europeans, often unable to purchase slaves from the Swahili-dominated ports in the northwest, had also attempted to trade for slaves directly. To this end, they had tried to establish bases for themselves in Madagascar. Portuguese, Dutch and English slavers had called at the island sporadically throughout the seventeenth century, carrying away slaves, as well as cattle, for their settlements in India, the East Indies, the Cape, Dutch Mauritius and Mozambique, but these connections were not common or permanent enough to have paved the way for later French dealers from the Mascarenes. Attempts were made to colonise parts of the island by the English, the Dutch and the French themselves, but they all failed miserably. The Dutch eventually came to know the country as *Coemiterium Batavorum* – the graveyard of the Dutch. Being similarly blighted by local hostility, sickness and death, English efforts at colonisation were finally abandoned after the 1640s.¹⁵

It was not simply the close proximity of eastern Madagascar that attracted the French from the Mascarenes when they began seeking slaves and food provisions for their islands in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The *Grande Isle*, as Madagascar was known, was at this time arguably more important to French ambitions than the Mascarenes themselves. In its plans for a prosperous future in the Indian Ocean, the *Compagnie des Indes* envisioned the foundation of a series of trading colonies on Madagascar. Indeed it was only after these endeavours had spiralled into a state of disaster that the Mascarenes grew in importance in the eyes of the *Compagnie des Indes*. Beginning in 1642, the establishment and maintenance of 'Fort Dauphin', a trading and provisioning colony in south-eastern Madagascar (Taolagnaro), had been a major project for the French for more than three decades. Already problematic relations with their hosts, however, were decisively ruptured in 1673, when settlers apparently replaced their Malagasy wives and concubines with newly sent orphans from France. This led to the killing of 14 men and 13 women by the Antanosy and an 18-month siege around the fort, which was eventually

14 Armstrong, 'Madagascar and the Slave Trade in the Seventeenth Century', pp. 211-233.

15 Brown, *A History of Madagascar*, pp. 35-43.

abandoned by the French.¹⁶ In 1674, the survivors fled Madagascar to join the handful of settlers who had been on Bourbon since 1665; in place of Fort Dauphin, that island now became the main French foothold in the south-western Indian Ocean. Despite the failure of Fort Dauphin, the hope of carving out a dominant space for themselves within Madagascar never entirely left the French, and this consideration clearly influenced the trade between the same island and the French Mascarenes. While the geographical proximity of Madagascar to Bourbon and Île de France was naturally important, the fact that the island was by far the largest supplier of slaves to the Mascarenes during the reign of the *Compagnie des Indes* was also encouraged by wider French expansionist aims.

Throughout the eighteenth century, however, various factors militated against the efficiency of French slave trading operations in eastern Madagascar. Firstly, since both the Mascarenes and Madagascar are located in the hurricane belt, it was only considered safe to travel to, and remain anchored off, the eastern coast of Madagascar between the months of June and November – the Austral winter or dry season. During the wet summer, from December to May, violent storms posed a serious risk to ships on the open sea and in the poorly protected bays of Madagascar's eastern coast. The wet season was also avoided because at that time of the year malarial fevers were commonly contracted by both slaves and merchants. Secondly, since slaves for sale to foreigners were typically acquired by coastal communities through kidnapping or the conquest of enemies, and were often first offered back to kin groups for high ransoms, the French traders who turned up at the few anchorages of the eastern coast could not always count on a steady supply of slaves.¹⁷ Exception made for such pirates as had settled on the eastern coast and intermarried with the Malagasy between the 1670s and 1720s,¹⁸ Mascarene slavers could not count on any commercial intermediaries along the eastern coast. They thus dealt with the leaders of coastal communities directly, usually supplying guns and ammunition in exchange for slaves, rice and beef. And this meant that French slave

16 Ibid., pp. 44-49.

17 Larson, *History and Memory*, pp. 92-107.

18 Brown, *A History of Madagascar*, pp. 73-78.

traders tended invariably to become embroiled in local conflict, which made for unstable relationships.¹⁹

In the first half of the eighteenth century, a degree of order was ensured by the Betsimisaraka kingdom. Consisting of a confederation of chiefdoms centred on Foulpointe, in north-east Madagascar, the kingdom drew on the proceeds of the trade with the French to generate and maintain political allegiances.²⁰ This situation lasted until the 1750s, when the leader and founder of the kingdom, Ratsimilaho, the son of an English pirate and a Fenerive princess, died.²¹ This left territorial leaders to vie for dominance. French traders, who believed that these wars would result in the production of more captives at more competitive prices, supplied arms to the various factions involved in the conflict. Contrary to French expectations, however, the long-term effect of the violent demise of the Betsimisaraka kingdom was to increase social dislocation and to disrupt the workings of the trade in both foodstuffs and slaves. Indeed, as the conflict went on, instead of being sold to the French, prisoners of war were more commonly retained by the warring parties with a view to ransoming captured kin. At the same time, the rice fields belonging to enemy groups were routinely destroyed.²²

All of this meant that from the 1760s – on the very cusp of the Mascarenes' major economic expansion and slaving boom – an unfavourable trading environment prevailed on the east coast of Madagascar, which French slavers were known sometimes to leave empty-handed.²³ The result of this combination of instability in eastern Madagascar and the liberalisation of trade, which diminished the significance of the *Compagnie's* ultimate aims for the *Grande Isle*, was that large numbers of competing, Mascarene slave traders sought to establish alternative supply routes. While numbers of slaves were still to be found in north-western Madagascar, the area was no longer the vast trading hub that it had been in the seventeenth century. Beginning in the early eighteenth century, the position of north-western Madagascar in Swahili networks had been gradually taken over by Cape Delgado and Kilwa.

19 Larson, *History and Memory*, p. 63

20 Ibid., p. 61.

21 Brown, *A History of Madagascar*, pp. 80-81.

22 Larson, *History and Memory*, p. 62.

23 Ibid., pp. 66-74.

Supplied by Yao-dominated caravan routes joining the interior of East Africa and the coast, these two localities now provided the bulk of the slaves required by the Swahili city-states as well as Oman.²⁴ With the Comoros also losing much of their former pre-eminence as a redistributor of Malagasy slaves, the French naturally turned their sights to East Africa.

Mozambique

The trade between the French Mascarenes and the Portuguese at Mozambique had begun tentatively in 1721 and had been openly encouraged by La Bourdonnais in the 1730s. He himself had a friendly relationship with the Portuguese and was aware of their projects in East Africa, having served in their navy between 1729 and 1732.²⁵ Despite Lisbon's ban on trading with other European powers, the Portuguese in Mozambique were often motivated by profit rather than loyalty to the metropolis. Want of resources also played a role, since their capital, Mozambique Island, was not self-sufficient. Thus, Mascarene slavers were easily able to purchase slaves at good prices in Mozambique Island by exchanging grain or other basic commodities. Alpers notes that the French were also making direct contact with the Makua and the Swahili to the south of Cape Delgado, the northern Portuguese border, from at least as early as 1741.²⁶ This was especially encouraged during periods when trading at Mozambique Island was made more difficult on account of the divergent attitudes towards trading with the French held by successive Portuguese governors. These periodic difficulties also encouraged trade with the Portuguese Quirimba islands, to the north of Mozambique Island. One of the justifications adduced by the Portuguese officials who chose to ignore Lisbon's prohibition on trade with foreigners was that the French, in their determination to leave the coast with slaves, would otherwise acquire them from native communities in exchange for firearms, an outcome that the Portuguese were keen to avoid, having banned their own citizens from trading guns with any Africans.

24 Vernet, 'Slave Trade and Slavery on the Swahili Coast,' pp. 54-58.

25 Alpers, 'The French Slave Trade in East Africa', pp. 88-89.

26 Ibid., p. 85.

The Portuguese in Mozambique used small numbers of slaves provided by the Yao or the Makua. Moreover, since the early sixteenth century, they had themselves inaugurated an ongoing, though relatively small, traffic in slaves between Mozambique and their bases in India and the East Indies. The most reliable estimates of the scale of this trade indicate that the numbers of slaves exported each year were lower than 400. Figures also varied considerably, for in some years fewer than ten slaves were exported to the East.²⁷ Even though the Portuguese required few exportable slaves in comparison with the French, what really mattered was that the structures for acquiring and exporting slaves had been in place in Mozambique Island and the Quirimba islands, especially Ibo, long before the arrival of slave ships from the Mascarenes. This explains why the French were able to quickly amass large numbers of slaves from these localities, in addition to those who were still being sourced from Madagascar. However, as Alpers indicates, the total volume of French-Portuguese trade remained too small to significantly alter slave trading patterns on the East African coast until the Mascarene expansion of 1770.²⁸ According to Malyn Newitt, the total number of slaves exported from Mozambique until the 1760s never exceeded 1,000 or so per year.²⁹ This situation dramatically changed after 1770, when it is estimated that Mozambique provided the Mascarenes with more than 3,000 slaves per year, averaging as many as 3,770 for the period 1786-1794.³⁰

Pereira do Lago, the Governor of Mozambique from 1765 to 1779, was, conveniently for the French, an exile with no hopes of ever being permitted to return to Portugal. He was thus perfectly willing to openly facilitate the slave trade to the Mascarenes at the time of their sharply increased demand. By the same token, however, he also intended to profit from it as much as possible and thus imposed high taxes on the participants in the trade. Despite the profits the French were still making – according to Alpers, a slave could be bought in Mozambique for about 30 patacas and sold in the Mascarenes for anything between 80 and 150 – they resented do Lago's taxes as well as the long waits, sometimes up to four months, for the

27 Pedro Machado, 'A Forgotten Corner of the Indian Ocean: Gujarati Merchants, Portuguese India and the Mozambique Slave Trade', in Campbell (ed.), *The Structure of Slavery*, pp. 20-21.

28 Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves*, p. 95.

29 Malyn Newitt, *A History of Mozambique* (London, 1995), p. 246.

30 Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves*, pp. 185-186.

required numbers of slaves to be amassed.³¹ These factors led French slave traders to continue to seek alternatives to Mozambique Island.

At the same time, because of the parallel expansion of Omani trade, the demand for slaves was increasing along the Swahili coast as well. The demand emanating from both Swahili merchants coming from the north and Mascarene slavers seeking better deals than at Mozambique Island accounts for the growing trade of the Quirimba islands. Even after the Portuguese ban on foreign trade was lifted in 1785, foreign merchants were still theoretically forbidden from operating at the Quirimbas or any other point within Portuguese territory, with the exception of Mozambique Island. In practice, however, these rules were generally ignored, and so these northern outposts became prominent slave trading locations in their own right. Ibo Island, in particular, became second only to Mozambique Island as a slave mart off the coast of Mozambique and a serious rival to the capital.³² By expanding their operations northwards, Mascarene slavers were increasingly brought within the Swahili trading sphere. This diversification in the supply sources for slaves was to become even more significant and defining in the lead up to the Seychelles' colonisation and during the islands' active participation in the trade.

The Swahili Coast

As has been noted, following the decline of Swahili trade in north-western Madagascar in the early eighteenth century and the coeval expansion of the Sultanate of Oman on the east African coast, the island city states of Kilwa, Zanzibar and the Lamu archipelago, particularly Pate, began to source slaves from mainland Africa to cater for Omani demand. By the 1770s Zanzibar had become the prime Omani headquarters in East Africa and was obtaining the majority of its slaves from the semi-independent Swahili state of Kilwa. Ascertaining the volume of the trade between the Omani possessions and East Africa in the eighteenth century is particularly problematic due to lack of tangible evidence. Austen estimates that around 2,250 slaves per year were exported northwards from East Africa throughout

31 Alpers, 'The French Slave Trade in East Africa', pp. 101-102.

32 Newitt, *A History of Mozambique*, p. 198.

the eighteenth century, a figure which – in his view – increased to 6,625 between 1815 and 1815.³³ Similarly, Martin and Ryan put yearly slave exports at 2,500 for the late eighteenth century and at 6,500 for the period between 1850 and the official abolition of the Omani trade in 1873.³⁴ For his part, Abdul Sheriff has argued that there is little evidence for such an increase, since Omani demand for slaves in the productive, domestic and military sectors had already peaked by the end of the eighteenth century. According to Sheriff, therefore, it is possible that the trade had peaked as early as then, even though no definitive evidence exists to confirm this supposition.³⁵ Nonetheless, it is clear that the Swahili trade to Zanzibar and the Persian Gulf was substantial enough to allow significant numbers of slaves to be re-routed to the French Mascarenes after 1770 and that, in Kilwa at least, slaves could be purchased for a fraction of the price obtaining in Portuguese Mozambique.³⁶ While slave imports into the French Mascarenes from the Swahili coast never did rival imports from Mozambique or Madagascar, the ambition to gain control of and re-direct strands of the Swahili slave trade animated many a French merchants, most notably Jean-Vincent Morice, who came closer than any other trader to persuading the French government to allow him to set up a trading post in Kilwa. In his intentions, the inauguration of a factory in Kilwa would go hand-in-hand with the foundation of a company to which he expected the Sultan of Kilwa to grant monopolistic rights over the slave trade.

These kinds of plans to develop slave trading enterprises on the Swahili coast are particularly important when considering the colonisation of the Seychelles, since it was hoped that the islands would become instrumental in relaying Mascarenes-bound slaves from locations further north on the Swahili coast. How these plans played out in the Seychelles specifically will be addressed in chapter 2. Here, it suffices to say that despite these keen entrepreneurs' efforts, which undoubtedly provided much of the initial impetus for investing in the Seychelles, their schemes

33 R.A. Austen, 'The 19th Century Islamic Slave Trade from East Africa (Swahili and Red Sea Coasts): A Tentative Census', in Clarence-Smith, *Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade*, pp. 28-29.

34 E.B. Martin and T.C.I. Ryan, 'A Quantitative Assessment of the Arab Slave Trade of East Africa, 1770-1896', *Kenya Historical Review*, 5,1 (1977), p. 79.

35 Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar*, p. 41

36 Alpers, 'The French Slave Trade in East Africa', pp. 109-110.

did not fulfil their imagined potential. In Morice's case, a cold response from the French Government did not stop him from personally acting upon some aspects of his provisional deals with the Sultan of Kilwa. His endeavour enabled him to carry away thousands of slaves from that island in the second half of the 1770s.³⁷

Other traders followed suit and, by the 1790s, Zanzibar itself had turned into the principal slaving hub for Mascarenian dealers on the Swahili coast.³⁸ The significance of these new sources of slaves for the French is demonstrated by the fact that about a quarter of Mascarenes-bound slave ships obtained their human cargoes from the Swahili coast during the 1780s. Still, while slave exports to the Mascarenes increased throughout the region after 1770, it was Mozambique that was most directly affected, quickly surpassing Madagascar as the principal provider of slaves for Mauritius and Réunion. As Richard Allen has demonstrated, between 1670 and 1769, Madagascar supplied nearly three-quarters of all the slaves imported into the French Mascarenes; East Africa's share amounted to c. 20 %. Between 1770 and 1810, however, Malagasy imports dropped to 31%, while East African imports climbed to 60%.³⁹

A Space for the Seychelles

It was at the outset of this period of rapidly increasing slaving voyages between East Africa and Île de France and Bourbon that a French settlement was established in the long-claimed, but hitherto largely untouched, Seychelles. While a full argument in support of the view that the colonisation of the Seychelles was motivated by the need to facilitate the booming slave traffic from East Africa will be developed in chapter 2, Allen's aforementioned data alone demonstrates that a dramatic reorientation of the south-western Indian Ocean's slave trade was afoot which placed the Seychelles in a prime position to become a servicing station. The Seychelles thus developed basic facilities to provide ships with fresh water and food – at first in the form of turtle and tortoise meat. The indigenous giant tortoises which populated the islands

37 Freeman-Grenville, *The French at Kilwa Island*, p. 13.

38 Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar*, pp. 47-48.

39 Allen, 'The Mascarene Slave-Trade and Labor Migration', p. 40.

were abundant and easy to hunt, contain and keep. These animals, whose meat was also understood to be a promoter of good health, were a significant factor in the Seychelles' innate ability to provision slavers even before agriculture could be established. On top of tortoises and turtles, saltfish and locally produced and imported grain, as well as medical supplies, quarantine opportunities and ship repair services were made available in the Seychelles to ease the transition of slaves between East Africa and the principal Mascarenes.

It is worth noting here that during the first four decades in the life of the Seychelles colony, perhaps as many as 115,000 slaves were exported from East Africa to the French Mascarenes. These 115,000 slaves amounted to almost 50% of all of the slaves (243,346) imported into the same French island colonies throughout the entire period of the legal slave, ending in 1810.⁴⁰ All of these slaves were brought to the Mascarenes in an estimated 400 voyages.⁴¹ The available documentation does not indicate exactly what percentage of these voyages included a stop-over in the Seychelles, since captains did not always provide full details about their movements. Some ships, for instance, are known through incidental reports to have stopped at the Seychelles; yet the relevant *déclarations d'arrivée* (see introduction, p. 29) make no mention of any such stops having taken place. Because of these, such instances are not included in the 59 Seychellois stops uncovered by Richard Allen in his analysis of the Mauritian *déclarations d'arrivée*. This indicates that the number of ships breaking their journeys at the Seychelles was undoubtedly higher than the (already considerable) total suggested by the *déclarations d'arrivée*.

As well as facilitating the movement of slaves to the principal Mascarene Islands, the Seychelles imported slaves to work in their growing primary and secondary sectors, as well as in the production of cash crops such as cotton. Voyages between the Seychelles and East Africa to cater for this internal demand for slaves were not uncommon. However, greater opportunities to sell slaves elsewhere meant that, even as the Seychelles became an established colony, housing more than 3,000 slaves by

40 Ibid., Table 3, Projected Slave Exports to the Mascarenes, 1670-1848, p. 41.

41 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, Table 9, Slaving Voyages Involving the Mascarenes, 1718-1809, pp. 68-69. Figure taken from combined confirmed, probable and unsuccessful voyages between 1770 and 1809.

1810,⁴² the majority of slaves that reached the islands were ultimately destined for Île de France or Bourbon.

The Mascarene Network

While this study is focused on slave trading, and while it will be the argument of chapter 2 that the opportunities provided by the trade in slaves were of the greatest significance in French plans to settle the Seychelles, it is important to note that the archipelago offered many benefits to Mascarene commerce in general and that slave trading was thoroughly interconnected with other trades. The natural temptation entirely to isolate slave trading on account of its human significance can be unhelpful when trying to understand the workings of multi-layered trading networks – networks which were dominated by, but not limited to, mass forced migrations.

Slave trading between Madagascar, the Comoros and East Africa, as well as between these areas, the Mascarenes and India and Southeast Asia, was deeply interwoven with the trade in other goods. Thus, besides slaves, Madagascar also exported cattle and rice; East Africa could provide maize and ivory, while textiles, rice and seeds were highly sought-after Indian and Southeast Asian commodities. Because of these additional trading opportunities, ships often carried slaves as only parts of mixed cargoes. While cargoes consisting primarily of slaves, up to 400 per voyage in some cases,⁴³ did become common in the closing decades of the eighteenth century, these moved along the same routes as had been paved by smaller vessels – vessels which often carried composite cargoes and whose itineraries were informed by the necessity of transporting commodities other than slaves. This was true of the Seychelles, which provided merchants with tortoises, saltfish, spices and coco de mer seeds, as well as slaves and services, from the moment of their colonisation. Toussaint's data shows that the first five recorded Mauritian ships to have travelled to the Seychelles for trading purposes between 1770 and 1795 brought back only tortoises. From this point on, mixed cargoes, including cotton, nutmeg, fish or

42 Scarr, *Seychelles since 1770*, p. 45.

43 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, Table 11, Size of Slave Cargoes from Eastern Africa, 1772-1809, p. 76.

coconut oil as well as tortoises and turtles, became more common.⁴⁴ Although slaves are shown to have transited through the Seychelles throughout the last three decades of the eighteenth century, they do not feature as a Seychellois export in Mascarenian records until after the turn of 1800.⁴⁵

The comparatively small, but still significant, trade in Indian slaves to the Mascarenes was largely carried out as a supplement to trade in other goods. Many of the approximately 20,000-24,000 Indian slaves estimated to have been imported to the Mascarenes before 1810 represented additional purchases by captains who were primarily interested in rice or textiles, which could also be used to acquire cheaper and more readily available slaves in East Africa.⁴⁶ However, as shown by Pedro Machado's work, textiles and other accepted currencies for the slave trade were available in Mozambique thanks to the local presence of Gujarati merchants.⁴⁷ This worked towards reducing the intensity of connections between India and Mascarene dealers, rendering the latter's trade in Indian slaves sporadic and far less systematic than that in East African and Malagasy slaves. The fact that slaves could often be bought in exchange for food in famine-stricken Mozambique further reduced the need to involve India in the trade. Moreover, if textiles were made available by Indian merchants already in Mozambique, cowrie shells and foodstuffs could be obtained – and paid for in coin – from the Swahili operating in the Quirimbas or further north.⁴⁸

Despite this general trend, voyages seeking specifically Indian slaves, who were more highly regarded as skilled workers and artisans in the Mascarenes than their African peers, did take place occasionally. As was true for East Africa, the foundations for overseas slave trading had been laid by previous European operators in the coastal regions of southern India. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Portuguese, Dutch and English had taken Indian slaves to their various establishments in the East Indies, Dutch Mauritius and the Cape. It is difficult to ascertain the scale of this early European slave trade in India. Although the records

44 Toussaint, *La route des îles*, Table 5, Relevé des cargaisons, pp. 480-481.

45 Ibid.

46 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, pp. 118-128.

47 Machado, 'A Forgotten Corner of the Indian Ocean'.

48 Newitt, *A History of Mozambique*, pp. 245-246.

of English exports are missing, current estimates set Portuguese exports at between 5,000 and 6,000 slaves per year at various points across the seventeenth century. The Dutch, meanwhile, were responsible for carrying off at least 100,000 Indian slaves over the course of the same century.⁴⁹

Indians became slaves as a result of conflicts and political instability. However, the custom of kidnapping children for sale as slaves, or selling one's own children or even one's self during famine or as a reaction to extreme poverty, was also known.⁵⁰ The French bases at Chandernagar and Pondicherry, established in the 1670s, and Mahé, Yanam and Karaikal (from the 1720s-1730s) became slave-exporting centres, allowing a small but regular supply of slaves to be carried to the Mascarenes throughout the eighteenth century. Allen estimates that only around 5,000-5,700 Indian slaves were shipped to the islands, mostly on the back of other trades, until 1769. This was to increase to 14,750-18,200 between 1770 and 1810, though the greatest increase took place before 1793, the year in which the British temporarily seized Pondicherry.

This 'mini-boom' in Indian slave imports into the Mascarenes thus coincided with the aforementioned liberalisation of the trade and the colonisation of the Seychelles in 1770. It might also have had something to do with the discovery of a faster route to India, which made use of the Seychelles themselves, in 1769. Prior to this, ships necessarily travelled eastwards from Île de France, sailing far into the Indian Ocean and searching for winds heading northwest, sometimes stopping at Rodrigues for provisions, though its short distance from Mauritius itself (only 600km) limited the island's potential as a stop-over on the long voyage to India. While many ships travelled to India via the Seychelles during the French period (including the *Seine*, which permitted La Pérouse to write one of the few accounts of the Seychelles during the 1770s),⁵¹ evidence of Indian slaves reaching Île de France and Bourbon via the Seychelles has thus far not been located. Even after 1770, moreover, ship captains still habitually used the longer route eastwards – possibly because doubts

49 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, pp. 111-116.

50 *Ibid.*, pp. 121-123.

51 ANF C7/165, Jean François de la Pérouse, 'Mémoire sur les îles Seychelles et Praslin pour M. Le Ch Ce Ternay', 1773.

were soon cast on the strength of the winds along the new route by one at least of the navigators who had pioneered it.⁵² Even so, when one considers that captains, particularly of merchant ships, did not always record the details of their voyages, and that, initially at least, the route to India via the Seychelles discovered in 1769 was considered to be potentially faster than the route eastwards, the possibility that some of these slaving voyages to India made use of the Seychelles route can hardly be ruled out. We will return to this question in chapter 2.

Slaves arriving in Île de France and Bourbon from Southeast Asia were considerably fewer than those hailing from India. While censuses and contemporary observers mention significant numbers of Southeast Asians,⁵³ there are no records of French ships having travelled to Southeast Asia to purchase slaves during the era of the legal slave trade. This being the case, Southeast Asian slaves were likely to have been purchased in India and thence conveyed, perhaps occasionally through the Seychelles, to Île de France and Bourbon.

As a way of concluding this discussion of the broader networks revolving around the Mascarene, it is worth mentioning in passing that the islands' trading connections extended well beyond the confines of the Indian Ocean. Both European and American ships took advantage of well-established slave supply points in East Africa and Madagascar from as early as the 1730s, and continued to do so throughout the eighteenth century. Ships from the Antilles and Brazil commonly sought slaves on the East African coast, especially, though not exclusively, in the last twenty years of the eighteenth century, the time of the region's greatest involvement in international slave trading. The Mascarenes themselves were known to have acted as provisioning stations for European or American ships engaged in this trade, or as bases from which such voyages could be launched.⁵⁴ Allen has emphasised the importance of recognising the links that European slave trading ushered in between the ostensibly

52 Alexis-Marie de Rochon, *Voyage à Madagascar, à Maroc et aux Indes orientales* (Paris, 1801), vol. 2, p. 154.

53 See, for example, d'Unienville, *Statistique de Île Maurice*, pp. 277-278.

54 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, pp. 87-89.

separate Indian Ocean and Atlantic worlds.⁵⁵ By the end of the eighteenth century, then, the Mascarene network can be described as a truly global, or globalizing, one.

The Last Years of the Legal Trade

The official end of the Mascarene slave trade came in 1810, when the French islands fell to the British, who promptly extended to them the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act of 1807. This was not a sudden conquest, however, but the result of a sustained campaign which itself bore heavily on all forms of trading to the Mascarenes. Of particular significance to the role of the Seychelles (as will be seen in later chapters) was the way in which the slave trade was affected by escalating conflicts between the French and British during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars after 1793. Besides putting a strain on the economy of the French islands, the nature of warfare in the Indian Ocean during these conflicts, with British and French vessels being encouraged to turn their hands to privateering, meant that merchant ships, including slavers, became legitimate targets. The slave trade to East Africa was significantly hampered as a result. Alpers, for instance, noted that, after 1794, not a single slave ship called at Mozambique for two full years.⁵⁶ In a similar vein, Sheriff pointed out that British patrols around Zanzibar, which by this time was the most important supplier of slaves to the French on the Swahili coast, deterred Mascarenian ships from visiting that port.⁵⁷

Overall, however, the slave trade to the Mascarenes continued to increase even in wartime. Between 1789 and 1797 projected slave imports into Île de France, Bourbon and the Seychelles totalled about 35,000. These increased to almost 59,000 in the following decade, 1798-1809.⁵⁸ During the first decade of the nineteenth century, the increasing demand for slaves in the Mascarenes, the dangers posed by British warships in the Mozambique Channel, competition from Brazilian vessels at

55 Ibid., pp. 102-103.

56 Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves*, p. 188.

57 Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar*, p. 46.

58 Allen, 'The Mascarene Slave-Trade and Labor Migration', Table 2, Projected Slave Imports into the Mascarenes, 1715-1809, p. 39. Based on the highest of Allen's two possible rates of slave mortality.

Mozambique and rising prices there, all caused Madagascar once more to become the favourite destination for Mascarene slavers. Although the latter experienced difficulties in Mozambique, the strength of the demand originating from their islands was such that slaving voyages increased there too – from 55 voyages in the 1790s to 88 in the 1800s.⁵⁹ The Swahili coast also experienced an increase – from 24 to 32 voyages – during the same period.⁶⁰ Pre-existing – and theoretically illegal – connections with the inhabitants of the Quirimbas allowed French dealers to overcome some of the difficulties associated with trading at Mozambique. These links, as well as those on the Swahili coast, diminished the effects of the Franco-Portuguese conflict of the Napoleonic wars and the ensuing Portuguese ban on French trade in Mozambique in 1808.⁶¹

After the British conquest of the Mascarenes in 1810, the multitude of islands that make up the Seychelles archipelago, with their empty coves and dense forests, made a decisive contribution to the continuation of the now illegal slave trade of the Mascarenes. Through mechanisms that will be explored in chapters 4 and 5, between 1810 and 1830, an estimated 122,000-149,000 slaves were illegally imported into the Mascarenes.⁶² The phasing out of the illegal slave trade in the 1820s and 1830s and its replacement – the transportation of indentured labourers after the abolition of slavery in the British Mascarenes in 1835 and in Réunion in 1848 – mark the end of the high era of European slave trading in the Indian Ocean. Consisting of an extensive network of interactions reaching far beyond the confines of the Indian Ocean itself, for more than a century, this trade had existed primarily to provide Mauritius and Réunion with what may have been up to 384,040⁶³ enslaved adults and children from all corners of the Indian Ocean and beyond.

59 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, Table 9, Slaving Voyages Involving the Mascarenes, 1718-1809, pp. 68-69

60 Ibid.

61 Newitt, *A History of Mozambique*, p. 248.

62 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, p. 175.

63 This is the highest estimate of French slave imports into the Mascarenes; Allen, *European Slave Trading*, Table 1, European Transoceanic Slave Shipments to Indian Ocean Destinations, 1500-1850, pp. 16-18.

Chapter 2 The Seychelles Enter the Mascarene Slave Trade

The colonisation of the Seychelles in 1770 and the settlement that developed thereafter have naturally been focal points of enquiry for general histories of the islands. As has been argued in this dissertation's introduction, these works do not engage with the wider features of the Mascarene slave trade outlined in the previous chapter. Yet the very timing of the colonisation of the Seychelles – taking place in the immediate aftermath of the liberalisation of trade and at the outset of the Mascarenes' slaving boom – forcefully suggests that the changing dynamics of the slave trade influenced the intentions and actions of early settlers, as well as those merchants who incorporated the islands into their shipping routes. The close relationship that obtained between the inclusion of the Seychelles into the Mascarene network and an intensifying regional slave trade forms the subject of this chapter. Its main objectives are to shed new light on some of the motivations for the colonisation of the islands and to permit a clearer appraisal of the roles attributed to the Seychelles in the shifting patterns of intense human trafficking in the south-western Indian Ocean.

The Turn of the 1770s

As has been noted in the previous chapter, the turn of the 1770s marked a significant change in the dynamics and scale of the Mascarene slave trade. After this point, there was a sizeable increase in slave imports, as well as in the number of slaving voyages carried out by Mascarenian dealers. The decade in question was also characterised by shifts in trade routes and in the main sources of slave supplies. The difficulties experienced by the French in Madagascar from the mid-eighteenth century, combined with the enormous increase in Mascarenian demand for captive labour, brought about a re-orientation of trade and accounted for East Africa overtaking Madagascar as the principal source of slaves for the Mascarenes. These developments meant that the Seychelles found themselves closer than before to the natural path of East African slaving voyages. To understand the significance of this passing traffic and its need for additional servicing, it is necessary to take a closer

look at the volume of the East African slave trade during the years leading up to, and in the immediate aftermath of, the colonisation of the Seychelles.

The trade's increasing volume during the eighteenth century has been clearly brought to light by Richard Allen's *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean*.¹ Drawing on the records of 952 confirmed, probable and unsuccessful Mascarene slaving voyages between 1718 and 1809, Allen's work disaggregates the number of voyages to various locations per decade and indicates the numbers and origins of the slaves imported into the Mascarenes, including the Seychelles. During the century before 1770, there had been an estimated 55,122 slaves imported into the Mascarenes, predominantly from Madagascar. Over the course of the next forty years, the figure shot up to 186,816, with East Africa becoming the preeminent source of slaves. Voyages to East Africa brought up to 115,189 slaves to the Mascarenes between 1770 and 1810, compared with a mere 11,468 during the previous century.² Allen's database also shows that the number of known and probable slaving voyages prior to 1770 ranged from 14 to 43 per decade, with an average of 23.³ While the 1760s saw 20 known and probable slaving voyages, this figure leapt to 109 in the 1770s and had further climbed to a staggering 286 by the 1810s.⁴

The year 1770, in sum, forms a watershed, separating two distinct phases in the slave trade of the Mascarenes. Moreover, it is clear that the shift from one phase to the next was sudden, with the number of known and probable slaving voyages increasing by roughly 450% from the 1760s to 1770s, and the number of imported slaves increasing by up to 267% in the second phase. Allen acknowledges that the data available to him are far from complete, due to the fragmentary nature of the sources, and that future research will likely reveal more voyages having taken place and greater numbers of slaves having been imported into the Mascarenes. For all

1 Allen, *European Slave Trading*.

2 Ibid., Table 1, European Transoceanic Slave Shipments to Indian Ocean Destinations, 1500-1850, pp. 16-18.

3 The unusually high number of 43 in the 1730s can be attributed to La Bourdonnais's coeval extensive projects to develop the islands (see chapter 1, pp. 38-39).

4 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, Table 9, Slaving Voyages Involving the Mascarenes, 1718-1809, pp. 68-69.

their probable deficiencies, however, these figures are the most comprehensive to date and powerfully demonstrate, if not exact numbers, at least the rapidly changing dynamics of the trade of which the Seychelles would become an integral part.

To understand the wider context for these changes, it is necessary to examine not just the slave trade, but the wider scope of Mascarene commerce and also the cultural and political responses to this transformed state of affairs, which in turn influenced the size of the trade flowing between East Africa and the Mascarenes. The post-1770 shift coincided with the inception of free trade in the Mascarenes. Prior to 1769, only ships belonging to the state-chartered *Compagnie des Indes* were permitted to conduct any trade to or from its main outposts in the south-western Indian Ocean: Île de France and Bourbon. The liberalisation of trade in 1769 was a result of the Company's bankruptcy in 1765 and the ensuing handover of control of the islands to the French Crown. Unlike the *Compagnie des Indes*, the new Royal Administration did not seek to impose a trading monopoly. Rather, it encouraged its citizens to seek out new opportunities for themselves. Thus the 1769 decree which granted all French nationals the right to trade with the islands ushered in a situation in which fortune-seeking Mascarenian operators could both take advantage of pre-existing trading connections and also pioneer the opening of new ones. This led to a great expansion of commerce and turned the islands into major trading centres in the Indian Ocean. By 1787, the benefits of free trading were being increasingly realised by the French government, and so trading rights were extended to all foreign nationals. Once consolidated, the use of the islands as entrepôts for all manner of shipping continued to grow for the remainder of French rule: the 78 ships that called at Port Louis, the capital of Île de France, in 1769 had become 347 by 1803.⁵

We know comparatively little about commercial shipping in the period before 1770. However, it is clear that liberalisation resulted in a rapid expansion in trade of all kinds. According to Toussaint, between 1735 and 1767 – that is, from the beginning of La Bourdonnais's governorship to the replacement of the *Compagnie des Indes* – visits from foreign ships were few and far between, while the Mascarenian shipping

5 Allen, *Slaves, Freedmen and Indentured Labourers*, p. 12.

industry was practically non-existent.⁶ At the same time, Allen has suggested that the increasing numbers of ships trading and stopping at the Mascarenes after 1770, combined with high mortality and low birth rates among the islands' slaves, were responsible for the increase in slave imports and slaving voyages. While Île de France and Bourbon's merchants concentrated on Madagascar and, increasingly, East Africa, bringing back slaves as one component of mixed cargoes which also included foodstuffs and other essentials, ships from Bordeaux and Marseilles were now regularly calling at Port Louis as they undertook long-distance trading voyages. These ships could profit from the food and wine they bought at the Cape and then re-sold in Île de France. They also purchased textiles in India and used them to buy slaves in East Africa – slaves who could then be sold in the Mascarenes, or even carried to the Americas.

The transition to free trading also reveals that attitudes towards hitherto dominant Malagasy slaves and the trading environment of Madagascar had been worsening for some time. Once the *Compagnie*'s ultimate ambitions to establish control over parts of the islands faded into the background, the search for alternative sources of slaves was actively encouraged by the new government. Desroches, the Governor of Île de France, and *Intendant* Poivre noted in a joint report that Madagascar had previously been the 'wet-nurse' of their island. But they also stressed that, under the regime of the *Compagnie des Indes* and especially during the Seven Years' War, the greed of particular individual traders in Madagascar had 'sacrificed the good of the colony'. In their view, there was little hope of correcting these abuses, since everything had been 'spoiled already'.⁷ The increasing number of east African slaves imported into the Mascarenes after 1770 also spoke to the prejudice held by most planters that Malagasy slaves were more volatile and harder to control than their east African peers. In another report, for instance, Poivre claimed that Mozambicans were strong, robust and good at sea, while Malagasy slaves were '*amoureux de leur liberté*,

6 Toussaint, *La route des îles*, p. 96.

7 ANF C4/27, Desroches et Poivre, 'Articles du rapport d'administration des Mascareignes pour l'année 1770'.

déserteurs éternels'.⁸

Showing awareness of the growing importance of Mozambican slaves to Île de France, Desroches and Poivre also commented on the often ignored fact that the export of slaves from Mozambique to territories falling outside the Portuguese sphere had, in theory at least, been forbidden by Lisbon. They thus urged the Minister in Paris to come to some agreement with the Portuguese Crown to overcome this technical barrier, which was in any case ignored by both Portuguese officials in Mozambique and French traders from the Mascarenes. Where profits were to be made, distant rules from the mother countries were clearly of secondary importance. This, in fact, would remain true even during the Napoleonic wars, when, despite France and Portugal being declared enemies, the slave trade between Mozambique and the Mascarenes did not come to a halt.⁹

By the 1770s, then, conditions were in place for the northern coast of Mozambique to become the main destination for rapidly expanding numbers of private traders seeking increasing quantities of slaves for the Mascarenes. It is not coincidental that the trade between the two localities – treated with secrecy at its outset in the earlier decades of the eighteenth century – was now actively encouraged by the then governor at Mozambique, Pereira do Lago. Like other Portuguese officials, he held the view that the French brought with them the best commodity, money, and took away the worst: the Makua of northern Mozambique.¹⁰ This tongue-in-cheek comment, of course, reflects the Portuguese keenness to trade, but also their problematic relations with the Makua, who indeed made up a large proportion of the exported slaves (370 out of every thousand, according to Alpers).¹¹ Do Lago defended the growing commerce between his possessions and the Mascarenes by stressing that Portuguese trading ships themselves sailed to the Mascarenes to trade. While the law stipulated that foreigners could not trade in Portuguese colonies,

8 ANF C4/22/112, Poivre to Ministre de la Marine, 16 June 1768. On the preference for Mozambican slaves over Malagasy slaves, see also Campbell and Alpers, 'Introduction: Slavery, Forced Labour and Resistance in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia', p. 4.

9 Edward Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves*, p. 186.

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*, p. 152.

nowhere – do Logo argued – did it prevent Portuguese subjects from venturing out to conduct trade elsewhere. Do Logo’s acumen, however, could hardly disguise the fact that Portuguese-driven exchanges were almost negligible by comparison with the numbers of French ships which travelled to Mozambique to trade. Uninterrupted by Lisbon, slave exports from Mozambique (primarily, though not exclusively, to the Mascarenes) continued to grow up to, and beyond, 1785, when Lisbon legalised the trade between Mozambique Island and the French possessions in the south-western Indian Ocean.¹²

At the turn of the 1770s, the dramatic increase in slave imports and the changes in the primary sources of slaves were seen as permanent and positive developments by influential traders and political figures in the Mascarenes. The Seychelles colony, then, came into existence at a time when French operators in the south-western Indian Oceans were actively exploring ways of consolidating trading relationships between the Mascarenes and Mozambique. Additionally, as we have begun to see in the previous chapter, developing French interest on the Swahili coast rose to prominence at about the same time as the Seychelles were being colonised and settled. This – as will be shown below – was hardly a coincidence.

Enter the Seychelles

The few historians who have pondered over the motivations for the initial colonisation of the Seychelles have commonly argued that French authorities were primarily animated by military or agricultural concerns. Military factors dominate the perspective of Réunionnais historian Claude Wanquet, who was also responsible for cataloguing many of the Seychelles’ archival documents.¹³ Wanquet noted that the initial explorations of the Seychelles in the 1740s were commissioned by Île de France governor La Bourdonnais as part of his wider ambition to strengthen France’s influence in an integrated Indian Ocean. Encouraged by La Bourdonnais, the voyages of Lazare Picault in 1742 and 1744 revealed that the strategic location of the Seychelles and Mahé’s good natural harbour, along with the islands’ seemingly

12 Newitt, *A History of Mozambique*, p. 247.

13 Wanquet, ‘Le peuplement des Seychelles’.

healthy climate and good soil, gave them great potential to house and provide for a naval base. The foundation of a military base in the Seychelles was still on the agenda well into the 1790s, but lack of funds and other military priorities, especially in India, meant that the project was never realised.

The possibility of establishing a shorter route to India is mentioned by the same Wanquet and also by Scarr as another relevant factor behind the French decision to settle the Seychelles.¹⁴ Mention has already been made of the fact that the new route to India via the Seychelles did not gain universal acceptance (see chapter 1, pp. 48-49). In 1769-1770, however, the ambition to turn the Seychelles into a provisioning and servicing station for ships plying the route between Île de France and India was definitely on the cards and did undoubtedly influence the process of colonisation of the archipelago. In October 1769, Lieutenant Jacques Raymond Grenier completed his exploratory voyage and reported favourably on it.¹⁵ Journeys between Île de France and the French Indian colony of Pondicherry were known to take between two and a half and three months and were limited to the months of September and April, when ships could sail directly east from Île de France, via Rodrigues, and then search for a northerly wind to India's eastern coast.¹⁶ Grenier and his companion, the naval astronomer Alexis-Marie de Rochon, had reached the Seychelles from Île de France in two weeks. There, they had spent a month exploring the islands and their uncharted reefs. From the Seychelles, they had sailed the unfamiliar waters to the north east, via the Maldives, reaching the Malabar coast within another two weeks. A mere week after that, having cruised along the southern Indian coast line, they had arrived in Pondicherry.¹⁷ In other words, they had cut the longest sailing time by half and shown that journeys to India could now take place all year round.

Grenier and de Rochon also noted that the waters of this section of the Indian Ocean were not as dangerous as Portuguese rumours would have had them believe. In addition, Grenier's report indicated that, while the Seychelles had not hitherto been used by trading ships of the *Compagnie des Indes*, the French military was

14 Ibid., p.189; Scarr, *Seychelles since 1770*, p. 6.

15 ANF C2/278, Grenier to Ministre de la Marine, 13 November 1770.

16 ANF Ms91/7 Steinauer et Poivre to Ministre de la Marine, 18 February 1769.

17 Jacques-Raymond Grenier, *Mémoires de la campagne des découvertes dans les mers de l'Inde* (Brest, 1772), pp. 25-28.

nonetheless anxious to prevent the islands from falling into the hands of the English – a development that could threaten French stakes in the Indian Ocean. In this light, Grenier urged that the charts and logs of previous explorers, as well as the amended and improved charts that he and de Rochon would produce, be kept strictly secret, even from French merchants, and that the islands be used for military operations only.¹⁸ The evidence left behind by Grenier certainly supports Wanquet's contention that military concerns were not unimportant in determining French policy towards the Seychelles.

De Rochon's doubts about the strength of the winds during the opposite season were confirmed shortly after his and Grenier's initial voyage: in December 1770, a captain Du Roslan had to give up on the route and turn back.¹⁹ By this time, however, the colonisation of the Seychelles was already under way. The realisation that the Seychelles route to India was only practical for half the year did not render it insignificant and many ships – including merchant ones – would eventually take advantage of it. It may, however have had something to do with the Île de France government losing much of its earlier interest in the Seychelles as a potential military base and, more generally, with its altogether non-committal approach to the entire colonisation scheme.

But there was more to the colonisation of the Seychelles than their potential usefulness in linking the Mascarenes and India and/or the threat of their being occupied by the British. Indeed, by the time that Grenier was penning his report to Minister of the Navy in November 1770, at least one of the traders whose exclusion from the Seychelles the Lieutenant advocated had already latched on to the secret. Henri François Charles Brayer du Barré was a Normand entrepreneur and new-comer to Île de France who had previously worked for a lottery in Rouen and as a commissioner of trade at the Cape. Barré arrived in Île de France in May 1770, aboard his ship, the *Duc de Praslin*.²⁰ By as early as August, Governor Desroches

18 ANF C2/278, Grenier to Ministre de la Marine, 13 November 1770.

19 Du Roslan 'Mémoire sur la Campagne que j'ai faite par ordre du Roi dans l'Archipel d'Isles situées au N. E de Madagascar en 1770-1771', published in Fauvel, *Unpublished Documents*, p. 49.

20 ANF CE/51/144-147, 'Un mémoire de l'armateur Brayer du Barré, de l'Isle de France', 30 August 1775.

and *Intendant* Pierre Poivre had responded positively to his requests to establish a settlement of about 30 people in the Seychelles.²¹ The settlers were to occupy Sainte Anne, a 4km² island lying opposite Mahé's vast natural harbour. Poivre instructed Barré to have his settlers – fifteen Frenchmen, seven slaves, five Indian workers and a Malagasy woman – cut wood for construction, fish and try to grow enough food for nine months. Barré was expected to undertake this project using his own means and at his own risk.

Poivre's own interest in the Seychelles was primarily agricultural, having first thought of cultivating spices in the islands during his initial posting to Île de France in the 1750s. Poivre had then remarked that the Seychelles' latitude was the same as that of the prosperous spice plantations in the Dutch East Indies. At the time, however, the Seychelles had been considered too poorly known and the financial risks too great, especially as the Seven Years' War was draining French colonial funds. In 1770, from his new position of *Intendant*, Poivre finally had the authority to test his original belief that spices could thrive in the Seychelles. Having justified himself with Versailles by pointing to the military significance of the project, Poivre gave Barré the go ahead.²²

Poivre is likely to have regarded Barré as a kind of guinea pig, on whose success or failure hinged the future of his agricultural schemes. But Barré had a pressing agenda of his own – one that foregrounds the likely commercial motivations behind the settlement of the Seychelles. Barré was neither a military man nor an agriculturalist. He was an entrepreneur, a commissioner of trade with a specific interest in the slave trade. He was also incredibly ambitious, dreaming of establishing a commercial empire stretching from India to Brazil.²³ He was never particularly concerned with the military function of the islands, and neither did he share Poivre's dreams of large-scale spice production, though he was undoubtedly prepared to profit from the trade in agricultural produce, on which he also depended for feeding his settlers and slaves. Rather, what his writings clarify beyond doubt is that Barré above all conceived of the Seychelles as a trading post with the potential to more efficiently

21 ANF C4/145, Poivre et Desroches to Ministre de la Marine, 12 August 1770.

22 ANF C4/145, Poivre et Desroches to Ministre de la Marine, 12 August 1770.

23 Scarr, *Seychelles since 1770*, p. 8.

connect Île de France with India, Arabia and East Africa, and to enhance the exchange of goods between these regions. The trade in slaves occupied pride of place in his plans.

Little more than a month after his settlers had arrived and begun to build themselves rudimentary shelters on Sainte Anne, Barré began more openly to reveal his true intentions. In October 1770, he wrote to Poivre, requesting that a ship be made available for trading slaves with contacts he had already made in Pate, in the Lamu archipelago, far to the north of the still largely unknown Swahili ports of Kilwa and Zanzibar. Barré was keen to point out that his partners in Pate, who included the queen of the island herself, could supply as many as 3,000 slaves per year.²⁴

Poivre, seemingly only concerned with the spice garden that Barré's settlers had inaugurated, was not interested in Barré's proposal. Barré, however, was undeterred. In December – after receiving word from the captain of the *Heure du Berger*, who had stopped at Sainte Anne in October, that his settlers were surviving and had begun constructing houses²⁵ – he wrote directly to the Minister of the Navy, the Duc de Praslin. In his report, Barré stressed the Seychelles' value as a provisioning station. Besides assisting and servicing ships en route to India – Barré remarked – the envisioned trading centre he sought funds for could also be used by those engaged in the trade with Mozambique.²⁶ Perhaps it had been Poivre's cold response to his bold plans for the Swahili coast that had convinced Barré to foreground the more familiar trade at Mozambique – and the possible role of the Seychelles in it – in subsequent letters. As we shall see, however, his plans for Pate had not been abandoned.

After 1772, when Poivre retired, Barré further de-emphasised the importance of spices in his requests for investments in the Seychelles. While continuing to follow a multi-pronged approach in advertising the benefits offered by the islands to potential investors, trade now clearly emerged as his dominant concern. Tellingly, the incipit of the first communication he sent to the French government after Poivre's departure

24 ANF C4/29, Brayer du Barré et Ménassier to Poivre, 4 October 1770.

25 McAteer, *Rivals in Eden*, p. 66.

26 ANF C4/145, Brayer du Barré to Duc de Praslin, 10 December 1770.

read as follows: ‘The advantage to the state, without which there can be no support, is naturally commerce. This is the contribution I have been occupied with, by my care and labours.’²⁷ From this point on, all of his homebound letters included detailed trading schemes, all of which placed a strong emphasis on the slave trade.

In the same ‘*Mémoire*’ of 1772, Barré optimistically predicted that the Seychelles’ natural wood supplies would enable traders to procure the ‘first canvases of India and the last coffee of Moka’ without the need to resort to cash transactions. He then went on to state that the Seychelles could serve as a general warehouse. From here, some of these goods could be sent to Europe and to the coast of Africa. At the heart of Barré’s proposals for the Seychelles, however, lay the view that the islands ‘would serve as a depot for the trade in slaves, who would be carried to Île de France and Bourbon. While they remained on the ground to refresh themselves, and during the time of the monsoon proper [December to March] before being transported to Île de France and Bourbon, all these slaves would work on planting or crushing the seeds.’ Thus it was that Barré subordinated such agricultural work as was to take place on the Seychelles to the trade-centred vision he had for the islands. On this score, he further explained that, at present, ships stopping at Mahé were provisioning themselves with poultry, pigs, goats, turtles and tortoises and some vegetables; in the near future, however, there would also be wheat in abundance. In addition to this, watermills were under construction whose primary aim would be to furnish visiting vessels with fresh water.²⁸ In Barré’s intention, then, the most important agricultural work to be carried out was that which was necessary to support the high numbers of trading ships that he hoped would call at the Seychelles. It is also clear that he expected that the bulk of such work would be performed by a large – a transient – population of slaves. He already understood – or so it seems – that these same slaves would require long periods of rest in the Seychelles, either on account of the hardships they were bound to endure during their sea journeys or in order to avoid the hurricanes which threatened all ships attempting to sail to Île de France and

27 ANF C4/145, ‘*Mémoire sur l’établissement des Sèches par Brayer du Barré*’, 1772.

28 Ibid.

Bourbon between December and April. Making his position clear, he insisted that, at the Seychelles, ‘one is at the door to the coast of Africa’.²⁹

Another indication that the growing slave trade of the Mascarenes informed Barré’s plans for the future of the Seychelles is to be found in the different emphasis he placed on Seychellois produce. While keen to foreground the availability of wood on the Seychelles and the fact that this could be used to obtain Indian textiles – an absolute necessity for trading in slaves on the eastern coast of Africa – his plans for the trading of the spices that his settlers had been half-heartedly to cultivate on Poivre’s orders were never fully spelled out. Moreover, Barré’s background predisposed him to regard the main value of the Seychelles as lying in their integration into expanding slave trading networks. Before taking on the Seychelles settlement as his new project, he had overseen slaving voyages to Mozambique and Madagascar while at the Cape and upon arriving in Mauritius.³⁰ In fact Barré makes his first appearance in Île de France records in a letter from the Portuguese Governor at Mozambique to Desroches. The letter contained a note for Barré himself that reported on the good conduct of Barré’s agent, Jean Becquet. While aboard one of Barré’s three slaving vessels, the *Duc de Praslin*, Becquet had been able to secure 300 slaves in twenty days on the Mozambican coast. This was especially impressive, since disease had apparently reduced the number of slaves for sale. The letter also contained an offer to purchase a ship, should there be a suitable one for sale in the Île de France harbour that Barré could source.³¹ In the few months he spent in Île de France before sending his settlers to the Seychelles, Barré continued to cultivate his connections with Mozambique, but he also commissioned a voyage to Fort Dauphin, in Madagascar, for slaves and cattle.³²

While Barré always assured his potential backers of his solid relationships with Portuguese Mozambique, he was aware of the difficulties that this area might pose

29 Ibid.

30 ANF CE/51/144-147, ‘Un mémoire de l’armateur Brayer du Barré, de l’Isle de France’, 30 August 1775.

31 ANF C4/29/203, Copie d’une lettre traduite du portugais, lettre à M. Brayer du Barré, armateur à l’Isle de France par procureur général à Mozambique, 15 March 1770.

32 ANF CE/51/144-147, ‘Un mémoire de l’armateur Brayer du Barré, de l’Isle de France’, 30 August 1775.

for slave trading in the long term. He thus advised that the French government should strike a deal with the Portuguese King with a view to preventing a mutually beneficial relationship from being hampered by outdated trading policies.³³ Barré's ultimate vision for the Seychelles as a slave trading way station, however, was also clearly predicated on his growing links with the Swahili coast to the north of Mozambique Island. Barré's aforementioned Swahili connections resulted in his being able to inform Poivre in October 1770 that the son of the King of Anjouan was also the son of the Queen of Pate, and that the same prince desired to travel to the mainland – that is, presumably, Mozambique – in a European ship.³⁴ Obliging in this would enhance Barré's reputation with both authorities and further reduce the cost of purchasing slaves in all three locations, with Pate – an island hitherto untapped by Europeans – being the most promising supplier. From Pate, off the northern coast of Kenya, the fastest and safest route to Île de France and Bourbon was undoubtedly via the Seychelles.

Tapping into the vast stores of slaves, usually destined for the Persian Gulf, that were available on the Swahili islands, and sending them to Île de France and Bourbon via the Seychelles was one of the few entrepreneurial visions surrounding the colonisation which Barré seems to have made a serious effort to kick-start without waiting for official assistance. Four years after the initial 1770 proposal to bring 3,000 slaves per year from Pate, Barré claimed to have used the good offices of the well-known Île de France slave trader, Captain Brugevin, who also plied a trade to the Americas, to come to an agreement with the King of Pate. The latter undertook to supply (a more realistic) 2,000 slaves per year to Île de France via the Seychelles. Barré also explained he had been working on similar agreements with the rulers of Mombasa, Anjouan and Kilwa.³⁵ One of Barré's employees, the aforementioned Becquet, met with prince Kombo of Mombasa in 1771. The Swahili nobleman had been banished from his home by the Omanis and had gone to Mozambique to seek help from the Portuguese in expelling them. A failed attempt to claim back Mombasa in 1769, however, had lowered his confidence in the Portuguese as well as landing him in debt. By 1773, Kombo was writing to Governor Ternay in Île de France,

33 ANF C4/145 Brayer du Barré to Duc de Praslin, 24 March 1771.

34 ANF C4/29 Brayer du Barré et Ménassier to Poivre, 4 October 1770.

35 ANF C4/145 Brayer du Barré to Ministre de la Marine, 25 January 1774.

asking for similar help to take back Mombasa and for his debts to the Portuguese to be paid off. He had learned from the likes of Becquet that the French were looking to expand their slaving networks, and so he offered to hand over Mombasa to France, while remaining the local ruler, and to allow French ships to trade there for ‘many millions of men’.³⁶

The attempt to strike allegiances with the Europeans in the hope of gaining, or re-enforcing, autonomy within an Omani-dominated region was common enough amongst Swahili authorities. Freeman-Grenville, for instance, noted that this was a major factor influencing the negotiations between Morice and the leaders of Kilwa, who had declared themselves independent from Omani rule in 1770.³⁷ Barré, then, was clearly involved – if not directly, through his agent Becquet – in trying to utilise Swahili-Omani tensions in a way that would open up slave trading opportunities for the Mascarenes. These contacts between Swahili leaders and French traders help to explain why Barré lists Anjouan, Kilwa, Pate and Mombasa, but never the Omani stronghold of Zanzibar, as possible new sources of slaves, pointing out that the Seychelles would be the perfect base from which to launch voyages to these locations and/or to resupply ships which travelled between these places and Île de France.³⁸

No details are known of the dealings between Becquet and the Queen of Pate, the prince of Anjouan or prince Kombo of Mombasa in 1770-1771, but he clearly made a particularly bad impression on Kombo. In his 1773 letter to Ternay, Kombo stated explicitly that his offer to deliver Mombasa to the French would only stand if Becquet was either put to death or imprisoned for life. ‘If, after having ceded my country to the French, I learn that the said Becquet is either on your islands or in Europe, or any other place in the world, I shall have the full right to revoke my donation; which I make solely on the condition that the said infamous man shall never reappear.’³⁹ Interestingly, Ternay did not instantly dismiss the offer, but wrote to the *Ministre de la Marine*, stating that he saw ‘no obstacle’ in carrying out the

36 ANF C4/33, Ternay to *Ministre de la Marine*, 13 February 1773.

37 Freeman-Grenville, *The French at Kilwa Island*, pp. 41-42.

38 ANF C4/145 Brayer du Barré to *Ministre de la Marine*, 25 January 1774.

39 ANF C4/33, Ternay to *Ministre de la Marine*, 13 February 1773.

mission to take Mombasa, which would then be able to provide up to 6,000 slaves per year. In his reply, the then *Ministre de la Marine*, Charles Maillart, ignored the fate of Becquet and admitted that Kombo's was indeed an attractive offer for the ease with which the country could be taken and the benefits it could provide to slave traders. Finances, however, could not permit it, especially since the long standing French ambition of establishing a settlement on Madagascar had still not been realised.⁴⁰ Despite the metropolitan government's reluctance to give up hopes in Madagascar, it is important to recognise that Barré and his employees' attempts to take advantage of slaving opportunities on the Swahili coast at the time of the colonisation of the Seychelles were not solely the result of Swahili hopes of undermining the Omanis, as in Kombo's case. Rather, they are to be understood as the harbingers of later Mascarenian ambitions to carve out a dominant trading space in the region.

In 1773, Governor Ternay himself expressed concern that, although the current Governor of Mozambique was willing to turn his back on Lisbon's protectionist policies, his successor might well take a different view. He thus believed that traders would be well advised to scout for opportunities elsewhere. In addition, it was understood by traders and government officials in the Mascarenes that Mozambican slave supplies could not keep up with their demand. Pereira do Lago himself, the most avid supporter of French slave trade among Portuguese governors, had in fact earlier written to Ternay, urging Île de France and Bourbon not to send several ships at once and to avoid the months of March and April, when ships arrived in Mozambique from Europe.⁴¹

Barré's vision for the Seychelles as a trading post and depot for slaves, largely acquired from the Swahili coast, must also be compared with the far more famous proposal put forward by Jean-Vincent Morice. The scheme to establish a slaving depot on Kilwa was negotiated by Morice and the sultan of that island between 1775 and 1776. In Morice's plan, a fort on the island would form the hub of a monopolistically-run network through which he would provide slave owners in the

40 ANF C4/33, Ternay to *Ministre de la Marine*, 28 October 1773; ANF CB/203/323-324, *Ministre de la Marine* to Ternay, 23 April 1775.

41 ANF C4/33 Ternay to *Ministre de la Marine*, 13 February 1773.

Mascarenes, and potentially also in the Antilles, with up to 10,000 slaves per year. The slaves in question would hail, not only from Kilwa itself, but also from Portuguese Mozambique, the Comoros, and Madagascar, where they were to be exchanged with such Indian goods as his company planned to purchase with French commodities in Surat.⁴² It is unclear how far Morice planned to include the Seychelles in his ambitious trading scheme, but he was certainly aware of the new and expanding settlement on the islands, which he listed as a possible destination for his slaves.⁴³ Despite Maurice's pressures throughout the 1770s, the French government rejected his proposals. Not only was the French Crown reluctant to bring monopolies back to life following the demise of the *Compagnie des Indes*, but it also feared damaging relations with Zanzibar's Omani rulers by forming official allegiances with the 'Moors' – that is, the Swahili – who at times had tense relations with the Omanis, who were themselves demanding slaves from the Swahili coast.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the option of government-sponsored forts built on foreign soil with local permission, rather than on claimed land, was considered risky and unworkable after the failures of this approach on the coast of West Africa in the previous century. Nevertheless, independent trading by private Mascarene operators continued to grow on the Swahili coast, with both the Swahili and the Omanis.

The developing relationships between Barré and Becquet, on the one hand, and, on the other, the rulers of Anjouan, Pate and Mombasa from at least 1770 significantly predated the start of Morice's 1775-76 dealings in Kilwa and his first trading expedition to Zanzibar in 1773. Even so, the projects by the two entrepreneurs were being assessed by government in Île de France and Versailles at the same time. Barré's Seychelles-focused scheme, while not being afforded any direct financial support, had already been approved and could be expected to draw on enough support from slave traders to make the injection of significant government resources unnecessary. Neither did it depend on monopolistic rights being granted to any particular trader – the Seychelles simply needed infrastructure, workers and some good publicity. Morice's plan, on the other hand, was predicated on the existence of an officially sanctioned relationship between the Mascarenes and Kilwa, a potential

42 Freeman-Grenville, *The French at Kilwa Island*, p. 25.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

44 *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 214.

antagonist to the dominant Omanis, and it also necessitates the issuing of a trading monopoly. Even if government was not sufficiently persuaded by Barré as to deem his plans worthy of investment, his settlement scheme still held out the promise of contributing to the growth of private French trade along the Swahili coast without the kind of direct intervention advocated by Morice. This being the case, and even in the absence of direct evidence, it is not unreasonable to hypothesise that the newly launched Seychellois experiment, and a degree of optimism surrounding the islands future role as a slave trading hub, may have played a role in the decision ultimately to reject Morice's proposals.

While Barré's plan for the Seychelles to function as a slaving station was not realised to the full extent of his vision, his dealings with Pate in particular are likely to have resulted in some voyages between this island and the Mascarenes via the Seychelles. Vernet's work suggests that this might indeed have been the case, since the Sultan of Pate sent out a plea for reconciliation with the French in 1776, following a period in which the few French ships that had traded there had been seemingly poorly received. Vernet himself surmised that the ships concerned may have been associated with Barré and the deals he had earlier struck with the Sultan.⁴⁵

The weight of the (admittedly fragmentary) evidence, in sum, urges us to locate, not just commercial motivations generally, but slave trading – and the ongoing French push towards the Swahili coast – specifically at the heart of the early history of the peopling of the Seychelles. At this stage, it is worth pausing to ask why such aspect has been commonly overlooked by specialists. First, historians appear to have been led astray by the ways in which Barré himself defended his project in Versailles. Writing to the *Ministre de la Marine*, it was natural for Barré to foreground the military benefits that would accrue to France from the colonisation of the Seychelles. In order to gain the support of Poivre, Barré also clearly overemphasised his shared interest in spice cultivation. The works of Scarr and McAteer acknowledge that Barré's settlers did have some success in spice cultivation, but they also point out that their efforts fell below Poivre's expectations. There were several problems with Barré as a business partner for Poivre. Most important of all was the fact that Barré's

45 Vernet, 'La première traite française à Zanzibar', p. 485.

trading aims – which emerged to the surface only gradually – were largely incompatible with Poivre's, leading the *Intendant* to question whether Barré truly ever cared at all about spice cultivation. The result was that, after little more than a year since the original settlement, Poivre, instead of supplying Barré with the resources he was asking for, abandoned him and sent his own agent to the Seychelles to establish a separate spice garden, leaving Barré's settlers with effectively no backing from the Île de France administration.⁴⁶ Also significant is the fact that the homebound correspondence of Poivre and Desroches did no justice to Barré's ultimate motives either. While Barré was the main actor behind the colonisation of the islands, he was essentially used by Poivre and Desroches, who saw fit to exclude the trader's vision for the Seychelles in their reports to a government which, they knew, had little time for the now privatised profits of trading.

If Barré's trading intentions were obscured by those of Poivre and the *Ministre de la Marine*, they have been further forgotten because they initially fell far short of their original targets. While slave trading did eventually become a major feature of the Seychelles' economy, Barré himself was never to witness it rise to the levels he had envisaged in his letters. His constant pestering, always tailored to the interests of his funders, earned him only minimal backing. Even before his break with Poivre, the support that Barré obtained from the *Intendant* was barely enough to get plans underway. In 1771, Barré's settlement did receive additional supplies and workers to help with its expansion from Sainte Anne to Mahé. However, all of these workers, Barré stated, were bad subjects; the slaves sent to the Seychelles in 1771 had apparently come straight from prison. Work was slow, the harvests were thin and the workers, Barré complained, did not have their heart in the project.⁴⁷

Compounding Barré's predicament was the fact that ships were slow to make use of the new settlement for more than a watering stop, and, at first, they only called at the islands infrequently. Though far from complete, the shipping records relating to the early years of the colony are nonetheless revealing. Between 1770 and 1773, only five royal ships – the *Belle Poule*, the *Etoile du Matin*, the *Heure de Berger*, the *Nécessaire* and the *Marianne* – traded at the Seychelles on six occasions. Between

46 McAteer, *Rivals in Eden*, p. 68.

47 McAteer, *Rivals in Eden*, p. 67.

them they took away 3,700 tortoises, 430 goat, 200 birds/poultry and one pig.⁴⁸ Only six merchant ships are known to have been sent to Seychelles from Île de France throughout the 1770s specifically for trading. The three ships whose cargo is known – the *Sainte-Françoise*, the *Tonnerre* and the *St Joseph*– all arrived in 1776 and only bought tortoises.⁴⁹ The number of slavers that arrived in these early years of the colony was not recorded, or, if it was, no record has survived. A 1775 account of the islands by Ternay, however, noted in passing that, by 1772, vessels returning from the coast of East Africa were calling at the Seychelles just as frequently as those bound for India, and that these, as well, benefited from tortoise and turtle.⁵⁰ From the perspective of Barré’s workers, then, their employer’s instructions – to grow food and (less enthusiastically) spices, cut wood, catch and preserve fish and purchase, store and sell goods – were unnecessary to either survive or make a profit. The workers of the settlement had an agenda of their own to add to those of Barré, Poivre, Desroches and the Minister. Giant tortoises, goats and poultry were wild and abundant across the islands. Rounding them up and selling them on to passing ships was easy work for the early settlers and they naturally took to this commercial activity more readily than the other tasks they had been requested to perform.

Since they were not won over by Barré’s entrepreneurial vision, the Seychelles’ early settlers were not loyal to him. Together with passing ship captains, they cut him out of deals which were more often than not centred on the mere selling of wild tortoises. The surreptitious nature of such deals, incidentally, is probably a further reason for the lack of specific documentation relating to the archipelago’s early trade. The ease with which settlers traded in tortoises greatly hindered Barré’s plans for the islands to develop into a thriving commercial and provisioning station. By 1772, he was already complaining that his workers had not followed his orders; and he proceeded to replace his first commander, Delaunay, with another settler, Anselme. But it was already too late. By this time, Poivre’s separate spice garden was under way, while the agent whom Poivre had dispatched to oversee its workings, Antoine Gillot, had been made commander of the islands. To Barré’s

48 ANF C4/145, *Mémoire sur les îles Seychelles*, Maillart-Dumesle, 1775.

49 Toussaint, *La route des îles*, Table 5, Relevé des cargaisons, pp. 480-481.

50 Maillard et Ternay, ‘Mémoires et Observations sur les îles Seychelles, autrefois îles Mahe’, [1775], in Fauvel, *Unpublished Documents*, p. 107.

despair, some of his own workers were lured away from his settlement to work on Poivre's spice plantation.⁵¹

Later that year, Desroches was replaced as governor of Île de France, while the now retired Poivre was replaced as *Intendant*. Though Barré had hoped that their replacements, Governor Ternay and *Intendant* Maillart-Dumesle, would be more supportive, they proved to be the opposite. Governor Ternay sent a damning report in October 1772, calling the Seychelles colony a failure. Accusing Barré of having let his imagination run wild and of being unfit for the task, Ternay suggested that the trader should simply give up. The only reason that Ternay did not recommend abandoning the colony altogether was that the English were known to be visiting Praslin for coco de mer seeds, and he feared that if they gained access to the harbour, they would then interfere with French shipping.⁵²

Barré's reputation, as well as his project, were now in ruins. Though he wrote numerous letters to Versailles defending himself and asking for yet more support for the Seychelles experiment, he never received it. Desperation led him to fabricate the tale of a silver mine on Sainte Anne which was just waiting to be exploited for the King. The only input required were sufficient funds to excavate it. His fraudulent behaviour saw him narrowly avoid jail. In 1776, when he declared his intention to visit the Seychelles and asked the Crown for the loan of a ship, he was instead ordered to repay the 174,000 livres that he already owed to his creditors. Eventually, he managed to reach the Seychelles by other means. Upon arrival, he clashed with Captain Boulet of the *Tonnerre*, who sought to avoid paying Barré his due by claiming to have loaded tortoises, not in Mahé, but in the other islands of the archipelago, where they were free. Barré's reaction – the formation of a kind of settler militia with which to extract money from ship captains by force – elicited the recommendation that he be removed entirely. Now ousted, Barré disappeared with his debt. By June 1777 rumours of his death in Pondicherry reached Île de France.⁵³

51 McAteer, *Rivals in Eden*, pp. 68-73.

52 ANF C4/31/64, Ternay et Maillart-Dumesle to Ministre de la Marine, 12 October 1772.

53 McAteer, *Rivals in Eden*, pp. 81-82.

These disastrous results dominate accounts of Brayer du Barré's role in the colonisation of the Seychelles. His schemes, nonetheless, deserve to be taken seriously and to be set in the context of the fast-evolving slave trade of the south-western Indian Ocean. When viewed against the backdrop of developments in East Africa – the unpredictability of supply and co-operation at Mozambique Island, the growing links between the Mascarenes and Swahili leaders and traders to the north and the ambition to consolidate such links – a deeper understanding can be gained of Barré's ultimate plans for the Seychelles as a trading post. What is evident from Barré's writings and actions is that the slave trade – an activity with which he was familiar and for the further development of which he had a number of well-defined ideas – was an integral aspect of the Seychelles colonisation project. In fact, since Barré was scarcely supported by the colonial administration in his endeavours, it is tempting to conclude that the general desire to profit from the slave trade and from the specifically Mascarenian ambition to strengthen slaving connections with the Swahili coast was Barré's overarching goal as he set about colonising the Seychelles.

The Slave Trade and the Growth of the Early Seychelles Colony

The conditions that blighted Barré's plans in the 1770s were not to last long after his reported death. With insufficient assistance from the Île de France administration, the trading post and way station in the Seychelles would live or die on its own merit. The 1780s witnessed a slow build-up of exchanges between Seychellois settlers and passing slavers, who were perhaps initially spurred by Barré's earlier efforts to advertise the benefits of the islands among his associates. At the time, *Commandant* Gillot's greatest difficulty was to provide increasing numbers of passing ships with food. In 1785, for instance, Gillot explained that the obligation to feed passing ships could not be avoided, even if it resulted in his and the other settlers having to starve later.⁵⁴ In the 1780s, agriculture was still largely undeveloped on the islands, and most of Mahé's inhabitants continued to concentrate on the hunting and trading of turtles and tortoises. On the other hand, Pierre Hangard, who had appropriated

54 Mauritius National Archives (henceforth MNA) TB7, Gillot to Souillac and Chevreau, 29 March 1785.

Barré's abandoned settlement on Sainte Anne, was already growing large quantities of maize, rice and manioc. The former soldier and Madagascar slave trader was soon growing enough food to feed not just his own slaves, numbering 100 in 1788,⁵⁵ but also those owned by the French King and placed under Gillot's command. Hangard was also running his own secret trade with passing ships, cutting Gillot out of the profits. The *Commandant* complained that the Sainte Anne-based Hangard would often intercept incoming vessels before they had moored at Mahé's harbour and inform them that Gillot would not allow any ship to take more than 60 tortoises.⁵⁶ Gillot admitted that while he himself did not have the means to supply either trading ships or those coming to recover sick slaves and crews with enough tortoises, Hangard knew the best places to find them and would assist crews in taking them in the hundreds. Other secret dealings that vexed Gillot took place between passing slavers and Pierre Lambert, the only white settler on Praslin. Some ships – the *Commandant* charged – even called at uninhabited islands to fill their holds with tortoises without his prior permission.⁵⁷ The problem was that Gillot lacked the means to harvest large quantities of tortoises and other foodstuffs, admitting that he struggled to resupply even the royal ships and hospital, which were his priority. In any case, he viewed the consumption of the animals on such a scale as entirely reckless, fearing that ship captains – and he named Boileau, Gilbert and Drancourt as the worst culprits – would end up devastating the fauna of the islands.

Slavers arriving in the Seychelles during the first twenty years of the colony's existence provided the settlers with opportunities for trading, especially in tortoises, but they also exacted a heavy toll on the islands' limited food supplies. Besides contributing to the alarming reduction in tortoise numbers witnessed in the 1780s,⁵⁸ they also demanded large quantities of rice and maize, often beyond the Seychelles' means. The story of the *Bélisaire*, a slaver which reached the Seychelles in 1784, shows not only the desperate state of many of the ships which moored on the islands, but also the tensions that developed between Gillot and the likes of Hangard over the responsibilities, and opportunities, that came with them.

55 Wanquet, 'Le peuplement des Seychelles', p. 191.

56 McAteer, *Rivals in Eden*, p. 93.

57 *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.

58 Malavois, 'Mémoire sur la tortue de terre, la tortue de mer et le caret de l'Archipel de Seychelles', in Fauvel, *Unpublished Documents*, p. 282.

In March the *Bélisaire* loaded 246 slaves at Ibo and was later becalmed near Anjouan for a month. Because of this unanticipated delay, the ship's food stores were rapidly depleted and the slaves and crew began to suffer from scurvy. The captain then either decided or was forced by winds to head for the Seychelles, rather than return to Anjouan, to resupply. By the time the *Bélisaire* arrived in Mahé in June and fired a distress shot, 92 of its slaves had lost their lives.⁵⁹ With the crew being too weak from disease, Gillot's workers had to row to the ship and help to moor it off Cerf Island. Among the other provisions, the *Bélisaire* required rice, which Gillot, in Hangard's absence, took from the Sainte Anne settler's stores. Hangard's Malagasy lover and mother of his children, Annette, protested but was pushed aside and paid in slaves from the *Bélisaire*, though not as many as she demanded. When Hangard himself returned, he complained that an act of robbery had been committed in taking large quantities of precious rice in exchange for a few sickly slaves.⁶⁰

Using slaves as currency to pay for essential supplies and services became common as wood cutting and agriculture expanded in the Seychelles from the 1780s. There is no record of imports into the Seychelles for this period, but this informal swapping of slaves for food and other goods and services may explain why Hangard, who was wont to indulge in covert deals with passing slavers, was able to amass as many as 100 slaves by 1788, while other planters had no more than 42.⁶¹ The practice was still common on the islands more than twenty years later, on the eve of abolition. In October 1807, an unnamed Portuguese ship ferrying 240 slaves to Île de France had undergone repairs in the Seychelles. These cost 3,000 piastres, which, Governor de Quinssy explained, were '*payable en noirs*'.⁶²

Information on the numbers of slaves or crewmen who died on voyages involving a stop-over at the Seychelles is exceedingly rare. However, there are enough indirect early indications to suggest that the efforts to restore the health of travelling slaves

59 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, p. 81.

60 Scarr, *Seychelles since 1770*, p. 9.

61 Wanquet, 'Le peuplement des Seychelles', p. 191.

62 SNA A.26/16, Le Roy to Leger, 15 October 1807.

and crews had more than a little to do with the Seychelles being fully incorporated into the Mascarene slave trade. In 1787, for instance, Gillot bemoaned the fact that as many as three slaving captains belonging to diseased ships had died during their stays in the Seychelles over the course of that year alone.⁶³ The fact that the ships calling at the Seychelles were often suffering from disease and in serious trouble means that the pressures placed on the resources of the islands were all the greater and more urgent. The timing of the *Bélisaire*'s arrival, June, also indicates that the services of the Seychelles were required all year round, and not just during the monsoon season (December to March/April), when especially difficult and dangerous sailing conditions obtained.

The position of the Seychelles in the immediate aftermath of their colonisation was ultimately unsustainable. The early inhabitants obviously saw little benefit in following Barré's instruction to cultivate food in high quantities and build water mills for the large numbers of ships that he imagined would eventually visit the islands. Rather, they preferred to resort to a kind of pillage economy, offering tortoise meat to visiting ships. But this would eventually lead to serious problems. Without the necessary agricultural advances required to resupply increasing numbers of ships and their crews and slaves during stays which could last for several weeks, the slave trade would become a burden on the islands and those trying to govern them, rather than a mutually profitable enterprise. Hangard's anomalous success at growing food on Sainte Anne granted him a virtual monopoly over trade with passing slavers, allowing him to become rich in cash and slaves and to expand his own business. The other settlers, meanwhile, struggled to survive from plundering the natural resources of the islands, while the administration barely kept itself afloat. This state of affairs was to last until the mid-1780s, when reports reaching Île de France began to worry Governor Souillac.

In response to the situation obtaining on the archipelago, Souillac appointed a new *Commandant*, Jean Baptiste Philogène de Malavois, in 1787. Malavois was sent to the Seychelles with instructions to stop settlers and slavers freeloading on natural resources and privately profiting from them. The changes he implemented in the

63 MNA TB7, Gillot to Souillac, 8 May 1787.

Seychelles have been discussed at length by Scarr.⁶⁴ Malavois introduced laws forbidding the unauthorised killing of turtles and tortoises, imposed restrictions on the harvesting of coconut oil, announced that settlers who owned land in different parts of the archipelago (most notably Hangard) would have to settle in one area and give up their other plots, and he declared all natural resources to be Crown property. Settlers who made their living from the sale of natural resources were directed to concentrate on agriculture instead. According to McAteer, one of the reasons behind Malavois's reforms was to prevent the islands from being used, or taken over, by the English, who had settled at Diego Garcia and were suspected of frequently taking supplies from Praslin.⁶⁵

These conservationist and agricultural measures were not promoted in the hope of turning the Seychelles into a profitable food-growing sub-dependency of Mauritius. Rather they were meant to ensure the continued occupancy of the islands with a view to providing a deterrent to the English, preserving a supply of tortoises for passing naval ships and, potentially, for shipment to Île de France, and safeguarding the viability of a refreshment stop for slave ships. While Malavois and his superiors did not question – and indeed expected to profit from – the role of the Seychelles in provisioning commercial ships, they were keen to ensure that such role would not be fulfilled at the expense of supplying such naval ships as might visit the island in the future or keeping a store of tortoises for potential shipment to Île de France. Because of these reasons, slavers, as well as other visiting ships and the settlers, would no longer be permitted to help themselves to the Seychelles' natural resources. To encourage agriculture, ships were now forbidden from stopping and loading tortoises or wood at any island except Mahé and the islets within view of its harbour, and no more than Malavois dictated. In an attempt to stop unregulated private trade, settlers were also forbidden from communicating with ship's captains before the latter had reported to Malavois himself.⁶⁶

64 Scarr, *Seychelles since 1770*, pp. 11-14.

65 McAteer, *Rivals in Eden*, p. 103.

66 Malavois, 'Mémoire sur la qualité du sol de l'île Seychelles', n.d., in Fauvel, *Unpublished Documents*, p. 248.

There is unfortunately no continuous record of the numbers of ships, or slavers specifically, which called at the Seychelles throughout its slaving period, or of how much locally-grown food they consumed, as opposed to tortoises and turtles. Thanks to Gillot and Malavois's efforts, however, some usable data do exist. One slaver, *l'Huron*, is recorded as having stopped for refreshment at the Seychelles in 1782; two more – *le Raze* and *la Petite Victorie* – visited the islands in 1783.⁶⁷ Numbers increased thereafter, with seven slave ships being listed in 1784, seven in 1785 and eight in 1786.⁶⁸ All of these vessels spent between three weeks and six months in the Seychelles, and most of them appear to have consumed large numbers of tortoises – between 50 and 210.⁶⁹ In 1786, Malavois also recorded the total amount of food provided to visiting ships, as well as the origins of these same ships. He noted that the amount of rice and maize grown on the islands totalled 215,350 lbs, with double the amount of maize compared to rice. Of this total, 22% of the maize and 23% of the rice were sold to visiting ships. The latter comprised two ships belonging to French companies, one from India, five from Île de France and the eight slavers returning from the coast of East Africa.⁷⁰ In 1786, then, and undoubtedly in other years as well, slaving vessels made up a clear majority of the ships which called at Mahé. Unsurprisingly, another general report on the islands dating to 1788 stressed that it was vessels engaged in the slave trade which were benefiting the most from the existence of the Seychelles colony.⁷¹

The eight families who occupied the Seychelles at the time of Malavois's arrival could not grow enough food to satisfy the needs of passing ships. In 1788, the same Malavois noted that some ships arrived only to find that no assistance was forthcoming.⁷² This state of affairs played no small part in the decision to expand the population of the Seychelles. If continued occupation against English ambitions had been the sole driver of the Île de France government's interest in the Seychelles, then

67 MNA TB18/1 Gillot, 'Etat des vaisseaux en relaché aux Seychelles', 1782-1785.

68 Malavois, 'Etat des Vaisseaux qui ont relaché aux Île Seychelles en 1784,1785 et 1786', in Fauvel *Unpublished Documents*, p. 268.

69 MNA TB18/1 Gillot, 'Etat des vaisseaux en relaché aux Seychelles', 1782-1785.

70 Entrecasteaux et Motais de Narbonne to Ministre de la Marine, 28 December 1788, in Fauvel, *Unpublished Documents*, p. 164.

71 Entrecasteaux et Motais de Narbonne, 'Rapport sur les Iles Seychelles, 1788', in Fauvel, *Unpublished Documents*, p. 165.

72 Malavois, 'Mémoire sur la qualité de sol de l'île Seychelles'.

Malavois could have simply recommended that the existing population of Seychelles sustain themselves, and perhaps the odd naval ship bound for India, and turn away the ships whose demands could not be met. Instead, Malavois seized the opportunity presented by incoming slavers and used it to fuel a significant agricultural expansion on the islands. In the early 1790s, free plots of Crown land were offered to experienced, but struggling, planter families in Bourbon. These planters were obviously attracted by the prospect of selling their produce in a less competitive environment. They, however, moved to the Seychelles at their own risk, an adventurous course of action that the more established and successful Bourbonnais planters would have been unlikely to take. Twelve families arrived within the first five years of the new order, but Malavois himself warned his superiors not to send too many families at once, since survival in the Seychelles would be harder than what they were used to in Bourbon. In Malavois's view, a balance had obviously to be struck between the limited possibilities for food production and the high demand for provisions on the part of passing ships. Families came with few slaves, sometimes one or none, and worked the soil themselves. Trading their produce with passing slavers, they were able to acquire cheap slaves in return, prospering more than Malavois had expected.⁷³

In 1790, three more families consisting of 18 white men, women and children and 36 slaves were sent to the Seychelles from Île de France. These were wealthier families, including among them a Royal shopkeeper and a surgeon. A year later, the population of the islands was reported to consist of 65 whites, subdivided into 17 households; around 20 free non-whites – that is, freed Africans and Malagasies, the mixed-race children of white men and their slaves, or freed, concubines, and a handful of Indians; and around 500 slaves.⁷⁴ Most of these slaves had been obtained from passing ships in exchange for food, repairs and quarantine facilities. From the end of the 1780s, their presence was no doubt instrumental in enabling Seychellois planters to grow cotton as a cash crop as well as some indigo. Despite these successes, Île de France could still not afford to protect the islands – and neither was it in a position to send Malavois boats with which to enforce his ban on illegal

⁷³ McAteer, *Rivals in Eden*, p. 106.

⁷⁴ Wanquet, 'Le peuplement des Seychelles', p. 195.

trading with slave ships.⁷⁵ Despite the limited support he enjoyed, and even in the absence of the means effectively to police his new rules against private trading, Malavois agricultural policies did produce the expected fruits. The increased availability of foodstuffs encouraged more and more slave ships to rely on the islands.

Economic progress under Malavois meant that the Seychellois began to begrudge their islands' subordination to Île de France. Especially resented was Île de France's insistence that all the unsold produce of the Seychelles be sent there for sale. Île de France's restrictions on the settlers' wish to exploit the natural resources of the islands were similarly irksome. In 1790, largely in response to the news of the Revolution in France, the heads of Seychellois settler families convened to form an Assembly. The Seychelles Assembly made it known to Île de France that it would take no instruction from it, but await orders from the National Assembly in Paris. The Seychellois petitioned this higher authority, requesting that their rights to free trading and to the natural resources of their islands be respected. In their bid for autonomy, they recycled some of Barré's old ideas, stressing that while Mahé was already an important refreshment port for slavers and that the islands ran their own trade, more could be done to turn them into a major depot for slaves. They claimed that the Seychelles received over 30 ships per year and that the majority of these were slavers returning from East Africa to Île de France, though some were heading for the Americas as well. The Seychellois Assembly submitted that these ships stayed at the Seychelles for two, three or even six months, benefiting from water, wood, tortoises and turtles, and 'other refreshments'.⁷⁶ Tellingly these 'other refreshments' comprised all and any food the Seychellois had attempted to grow, while water and tortoises and turtles were given pride of place. Although not impossible in a record year, the figure of thirty ships was probably an exaggeration, since it exceeded by as many as 14 ships Malavois's recent tally of 1786.

Neither Paris nor Île de France accepted the Seychelles' demand for autonomy.⁷⁷ The Seychellois, moreover, also lost faith in the metropole following the decree of 16

75 McAteer, *Rivals in Eden*, p. 107.

76 Jean-Michel Filliot, *Les Seychelles et la Révolution française* (Paris, 1989), p. 56.

77 Scarr, *Seychelles since 1770*, pp. 14-16.

pluviôse (4 February 1794). Declaring slavery illegal, the decree was completely ignored by the Seychellois, no different in this from their Île de France and Bourbonnais counterparts. Île de France's grip over the Seychelles was to be shaken in the coming years, however, but not through the means that the settlers had expected. Malavois's prediction that not much could be done in the event of the British deciding to take possession of the Seychelles was proven correct in May 1794, when, following the spread of the Franco-British conflict to the Indian Ocean, a fleet of three British warships landed on Mahé with the intention of conquering the Seychelles. The then governor of the archipelago, Jean Baptiste Quéau de Quinssy, negotiated a capitulation, and the islands effectively became neutral in the war. While still continuing to supply and service French ships, including slavers and privateers, the Seychelles were now also expected to welcome British vessels. Since ships flying the flag of capitulation were not to be harmed by British warships, this offered the Seychellois an opportunity to increase their direct involvement in commerce, including the slave trade – even though they could still be prevented from landing in Île de France or Bourbon and ships from the latter two islands could still be seized while in the Seychelles harbour. In essence, until Île de France came under an intensive siege in 1808 – a siege that would eventually lead to its fall to the British in 1810 – the slave trade through the Seychelles, and especially that conducted by the Seychellois themselves, continued largely unhampered. In the late 1790s and 1800s, then, the Seychelles continued to grow economically. Besides the slave trade, this growth was now also increasingly powered by cotton. In 1804, there were 215 white inhabitants in Mahé and Praslin, 86 free non-white inhabitants and 1,820 slaves.⁷⁸ By 1810 the slave population had already increased to more than 3,000.⁷⁹ The majority of these were now employed in cotton production. By this point, the population of tortoises in the inner islands had been almost entirely wiped out, with an estimated 10,000 having been exported and unknown numbers consumed on the islands by both settlers and moored ships during the previous few decades.⁸⁰

78 Ibid., p. 27.

79 Ibid., p. 45.

80 Lionnet, *The Seychelles*, p. 130.

What the Seychelles experienced during the first two or three decades of their life as a colony was thus a slow and incremental move towards becoming a significant provisioning centre for slave traders. While Barré's grand plans would never be realised in their entirety, the Seychellois did learn that the slave trade offered the most immediate opportunities for self-enrichment. These opportunities, identified by Malavois, brought about a transformation in the life and society of the islands. Because of the dependable demand for foodstuffs and other provisions that it generated, the slave trade provided the Seychellois with the means to kick start agricultural production on a significant scale in the second half of the 1780s. The cotton plantation sector emerged out of this slave trade-driven agricultural development. Cotton quickly became the Seychelles' main source of income and transformed the islands into something more akin to a slave plantation society, requiring thousands of imported slaves to work the cotton fields that would eventually cover significant portions of the islands' cultivatable land. The slave trade, in sum, can be understood as having been of crucial importance to the early development of the Seychelles; later, it acted as a catalyst for the transition to a cash crop producing society with its own significant requirements for slave labour.

Chapter 3 Slaving Services and the Seychellois

The impetus that the slave trade gave to the development of serious agricultural pursuits on the Seychelles (see chapter 2) was reflected in the growth of the islands' secondary and tertiary sectors. The ship building industry of the Seychelles, which lasted well into the twentieth century, had its roots in such repair services as were being offered to damaged slave ships from the closing decades of the eighteenth century. Likewise, whaling ships that frequently called at the Seychelles during the south-western Indian Ocean whaling surge of the 1820s were serviced and provisioned in much the same way as slavers had been. Furthermore, the origins of the Seychelles' leper colony, famous throughout the nineteenth century, can be traced to such essential elements of the slave trade as quarantining and medical services. The aim of this chapter is to unpick the details of these practices in order to reconstruct an as accurate a picture as possible of the kind of vital services that the Seychellois delivered to an increasingly east African- and Swahili-centred slave trade.

The fact that the Seychelles were used as a stopping point for slavers has often been asserted in the literature concerning the Mascarene trade. Some studies even acknowledge the importance of the islands to slave ships suffering from the worst effects of disease and bad weather.¹ In his work on the overall Mascarene trade, Richard Allen has pointed out that the Seychelles were the most common refreshment station for slavers travelling between East Africa and Île de France or Bourbon. Drawing on a larger sample of voyages, Allen has also strengthened Toussaint's contention that ships in need of provisions or recovery remained in the Seychelles for about a month on average.² These works, however, are largely silent on the question of how exactly the islands were used by slavers and to what ultimate effects.

Works devoted specifically to the Seychelles are also of limited help here. They, too, offer precious few insights into the islands' role in enabling a regular slave traffic to

1 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, p. 80 ; Toussaint, *La route des îles*, pp. 458-487.

2 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, p. 80.

the principal Mascarene islands. Lionnet's work acknowledges that Seychellois slavers sold slaves in Île de France and that this may have been the result of the difficulties faced by Mauritian dealers during the war years: unlike Mauritius, the Seychelles, and ships flying their flag, were, with a few exceptions, able to remain neutral and untroubled by British warship during the Revolutionary Wars.³ Deryck Scarr mentions a few specific instances of interactions between slavers and settlers, such as the altercation between the crew of the *Bélisaire* and the Hangard household to which reference has been made in the previous chapter. However, little else has been reported of passing slavers in the Seychelles' sparse historiography. The most detailed inquiry into the Seychelles' role in servicing passing slavers remains Toussaint's chapter on the Seychelles in *La Route des îles*.⁴ This work focuses on Seychellois shipping rather than the refreshment stops made by Mascarene traders in general, though it acknowledges that the latter did represent a key feature of the economy of the Seychelles. Toussaint notes that repair work to ships was carried out during stops, but the questions of how this and other services were delivered in the Seychelles, and how these services enabled or assisted the wider Mascarene slave trade, have yet to be properly answered.

That the specific activities revolving around passing ships have been so obviously neglected is largely a result of the limitations of the available records. Typically, data about refreshment stops in the Seychelles take the form of short asides – offered, it seems, at the discretion of ship captains – within such general descriptions of their voyages and cargoes as they were required to deliver to authorities on arrival at Mauritius. The Mauritian *déclarations d'arrivée* consist of thousands of entries relating to all manner of imports and arrivals to the island, including slaves. These records are almost the sole body of sources that can be used to extract any details about slaving voyages that involved the Seychelles. They, however, pose several problems. The *déclarations* did not conform to a set pattern: some descriptions merely amount to a few lines, including only the most basic of information, while others, much lengthier, provide fuller narratives. This means that it is not possible to discern the true frequency with which stops were made in the Seychelles; refreshment stops may well have taken place even when ship captains did not see fit

3 Lionnet, *The Seychelles*, p. 135.

4 Toussaint, *La route des îles*, pp. 458-487.

to mention them. Some records indicated only the last port of call, meaning that if a slave ship which had broken its journey at the Seychelles had also touched Bourbon before arriving at Île de France, only this last location might be recorded in the relevant *déclaration*. Even when such stops are mentioned, the descriptions provided in the *déclarations* are rarely exhaustive, amounting to such telegraphic formula as ‘*relâche aux Seychelles*’ or similar. However, hidden among the thousands of entries, a handful of Seychelles-related *déclarations* do convey enough detail to shine some light at least on the reasons why stops were made, the kinds of activities the slavers engaged in, how slaves spent these waiting periods and the length of time that vessels spent moored in the vicinity of the islands. Identified by Richard Allen during his painstaking efforts to consolidate all available information on Mascarene slave trading voyages, the 59 Mauritian *déclarations d’arrivée* that mention stops in the Seychelles lie at the core of this chapter. When examined alongside the more general reports produced by *Commandeurs* Gillot and Malavois, these sources permit us to form a sufficiently precise idea of the slaving services offered by the Seychelles during the French period.

The Horrors of Disease

The reasons that ships called at the Seychelles, almost always on their return journey from East Africa to Île de France and Bourbon, were varied and overlapping, though they generally fall into the categories of health and recovery, provisioning, additional trading, ship repairs and sheltering from adverse weather. Where the topic has been broached in the existing literature, the most commonly cited function attributed to the Seychelles by passing mercantile ships was as a place of recovery, or quarantine station, for sick slaves and crew.⁵ While – as will be shown below – the Seychelles also offered several other important advantages, the problem of disease aboard slaving vessels certainly compelled many ships to seek refuge in the Seychelles and was indeed the most common cause for stop-overs at the islands. The notoriety of poor health and disease among slaves being ferried between the east African coast and Île de France and Bourbon underscores the necessity of such a sanatorium for

⁵ Filliot, *La traite des esclaves*, p. 226; Allen, *European Slave Trading*, p. 80; Scarr, *Seychelles since 1770*, pp. 9, 16 ; Toussaint, *La route des îles*, p. 461.

captains seeking to reduce mortality. Slaves purchased from the holding pens of Ibo and Mozambique Island were particularly known for carrying disease and also for being notably distrusting of, and resistant to, treatment by their captors.⁶ The need for a place of recovery is further highlighted by slave mortality rates being possibly as high as 29.6% in the late eighteenth century, according to the latest projections.⁷

The *déclarations d'arrivée* reveal the cold, factual manner in which captains dealt with the great number of casualties aboard their ships. Captain Lalande of the *Licorne*, for instance, simply reported that 94 out of the c. 200 slaves he had bought in Zanzibar and Kilwa died during his return to Mauritius in 1791.⁸ A more vivid portrayal of the horrors of disease that haunted slave ships in these waters is provided by the 1787 journal of Captain Brugevin, the same man who had negotiated slave trading agreements with the Sultan of Pate on Barré's behalf in the 1770s.⁹ By now a well experienced slave trader, Brugevin appended to the journal of his voyages some short essays on slave-welfare, including the challenge of disease. A form of rapidly infectious dysentery which he calls '*le chéringose*' was responsible for killing, according to his estimates, about a third of east African slaves on journeys to Île de France and Bourbon in the 1770s and 1780s; he considered himself fortunate for having lost only a quarter of his slaves on his last three voyages. *Le chéringose*, Brugevin noted, was a disease from which only the most robust individuals recovered. In weaker subjects, however, it became putrid in a short time, and once it reached that stage, no remedy was likely to save the sufferer. Once the symptoms of scurvy set in on top of those of *le chéringose*, the affected slave could hardly stand and would soon perish. Brugevin stated most gravely that, on his first few voyages, he had cut open several bodies in an attempt to understand the disease and had thus seen gangrenous intestines peppered with ulcers and inflammations.¹⁰

6 Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, p. xiii.

7 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, Table 14, Slave Mortality on Mascarene related Voyages, 1729-1809, p. 82.

8 MNA F30/134.

9 G. Debien, 'Journal de la Traite de "La Licorne" de Bordeaux au Mozambique (1787 - 1788)', *Caribbean Studies*, 19, 3-4 (1979), pp. 89-123, esp. pp. 111-115.

10 Ibid.

Many believed that death was a certainty once *le chéringose* had reached a certain point, but Brugevin believed differently, having seen several members of his crew survive despite being ‘severely attacked’ by the disease. He apparently employed surgeons of high repute on his voyages, but the best that they and Brugevin himself could do was to subject the slaves aboard his ships to a horrific ordeal of trial-and-error experiments to keep them alive. Restricted diets, repeated enemas and cocktails of various potions did little to help. Brugevin writes that, out of a group of 80 slaves that underwent treatment in 1787, less than 10 survived; the rest were thrown into the sea. Brugevin also provides a rare insight into the viewpoint of at least some east African slaves, who were apparently so fearful of the medicines that they had to force-feed. Those who had undergone certain treatments, such as enemas, were ostracised by other infected slaves, seemingly disgusted at the prospect of having to eat from the same bowls. When questioned, slaves would unanimously deny their illness, and the excruciating pain that went with it, for fear of being subjected to the ‘treatments’.¹¹ Megan Vaughan has pointed out that there existed a prevailing view among Yao slaves in particular that these treatments were in fact preparation for the cannibalism that white men were rumoured to partake in.¹²

Le chéringose was just one of many diseases from which slaves suffered during their sea crossings. Despite vaccines becoming available and being commonly administered by slavers upon embarkation, smallpox appears to have remained common. Filliot notes that the eighteenth-century epidemics which ravaged the slaves of Île de France and Bourbon can be traced to outbreaks on slave ships returning from both Madagascar and Mozambique.¹³ Although the highly contagious smallpox, naturally, caused serious outbreaks of panic, the most typical disease of the east African slave trade was scurvy. The exact cause of the disease was still largely unknown, at least among Mascarenian slavers in the late eighteenth century, but periods of rest – and an improved diet – in the famously healthy environment of the Seychelles were known to be the best cure for this particular affliction. Filliot notes that slavers viewed the Seychelles themselves as an ‘antidote’ to scurvy.¹⁴

11 Ibid.

12 Vaughan, *Creating the Creole island*, p. xiii.

13 Filliot, *La traite des esclaves*, p. 225.

14 Ibid., p. 226.

By the time slaves reached the Seychelles' waters, their health needs would have been especially urgent. The state of health of even such slaves as had not contracted life-threatening diseases would have significantly declined following several weeks or months at sea. This must have been especially the case when one considers that the same slaves had often spent long periods of time being held at Mozambique or Zanzibar, after being forcibly marched for weeks to reach the coast from the interior localities where they had originally been enslaved. Scurvy and dehydration could thus be as serious as an outbreak of the dreaded *chéringose* or smallpox if allowed to intensify, and they could make recovery from an additional infection almost impossible. The terror surrounding more contagious diseases like *le chéringose* and smallpox has overshadowed the seriousness of the poor health caused by the effects of malnutrition, confinement and subjection to prolonged periods of darkness that the slaves had to endure on their voyages, worsened undoubtedly by the trauma of their enslavement. While, among slavers, the decision to stop at the Seychelles was driven by a simple desire to reduce financial losses, for many slaves, the islands represented their only hope of completing their voyages alive. For many others, a stay in the Seychelles also provided a welcome period of respite from the awful days and nights crammed below decks.

Despite all these benefits, slave recovery was far from certain. While the air and water of the Seychelles were certainly cleaner than would have been the case in, say, Port Louis, and even though food was more varied than aboard slave ships, these factors alone could do very little to reverse the effects of disease in slaves already at an advanced stage of consumption. Medical facilities in the Seychelles were fairly advanced for a small and distant sub-dependency. According to surviving inventories, the shop at *l'établissement* was kept well stocked with a wide variety of medicines. Rhubarb, used to treat scurvy, was always made available,¹⁵ and the islands housed a small hospital built in 1778.¹⁶ These medicines and facilities, however, are unlikely ever to have been made available to the slaves who transited through the islands. The few recorded transactions between slave ships and the inhabitants or administrators of the Seychelles list foodstuffs – including the

15 MNA TB15/1, 31 March 1799.

16 McAteer, *Rivals in Eden*, p. 85.

omnipresent tortoises and turtles – being bartered, rather than medicines.¹⁷ The few mentions of medicines being sold and passengers being admitted to the Seychelles' hospital only involve military ships making stops on their way to and from India.¹⁸ It is probable, however, that medicines were also sold to slaving captains and crew who were themselves suffering from sickness and disease. The large numbers of slaves whom they transported would have more likely been offered only improved foods and left to hope for the better.

Slaves Disembarked

When vessels reached the Seychelles for a refreshment stop, slaves appear to have been deposited on the very small islands which surround Mahé. Writing in March 1787, Malavois noted that Cerf Island (131 hectares), Long Island (23 hectares) and Anonyme (39 hectares) were used to this end.¹⁹ These islands offered temporary shelters, as well water supplies and tortoises. Before Malavois introduced his conservationist policies (see chapter 2, p. 76), it is likely that slaves were left free to kill and cook the tortoises as they saw fit. This practice may well have resulted in the fire that, according to Malavois, destroyed many of the trees on Cerf and Long in 1786, the year before his arrival.²⁰ As part of his intervention, Malavois recommended that Cerf Island should serve as a protected area for all the relocated tortoises of the archipelago, as well as a rice growing area. Slaves in transit and the contagiously sick were instead to be housed in even smaller islands (such as the Île du Sud-Est and the Île Cachée) already bereft of tortoises to plunder. With slave ships remaining in the Seychelles for long periods, it was preferable for both the slave traders and the Mahé settlers to keep transitory slave populations at a safe distance, but within confined and easily policed spaces. Insofar as it was possible, it was also expected that the slaves would provide for themselves. The small islands dotted around Mahé's harbor served these purposes admirably.

17 MNA TB18/1 Gillot, 'Etat des vaisseaux en relaché aux Seychelles, 1782-1785'.

18 MNA TB15, 20 May 1799.

19 Malavois, 'Notice ou aperçu général sur les îles Seychelles', 1 March 1787, in Fauvel, *Unpublished Documents*, pp. 235 -236.

20 Ibid.

But the larger islands were popular with slave dealers as well. Praslin appears in the records as a place of refreshment from as early as the 1770s.²¹ The advantage of Praslin was that it was inhabited and provisioned, but out of sight of the Mahé-based authorities and far enough to prevent panic over the possible spread of disease to the latter islands. For captains wishing to keep their slaves close by, but contained and quarantined, Curieuse, off the northern coast of Praslin, worked just as well as the aforementioned small islands surrounding Mahé. Curieuse would eventually develop into a permanent quarantine station for sick slaves throughout the Mascarenes. Praslin remained a popular refreshment location throughout the Seychelles' slaving period and boasted its own repair industry. One *déclaration d'arrivée* dating to 1803 names Praslin specifically as the site where the *Uni*, travelling back from Zanzibar with an unspecified number of slaves, disembarked its human cargo for refreshment purposes.²² A more substantial entry from August 1804 explains that, after reaching the Seychelles, the *Général Isidro*, which was carrying 350 slaves from Mozambique, discovered that the bottom of its food boiler was broken. Besides suggesting that ships sometimes used their own equipment to cook rice and maize for the slaves while on the islands, the incident casts some light on the significance of Praslin's repair industry at this time. The *Général Isidro* called at Praslin specifically to have the broken boiler repaired. In Praslin, moreover, the slave dealers were also able to purchase a second boiler, should the repaired one not last for the remainder of the voyage.²³

One of Praslin's likely downsides was that the large island was less densely inhabited than Mahé and less easily controlled than the smaller Seychellois islands. These circumstances must have encouraged slave flights. Indeed, at least two of the *Général Isidro*'s 350 slaves did escape their captors during their stay on Praslin.²⁴ Escapes are also known to have taken place on Mahé. On the large islands, fleeing slaves had a better chance of avoiding recapture until after the departure of the ship to which they had belonged. Such was the case of the six individuals who slipped away from the *Olympe* in 1793. Since the slaves could not be found during the

21 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, p .96.

22 MNA GB 40/142.

23 MNA GB 40/56.

24 Ibid.

month that the ship spent in Mahé, the then *Commandant* of the islands, Charles Joseph Esnouf, promised to continue searching for the escapees and to send them on to Mauritius once they were captured.²⁵ For the majority of the slaves who remained with their captors, however, a stay in the Seychelles probably involved some work. If fit enough, slaves in transit may have been expected to fish, fetch water, collect tortoises or turtles, and help prepare provisions; it is also entirely possible that transiting slaves were leased out to local planters, as Barré had imagined would be the case.

Despite their access to clean air, water and better food, slaves did not always survive their stays in the Seychelles. Thus, for instance, eleven slaves passed away during the month that the *Bélisaire* spent in Mahé in 1784, compared to the 92 who had died during the ship's previous two months at sea.²⁶ With recovery from serious illness being unlikely, from the perspective of ship captains, a long stay in the Seychelles was a chance to allow their worst affected slaves to succumb to disease while separated from recovering individuals. For the majority of the slaves, though, a stop in the Seychelles was a chance for their general health to recuperate from the effects of poor nutrition, dehydration, scurvy and other ailments before the last leg of their voyage. This served to make them less vulnerable to the effects of infections that would be bred in the squalid environment below decks in the weeks to come and could have prevented cases of *le chéringose* from developing into the 'putrid' state that the likes of Brugevin so dreaded. The breaking up of slaving journeys – with an opportunity for slaves to build up their strength for about a month on average, before being forced to endure another month or so at sea on the way to Mauritius – was the principal way in which the Seychelles were utilised to reduce the number of slave fatalities.

There was an alternative to death or recovery followed by re-embarkation. According to Captain Vignaud, thirteen of the *Général Isidro*'s 350 slaves were deemed not to have made a sufficient recovery by the time he felt he should set sail once more – about three weeks after his arrival in Mahé. These thirteen slaves were left behind and were taken over by Seychellois settlers, who therefore acquired some

25 MNA F10/514.

26 MNA OC48/2. See also chapter 2, pp.73-74.

extra slaves at no expense. Vignaud's detailed *déclaration* makes clear that a number of the slaves he was carrying had been branded on their arms while still in East Africa to signify ownership. Different brands indicated different owners, who had ordered specific types of slaves to be fetched and had paid for them in advance. Vignaud's cargo included slaves belonging to at least five different prospective proprietors in Île de France: whoever had ordered slaves to be branded with an 'O' was unlucky enough to be the owner of the two aforementioned escapees, nine of the thirteen slaves who were deemed to be too ill to be re-embarked from Praslin and twelve more who had died at sea. Four other would-be owners lost one, two or four slaves in total.²⁷

Provisioning

While the attempt to limit the effects of disease on the slaves, or on the inhabitants of Île de France or Bourbon with whom the slaves were destined to come into contact, was frequently a major factor in the decision to call at the Seychelles and remain there for lengthy periods, records rarely cite health concerns as the sole reason for stopping in the Seychelles. This might imply that many captains did not consider the lives (and profits) to be saved by means of a mid-way recuperation to be a sufficient justification for delaying their return to Île de France or Bourbon. Even so, where no reason at all is proffered for breaking the journeys at the Seychelles, it is reasonable to assume that if the stops lasted for more than a couple of weeks, then captains had called at the islands to await for health improvements before continuing their journeys. Where more detailed reasons for stops have been entered in the *déclarations d'arrivée*, a combination of factors was more likely to be mentioned than the obvious health concerns. In these instances, it is not uncommon for the records to overlook the appalling state of health of crews and slaves, and the potential for recovery in the Seychelles, and to offer an altogether different reason to justify the stop-overs. In 1792, for example, *L'Union*, captained by Jean Loiseau, was noted to have lost 23 slaves and one crewman to disease within just the first four days of leaving Mozambique; an undetermined number of additional casualties followed suit. Yet the ship spent only two weeks in the Seychelles, which would

27 MNA GB40/56.

have allowed for only minimal recovery. Glossing over the devastating effects of disease, the reason cited for the stop-over was to resupply the ship with water.²⁸

The need to gather fresh water and other food provisions is frequently listed as the main reason for making a stop in the Seychelles. Tortoises and turtles constituted the most sought-after product of the Seychelles and were consumed in large quantities while ships remained on the islands. Within the context of the Seychelles serving as a place of recovery, it is worth reiterating that these animals were not simply regarded as a convenient foodstuff, but were actually viewed by the French in the Mascarenes as being endowed with medicinal properties. Their meat and oil, in particular, were used by hospitals in Île de France and the Seychelles to speed up recoveries.²⁹ We now know that the meat of these animals is rich in vitamin C – crucial for preventing and combating scurvy, the East African slave trade’s most prevalent disease. This being the case, Seychellois tortoises – more readily available on the islands than rice and maize until at least 1800 – must have made a real (if impossible to quantify) contribution to improving the health of passing slaves. Lionnet also notes that because these animals can survive long periods without food, they were often packed into slave ships alongside the slaves themselves. Providing a source of food for the remainder of the journey, they further reduced the effects of scurvy among slaves. Other food supplies which were taken aboard upon departure consisted of the rice or maize grown by one of the few successful Seychellois planters, such as the aforementioned Pierre Hangard. The possibility of obtaining fresh food and water mid-way through a long sea voyage undoubtedly worked in other ways to reduce the effects of disease.

This is borne out by the case of *Le Républicain*. In 1794, when it was not even half way through its journey to Mauritius, this ship had already used up all of its food reserves on a cargo of slaves from Kilwa and Zanzibar who were badly affected by scurvy. It was only the availability of fresh provisions in the Seychelles that saved *Le Républicain* and its human cargo from disaster.³⁰ The fact that food supplies could be obtained in the Seychelles meant that rations aboard ships could be administered

28 MNA F10/272.

29 McAteer, *Rivals in Eden*, p. 94.

30 MNA F30/43.

more flexibly, depending on the changing health needs of crews and slaves. Without the option of almost guaranteed reprovisioning at some point on the homeward journey, whatever food and water supplies the ships had loaded on the African coast would have had to last for the entire duration of the unpredictable crossing back to the Mascarenes. This was a journey which averaged around fifty-five days, but which was not unknown to last for as many as seventy, when weather conditions were unfavourable.³¹ Unless they were prepared to turn back on themselves and head for East Africa, the Comoros or Anjouan – or take an extremely long detour east to the Chagos Islands (during the periods when they were inhabited and stocked with small amounts of food) – the only option available to starving slave ships besides the Seychelles would have been to call at Madagascar. Stops in Madagascar – in particular at Bombetok (Mahajanga), in the northwest, or various ports in the northeast – are indeed very occasionally mentioned in the Mauritian *déclarations d'arrivée*. But relying on Madagascar for food supplies was altogether unwise, not just because of the unpredictable availability and pricing of goods and services, but also because relations with Malagasy coastal inhabitants were often unstable and marked by hostility.³² The Seychelles, then, offered the most reliable option to slavers in need of provisions and permitted a degree of flexibility in rationing out food and water to slaves – especially those who were in danger of losing their lives as a result of malnutrition and scurvy.

Ship Repair

Alongside the health benefits that the Seychelles afforded slavers, additional practical advantages of having a way station between East Africa and Île de France and Bourbon come to light in the *déclarations d'arrivée*. A frequent reason for stopping in the Seychelles was the need to repair damages to ships caused by storms and dangerous sailing conditions or accidents. One ship, *Le Calvados*, suffered a long list of damages, including, most notably, the loss of its mast. The ship spent the period between 13 July and 8 September 1793 travelling to, and then undergoing

31 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, p. 80.

32 Larson, *History and Memory*, p. 63.

repairs in, the Seychelles after leaving Mozambique with a cargo of slaves.³³

Likewise, *L'Aimable Eléonore* called at Seychelles in 1791 after taking on water from several storms and hitting a reef, an accident which had resulted in the death of 30 of its 108 slaves.³⁴

Initially, repairs were probably carried out by crews themselves rather than any experienced workers residing on the islands. Indeed, we know that throughout the first decade of the Seychelles colony, the settlers had barely the tools required for their own agricultural projects and were sometimes presented with tools from passing ships when essential items were especially scarce.³⁵ From the mid-1780s, however, thanks to the economic expansion kick-started by *Commandant* Malavois, the Seychellois were able more effectively to capitalise on the passing ships' need for repairs. By the first decade of the nineteenth century, captains were paying into the thousands of piastres for professional repair work by Seychellois inhabitants and were even able to source specific equipment, as the aforementioned case of the *Général Isidro* and its broken food boiler – a piece of equipment that was capable of catering for up to 350 slaves – demonstrates. At the request of the Seychellois, repairs could be paid for in slaves themselves. These newly obtained slaves – to whom one must add the sick slaves left behind by some slavers – could then be absorbed into the local slave population, sold to such incoming slavers as may have wished to replace the slaves who had died since leaving the East African coast, or sold to Seychellois dealers who made their own voyages to Île de France or Bourbon.³⁶

Little is known of the kind of repairs that were carried out early on in the Seychelles' history. Thus far, the only description of any repair station on the islands to have come to light postdates the legal slave trade by twenty years; it, nonetheless, does provide some insights into what repair stations might have looked like in earlier periods as well. Jean François Hodoul, a slave trader and privateer during the Revolutionary Wars who arrived in the Seychelles in 1791, is known to have built

33 MNA F10/555.

34 MNA F10/103.

35 ANF C7/165, Jean François de la Pérouse, 'Mémoire sur les îles Seychelles et Praslin pour M. Le Ch Ce Ternay', 1773.

36 SNA A.26/16, Le Roy to Leger, 15 October 1807.

his own careenage in Mahé's natural harbour in 1829. Hodoul had his slaves pile rocks and debris to form a 300 square foot islet a few yards away from the shore from which to access the exterior of moored ships.³⁷ In the mid-nineteenth century, ship-building formed the Seychelles' main industry.³⁸ This had clearly grown out of earlier ship repair stations. The first ship to be fully built in the Seychelles was the brig *Creole des Seychelles*, which was recorded as having set sail for Mauritius in 1791. By 1808, nine more ships, ranging from twenty-five to seventy tonnes, are listed as having been built in the Seychelles; two more were reportedly under construction at the time. All of these are noted to have been engaged in transporting slaves from East Africa to either the Seychelles themselves or Mauritius and Réunion.³⁹ In sum, the kinds of damages suffered by *Le Calvados* or *L'Aimable Eléonore*, as well as the general deterioration of vital slaving equipment, could clearly be dealt with in the Seychelles from the 1790s onwards.

The main practical advantages of having a ship repair and construction industry half-way-through an oceanic slave trading route are obvious enough. The Seychelles enabled slave voyages to continue even after the relevant ships had taken hits from severe storms. Perhaps less obvious is the fact that, by forcing rest-time upon slaves who awaited the completion of the repairs, and by reducing the time spent below decks on what would otherwise have remained slow-moving, damaged ships for the last part of the journey to Mauritius or Réunion, the Seychelles' ship repair complex might have contributed indirectly to reduce slave mortality. Even if one accepts that the emphasis on damages in the *déclarations d'arrivée* may have been at times exaggerated to support insurance claims, it is clear that damage-related stops in the Seychelles were fairly frequent and that the indirect benefits of such stops on slaves should not be overlooked.

The Consumption of Tortoises

37 SNA B.5/72, Chief Secretary to Harrison, 19 November 1829.

38 Toussaint, *La route des îles*, p. 459.

39 Ibid.

By providing for the needs of slavers, the inhabitants of the Seychelles actively participated in the process of transporting enslaved Africans to Île de France and Bourbon. Reference to the provision of tortoises to passing slave ships and their cargoes has already been made at several points. However, given its importance in the overall economy of the Seychelles, the subject deserves separate treatment.

Besides constituting a convenient and healthy source of food for passing slaves, Seychellois tortoises were also imported into Mauritius or Réunion for sale. This was an additional inducement for slavers to break their journeys at the Seychelles. For instance, Captain Chateauxneuf of the *Aventurier*, which sailed from Île de France to the Quirimbas for slaves in 1777, was instructed by the voyage's financiers to purchase tortoises and bring them back to Île de France in the event of a refreshment stop in the Seychelles becoming necessary.⁴⁰ The tortoises exported to the main Mascarene islands, however, were never more than a fraction of those consumed directly by passing ships. The sale of tortoises was indeed a typical form of interaction between Seychellois settlers and slavers and represented a significant source of income for the former. Surviving receipts pertaining to the sale of tortoises relate mostly to naval ships coming from India, which were subject to much stricter forms of accountability than private slave ships. Slavers, on the other hand, engaged in unrecorded deals with the Seychellois. Although slavers were suspected of landing on the archipelago's outlying islands and of attempting independently to round up tortoises for free, it is obvious that, more often than not, they were aided and abetted by settlers, who competed with each other to provide slavers with supplies of the tortoises which they had secretly garnered.⁴¹ As we know (see chapter 2, pp. 72-73), *Commandant* Gillot accused the settlers in the 1780s of dealing surreptitiously with slavers and of supplying the latter with what he suspected to be great numbers of tortoises which had been clandestinely harvested from islands where hunting was forbidden. Allen's discussion of the *Aventurier*'s expenses reveals how cheaply services could be obtained in the Seychelles at the time of Gillot's tenure. The ship, which spent much of the period between 26 July and about mid-September 1777 resting its slaves at Praslin, spent only 60 livres in the Seychelles and probably left

40 MNA OB29/24, and Allen, *European Slave Trading*, p. 96.

41 MNA TB7, Gillot to Souillac, 8 May 1787.

with a cargo of tortoises.⁴² This was about the same cost as one of the 76 child slaves purchased in the Quirimbas or half as much as one of the more expensive 133 male adult slaves obtained by Chateauxneuf. Put differently, the cost of the *Aventurier*'s two-month-long stay in the Seychelles, the food provisions it bought for its surviving 318 slaves and the tortoises it carried back to Île de France only amounted to 0.008% of the voyage's total expenses.

Although Gillot apparently opposed the Seychellois' destructive relationship with the archipelago's tortoises, he never managed to do much about the problem in the 1770s. Visiting Lieutenant Charles Routier de Romainville, who had been temporarily dispatched to the Seychelles with a view to reining in the settlers in 1778, was the first official from Île de France actively to tackle the issue. One of the measures he sponsored was to place two small ships on constant patrol in order to prevent both settlers and slavers from harvesting tortoises in uninhabited islands.⁴³ This, however, only served to give the settlers a head start in their undermining of Malavois's later and more serious and longer-lasting efforts (see chapter 2, pp. 77-79). On the basis of Gillot and Malavois's writings, McAteer concluded that slave ships – either on their own or with the active help of the Seychellois – routinely took away more tortoises than even the highest recorded figure – 210 – suggests.⁴⁴ Though the indiscriminate culling of tortoises decreased in the aftermath of Malavois's conservationist measures, tortoises continued to be used by slavers as an important source of food until about 1800, by which time their numbers had declined dramatically.⁴⁵

This mutually beneficial arrangement between settlers and slavers, at the expense of the administration and the ecological balance of the islands, saw capital from the slave trade transition directly to private Seychellois citizens, for the most part surreptitiously. These sorts of transactions explain why some settlers like Hangard and Lambert were able to enjoy a measure of economic success, while the administration always struggled to keep afloat. Given these circumstances, the

42 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, p. 96.

43 Scarr, *Seychelles since 1770*, p. 9; McAteer, *Rivals in Eden*, pp. 85-86.

44 McAteer, *Rivals in Eden*, p. 93.

45 Lionnet, *The Seychelles*, p. 130.

economic benefits of the Seychelles for mercantile shipping, which consisted mostly of slavers, were far from obvious to Franco-Mauritian authorities, who never viewed the sub-dependency as much more than a foothold intended to keep the British away from the south-western Indian Ocean. Government records reflect this dismissive attitude, which is no doubt partly responsible for the limited attention that historians have devoted to exploring the Seychelles' trading connections and functions. While the Seychelles' official role, as captured in administrative records, appears minimal, the generally undocumented, frowned-upon and, at times, entirely forbidden actions of the islands' inhabitants actually formed an integral part of a set of exchanges that significantly contributed to the growth of the Mascarenes' East African slave trade.

The Fear of Slave Resistance

On at least one documented occasion, the Seychelles were also utilised by slave traders recovering from a shipboard slave rebellion. Slave revolts occasionally erupted along the east African shores and during sea crossings, and these have been discussed to varying degrees in the wider literature on the Indian Ocean slave trades.⁴⁶ While only 28 slave insurrections have so far been documented, and only 12 of these have been found to have taken place at sea, the actual number is estimated to have been far greater.⁴⁷

The evidence pertaining to these revolts reveals the desperation with which individuals resisted their enslavement. On very rare occasions, well-organised revolts were successful,⁴⁸ but what most records illuminate are short-lived bursts of almost suicidal resistance to captors, often taking place while slaves were brought on deck for exercise. Deaths were common on both sides, with crewmen, as well as slaves, being reported as having died from head wounds or being thrown overboard. Rebels were shot in their tracks, or at times executed in the aftermath of the

46 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, pp. 82- 84; Satyendra Peerthum, 'Determined to Be Free: *Marronage* and Freedom in Mauritius', in E. Kofi Agorsah (ed.), *Freedom in Black History and Culture* (Middleton, CA, 2001), pp. 104-127.

47 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, p. 83.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 84.

rebellion; more commonly, however, they appear to have thrown themselves into the sea upon realising the failure of the insurrection.

Following a quashed rebellion, there may well have been a perceived need to interrupt a journey. This appears to have been the case with the aforementioned *Le Républicain*, which in 1794 lost 60 slaves during a revolt before it left Kilwa.⁴⁹ The playing out of the revolt is not described in any detail, but the prevalence of disease among slaves and crew is noted to have worsened conditions aboard the ship. With food supplies running out, and the ship's crew suffering from widespread sickness, it was feared that a renewed attempt at rebellion might prove impossible to repress. In this case, then, the slavers deemed it imperative to stop at the Seychelles as soon as possible, not only because of the need for food and recovery, but also because they understood that they were in mortal danger from their cargo of slaves. The temporary landing of slaves may have relieved building pressures among captives to a degree. And the fact that the most daring, or desperate, of slaves would have been inclined to try their luck at *marronage* while in the Seychelles may also have worked towards reducing the risks of violent conflagrations while at sea.

The Slave Trade of the Seychellois

Although the Seychelles were used most frequently by slaving vessels hailing from Île de France or Bourbon, the Seychellois were by no means passive receivers of slaves or opportunistic service-providers and salespeople to foreign ships. The islands spawned an active trade of their own. A number of entrepreneurial Seychellois inhabitants embarked on voyages to East Africa, often in ships built locally for that purpose. It was not only as an annex to Île de France- and Bourbon-bound voyages that slaves were imported into the Seychelles. Independent voyages to supply the Seychelles with slaves were also undertaken. Lionnet notes that of the 22 ships listed by Toussaint as having imported slaves into the Seychelles, 11 were commanded by Seychellois.⁵⁰ These same 11 ships are noted to have carried more than 1,000 slaves to Mauritius between 1803 and 1811, which accounts for about

49 MNA F30/43.

50 Lionnet, *The Seychelles*, p. 135.

10% of all of the slaves imported into Mauritius during that period.⁵¹ According to Scarr, in the first decade of the nineteenth century there may have been about five Seychellois at sea engaged in slave trading at any one time.⁵² These Seychellois captains habitually stopped in the Seychelles if they carried slaves destined for Île de France or Bourbon. While in the Seychelles, of course, they were able to deliver a portion of their slaves to their own estates.

The vigour with which slave trading was undertaken by some Seychellois is borne out by the frequency with which their ships crop up in the records and the numbers of slaves that some of them managed to carry, reaching up to 150 at times. Moreover, it was a Seychellois resident, Constant Dupont, who penned an 80-page manual listing anchorages and slave-exporting localities on the African coast, the culmination of nine years of experience commanding the *Courrier des Seychelles*. This work shows that the Seychellois had an intimate knowledge of the small islands between Mahé and the African coast where water and shelter were available. In addition, Dupont indicated that he had a set of contacts which stretched from Ibo to Zanzibar and that he was in a position to advise on the locations which offered the best slave prices. His exclusion of Mozambique Island would appear to suggest that Seychellois dealers tended to avoid the locality on account of changing Portuguese trading policies and the heavy taxes that they exacted, or the closer proximity and connections developed with the Swahili coast. Dupont also appears to have developed a working knowledge of the Swahili language, which he was keen to share with his Seychellois counterparts in his manual.⁵³

The Seychelles' effective neutrality during the Franco-British war (see chapter 2, p. 80) gave Seychellois ships and traders a particular advantage over their Île de France or Bourbonnais peers. Merchant ships, including slavers, became targets for British warships during the conflict. Many slavers, as well as the slaves they transported, are known to have been taken as prizes by British warships prowling the Mascarenes' shipping lanes. For instance, after leaving the Seychelles in 1804, the aforementioned *Général Isidro* was chased by a warship, but managed to avoid

51 Ibid. For Toussaint's original tally, see *La route des îles*, p. 465.

52 Scarr, *Seychelles since 1770*, p. 28.

53 SNA, A11, Dupont, *Instruction du plan de la côte d'Afrique*, 1811.

capture and safely reach Île de France. Captain Vignaud was luckier than the Captain of the *Louisa*, who lost his ship and 260 slaves to the British while anchored off Cerf in 1798,⁵⁴ or that of the *Deux Andrés*, which, in May 1794, was captured alongside its 400 Mozambican slaves before Pierre Hangard could row out in his pirogue to give warning of the British presence in Mahé's harbour.⁵⁵

The capitulation that Quinssy had negotiated in 1794 included the demand that Seychellois ships not be interfered with. This was, with a few exceptions, upheld by the British and Seychellois slavers were left alone even when British warships came to the islands seeking to make prizes of Île de France or Bourbonnais ships which were harboured there. For example, during the visit of the warship *Concorde*, which renewed the Seychelles' original capitulation in 1804, the British vessel is noted to have made prizes of Île de France slavers, but to have left those belonging to the Seychelles untouched.⁵⁶ As attested by the fate of the Île de France slaver, *Sophie*, Mascarenian slavers, as well as the slaves in their possession, could count themselves lucky if they were seized peacefully. Returning from Mozambique with a cargo of slaves, the *Sophie* found itself in Mahé's harbour in August 1801, when the British warship *Sybille* arrived and opened fire on the nearby *Chiffone*, a naval vessel under French colours that was transporting exiles to the Seychelles. Treating the slaver as fair game during its attack on the *Chiffone*, the crew of the *Sybille* collaterally killed 4 sailors and 29 slaves aboard the *Sophie*.⁵⁷ Episodes such as this support Lionnet's contention that wartime threats, from which the Seychellois were immune, greatly encouraged the latter to invest in the southbound slave trade – supplying around 10% of all the slaves imported into Île de France between 1803 and 1810 and an unknown number into Bourbon.⁵⁸ Toussaint's record of 117 ships that arrived in Île de France with produce or slaves acquired in the Seychelles, as opposed to slave ships having made a recovery stop there, between 1776 and 1809 is revealing of the move towards slave trading to the principal Mascarenes by the Seychellois. The data show that it was the same Seychellois ships, which had

54 McAteer, *Rivals in Eden*, pp. 131-132.

55 Ibid., pp. 125-126.

56 Quinssy and Wood, 'Seconde sommation de reddition', 21 September 1804, in Fauvel, *Unpublished Documents*, p. 191.

57 MNA F30/354.

58 Lionnet, *The Seychelles*, p. 135.

previously been engaged in trafficking east African slaves to their own archipelago and making occasional voyages carrying cotton or oil to Île de France, did not begin to include slaves as part or all of their cargoes destined for the latter island until after 1803.⁵⁹ The Seychellois faction of the slave trade to Île de France and Bourbon, then, can be seen as an adaptation of an existing pattern of bringing slaves to the Seychelles, and sending cotton, tortoisés and oil to the main Mascarenes.

Besides being active participants in the trafficking of slaves from East Africa to their own islands and to Île de France and Bourbon especially during periods of intense conflict, the Seychellois participated in the trade in slaves across the breadth of the Mascarene network. When writing to the National Assembly in Paris in 1790 (see chapter 2, p. 79), the members of Seychelles Assembly described themselves as regular suppliers of provisions for ships bound for the Americas.⁶⁰ The evidence pertaining to other trading connections is more solid. In 1801, for instance, the *Licorne* traded for slaves in Anjouan before stopping in the Seychelles, en route to Mauritius, in 1801.⁶¹ A few years later, in 1809, *l'Etoile* made a refreshment stop in the Seychelles while it carried 150 slaves from north-western Madagascar to Mauritius.⁶² Seychellois links with India also make it very likely that slaves were brought from the Malabar Coast to the Seychelles, via the Maldives. While no records have been found of Indian slaves having been transported to the islands, and even though there is no data to indicate how many Seychelles-based slaves were of Indian origin before 1827, a number of slaves were probably brought to the islands on the back of the Seychellois trade in wood – a trade which, unlike that in locally-grown produce, had not been expressly forbidden by Île de France. Because much trade between the Seychelles and India took the form of smuggling, it has left very few documentary traces. Yet there are sparse indications that it was frequent and significant. One report, for instance, notes that, after having gone to Cochin and, then, Bombay in September- October of 1793, Jean Loiseau, a Seychellois captain, lost his ship, the *Deux Amis*, to the Marathi people, though Loiseau did not explain

59 Toussaint, *La route des îles*, Table 5, Relevé des Cargaisons, pp. 480-481.

60 Filliot, *Les Seychelles et la Révolution française*, p. 56.

61 MNA F10/134.

62 Toussaint, *La route des îles*, p. 465.

how.⁶³ Loiseau himself had obviously strong links to India, so much so that he ended up marrying one of his own, freed, Indian slaves.⁶⁴ For all of their obvious limitations, these fragments of evidence demonstrate that the Seychelles did not simply service one line of traffic, but rather played an active part in a broad range of slaving initiatives that spanned the western Indian Ocean, and that the islands were a versatile, dynamic and integral part of the Mascarene network.

The Significance of the Slave Recovery Station

While the Seychelles catered to almost all of the perceived needs of the slave trade from East Africa (and other localities) to the Mascarenes, it can be argued that their most significant historical function was as an alleviator of sickness, disease and death. Reliable mortality rates for east African voyages before 1770 are unavailable. The commonly accepted figure of 21% derives from the studies of Toussaint and Filliot, both of whom relied on surveys of voyages from 1777-1810.⁶⁵ Allen's more recent suggestion that slave mortality rates on east African voyages may actually have been closer to 29.6 % is likewise only shown to have applied to voyages undertaken between 1772 and 1808.⁶⁶ We are therefore not in a position precisely to gauge the effect that refreshment and recovery stops in the Seychelles might have had on slave mortality. Some intelligent guesses can nonetheless be advanced. First, as Filliot pointed out, it is almost certain that mortality rates at the time of the *Compagnie des Indes* (i.e., before 1770) were higher than in later decades, since the principles of vaccination against smallpox were by then still unknown. Vaccination, however, was of little help to the large numbers of slaves who continued to suffer from *le chéringose*, scurvy or other sicknesses caused by their awful living conditions aboard ships. The best cure for these serious and life-threatening ailments was a long stop in the Seychelles and the combined environmental and dietary improvements that this entailed. The islands' impact on mortality rates, therefore, is

63 MNA F10 473.

64 Scarr, *Seychelles since 1770*, p. 32.

65 Toussaint, *La route des îles*, pp.451, 454, and Filliot, *La traite des esclaves*, p. 228.

66 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, p. 82.

likely to have been significant for voyages which underwent refreshment and recover stops.

Allen's tally of slaving voyages for the 1780s, 1790s and 1800s indicates that there were at least 79, 132 and 126 confirmed and probable slaving voyages to East Africa, including the Comoros and Anjouan, in each decade.⁶⁷ Assuming that these voyages were fairly evenly distributed and that they were not too disrupted by warfare, it can be concluded that about eight east African slave ships per year alighted in Île de France and Bourbon in the 1780s and about 13 in both the 1790s and 1800s. Thanks to Gillot and Malavois's reports, we know that the number of refreshment stops at the Seychelles increased from one or two per year in 1782-1783 to seven and eight in 1784-1786 (see chapter 2, p. 77). The (probably exaggerated) figure of 30 ships per year mentioned by the Seychelles Assembly in the early 1790s (see chapter 2, p.79) can probably be taken as an indication that the number of refreshment stops continued to increase in later years. If only eight known slavers per year landed in Île de France and Bourbon in the 1780s and about 13 from the 1790s onwards, then it would be tempting to conclude that virtually every ship from East Africa called at the Seychelles from the mid-1780s. This, of course, cannot have been the case, since we know of slavers who did not break their journeys at the Seychelles. Still the practice was obviously common among Mascarenian slave traders – so much so that, when summarising the state of the slave trade of Mauritius on the eve of abolition, the British Commissioners of Eastern Inquiry could write that voyages from the Swahili coast, if not from East Africa as a whole, had been 'generally accomplished by way of the Seychelles.'⁶⁸ These calculations and fragments of evidence are deeply suggestive, even though they are also illustrative of the limitations in the available data on slaving voyages stemming from ineffective record keeping as well as the loss and destruction of many of the *déclarations d'arrivée*.⁶⁹

67 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, Table 9, Slaving Voyages Involving the Mascarenes, 1718-1809, pp. 68-69.

68 Parliamentary Papers 1829 XXV, 292, Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry upon the Slave Trade at Mauritius, p. 9.

69 Ibid., pp. 66-67.

Higher estimates of the number of yearly east African slaving voyages can be arrived at through other, though equally problematic, data. Using the best available estimate of the number of yearly slave imports into the Mascarenes – Allen’s ‘Projected Slave Imports into the Mascarenes 1715-1809’⁷⁰ – and assuming that 60% of these came from East Africa in shiploads averaging 173 surviving slaves, it is possible to deduce that the actual number of slavers alighting every year in Île de France and Bourbon in 1780s was perhaps eleven or twelve, rather than the eight that can be arrived at on the basis of confirmed voyages. If this hypothetical figure holds water, then it would appear that about two-thirds (7/8:11/12) of east African slaving voyages made a stop at the Seychelles in the mid-1780s.

Not enough data exist for the 1790s and 1800s to make similar calculations possible. Circumstantial evidence, however, suggests that the proportion of slavers which used the Seychelles as a refreshment and recuperation station is likely to have increased. Quite apart from the assertions of the Seychelles Assembly, we have the reports of visitors, most of whom mentioned the presence of at least one – and, more often, three or more – recovering slavers in the archipelago. Three slave ships were present during the 1791 visit by the India-bound *Minerve*, which was ordered to raise the French flag over the Seychelles during the turmoil of the Revolution.⁷¹ One more slaver, the *Deux Andrés*, with a large cargo of 400 slaves from Mozambique, was met, and seized, by the British fleet which took possession of the Seychelles in May 1794.⁷² The presence of three, or perhaps four (one unknown ship was temporarily sunk in the harbour to avoid seizure), slavers was recorded during the visit of the British *Concorde* in 1804.⁷³ Three more were spotted during another attack in the following year.⁷⁴ According to McAteer, the British visited the Seychelles, on average, once a year between 1794 until 1811; each time, they took one or two prizes – mostly slavers.⁷⁵

70 Allen, ‘The Mascarene Slave-Trade and Labor Migration’, Table 2, Projected Slave Imports into the Mascarenes, 1715-1809, p. 39.

71 Filliot, *Les Seychelles et la Révolution française*, p. 55.

72 McAteer, *Rivals in Eden*, p. 125.

73 Ibid., p. 135

74 Ibid., pp. 215-216.

75 Ibid., p. 132.

The important question of what proportion of these east African voyages can be traced to either Mozambique or the Swahili coast lacks the documentation required for a firm answer. However, of 26 records of east African voyages which note a stop in the Seychelles and also offer a more exact location than ‘the coast of Africa’ for the origin of the slaves they carried, 16 list Mozambique or the Quirimbas and 10 list Swahili ports. Given that there may have been as many as 260 stops in the Seychelles on the 400 confirmed, probable and unsuccessful slaving voyages to East Africa after 1770,⁷⁶ this survey of 26 is far too small to give any weight to an argument. However, if the Seychelles did indeed have a stronger appeal to those engaged in Swahili coast voyages, it is not surprising that the proportion of voyages from that region found in the 26 Seychelles-related records stands at 38%, while the proportion of voyages to the Swahili coast represented only 29% of all east African voyages regardless of stops between 1770 and 1809.⁷⁷

While the estimate that two-thirds of slave ships returning from East Africa underwent refreshment or recovery stops in the Seychelles during the 1780s is hardly conclusive, if a majority of east African voyages did opt to make use of the Seychelles in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, then the acknowledged significance of the Seychelles in the Mascarene trade, and even our understanding of the experience of slave voyages, is in obvious need of re-evaluation. It is hoped that what has been presented in this chapter has demonstrated that, during the French period, slavers developed an increasing reliance on the Seychelles for a wide range of services, most importantly health services taken up to reduce slave mortality. If, as has been suggested, around two thirds of slavers on east African voyages used the Seychelles as a serious measure against disease during the 1780s, and perhaps more of them in the 1790s and 1800s, our understanding of the perils of sea crossings on the East African route of the Mascarene trade – with a mortality rate of perhaps as high as 29% - must be significantly stretched.

76 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, Table 9, Slaving Voyages Involving the Mascarenes, 1718-1809, pp. 68-69.

77 Ibid. Percentage calculated using confirmed, probable and unsuccessful slaving voyages from the Swahili coast to the Mascarenes and confirmed, probable and unsuccessful slaving voyages from Mozambique to the Mascarenes.

Chapter 4 The Seychelles and the Onset of the Illegal Slave Trade

The Seychelles are well known to have provided a safe haven for traffickers during the years of illegal slave trading. Indeed, this is probably the islands' most frequently noted function in studies of the western Indian Ocean's slave trade. Following the British conquest of Île de France in 1810, the 1807 Abolition Act was, albeit reluctantly and with notable confusion and delay, applied to the Mascarenes. Unsurprisingly, slave trading – an economically profitable and culturally engrained activity that these same European empires had once actively encouraged – was not readily given up by colonists and merchants on the unveiling of the new legislation. Its enforcement, as was the case during the struggles against the Atlantic slave trade, necessitated an extensive policing campaign that saw the British colonial government in Mauritius – as Île de France was now renamed – trying, often in vain, to track down and prosecute traders and to develop measures to slowly suffocate the trade.

As noted in the introduction of this dissertation, scholarly works concerning the Mascarene trade have paid considerably more attention to its illegal phase than its legal one, especially with regards to the Seychelles' involvement. Allen's outline of the illegal trade's structure and volume provides the most complete overall picture. On the basis of his own research into Mauritius and the Seychelles,¹ and that of Hubert Gerbeau on Réunion,² Allen's conclusion is that the number of slaves illegally imported into the Mascarenes between 1811 and the early 1830s must have fallen somewhere between 120,000 and 149,000.³ The increase in the slave population of the Seychelles following the British conquest shows that the number of slaves consumed by this small sub-dependency of Mauritius was not a negligible portion of the Mascarenes' total. In just four years, for instance, the Seychelles' slave population more than doubled: from 3,015 in 1811, when the islands became subject

1 Allen, 'Licentious and Unbridled Proceedings', Table 2, Projected slave imports into Mauritius and the Seychelles, 1811-1830, p. 100.

2 Gerbeau, 'Quelques aspects de la traite illégale.'

3 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, p. 175.

to the British ban, to 6,950 in 1815.⁴ The fact that only one third of the slaves registered in 1811 were women further indicates that such an increase could only have been the result of extensive slave trading to the Seychelles.

The individuals who made up these numbers were sourced from a catchment area similar to that from which the Mascarenes had drawn their captive labour when the trade had been permitted. Madagascar, Mozambique and the Swahili coast remained favourite haunts, while West Africa, India and Southeast Asia provided only occasional shipments. Hubert Gerbeau and Marina Carter's work shows that slaving destinations changed throughout the period, as illegal traders were forced to adapt to abolitionist pressures and countermeasures.⁵ Not only did slavers move between various ports in Madagascar and the east African coast in response to British interventions, but Southeast Asia also increased in popularity in the late 1820s, by which time trading at the former locations had become increasingly difficult.⁶ In the 1810s, when the newly criminalised slave trade continued to a large extent unmolested, the most popular source of slaves for Mauritian and Bourbonnais traders became once again the comparatively nearby shores of eastern Madagascar. Despite this island becoming the focus of multiple anti-slaving campaigns, resulting in increasing imports from other locations, Madagascar remained the most significant provider of slaves to the Mascarenes. Overall, throughout the history of slave trading in the Mascarenes, Madagascar is estimated to have supplied three-quarters of all the new slaves brought to the Mascarenes; East Africa, for its part, supplied a fifth.⁷

Having examined the roles fulfilled by the Seychelles in the context of the 'French' slave trade, it is easy to imagine that many of these pre-existing functions were so adapted as to meet the requirements of the new, illegal era. Especially in the early years of the illegal slave trade – before, that is, significant abolitionist interventions made themselves felt locally – the Seychelles, and especially Mahé and Praslin, continued to provide a resting and recovering place for east African slaves, as well as a provisioning station for Mauritius- and Réunion-bound ships. However, following

4 Scarr, *Seychelles since 1770*, p. 45.

5 Marina Carter and Hubert Gerbeau, 'Covert Slaves and Coveted Coolies in the Early 19th Century Mascareignes', *Slavery and Abolition*, 9, 3 (1988), pp. 194-208.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 199.

7 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, p. 154.

the repressive measures of the late 1810s and early 1820s, slavers also began to utilise the Seychelles, both the outer and inner islands, in the smuggling of Malagasy slaves to Mauritius and Bourbon. Put differently, the Seychelles' centrality to illegal slave trading networks extended far beyond the traditional east African routes.

As with the legal slave trade, it is clear that the Seychelles were part and parcel of long established socio-economic networks that connected them to the other Mascarene islands and the sources of their slave labour. This intricate web caused difficulties in the suppression of the slave trade. For example, the passing of Bourbon to its abolitionist British conquerors in 1809, and back again to the slave trade-endorsing French in the 1814 Treaty of Paris, served to compound a confused legal picture behind which slavers from all of the Mascarene islands could hide. This proved to be the case at least until 1817, the year in which the slave trade was finally abolished in Bourbon as well. The inability and, at times, unwillingness on the part of Seychellois authorities to deal with the kinds of antics that had made the fortunes of Hangard and Lambert in the early years of the colony (see chapter 2, pp. 72-73) meant that at no point in the early decades of the nineteenth century could any governor or civil agent claim a serious degree of control over the inhabitants of the archipelago. Economic conditions also played a part in the development of distinctly Seychellois elements to the illegal trade. As will be examined more closely in the following chapter, the response to the declining economy of the Seychelles from the late 1810s onwards encouraged the trafficking of thousands of illegal slaves to Mauritius, as a boom in 'legitimate' slave transfers from the sub-dependency got underway. It was these circumstances, as well as the natural advantages inherent in the islands' position and topography, that allowed the Seychelles to become an adaptable and persistent hub for illegal slave trading until the late 1820s.

Gerbeau subdivided Réunion's illegal trade into three phases. The first, spanning the period between 1817 and the mid-1820s, was characterised by the continuation of existing slaving methods and the inability of the authorities to curtail the trade. The second witnessed the slow decrease of the trade as a result of British negotiations with Madagascar and East Africa, humanitarian pressure from Europe and economic circumstances within the Mascarenes. During a third phase, after 1830, the trade was

conducted on a very small scale, before eventually fading out of existence.⁸ Allen has emphasised the close connections between Mauritian and Réunionnais slaving and demonstrated that, while circumstances on the two islands were at times widely different, Gerbeau's general phases were mirrored in the Mauritian experience (some chronological discrepancies notwithstanding). Gerbeau and Allen's tripartite typology offers a useful prism through which to study the Seychelles' contribution to the trafficking of slaves to its bigger southern neighbours. This chapter and the next aim to show that, in accordance with the phases identified by Gerbeau and Allen, the Seychelles and the Seychellois were involved in several, sometimes overlapping, modes of trafficking east African and Malagasy slaves to Mauritius and Réunion as well as their own islands. During an initial period, roughly coinciding with the early and mid-1810s, slaves continued to be handled via the Seychelles in much the same way as they had been before abolition. A few additional precautions were all that was required to parry the minor efforts of the largely powerless British authorities. The introduction of repressive measures in the closing years of the decade, however, prompted a gradual process of adaptation and transformation on the part of traders making use of the Seychelles route. While the overall picture was certainly not one of effective repression by authorities, either in the Seychelles or the main Mascarene islands, the trade did change under the pressure of increasing surveillance and harassment towards the end of the decade. This chapter addresses this initial phase in the illegal trade and asks how slavers, especially those using the Seychelles, responded to the criminalisation of their trade and its slow repression. The second phase, as well as the third, will be discussed in the following chapter.

Coming to Terms with Illegality

Upon the taking of Mauritius in December 1810, the new British Governor, Sir Robert Farquhar, became responsible for applying the 1807 Abolition Act to the island and its numerous dependencies: Bourbon, the Seychelles, Rodrigues, Diego Garcia, Agaléga, Providence, Coëtivy, St. Brandon and some small outposts on the eastern coast of Madagascar. Farquhar quickly realised that both the settlers and the French agents who still held office in the new administration were as reluctant to

⁸ Gerbeau, 'Quelques aspects de la traite illégale'.

discontinue the slave trade in 1810 as they had been in 1796, when they had turned their back on the metropolis and evicted the Parisian representatives entrusted with the task of implementing the abolition of slavery brought in by the revolutionary government.⁹ Indeed, had the slave trade not been legalised again by Napoleon in 1802, the Mascarenes might well have preferred to be taken over by Britain – before that country, too, resolved to go down the road of abolition from 1807. Besides their obvious desire to continue a practice which many regarded as central to the prosperity and/or survival of the islands, French settlers also maintained they were legally entitled to continue the slave trade after the British takeover. In the terms of surrender which had been negotiated in Mauritius and Réunion in 1810 and 1809, respectively, but which had applied to the Seychelles from as early as 1794, the British had agreed to allow the Franco-Mascarenians to uphold their cultural and religious institutions. Although these provisions referred to the French language and Catholic faith, which were indeed left entirely alone by the new government, the free inhabitants of the island argued that slave trading, too, was a cultural institution requiring protection under the capitulation agreements. At least on paper, the British had already been in possession of the Seychelles for sixteen years. Throughout this period, they had not sought to change French habits, including their participation in the slave trade both before and after 1807. Such considerations must have played an important role in the calculations of many Mascarenian settlers and opinion-makers.

The strength of Mauritian convictions on this matter and the apparent impossibility of enforcing a ban prompted Farquhar to ask the Earl of Liverpool, the then Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, whether the slave trading ban actually applied to Mauritius and its dependencies. In his view, the fact that the law did not include a clause stating that the Abolition Act should be automatically applied to all new colonies upon their acquisition made its status in Mauritius uncertain. He was also under the impression that the British government had permitted Trinidad to import slaves even after the ban had come into effect. A final critical consideration – Farquhar went on – was the serious shortage of labour in Mauritius. This, he explained, was the consequence of the recent years of warfare and the siege of the island, as well as of disease and hurricanes having claimed the lives of many slaves.

⁹ Auguste Toussaint, *Histoire des îles Mascareignes* (Paris, 1972), pp. 114-117.

Farquhar's position was that if the labour force was not replenished, the Mauritian economy would rapidly decline and Mauritius and its dependencies would become 'deserts'.¹⁰

The siege of Mauritius between 1806 and 1810 had certainly been an inconvenience and had hastened its fall to the British, but the blockade had not been maintained seamlessly. Ships engaged in it had had to provision at Madagascar, which meant there had been ample opportunities for the slave trade to continue. Filliot suggested that between 1793 (the year in which France and Britain came into conflict) and 1810, 35,000 slaves were still imported into the Mascarenes.¹¹ Allen's more refined data on slaving voyages shows that between 1789 and 1809, the number of slaves imported was more likely to have been between 50,000 and 59,000,¹² and that, between 1800 and 1809, known slaving voyages more than doubled compared to the previous decade.¹³ There may well have been a decrease in imports, or at least recorded imports, in the last couple of years of the blockade, but the impression is difficult to escape that, when writing to the Earl of Liverpool, Farquhar was utilizing every excuse under the sun to be spared the trouble of undertaking a deeply unpopular and difficult task.

The Colonial Secretary's response was one of astonishment: he 'could not sufficiently express [his] surprise' at Farquhar's 'extraordinary misapprehension'.¹⁴ He denied that Trinidad, or any part of the British Empire, had been permitted to carry on the trade; Mauritius would thus be no exception. Farquhar was instructed to enforce the ban immediately, punish those who breached it, and report on any cases of slaves having been imported since the beginning of his tenure. Informed by the views of settlers and the French officers in his own government, Farquhar's initial stance underlines the impossibility of the task he had been entrusted with and set the

10 Parliamentary Papers 1826 XXVII, 295, Farquhar to Liverpool, 15 February 1811, No.1, pp. 6-7.

11 Filliot, *La traite des esclaves*, p. 96

12 Allen, 'The Mascarene Slave-Trade and Labor Migration', Table 2, Projected Slave Imports into the Mascarenes, 1715-1809, p. 39.

13 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, Table 9, Slaving Voyages Involving the Mascarenes, 1718-1809, pp. 68-69.

14 Parliamentary Papers 1826 XXVII, 295, Liverpool to Farquhar, 2 May 1811, No. 2, pp. 7-8.

stage for the game of cat and mouse that was to follow. Having run out of options, Farquhar ordered government schooners to seize any ships they suspected of carrying slaves.¹⁵

The Seychelles, by this time, had also received their new British authority in the form of Bartholomew Sullivan. Sullivan had been sent by Farquhar in 1811 to assume the position of *Commandant*, having effectively sole responsibility for managing the sub-dependency in cooperation with its pre-existing, but slightly reshuffled, government. Though removed as governor, Quinssy kept his position as *juge de paix*. Like in Mauritius, the inhabitants of the Seychelles were unfavourably inclined towards their new British overseer. Sullivan, a Lieutenant wounded in service and now dependant on crutches to walk, could do little to counter the slave trade, if indeed that was what Farquhar really expected of him. By this time, the extent to which the Seychelles functioned as a transmitter for Mauritius- and Bourbon-bound slaves was only just becoming apparent to Farquhar, thanks to the information that was being teased out of the captains of captured vessels. Sullivan, however, formed a clear opinion more rapidly, admitting that the slave trade was rife on the islands a mere few months after his arrival. Although there were ‘no exertions wanting’ on his part, Sullivan went on, he was effectively helpless to interfere with the trade in the Seychelles, the public being ‘unfortunately interested in its favour.’¹⁶

Sullivan’s one attempt to go against this logic and take a stand against slaving only served to highlight the audacity of the Seychellois in deterring him. In April of 1812, he received word from a free black informant that a cargo of slaves from Mozambique had been landed on a particular habitation in Praslin belonging to Madame Pisquier. The slaver in question was Captain François Romarf, who commanded the schooner *Virginie*. It was not the first rumour of ongoing slaving that Sullivan had heard since 1811, but this time he took it upon himself to act. Expecting no assistance from, and probably dreading the unanimous resistance of, French settlers and the members of his government, he set out with only eight government slaves and a free black man employed by him, all armed with swords and muskets. Boarding a small pirogue, they rowed over night the 30 miles to

15 Nwulia, *The History of Slavery*, p. 41.

16 MNA TB29, Sullivan to Colonial Secretary, 28 September 1811.

Praslin. Arriving at dawn, the party immediately found, in huts close to the shore, about 40 slaves still in chains. Sullivan describes them as ‘skeletons’, noting that they must have been almost starved during the voyage. Romarf himself was noted to have attempted to escape with seven slaves by running with them into the surrounding forest. Sullivan and his small army of slaves chased and eventually apprehended the fugitives. If the seizure was successful against the odds, the prosecution met with a different fate.¹⁷

The *tribunal de paix*, Quinssy’s court in the Seychelles, overruled the confiscation of the 41 slaves and released Romarf, disputing Sullivan’s authority to make such a seizure. Sullivan himself was not given any opportunity to be heard at the trial, and Romarf was allowed to keep his slaves. In a clear message to British authorities in both the Seychelles and Mauritius, the court then proceeded to convict Sullivan for having armed government slaves and led them into the dwelling of a white settler.¹⁸ The affair of the *Virginie*, which resulted in Sullivan’s resignation, shows that slavers and planters worked together in these early years. In particular, planters such as Madame Pisquier rented out holding quarters while the captains of slave ships remained in the Seychelles. This practice, as well as provisioning, dated back to the years of the legal trade. As will be shown below, it was only when anti-slavery efforts became more sustained and effective that original smuggling strategies had to be devised by slavers.

Experienced Concealers of Slaves

The roots of the clandestine trade out of the Seychelles can be traced back to the entry of Britain into the Revolutionary War in 1793. As was briefly noted in the previous chapter, during the conflict, not only warships but also privateering vessels began to pose a serious threat to the French in the south-western Indian Ocean. The harassment of French shipping that lasted throughout the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars often necessitated the adoption of avoidance strategies on the part of slavers. Although the focus of British attacks, and of the eventual siege, was

17 MNA TB29, Sullivan to Colonial Secretary, 1 May 1812.

18 Ibid.

always Mauritius and its surrounding waters, some vessels engaged in these efforts ventured further north in search of prizes. Although, on the whole, the 1794 capitulation agreement – which was intended to protect the inhabitants of the Seychelles and their property from any harm – was adhered to during the sixteen years it was in effect, the islands still received a considerable share of aggravation from British ships. Indeed, slave-trading vessels were regarded as valued prizes, since captured slaves often served to fill out the crews of vessels depleted by death and desertion.

The *Concorde* was one such frigate that sought to harass French shipping in the Seychelles and made slavers its target in September of 1804. Initially calling at Praslin to collect wood and water without even consulting Quinssy or anyone at Mahé, the *Concorde* first came into contact with a Portuguese slaver en route to Île de France. After a boarding party had been sent to confirm that the ship was indeed a neutral one, it was left alone. A few days later, however, the *Concorde* sighted a French schooner and sent a boat to seize the vessel, which was found to be carrying 70 slaves. Fifteen of these were taken on as crew of the *Concorde*, while the rest were carried away with their ship in tow. By the time the *Concorde* arrived in Mahé, with the Seychellois slaver Jean Sausse guiding them into the harbour on the journey over from Praslin, ships on the principal island had received word of the capture and taken due precautions. Thus, all the slaves aboard the French schooner, *Zephyr*, were hidden ashore, while another ship was intentionally sunk in the harbour. When he negotiated the terms of surrender with Quinssy on board his ship, John Wood, the captain of the *Concorde*, ignored the sunken ship and two other vessels of little importance, but he insisted that the *Zephyr* be taken with all of its cargo. He emphasised that the slaves who had been taken ashore should be returned, adding that a refusal to comply would be met with force.¹⁹ Wood then carried off to India the two slave-trading vessels he had gained possession of.²⁰

The following year, a similar attempt to hide slaves from British marauders on the part of the inhabitants of the Seychelles proved more successful. The frigate *Duncan*

19 Quinssy and Wood, 'Seconde sommation de reddition', 21 September 1804, in Fauvel, *Unpublished Documents*, p. 191.

20 McAteer, *Rivals in Eden*, pp. 207-208.

arrived at Mahé in November 1805 with the *Emilie*, a prize it had taken off Réunion. When the *Emilie* was sent to scour the coasts of Mahé for ships to destroy or take as further prizes, Dupont and Blin's *Courrier des Seychelles* was hidden close to the small island of Thérèse, which lies off the northwest coast. As a precaution, the Seychellois ship had been stripped of its sails, cables and anchor, and all the 170 slaves it had brought from Mozambique were hidden in the interior of Mahé. When this news reached Captain Sneyd of the *Duncan*, he responded by sending 50 crewmen in search of the slaves he believed were rightfully his, following his seizure of the ship in which they had been held. Quinssy's protests that the *Courrier des Seychelles* and its cargo, being the property of Seychellois citizens, should have been protected under the previous capitulation agreement fell on deaf ears, and Sneyd allowed his crewmen to pillage the estates of Dupont and Blin, taking 'everything they could find'.²¹ The loot apparently included the sails, cables and anchor of the *Courrier des Seychelles*, but not the slaves themselves. Blin and Dupont, no doubt assisted by other Seychellois and drawing on at least the moral support of Quinssy, managed to keep these 170 slaves hidden. After six days in the Seychelles, and having destroyed what other French ships he could find along the west coast, Sneyd left, taking with him the empty *Courrier des Seychelles* and leaving behind four deserters.

This defiant act in the face of a far stronger force foreshadowed important features of the Seychelles' illegal slave trade. What the example of the *Courrier des Seychelles* bears out especially clearly is the near impossibility for any authority to track down slaves hidden on Mahé, let alone on any of the scores of scattered islands that surrounded it for hundreds of miles. The fifty musketeers whom Sneyd had sent ashore had no compunction about destroying property in their search. That they were able to find the hidden effects of the ship highlights their determination to locate the missing slaves. Their inability to find them thus speaks volumes. Sneyd's was the strongest and most determined force to land on Seychellois soil in the early decades of the nineteenth century. This being the case, it is unsurprising that the smaller detachments that would be deployed throughout the period of the illegal slave trade were able to do so little to counter the trade's clandestine operations. As we have

21 Quinssy to Ministre de la Marine, 20 November 1805, in Fauvel, *Unpublished Documents*, pp.198-199.

seen in previous chapters, relationships between Seychellois settlers were not especially harmonious. Gillot's letters, for instance, confirm that squabbling and long-lasting grudges had been enshrined in tradition since the founding of European settlements on the islands.²² However, when confronted by an external power intent on destroying a way of life on which the Seychelles depended, a degree of solidarity appears to have emerged amongst the islands' free inhabitants. In the case under discussion, it is obvious that none of the latter leaked the secret, or any useful clues, as to where Dupont and Blin's slaves were hidden, perhaps temporarily absorbed into friendly plantations or guarded in some crevice on the mountains. Of course, there were instances in which self-interest trumped infra-settler solidarity. Given that some warships were willing to ignore the Seychellois' rights under the capitulation, it is perhaps telling that after Jean Sausse had guided the *Concorde* safely into Mahé's harbour, his own slaver was left alone, while others were confiscated by the captain of the *Concorde*. For the most part, however, a shared desire to undermine, or at least limit, British interference with the colony united almost all the free Seychellois.

Given this context, and the obvious desire on the part of the Seychellois to continue to profit from the trade, it is not surprising that Sullivan's one attempt at interfering with the slave trade on Praslin in 1812 should have been treated with such unanimous contempt by the Seychellois court. The seemingly shocking actions of the distant and unanswerable *tribunal de paix*, which condemned the authority who had made the seizure while letting the slaver go free with his slaves, was only one step further than courts in Mauritius and Bourbon could go in their refusals to condemn slavers in the 1810s.

The difficulties posed by the Mascarenes courts' refusal to condemn slavers was one of the factors that led Governor Farquhar to insist in 1812 that cases be heard in the Vice Admiralty Court at the Cape. In the event, this distant authority proved to have little time for the legal uncertainties that surrounded Mascarenian slave-trading cases. It was, first of all, difficult for the authorities to distinguish the illegal importation of new slaves from the legitimate transportation of pre-existing slaves

22 MNA TB7, Gillot to Chevreau, 20 April 1785.

from one place to another. The problem was compounded by the fact that, in the early years of British control, the future of many localities remained uncertain. In 1811, French troops at Tamatave, a port on the coast of eastern Madagascar, had refused to resist the squadron sent by Farquhar in February.²³ The fall of Tamatave, the last French-held territory in the south-western Indian Ocean, resulted in the transportation of some 800 French-owned slaves from eastern Madagascar to the more secure estates of their owners in Mauritius and Réunion. Movements of this kind – as will be further argued below – created a particular confusion behind which slavers could easily hide.²⁴

As early as 1814, the Vice Admiralty Court at the Cape had ridden itself of the unwelcomed burden that Farquhar had placed on its shoulders. It was therefore resolved that all further slave-trading cases would be heard in the courts of Mauritius and Bourbon.²⁵ In Bourbon, however, convictions proved impossible to secure. In November 1813, both its Court of First Instance and Court of Appeal ruled that, because the Abolition Act had never been published in the islands or registered by the courts, the relevant legislation did not apply; the two courts thus refused to hear any relevant cases.²⁶ In Gerbeau's view, many Mauritians who faced charges of slave trading used this move by the Bourbon courts to their advantage, becoming residents of that island rather than taking their chances with Mauritian courts.²⁷ In fact they need not have been so worried at this stage, if it is true that, as late as four years later, British authorities in Mauritius had still not managed to bring a single person to justice for slave trafficking. According to George Smith, the Chief Commissioner of Justice in Mauritius, all of the accused had either 'contrived to escape from the vessel, before they have been delivered up to the officers of justice, or having been secured in our prisons, have contrived to escape from them, or when

23 Brown, *A History of Madagascar*, p. 114.

24 Parliamentary Papers 1826 XXVII, 295, Farquhar to Liverpool, 26 October 1811, No. 4, pp. 8-11.

25 Parliamentary Papers 1826 XXVII, 295, Farquhar to Bathurst, 10 January 1814, No.18, pp. 28-31.

26 Gerbeau, *La traite illégale aux Mascareignes*, pp. 46-47.

27 Ibid.

brought to trial have been discharged by the grand jury, or acquitted by the petty jury.²⁸

The Lawlessness of the Early British Seychelles, 1812-1815

Farquhar's ideas about the growing role of the Seychelles in the smuggling of large numbers of slaves to Mauritius and Bourbon were by this point becoming more and more precise. In November 1813, the Governor informed London that 'there is no person in the Archipelago of Seychelles, capable, or indeed inclined, to repress such a traffic ... and the facility and cheapness with which slaves can be transported from Madagascar and the Coast of Africa, in the absence of any naval means of prevention, are to the planters, irresistibly strong; and accordingly I have every reason to think, that during the ensuing months, a most extensive importation of slaves will be attempted, which, under the present circumstances, it is neither in my power to hinder, nor, I fear, afterwards to trace.'²⁹ The capture of the *Diligent* in Mauritius a few months later confirmed the Governor's suspicions. The ship carried 173 East African slaves. Alongside them was some unspecified produce which permitted the authorities to establish beyond reasonable doubt that the schooner had passed through the Seychelles en route to Mauritius.³⁰

When Farquhar wrote that there was no one in the Seychelles capable or inclined to repress the illegal trade there, he was perhaps commenting on the attitude of Sullivan's replacement, Bibye Lesage, who presided over the islands as *Commandant* from 1812 to 1815. More than ten years later, Lesage was interviewed about his role in the Seychelles as part of the extensive 1826-1829 government enquiry into the state of the illegal slave trade at Mauritius, urged by prominent abolitionists in London upon hearing reports of the trade there. Lesage's testimony deserves to be examined in detail, as it provides crucial insights into the workings of the slave trade to and through the Seychelles in the early 1810s. The most

28 Parliamentary Papers 1826 XXVII, 295 George Smith to Farquhar, 6 September 1817, No. 46, p. 131

29 Parliamentary Papers 1826 XXVII, 295, Farquhar to Rear Admiral Taylor, 20 November 1813, No. 17, p. 27.

30 Scarr, *Seychelles since 1770*, p. 43.

immediately apparent aspect of Lesage's testimony is his seeming lack of concern for the slave trade. When asked about his duties in the Seychelles, he listed the issuing of land grants, the raising of taxes and the forwarding of appeals to Mauritius; he, however, did not see fit to mention anything in connection with the ongoing effort to combat the slave trade. When prompted, he did admit that, while Farquhar had given him no written instruction, he had nonetheless urged him to use every means in his power to put an end to the slave trade and to seize any vessels that he found to be engaged in it. The impression is that Lesage attempted to play down the extent of slaving in the Seychelles, pleading ignorance when convenient. He thus stated that he did not believe that there was much intercourse between the islands and the eastern coast of Africa. In his view, most ships coming from that direction carried tortoises from Aldabra. When questioned about Romarf's further trips to Africa, Lesage admitted that he was indeed aware that Romarf had previously been caught importing slaves by Sullivan, but he also claimed that, as far as he knew, during his time in the Seychelles, the only produce that Romarf had been bringing back from Africa on his continuing voyages were beeswax and tallow. Clearly Lesage thought he could fool his examiners.³¹

Lesage made no successful seizures of any vessels, but he did admit to having suspected that slaves had been introduced to the islands on four separate occasions. Even these half-hearted admissions, however, revealed a significantly nonplussed attitude. In three of the four instances, Lesage had not seen fit to act; on the fourth occasion, his attempt to interfere had apparently been thwarted by the captain of the vessel, who had assaulted him. When asked where these suspected new slaves had been landed, Lesage replied that two of the ships concerned had gone ashore at either Praslin or La Digue and that they had never made an appearance on the main island. The one ship that he suspected of having landed its slaves on Mahé had aroused his misgivings because it had first anchored at some point at 'the back of the island' and then sailed around to the harbour with no cargo. Pressed further on this matter, Lesage revealed that the ship in question was the *Aglaé* and that it had landed its suspected cargo of slaves at some hidden location in June 1814. The ship had then remained in the Seychelles until its departure on 1 October. By then, Lesage claimed,

³¹The UK National Archives (henceforth UKNA) CO 167/139 Bibye Lesage examined, 11 January 1827.

he ‘had no reason to suppose’ that the *Aglaé* was carrying the slaves whom he had suspected it had originally transported and put ashore.³² The range of possibilities open to slavers operating in the Seychelles, who could either import slaves into the islands themselves or purchase them in Mahé or another island, mean that Lesage could have been correct about the ship not leaving with the same slaves it was suspected of having landed. In this particular instance, however, the evidence demonstrates that the *Aglaé* almost certainly did leave the Seychelles with a cargo of Mozambican slaves. On 30 October, as attested by additional records, the same ship, commanded by a Captain Suzor and carrying a cargo of 164 ‘Mozambiques’, was apprehended by the government schooner *Magnet* in the waters between Mauritius and Bourbon.³³ It would have been highly unlikely for the *Aglaé* to have left the Seychelles, reached Mozambique, or another location where Mozambican slaves might have been available, loaded 164 of them and arrived in Mauritius or Bourbon in just 30 days, despite Lesage claiming that it was a fast vessel and possibly capable of that.

Lesage’s account of the one slaver he found cause to intercept shows that, while successful seizures in the Seychelles were extremely difficult at this time, it was easy enough for the authorities, when so inclined, to send advance warning of the impending arrival of slavers to Mauritius by using faster vessels. In his testimony, Lesage explained vaguely that, due to ‘various suspicious circumstances’, he had been led to seize the *Reverant*, a vessel captained by a Mr Pinaud. No slaves were found on board at the time, but Lesage suspected that they had been landed already. With no further evidence forthcoming, Lesage had released the vessel, but had had its movements watched for a period of six weeks. He claimed to have moved his boat near the vessel every night, but to have witnessed nothing untoward. Lesage also claimed to have carried out searches for the slaves on land but without effect. One night, Lesage’s boat was temporarily moved from the vicinity of the *Reverant* to communicate with a brig that had just arrived. Suspecting that this might have provided the opportunity to re-embark the slave cargo, Lesage boarded the *Reverant*

32 UKNA CO 167/139 Bibye Lesage examined, 11 January 1827, and Bibye Lesage re-examined 19 October 1827.

33 Parliamentary Papers 1826, XXVII, 295, Farquhar to Bathurst, 3 November 1814, No.30, p. 99.

at sea the following day. The captain then refused to allow Lesage to carry out a search. Instead, Lesage claimed he was attacked and wounded by Pinaud, whom he described as ‘an Italian and a man of atrocious character’. Having forced Lesage to retreat, Pinaud made a hasty escape with what Lesage reckoned to be about ninety slaves. Lesage sent word of the episode to Farquhar in the fastest ship available, and he reckoned that it was thanks to his prompt action that the *Reverant* was eventually intercepted, once more by the *Magnet*, and forced to run aground at Bourbon. Lesage, having taken a keen interest in Pinaud’s subsequent fate, states that he later learned that the crew of the *Magnet* saw the slaves being carried from the wreck into the hills of Bourbon before being able to seize the ship and Pinaud himself. The fact that these slaves were never recovered was the reason why Pinaud’s case did not lead to prosecution in the Mauritian Court of First Instance.³⁴

It is clear that Lesage, except in the case of the *Reverant*, was never really concerned with slave trading. This is perhaps why he was able to find some common ground with French settlers. He was defended by Quinssy against those who criticised him,³⁵ and it was only the Italian outsider, about whom Lesage had seemingly been warned by some Seychellois, who was interfered with. It is not unreasonable to view Lesage’s answers to the enquiry with a degree of mistrust. Initially, he appeared reluctant to offer information on either the *Aglaé* or the *Reverant*. In the case of the *Reverant*, he at first claimed he could recall neither the name of the ship nor any further details of the case pertaining to it. When he was re-examined, however, the name of the vessel did come back to him, as did a significant amount of detail concerning not only his encounter with the ship, but its subsequent fate as well. He even admitted that, after discovering that Pinaud had not been prosecuted for slave trading, he had written to the governor complaining of his assault – an action which resulted in Pinaud being imprisoned for three months. Deryck Scarr points out that Lesage himself was vaguely accused of being involved in slave trading by another Seychellois merchant, who once made a comment to the effect that Lesage should give it up and go and fight Napoleon instead.³⁶ Nothing more than this one-off comment itself can be found, and there is no other evidence to suggest that Lesage

34 UKNA CO 167/139 Bibye Lesage examined, 11 January 1827.

35 Scarr, *Seychelles since 1770*, pp. 42-43.

36 Scarr, *Slaving and Slavery*, p. 79

ever participated in, or benefited from, any part of the trade himself. If his account of having watched Pinaud nightly for six weeks is true, however, it is certainly not in keeping with his previous attitude towards slaving. The fighting between them aboard the *Reverant* and the enthusiasm with which Lesage followed Pinaud's case, eventually seeing that he ended up in prison for the alleged assault, if not the slaving, might suggest some deeper grudge against Pinaud himself rather than a change of attitude towards the trade on Lesage's part.

Lesage's account of the slave trading that went on under his nose goes some way towards explaining Farquhar's view that there was no one in the Seychelles capable or inclined to counter the illegal commerce in 1813. It also casts lights on some at least of the dynamics of the illegal trade in the Seychelles in the early 1810s. Slaves were customarily landed on some quiet corners of Mahé, Praslin and La Digue. After disembarking their human cargoes, empty slave ships made open use of the facilities in the harbour and elsewhere. Once the ships were resupplied, or after the slaves had been sufficiently rested, they were re-embarked for the onward journey towards their ultimate Mascarenian destinations. Above all, Lesage's experience seems to indicate that there was almost nothing that the authorities could do to actually prevent the arrival or departure of slavers operating in the Seychelles.

Repressive Measures, 1815-1820

The factors which eventually led slavers to adopt more covert modes of operation – modes which became visible from the early 1820s – began to take shape in the mid-1810s. In 1814 Farquhar began negotiations with contacts in India to secure a supply of convict labour.³⁷ Although the total number of convicts (1,500 between 1814 and 1837)³⁸ imported into Mauritius was small in comparison to the c. 60,000 slaves on the island at the time, or indeed the numbers of illegal slaves smuggled during the same period, by raising the prospect of a new labour force, the beginning of convict

37 Clare Anderson, *Convicts in the Indian Ocean: Transportation from South Asia to Mauritius, 1815-53* (Basingstoke and New York, 2000), p. 21.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

imports in 1814 probably made the subsequent measures against illegal slave trading a little easier for the Mauritian plantocracy to stomach.

With alternative labour sources being at least experimented with in Mauritius, Farquhar began to display a more pro-active approach to challenging illegal importers of slaves. His negotiations with King Radama of Madagascar's expanding Merina empire, which began in 1816, and his later deals with the Sultan of Oman in the 1820s, show an apparent desire to attack the trade at its sources. In exchange for agreeing to prevent his subjects from participating in the slave trade, and forbidding them from carrying out raids on Anjouan, the island of the Comoros group that had been Britain's ally, Radama was to receive gifts of £2,000 per year in cash or military supplies.³⁹ This deal (which was quickly side-lined by the three acting Governors that filled Farquhar's place during his absence from the end of 1817 to the middle of 1820) may have been at least partly motivated by Farquhar's ambition to bring an increasingly united Madagascar under British influence. Nonetheless, when the agreement was reinstated by Farquhar upon his return to Mauritius in 1820, Radama did manage to significantly reduce his subjects' participation in the trade.⁴⁰ The east African coast and its multitude of slaving ports presented Farquhar with a more intractable problem, and the Governor must have wondered where to begin combating the trade there. Slavers, having adapted to Radama's preventative measures, were once more turning their sights to the Swahili coast in the early 1820s, and so Farquhar began negotiations with the Sultan of Oman. This resulted in the 1822 Moresby Treaty, which secured an agreement with the Sultan that his subjects in East Africa would not sell slaves to Christians.⁴¹

At the other end of the trade, schooners and warships continued to seize slavers in the waters around Mauritius, while Farquhar also tried, in vain, to see that improvements were made to judicial proceedings so as to enable successful prosecutions. However, the Seychelles, the middle point of the trade, witnessed no preventative measures by Farquhar, though the archipelago continued to be blamed for being instrumental in siphoning large numbers of slaves. Although Lesage had

39 Brown, *A History of Madagascar*, pp. 115-129.

40 Allen, *European Slave Trading*, p. 168.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 170.

argued that he had no real way of knowing the true extent of slave trading in the Seychelles during his stay there, he had also suggested that the best means of stopping the trade was to place two vessels of 70 tonnes each in constant circulation of the Seychelles, and one to occasionally visit the coast of Africa.⁴² This was an expense that Farquhar was not in a position to afford. Lack of ships, and the lack of interest from London in provisioning the Mascarenes with more of them, undoubtedly played a part in the Seychelles not being assigned its own naval assistance until 1823.⁴³

There was one measure, however, that Farquhar did apply to all of the Mascarenes, including the Seychelles, in the hope of preventing the importation of new slaves anywhere. Besides finally publishing the Abolition Act in Mauritius for the first time in April 1813, in 1814, Farquhar kick-started the process that would eventually enable some prosecutions to succeed and thus play some, albeit limited, role in the eventual demise of the trade itself. This consisted of the monumental task of registering every slave in the colony. While the numbers of slaves attached to each private owner had been previously recorded for tax and census purposes, Farquhar's register was specifically intended to collect information about the slave population, including each slave's name, age, sex, caste, occupation and a physical description. This unprecedented 'slave census' was completed in the Seychelles in 1815 and Mauritius in 1816; from then on, triennial returns of the captive population were to be produced. Births, deaths, manumissions, transfers and sales were also to be reported to the appointed registrar of slaves or his office of assistance, which was a new wing of the government specifically created for that purpose. Since any slaves unaccounted for in the first census, excepting those born thereafter, must have been introduced illegally, the aim of the registers was to enable the government to hold proprietors responsible for having purchased illegal slaves, and thus deter the trade. New slaves found in the triennial returns were to be confiscated by the government, depriving their owners of the profits of their labour. Proprietors were warned that they could be subject to inspections of their slave stocks by the registrar of slaves or

42 UKNA CO167/139, Bibye Lesage examined, 11 January 1827.

43 SNA B1/12, Farquhar to Madge, 9 May 1823.

his agents, in an attempt to ensure that both the census submissions and subsequent returns were made accurately.⁴⁴

The inhabitants of the Mascarenes, however, remained undeterred and found numerous ways to undermine Farquhar's attempt to stifle the illegal slave trade through bureaucratic means. The tradition of escape, or *marronage*, among slaves provided a ready-made, plausible explanation for discrepancies in the registers.⁴⁵ Since maroons more often than not returned of their own accord after a period of absence, proprietors were able to pass off new slaves as old ones who had marooned before the census was taken and had since returned. Such, for instance, was the excuse adduced by Mauritian planter Madame Terreux when one of her older slaves reported her new acquisitions in 1821.⁴⁶ This excuse was only needed, of course, once she became the subject of an investigation. For the majority of planters this was not the case, and they could simply keep unrecorded slaves quietly on their estates. Since the hiring out of existing slaves was legal, slavers could also claim that any additional slaves seen on their properties belonged to other planters and had been leased out. Fraudulent submissions to the registrar or concealed deaths also permitted proprietors to disguise new slaves as Malagasy or Mozambicans who had been in the colony since before 1810. Other methods of getting around the registers have been shown to have existed in Mauritius. Nwulia states that inhabitants who possessed no slaves at all could make false returns and then sell the certificates of registration they had obtained to slave owners wishing to purchase new arrivals, or to importers who would seek to buy slaves in East Africa or Madagascar who matched the descriptions.⁴⁷ This method would certainly have been possible for proprietors in the Seychelles as well, especially as the registrar for slaves for the years 1821-1826, William Knowles, admitted that he did not at any point see the slaves to whom the first returns corresponded.⁴⁸ What was true of East Africa and Madagascar is likely to have applied to the Seychelles, for there, too, new slaves could be picked who

44 Nwulia, *The History of Slavery*, p. 41.

45 Peter Nicholls, 'Meet the Maroons: Runaway Slaves of the Seychelles, 1768-1839', MA Dissertation, University of Kent, 2013, pp. 24-29.

46 MNA HA 10/13, Instruction du Procès Criminel, 30 October 1821; Parliamentary Papers 1826 XXV11 352, Darling to Bathurst, 1 July 1820, No. 44, pp. 144-145.

47 Nwulia, *The History of Slavery*, p. 52.

48 UKNA CO 167/139 William Knowles examined, 19 December 1826.

matched the descriptions contained in the false certificates held by proprietors in Mauritius or Bourbon. Despite these problems, London-based officials continued to regard this method as the best possible means to counter the trade. When General Darling, the last of the three acting Governors during Farquhar's 1817-1820 absence, asked for more small vessels to be sent to aid the single warship in Mauritius at the time and the handful of government schooners that intermittently lent their assistance to hunt slavers, the request was denied. Instead, Darling was instructed to draw on the registers to garner evidence about illegal transportation.⁴⁹

The task of registering slaves in the Seychelles was first put in the hands of Lesage's replacement, Edward Madge, who was now at the head of a permanent civil administration. The first register orchestrated by Madge in 1815 was completed according to instructions, but Madge appears not to have used it to condemn any settlers who were found to be keeping illegal slaves on their estates. As one of the largest slave owners in the Seychelles himself – Madge accumulated over 100 slaves during the first five years of his tenure – Madge perhaps sympathised with slave owners and even resented the process of registration.⁵⁰ If scouting the Seychelles for newly imported slaves did not appeal to Madge, he nonetheless showed willingness on at least two occasions during his twelve years as Civil Agent, to intervene in slave trading.⁵¹

The first of his two interventions was the seizure of the *Marie Louise*, one year after his arrival. This episode warrants a fuller discussion than it has received in the combined works of Scarr, McAteer and Nwulia,⁵² none of whom have attempted to locate it within the changing patterns of illicit trading in the second half of the 1810s or pondered over its impact on future slave trading through the inner islands of the Seychelles. The consequences of the seizure were significant both for the authorities who sought to counter the trade and for the slavers who made use of the Seychelles.

49 Parliamentary Papers 1826 XXVII, 295, Lord Bathurst to Major General Darling, 21 February 1820, No. 40, p.122.

50 Scarr, *Seychelles since 1770*, p. 48.

51 Parliamentary Papers 1828 XXV, 205, Report by Edward Madge, 29 August 1826, No. 6, p. 82.

52 Scarr, *Slaving and Slavery*, p. 80, and *Seychelles since 1770*, p. 45; McAteer, *Rivals in Eden*, p. 246; Nwulia, *The History of Slavery*, p. 44.

Both parties, I argue, had their confidence knocked by confrontation; both would be less bold in future.

Madge first suspected the introduction of new slaves when reports of smallpox having broken out on several plantations on Mahé and Praslin came to his attention in January 1816. The source of the disease was traced to the *Marie Louise*, which had arrived the previous month and was then lying off Praslin. Madge seized the ship in the early part of February and arrested the owner, Sausse, as well as the crew. The slaves whom Madge was able to identify as belonging to the ship, numbering 48 out of an estimated 130, were placed on the old slave holding islands of Long, close to Mahé, and Cousin, close to Praslin, while the offenders were placed under the surveillance of the few volunteers whom Madge had recruited as an *ad hoc* police force. With the memory of Sullivan and Lesage's failures fresh in their minds, however, the slavers were not prepared to yield to Madge. Sausse's crewmen easily evaded Madge's guards and retook possession of the ship, while two of Madge's slaves were still on board. Not content with a simple escape and the theft of Madge's slaves, they headed first to Long Island to reclaim the slaves who had been placed there. According to one slave who was later interrogated over the affair, 13 slaves were forcibly carried off in boats and loaded onto the *Marie Louise*. The slavers then headed for Cousin. By this time, however, Madge had begun to give chase, and the slavers were thus forced to abandon the rest of the slaves and escape to Bourbon.

Madge quickly removed the remaining slaves from Cousin and placed them in what he thought would be a more secure holding place: the residence of a trusted planter, Mailliet, on Praslin. The owner of the vessel, Sausse, was placed under tighter security, but this did not stop him from following the example of his crew. On 12 March, Sausse made his own escape. Before heading to Bourbon himself, he called at Mailliet's estate, managing to remove at gunpoint twelve of the slaves whom Madge had placed there.⁵³ This audacious undermining of Madge's authority was not all that the civil agent had to complain about. What was more offensive to Madge, and indeed more revealing about the state of slave trading in the Seychelles at this

53 UKNA CO 167/131 Report by Justice George Smith to Governor of Mauritius, 2 May 1817.

point, was that Sausse was directly assisted in his escape by none other than the *juge de paix* himself, Quinssy.

The former governor of the islands, now subordinate to Madge, had entrusted his own slaves with the task of supplying Sausse with a boat and provisions, and he arranged his departure on the *Hirondelle*. Madge had Quinssy arrested and sent to Mauritius, where investigations that ran into 1817 revealed that Quinssy's slaves had indeed enabled Sausse's escape. Quinssy himself, however, escaped conviction by pleading ignorance of his slaves' actions.⁵⁴ Other circumstantial evidence that emerged during the investigations included the fact that it was widely known in the Seychelles that Quinssy and Sausse had previously lived together 'in the greatest of intimacy'. Also revealing was the fact that, immediately after Sausse's escape, Quinssy received an extension of his repayment agreement for slaves whom he had previously purchased from Sausse himself. In spite of all of this, Quinssy went free and subsequently returned to the Seychelles, where he continued to serve as *juge de paix*.

Although Madge's action in connection with the *Marie Louise* had not brought about the desired outcome, it served as a warning to slavers that the civil agent could cause serious disruption, if he so chose. As a result of the *Marie Louise* affair, Madge lost what little respect he may have had from the Seychellois. At the same time, he learnt that, while his actions might push the traders off the radar, it was futile to hope for actual prosecutions. This is borne out by the case of the *Lutteur*, whose seizure by Madge in May 1817 on the west coast of Mahé was possibly a knee-jerk to the recent acquittal of Quinssy. By this point, however, Madge's trust in the Mascarenes' court systems had so declined that, disregarding instructions from Mauritius, he refused to bring prosecutions against the high standing purchasers of the four slaves that he had been able to trace.⁵⁵ From this point forwards, Madge and the slavers seem to have avoided each other.

54 Ibid.

55 UKNA CO 167/130, Madge to Colonial Secretary, 15 October 1817.

Madge's anti-slave trading zeal would be questioned by the naval officers sent to the islands to counter the trade in the early 1820s.⁵⁶ Especially damaging to his reputation was his willingness to purchase one member of the group of slaves who had been seized from the *Marie Louise* and who were being returned to one of the ship's co-owners on account of the fact that they appeared to match existing registers.⁵⁷ One might view two seizures in twelve years as a very modest return and as sure evidence that Madge's attitude towards slavers was no different from Lesage's. Madge, however, saw things differently and, writing in 1827, he defended his conduct in the following terms:

the nature and position of the islands forming the dependency of Seychelles afford every facility to the landing of slaves without the possibility of its coming to the knowledge of the Government agent. At the period of our first possessing these islands no means whatever were established there for carrying into execution the Slave Abolition Laws. An agent of Government was first landed at Seychelles, with an authority for this purpose, in June 1811. From that period to the end of the year 1817 there was no regular establishment of a police, so that this officer had to contend alone and unsupported, even at the risk of his life, against the united interests of the people and the slave-traders. It is not so surprising, therefore, that so little was done, but rather that so much was effected under the circumstances above stated. It was not until the year 1822 that anything like a police force existed at these islands, when 20 gendarmes were granted by Governor Farquhar, and placed at the disposal of the civil authorities.⁵⁸

In the same note, Madge went on to state that, after 1818, there were no proofs of large shipments of slaves being brought into, or through, the Seychelles, exception made for a cargo from Madagascar in 1823. However, despite Madge's assertions, in July 1819, Governor Mylius of Bourbon had complained that, 'within a short period of time', his island had 'been inundated with negroes, imported through the medium of the Seychelles'.⁵⁹ For his part, Acting Mauritius Governor Ralph Darling, writing about the Seychelles in that same year, was still sure that slave ships 'first call at those islands, and take an opportunity, according to the information they receive, of

56 Parliamentary Papers 1826-1827 VI, 90, Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee, 22 May 1826, p. 63.

57 UKNA CO 167/95, Madge, in Blair to Cole, 17 March 1827.

58 Ibid.

59 Parliamentary Papers 1826, XXVII, 352, Darling to Bathurst, 27 July 1819, No. 27, p. 97.

proceeding with the negroes either to Bourbon or this Island.’⁶⁰ While these official comments clearly disprove Madge’s contention that Mauritius- and Bourbon-bound slavers had stopped using any part of the Seychelles from as early as 1818, the notion that, beginning in the late 1810s, large shipments of slaves were becoming less frequent – at least insofar as the inner Seychelles islands were concerned – cannot be as easily dismissed.

Until around the turn of the 1820s, the Seychelles only applied minor adjustments to its pre-abolition slave trading practices. These included the increasing reliance on less frequently visited areas of Mahé and the larger nearby islands as loading, resting and provisioning spots. Interventions by authorities were far and few between and always met with resistance. The few interventions that did take place, and began to occur more frequently from the latter half of the 1810s, in conjunction with the increasing seizures on arrival at Mauritius or Bourbon did however have some effect in the Seychelles themselves. The gendarmes who were stationed at Mahé in 1822, as well as the more frequent visits by naval patrol ships, including the long-awaited *Espiegle*, a schooner to be based in the Seychelles, all began to make their impact felt. While none of these made any seizures, their combined presence undoubtedly helped to deter slavers from trading as openly as they had done in the immediate aftermath of abolition.⁶¹ For all the convenience and profitability of bringing large shipments of slaves through to Mahé, Praslin, La Digue or Silhouette, the greater risks involved now required a change in tactics.

The tactics that slavers adopted in response to the measures outlined above included the more extensive use of the outer islands and the notorious ‘transfer system’, by which illegal slaves were imported into the Seychelles in order to be disguised as existing slaves, whose movement between the British Mascarenes was permitted. These tactics form the subject of the next chapter.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ SNA B1/12, Farquhar to Madge, 9 May 1823.

Chapter 5 The Slave Trade's Last Stand, 1820-1830

If the Seychelles are mentioned at all in wider studies of Indian Ocean slave trading, it is most often for their role in acclimatising new illegal slaves in order for them to be credibly presented in Mauritius as pre-abolition – and therefore legal – slaves.¹ This infamous trade, dubbed the ‘transfer trade’, was undoubtedly the most significant contribution of the Seychelles during the illegal period. It, however, must be understood in the appropriate context of the illegal Mascarene trade’s second phase. During this phase – which Mauritius entered in the early 1820s and Bourbon from the middle of the same decade – slavers responded to the abolitionist measures surveyed in the previous chapter. Over the course of this new phase, the Seychelles continued to cater both for their own labour requirements and for those of the main Mascarene islands. That the Seychelles were able to do this was largely a result of slavers adjusting to changing circumstances and allocating new functions to the islands. From the late 1810s-early 1820s, the Seychelles contributed in two distinct – though partly overlapping – ways to the illegal slave trade to the Mascarenes. The first – the ‘transfer system’ – was especially relevant to Mauritius and drew on the loophole that permitted the movement of pre-existing slaves between different islands of the dependency. Thus, over the course of the 1820s, slavers exploited the Seychelles to provide new east African and Malagasy slaves with real or fraudulent pre-abolition registration papers in order to bypass prohibitions against fresh imports into Mauritius. The second Seychellois contribution catered especially for the demand emanating from Bourbon, whose anti-slavery efforts lagged behind those of Mauritius. In this case, slavers did not pass newly-imported slaves as pre-existing ones, but rather made use of the outer islands of the Seychelles for provisioning purposes en route to Bourbon. This was the result of two developments. First, following Madge’s seizures (see chapter 4, pp. 127-130), the outer islands – and especially the Amirante archipelago, a group of eleven coral islands and atolls lying 250km south-west of Mahé – were regarded as a safer option than the inner islands. Secondly, with the Radama agreement (see chapter 4, p. 124) working towards

¹ See, for example, Alpers, *East Africa and the Indian Ocean*, p. 52.

reducing slave sales along the eastern coast of Madagascar,² more slaves began to be imported from locations – primarily north-western Madagascar and East Africa – whose comparative distance from Bourbon increased the need for provisioning stops.

Over the course of the 1820s, then, the Seychelles played both a ‘legal’ and a ‘logistical’ role in the illegal slave trade of the Mascarenes. These roles lie at the heart of this chapter, the main aim of which is to untangle the reputation of the Seychelles as an acclimatisation centre for a transitory population of new slaves from the parallel issue of the increased use of the outer islands as provisioning posts – two distinct, yet sometimes overlapping, modes of operation which have often been confused by both nineteenth-century observers of the trade and modern scholars. It is also my intention to offer some indications of how significant these activities were in the last phase of illegal trading. However, before delving into either of these two forms of slave trafficking via the Seychelles, it is important to connect their origins to broader developments in the Mascarene trade and identify the conditions – both in the Seychelles and elsewhere – which fostered their emergence.

The Need for New Methods

The actions taken by Madge in 1816 and 1817 ushered in tense relationships between him and the slavers of the Seychelles. The latter gave the government agent a wide berth and sought to act out of his sight, undoubtedly preferring to unload large shipments of new slaves on Praslin, La Digue or Silhouette than on Mahé, the main island where Madge was based. It was commonly understood that Madge could not possibly hope to bring the trade as a whole to an end. Slavers, however, must have dreaded the prospect of becoming the target of such demonstrations of zeal as Madge might have seen fit to stage largely for the benefit of Mauritius. As the mid-1810s had demonstrated, Madge’s actions, no matter how sporadic, could still cause serious disruption. As long as Madge could claim ignorance to Mauritius, however, he was satisfied; slavers thus understood that a degree of caution was warranted if they were to continue to cater for the demand for new slaves hailing from Mauritius,

² Parliamentary Papers 1829 XXV, 292, Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry upon the Slave Trade at Mauritius, p. 20.

Bourbon and the Seychelles themselves. As will be seen, the increasing avoidance of Mahé by large slave cargoes would influence both the location of the new provisioning posts for Bourbon-bound slave ships and the processes by which slaves were imported into Mahé for use in the Seychelles or transfer to Mauritius.

While bolstered and extended by slavers, the transfer system itself was not their invention. Economic factors – beginning with the decline of the Indian Ocean cotton plantation sector in the wake of American production in the late 1810s – drove the first wave of entirely legitimate transfers. Seychellois planters were still being prevented from trading their produce independently and directly with other nations and were still required to bring all of their produce to Mauritius. Because of these stringencies, they began to relocate in large numbers to Mauritius.³ Or, if they themselves did not move, they were still keen to transfer slaves who were becoming increasingly surplus in the Seychelles after 1818.

Developments within Mauritius, too, were highly significant and go a long way towards explaining both the island's continuing need for slaves and the fact that a large proportion of its slave trade came to be subsumed under the transfer system. Farquhar returned to Mauritius in 1820. After reinstating his agreement with Radama, he proceeded to relax searches of plantations and other measures closer to home that had been upheld by acting governors Hall and Darling since 1817. This coincided with a major cholera epidemic that killed perhaps as many as 7,000 slaves in Mauritius, more than 10% of its slave population.⁴ At the same time, sugar cultivation on the island was booming. Average annual exports of sugar from Mauritius stood at 3,097 tons for the years 1815-19. This figure more than trebled in 1819-24 (11,107 tons per year) and rose to 20,407 for the years 1824-29.⁵ Mauritian demand for plantation slaves must have increased accordingly, even though the lack of actual seizures was sometimes offered as proof that slave trading was practically non-existent. Allen's review of changes in the Mauritian and Seychellois slave population throughout the period of the illegal trade reveals that, in the early 1820s,

3 Ibid, p. 28

4 Allen, 'Licentious and Unbridled Proceedings', p. 101.

5 Allen, *Slaves, Freedmen and Indentured Laborers*, Table 1, Mauritian Sugar and the World Market, 1812-1934, p. 23.

an average of 1,100 slaves per year are likely to have been imported into Mauritius and the Seychelles.⁶ This represented an increase from the 820 who were likely to have been imported in 1819,⁷ the year when Darling had complained that ‘daily violations of the law [were] notorious and public.’⁸

In the early 1820s, Farquhar appeared confident about the prospects of bringing Mauritian slave trading to a halt. He drew special encouragement from the case of the *Coureur*, which – in his view – marked the end of Mauritian slave trading. The *Coureur* was a notorious slave ship captained by long-time Mauritian slaver Charles Dorval. In March 1821, having been sighted by the *Henrietta* as it approached the Mauritian shores by the light of the full moon, the *Coureur* attempted to flee. Upon being chased, Dorval hit the reef and quickly began disembarking the slave cargo he transported. Dorval managed to escape, but lost both his slaves and his ship, which he set on fire and let sink in an attempt to destroy evidence. Contrary to Farquhar’s assurances to London, this event did not coincide with the end of the slave trade to Mauritius. It, however, can be seen as marking a change in attitude on the part of slave traders in Mauritius. Word soon spread of Dorval’s ill-fortune. As a result, there seemed to be a noticeable decrease in the slavers’ usual activity around the island. Dorval himself realised his own game was up. Like many of the European pirates who had plagued shipping in these waters one hundred years earlier, Dorval accepted a pardon for his crime, switched sides and agreed to assist the hunt for other slavers.⁹ In his despatches to London, Governor Farquhar claimed that these circumstances were the result of the success of his measures against the trade.¹⁰ Farquhar, however, would soon realise that the abuse of the transfer system from the Seychelles offered Mauritian dealers new opportunities to continue their trade.

6 Allen, ‘Licentious and Unbridled Proceedings’, p. 102.

7 Ibid.

8 Parliamentary Papers 1826 XXVII, 352, No. 5, Darling to Bathurst, 16 July 1829; Enclosure 2, Darling, Proclamation, 16 July 1819, p. 92.

9 Scarr, *Slaving and Slavery*, pp. 96-97.

10 Barker, *Slaving and Antislavery*, p. 35.

The Manipulation of the Transfer System

The Commission of Eastern Inquiry, which would eventually be sent to Mauritius to investigate the state of the slave trade and its suppression, calculated that no less than 3,246 slaves had been transferred to the island by 1827, the vast majority of them having arrived from the Seychelles after 1821.¹¹ It was from this point onwards that the transfer system began to provide ostensibly legitimate employment for many previous slave traders, who could now openly do what they knew best: fill their ships with slaves and try to keep them alive during a sea crossing to Mauritius. For instance, in September 1824, Charles Langlois, one of the most prominent Seychellois slavers, ferried 87 slaves belonging to various owners across to Mauritius in the *Jeune Laure*.¹² As early as December of the same year, he was back again with another 144.¹³ With a suitable cover thus established, income could be supplemented through the introduction into Mauritius of new slaves, for whom false documents that identified them as pre-existing slaves were also provided. The owners of illegitimate slaves were liable to prosecution if it could be proven that they had fraudulently given them an identity from the 1815 register, but this never did occur. The consequences for the captains of ships believed to be at fault did not go beyond the imposition of simple fines.

Although Madge had not seemed persuaded of the usefulness of his slave registers for identifying illegal slaves in the Seychelles, the copy he sent to Port Louis was used by Mauritian custom officers to vet, with varying degrees of efficacy, the thousands of slaves that were being transferred there from the mid-1810s. Of the 3,246 that were sent between 1808 and 1827, only 79 were identified as illegal slaves.¹⁴ It is not possible to know how often or how thoroughly comparative checks

11 Parliamentary Papers 1829 XXV, 292, Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry upon the Slave Trade at Mauritius, p. 28.

12 Parliamentary Papers 1828 XXV, 205, Slaves imported into Mauritius—continued, No. 1, p. 50.

13 Parliamentary Papers 1828 XXV, 206, Salter to Bradshaw, 17 December 1824, No. 2, p. 92.

14 Parliamentary Papers 1829 XXV, 292, Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry upon the Slave Trade at Mauritius, p. 28.

were carried out on slaves arriving in Mauritius before 1823 (when Captain Moorsom, of the anti-slaving naval squadron, claimed to have ensured that every slave was systematically checked)¹⁵ and therefore how confident Seychellois dealers could feel about evading such controls. There is evidence, however, that there were frequent attempts to pass through customs slaves who showed remarkable discrepancies with their entries in the 1815 register. This suggests that thorough checking was not the norm in Port Louis, and that the paltry 79 slaves who were intercepted are not indicative of the true number of new slaves imported into Mauritius by manipulating the transfer system. The illegal slaves who were discovered at customs were commonly in very small groups, usually consisting of three or four individuals, and were attached to a wide range of planters who had never before been linked to the slave trade. This implies that the small-scale smuggling of new slaves dissolved into the constant traffic of goods and legitimate slave transfers in which the Seychellois earnestly participated.

The inconsistencies which alerted the authorities are sometimes explicitly mentioned in the cases of slaves who were either confiscated on arrival or sent back to the Seychelles. Height was the main determining factor, since this was often the only exact parameter featuring in the Seychelles register. Under the category ‘marks’ – intended to describe the various facial tattoos and scarifications with which almost every adult slave from Mozambique was adorned – the registrar most often wrote, quite unhelpfully, ‘*de son pays*’. On at least one occasion, however, a rare piece of detail under this category revealed that one slave, Louis Marcy, who was transferred to Mauritius in 1818, was in fact a new slave. While no attempt had been made to describe Louis’s particular facial tattoos, he was recorded as having a ‘V’ branded into his right arm. It was precisely this ‘V’ that the slave stopped at Port Louis customs was missing. As well as this, he was three inches shorter than the slave whose physical description had been recorded in 1815. Equally significant discrepancies were recorded in the case of the slave Frevier – who was transported alongside the fake Louis and who was five inches shorter than the slave register

15 Parliamentary Papers 1824 XXIV, 295, Moorsom to Nourse 21 June 1823, No. 2, pp.3-4.

suggested he ought to have been – and Fidèle, almost eight inches shorter.¹⁶

Occasional discrepancies as extreme as these suggest either that some Seychellois believed that thorough checking was not likely to take place or that the scale of the fraud was so large that slave owners and traffickers could not keep proper track of their deceits and occasionally slipped up.

Madame Rousseau was perhaps one such careless Seychellois. In 1818, she requested Madge's permission to transfer three of her slaves to Port Louis. After granting her wish, Madge realised that, only the previous year, Rousseau had submitted to him a certificate stating that she had sold two of the three slaves in question to another proprietor. Perhaps only to save himself, Madge wrote to Mauritius, explaining the mistake and enabling the 'confiscation' of the slaves there.¹⁷ Another one was the aforementioned Charles Langlois, who overlooked the fact that one of the slaves whom he transported to Mauritius in December 1824, and who was supposedly registered as having belonged to the Langlois family since before 1815, had actually been reported dead by another settler five years earlier.¹⁸

For most serious slave traders like Constant Dupont, however, matching up newly imported slaves to fit existing certificates and getting away with it was easy enough. Dupont claimed to have lost the paperwork relating to nine slaves whom he had transported to Mauritius in 1820, when his ship had foundered off the coast of St. Brandon. When these individuals were checked against the 1815 records, all were found to be too short or too tall, but only by an inch or two. Probably, Dupont's new slaves had been selected so as to pass a possible height check conducted by eye. Some of their 'marks' were also slightly inaccurate when properly checked: some slaves, for instance, were tattooed on their torsos, whereas their records stated they had no marks at all. This proved enough to arouse suspicion and resulted in a couple

16 Parliamentary Papers 1826 XXV, 206, No.7, Salter to May, 15 January 1820, No. 7, p. 13.

17 Parliamentary Papers 1826 XXV, 206, Madge to Draper, 27 June 1819, No. 2, p. 10.

18 Parliamentary Papers 1828 XXV, 206, Mylius to Bradshaw, 17 December 1824, No. 2, p. 92.

of the slaves being denied entry into Mauritius. But the degree of plausible deniability meant no further action was taken against Dupont.¹⁹

Speaking with the slaves themselves sometimes sparked off suspicion – for instance when the slave being questioned did not recognise the name of the owner he or she was linked to on paper, or when he or she appeared not to remember taking part in the 1815 census. Had slaves been questioned about their origins, the study of the illegal Mascarene trade would be vastly richer. However, official attitudes towards slave testimonies made this impossible. The Mauritian Collector of Customs, for instance, was convinced that slaves had passed through so many hands and been subject to so many masters, either by purchase or hiring, as to make it difficult for them to distinguish names.²⁰ Put differently, in the early 1820s, when the customs officer was putting his thoughts on paper, testimonies of slaves were still the lowest form of evidence and often considered unworthy of even being heard or recorded.

Mauritian officials regarded the problem of new slaves being smuggled into Mauritius through the stratagems summarised above as being entirely the fault of inefficient Seychellois authorities. They resented having to untangle the mess of the Seychelles registers and demanded that checks be carried out at embarkation by local authorities. Hinting at the sheer frustration felt by Mauritian authorities in 1820, the Collector of Customs wrote to the Chief of Police in Mahé to effectively spell out how to compare slaves to their written descriptions.

For instance, if in the registration account of the black he is said to be marked with a large V on his right arm, and in the man brought before you to represent the said registered black no such mark exists, he cannot be the same person. Again, if in the registered account the black named is recorded as having been 5 feet 2 inches high in 1815, it is clear, that although he might have grown taller in the succeeding years, he could not have become shorter, and consequently, if a black is brought as the one registered, whose height you find by measurement not to exceed 4 feet 6 inches, you will conclude,

19 Parliamentary Papers 1828 XXV, 206, Davis to Bradshaw, 16 July 1821, No. 11; Bradshaw to Davis, 17 July 1821, Nos. 12, 12a and 13, pp. 15-17.

20 Parliamentary Papers 1828 XXV, 206, Salter to Barry, 28 December 1822, No. 25, p. 24.

that as he is 7 inches shorter than the registered man whom he represents, he cannot be the person he personates, and therefore you will not grant him a pass.²¹

Mauritian officials complained again in June 1823, two months after the Seychelles had received the *Espiegle*, stating that since every single ship arriving in Mauritius from the Seychelles still carried numbers of slaves, and since there was no doubt that this was how the illegal trade was now being carried out, absolute adherence to the laws regarding the movement of slaves and the accepting of strangers into the islands should be maintained.²² In the event, nothing was to change in the Seychelles until December 1827, when the Commissioners of Eastern Inquiry in Mauritius put a stop to the transfer system by ruling that only personal domestic slaves could henceforth be brought into Mauritius.²³

By this time, the Seychelles had gained great notoriety among British authorities for the opportunities that they afforded for the acclimatisation of new slaves whom traffickers intended to present as pre-existing slaves at Mauritius. According to the intelligence gathered by Captain Moresby, the head of the anti-slaving naval squadron, and his contemporaries who sailed the western Indian Ocean in the early 1820s, the route via the Seychelles was the principal method of trafficking slaves to Mauritius for sale. Writing in November 1821, he expressed his confidence that ‘no clandestine landing has taken place [in Mauritius] since the destruction of the *Coureur* [in March] neither is there reason to apprehend one whilst the present measures are vigorously pursued.’ At the same time, he was also of the opinion that the Seychelles

supply this island [Mauritius] with a considerable number of new blacks, who the ingenuity of the owner make answer to the register in the government agent’s office at Mahé; these, with a few that may be occasionally smuggled from Bourbon, constitute the only supply that this island now receives; the stoppage of which rests more with the constant vigilance and careful scrutiny of those officers,

21 Parliamentary Papers 1828 XXV, 206, Davis to Harrison, 5 January 1820, No. 1, p. 12.

22 SNA B1/12, Farquhar to Madge, 23 June 1823.

23 SNA B3/16 Telfair to Cardew, 29 March 1827.

before whom, in the first case, the transferred blacks are brought, and in the other of the police and port officers, than in the duties of the naval department.²⁴

Moresby's successor, Captain Moorsom of the *Ariadne*, concurred, writing in October 1823 that he had 'no reason to suppose that slaves are introduced to Mauritius by any other mode than by transfer from Seychelles.'²⁵ It must be noted that both Moresby and Moorsom are likely to have underestimated the extent of smuggling of slaves to Mauritius via Bourbon.²⁶ Nevertheless what they were clearly beginning to understand was that transfers from the Seychelles were central to the continued supply of slaves for sale in Mauritius and that this practice involved a concerted effort to disguise new slaves as old ones by holding them for a period of time in some specific Seychellois locations.

Until the early 1820s, the Seychelles had been a rather ignored sub-dependency of Mauritius. Its sudden rise to prominence in the illegal Mascarene trade as a result of the manipulation of the legal transfer system came as a real shock – one that was felt not only by Mauritian authorities, but also in Britain, as reports of it reached the capital. In July 1825, *The Morning Chronicle*, a prominent London newspaper, published a short article on the slave trade to Mauritius. The article paid specific attention to the role of the Seychelles in replenishing the ranks of slaves at Mauritius, where, it was stated, 'most inhuman' treatment occasioned an 'enormous waste of life'.²⁷ The Seychelles were accused of providing the means to avoid detection by British cruisers for those seeking to import slaves into Mauritius. The islands, the article explained,

Were dependencies of the Isle of France, situated nearer to the coast of Africa, to which the slaves are first conveyed, and then carried to the Mauritius under the denomination of old slaves. There is not a person on the island who does not know perfectly well that the slaves are not old, but they are old according to the papers, which are fabricated. If not new, they have at most been six months in the

24 Parliamentary Papers 1826-1827 VI, 90, Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee, 22 May 1826, pp. 59-60.

25 Parliamentary Papers 1824 XXIV, 295, Moorsom to Nourse, 15 October 1823, No. 8, p. 8.

26 See Allen, 'Licentious and Unbridled Proceedings,' p.105.

27 *The Oriental Herald*, July-September 1825 ; reprint of an article from *The Morning Chronicle*, 29 July 1825.

Seychelles, for the purpose of removing, in some degree, the extreme awkwardness of the unhappy beings on their first introduction into a country, to the language, habits, and employments of which they are strangers.

The Morning Chronicle also pointed to the scandalous fact that, once transferred, slaves were openly advertised for sale in the *Mauritius Gazette*.²⁸ While the intermediary role of the Seychelles in the illegal slave trade had been known to Mauritian authorities for a while, *The Morning Chronicle* article also brought it to the attention of the British public. A year later, coinciding with the launch of the Commission of Eastern Inquiry's investigation, the article informed part of Fowell Buxton's address to the House of Commons in which the famous abolitionist stressed that the slave trade to Mauritius was still in full force and that much more needed to be done to bring it to an end. Buxton stated that thousands of purposefully acclimatised illegal slaves had come from the Seychelles and been introduced to Mauritius under the nose of the honourable gentleman sitting opposite him, Robert Farquhar, who listened in dismay, since, not having been informed of the topic of discussion, he was forced to concoct an impromptu defence of his action in the Mascarenes.²⁹

It is clear then, that in the minds of abolitionists in London and authorities in Mauritius, the Seychelles were understood to be responsible for the large numbers of slaves arriving in Mauritius; in some cases, it was believed that the route via the Seychelles was the only means by which slaves were still imported into Mauritius. The actual extent of the Seychelles' role in providing slaves to Mauritius through the transfer system is harder to know.

It is not possible to determine with any accuracy the number of new or illegal slaves included in the 3,246 slaves who were transferred to Mauritius from its dependencies between 1808 and 1827. We do know, however, that at least 2,998 of these were

28 Ibid.

29 Parliamentary Papers, 1827 XV, 2, Slave Trading and the State of Slaves at the Mauritius. 9 May 1826, pp. 1014-1051.

transferred from the Seychelles between 1821 and 1827.³⁰ The fact that, during the same period, the Seychelles slave population had only dropped by, at most, 609 slaves,³¹ is enough to demonstrate that the transfer system lent itself to massive abuses. The 2,389 slaves that can in all probability be connected to the manipulation of the transfer system in the Seychelles correspond to almost a third of the estimated 8,864 slaves who, according to Allen, were imported into Mauritius and the Seychelles combined between 1820 and 1827.

The Role of the Outer Seychelles

Since it first came to light, much confusion has surrounded the issue of how the Seychelles were instrumental in acclimatising slaves earmarked for illegal transfer to Mauritius. Some accounts trace the practice to the principal islands of the Seychelles; others, on the contrary, locate it in the archipelagos of the Amirantes or Alphonse, which make up the outer islands of the Seychelles, where – it was suspected – depots of slaves could be established without fear of detection. The argument of this and the next section is that while the inner islands did serve to acclimatise new slaves prior to transfer to Mauritius – a function they would continue to fulfil until the late 1820s, when the trade itself can be said to have all but disappeared from Mauritius – the evidence is much less solid to back the assertion that depots were being built on the outer islands for the purpose of acclimatizing new slaves and enabling them to acquire enough of the Creole language to be passed off as old slaves. It is certainly true that the outer islands were visited by slave ships, but, beyond Farquhar's own speculations, there is little evidence to suggest that slavers ever created dedicated spaces on the outer islands for accommodating new slaves. On balance, the evidence to be presently surveyed suggests that the slavers

30 Parliamentary Papers 1828 XXV, 205, Return of the Number of Slaves imported into Mauritius under the Provisions of the Act of 59 Geo. 3, c. 1 120, either as Domestic Servants, or permanently transferred to this Island, from 1st January 1821 to 10th April 1826, No.1, pp. 45-52; Parliamentary Papers 1829 XXV 292, Report by the Commissioners of Eastern Inquiry upon the slave trade at Mauritius, p. 28.

31 Allen, 'Licentious and Unbridled Proceedings,' Table 1, Slave Population of Mauritius and the Seychelles, 1809-1835, p. 96. Figure obtained by calculating the difference between the 1819 and 1827 slave populations, since records are available for neither 1820 nor 1821.

who visited the outer Seychelles were more often than not travelling to Bourbon (rather than Mauritius) and that their stops in the outer Seychelles were primarily motivated by provisioning needs or the need to transact quick sales of slaves.

Writing in June 1821, Farquhar told his superiors that an anonymous informant had recently come forward with information that slavers were establishing depots on ‘the isles of Providence and other islands of the Seychelles archipelago’ for the purpose of introducing them to Mauritius, where they could fetch between 300 and 400 dollars, a much higher price than in Bourbon, where they were selling ‘dog cheap’ at only 150. He was apparently informed that should he presently send a ship, he would find at least one or two cargos of slaves on these islands. The latter were to be left there, Farquhar wrote, until they had become ‘*françaisés*’, that is, familiarised with the French Creole language and customs expected of Seychelles-based slaves. A Mauritian ship, the *Industry*, was named as a particular culprit.³²

When this information was passed on to Moresby, it made perfect sense to him. Moresby had recently learned that eight ships, hailing from Zanzibar and carrying between 200 and 400 slaves each, had lately set sail for Bourbon. Moresby suspected that such a large quantity of slaves could not possibly have been introduced all at once to their new destination and that, therefore, some means of keeping these slaves in transit must have been available to the smugglers.³³ And if this practice was being undertaken by Bourbonnais slavers, neither Farquhar nor Moresby had any reason to suppose that Mauritius-bound slavers were not also indulging in similar strategies. By this time, Moresby had not been to the inner islands of the Seychelles. If he had, he might not have been so sure that depots were required in the distant islands to the south: the Amirantes, Alphonse and Providence archipelagos. The possibility of utilising the ‘peripheral’ inner islands to the north of Mahé – Bird, Dennis and North – clearly crossed neither his mind nor Farquhar’s. Moresby was also seemingly unaware at the time that large cargos of east African slaves could be deposited on the

32 UKNA CO 167/57 Despatch 46, Farquhar to Bathurst, 11 June 1821, No. 5, Memorandum of depots of slaves in the archipelago of the Seychelles, 8 April 1821.

33 African Institution, *Sixteenth report of the directors of the African Institution: read at the annual general meeting, held on the 10th day of May, 1822* (London, 1822), Appendix L, 2, Copy of a Memorandum delivered by Captain Moresby, of H. M. S. Menai, to R.T. Farquhar, Port Louis, 4 April 1821, pp. 170-171.

shore of eastern Madagascar, where smaller ships, ostensibly trading in rice or cattle, could pick them up in small numbers.³⁴ As for depots in the outer Seychelles islands, it has been noted that nothing of the sort was ever found.³⁵ The *Industry*, the only ship specifically named by Farquhar's informant as utilising depots in the outer Seychelles, was sighted sailing close to the Amirantes, but no evidence emerged that supported the specific accusation raised against it.³⁶

Insofar as slave depots are concerned, the limited evidence relating to Providence – especially singled out by Farquhar in 1821 and described as ‘the principal rendezvous of the slavers’ a year later by the chief of police in Mauritius³⁷ – is hardly more conclusive. This island, close to the northern tip of Madagascar, had seen transitory populations of Mauritian rather than Seychellois slaves. Since the scores of previously uninhabited islands dotted between Mahé, East Africa, Madagascar and Mauritius were never officially subdivided between those governed by Seychelles or Mauritius itself, they were treated as either part of the Seychelles or as a single Mauritian dependency, depending on whether they were used or inhabited by Seychellois or Mauritians. In 1817, the use of Providence, previously unclaimed, was granted to an officer of the health department of Mauritius, Monsieur Margeot, who was stationed there to isolate and treat lepers.³⁸ This island, eight miles long by one wide, did not have an anchorage, but was situated within easy reach of the anchorage at the neighbouring Juan de Nova. There was no fresh water and a total covering of coconut palms. Margeot seems to have had quite a permanent residence at Providence. According to an August 1826 report, Margeot was present at this time with seven free persons and twenty-five slaves.³⁹ Earlier in the 1820s the island seems to have been inhabited, at least by slaves, if not by Margeot himself: five slaves, three of them owned by Margeot, were transferred there in 1822, seventeen

34 Carter and Gerbeau, ‘Covert Slaves and Coveted Coolies’, p. 199.

35 R.W. Beachey, *The Slave Trade of Eastern Africa* (New York, 1979) p. 39.

36 Parliamentary Papers, 1825, XV, 311, Farquhar to the Imam of Muscat, 4 December 1821, No. 10, Enclosure 5, pp. 51-52.

37 UKNA CO 172/38 Byam, Three years in Administration, pp. 257-258.

38 Parliamentary Papers, 1826-1827 XVIII 110, Return of Number of Islands under Dependencies of Mauritius, and Naval and Military Establishments, p. 18.

39 Ibid.

were sent in 1823 and a single slave in 1825.⁴⁰ Margeot was present on the island between June 1823 and February 1824, the period of the affair to be presently discussed. It is clear that slavers visited the island, and especially the neighbouring group of six tiny islets known as Juan de Nova, for watering. With its good anchorage in the northern part of the islet group, Juan de Nova may have been preferable for this purpose. In 1821, when he visited the islands accompanied by Dorval, the slave trader turned informant, Moresby noted that the latter was able to point out a secret well on Juan de Nova, though not on Providence.⁴¹

In January 1824, Governor Cole, Farquhar's successor, received a letter from Margeot describing a desperate situation on Providence. According to Margeot, there were no food stores left and all those present on the island had been reduced to living on what fish they could catch from the shore.⁴² The cause of the crisis was the wreck of *Le Lys*, a Bourbonnais slaver which had left 110 slaves and its captain and crew stranded on the island since June 1823. In the absence of a naval ship at Port Louis, Cole hired a merchant ship and sent it to Providence's aid under the command of Captain Royers. He also hoped to be able to retrieve the illegal slaves before the captain and some of the crew of *Le Lys*, who had already been brought back to Bourbon on the ship that had carried Margeot's letter, could go after them. When Royers arrived at Providence, Margeot informed him that the slaves had already been taken by Lieutenant Hay in the naval sloop *Delight*. Apparently, Hay had captured the *Cecile* two months previously close to the slaving ports of north-western Madagascar with 160 slaves recently taken on board. After the arrival of the *Delight* in Mauritius, it had come to the attention of authorities that the jailed captain of the *Cecile* had been found to be offering a large sum of money to an English merchant if the latter could retrieve a cargo of slaves lying on an island – not a week's sail away – and ferry them for him to Bourbon. In all likelihood the *Cecile* captain knew of the wreck of *Le Lys*, but at the time Captain Hay assumed he was

40 Parliamentary Papers 1828 XXV, 205, Return of Slaves Shipped from Mauritius, pp. 47-57.

41 Parliamentary Papers 1826 -1827 VI, 90, Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee, 13 May 1826, p. 74

42 Parliamentary Papers 1825 XXVII, 12, Secretary Canning to Viscount Granville, 15 December 1824, No. 103, pp. 120-122.

referring to additional slaves taken by the *Cecile* who had been landed for want of provisions, and so he went in search of them.

The fact that the slaves and crew of *Le Lys* remained for as many as seven months on Providence before any ship arrived that could either remove the stranded persons or send word to Mauritius or Bourbon might suggest that the island was not in frequent use by slavers – at least in the second half of 1823. The 1825 testimony of a fisherman employed on Providence at the time, however, suggests that lawlessness was standard on the island and that not only had Margeot intentionally concealed the wrecked slaves there, but that one unfortunate slave was murdered by excessive punishment at the hands of his overseer.⁴³ Lack of any further information about Margeot's disposition and role is in no small part the result of the *Delight's* tragic fate upon sailing back to Mauritius. Before reaching the harbour, the ship was hit by a hurricane and sank: all of the slaves as well as Hay and his crew lost their lives.⁴⁴

Further confusion surrounding the issue of possible slave depots in the outer Seychelles islands stemmed from the fact that, at precisely the same time in which acclimatisation practices and the transfer system to Mauritius were expanding, the Amirantes islands were being increasingly used as provisioning points by slavers travelling between East Africa and Bourbon. This point is best illustrated through the evidence that came to light in the aftermath of the seizure of the schooner *Le Succès* in the vicinity of the Amirantes in 1821. Moresby was cruising in the area on the basis of Farquhar's information and was specifically searching for Mauritius-bound slave ships that utilised the islands as depots. What he found revealed a rather different picture. *Le Succès* had left Nantes with specific instructions from its owners and financiers to embark on large-scale slaving voyages, potentially involving

43 Parliamentary Papers 1829 XXV, 292, Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry upon the Slave Trade at Mauritius, p. 8.

44 Parliamentary Papers 1825 XXVII, 12, Secretary Canning to Viscount Granville, 15 December 1824. No 103, pp. 120-122.

Bourbon, Zanzibar, Mozambique, Angola and Cuba.⁴⁵ A review of the correspondence between the ship's supercargo, Latorzée, Captain Bertrant, owner Francois Michaud in Nantes and contacts in Bourbon reveal that, on the voyage in which the slaver was captured by Moresby's ship, the *Menai*, their plan was to sail direct from Zanzibar to Bourbon. Indeed, a Monsieur Gamin, who awaited their arrival in Bourbon, had been instructed to expect them to reach the island just a couple of weeks after they had left Zanzibar, leaving no time for their slaves to remain for any time in the outer Seychelles.⁴⁶ Also, despite dwelling on the numerous options open to slavers in the western Indian Ocean, the relevant correspondence makes no mention of any depot in the outer Seychelles or any notion of acclimatising these slaves prior to their entry into Bourbon. Although the plan was ultimately to import the slaves into either Cuba or Bourbon, the owners of the ship, with great delicacy, raised even the far riskier option of introducing the slaves to Mauritius, given the higher prices paid there; this, however, was left to the discretion of the slavers, who were to assess the risks involved once in the area. In the event this latter option was deemed unfeasible, and the slavers stuck to their trusted contacts in Bourbon.

Upon the ship's arrival, Gamin was expected to make preparations for the landing. As cover, he was to come to shore with a large quantity of cloves which were to act as a false cargo.⁴⁷ All parties involved were quite sure that these new slaves could be smuggled without difficulty into Bourbon, an island which had only outlawed the slave trade as recently as 1817 and where the (once more) French authorities were far behind those of Mauritius in taking measures to detect and prevent the trade. Indeed, the same *Le Succès* had been seized before in Bourbon, but the slavers had easily escaped justice (as all slavers here did until c. 1825) and suffered only delays to their next voyage.⁴⁸ In sum, if there were some unrecorded ships which did use the

45 African Institution, *Sixteenth report of the directors of the African Institution: read at the annual general meeting, held on the 10th day of May, 1822* (London, 1822) Appendix L, 2, Copy of a Memorandum delivered by Captain Moresby, of H. M. S. *Menai*, to R.T. Farquhar, 4 April 1841, pp. 170-171.

46 African Institution, *Sixteenth report of the directors of the African Institution: read at the annual general meeting, held on the 10th day of May, 1822* (London, 1822) Appendix K, 6, 12, Gamin to Latorzée, St Denis, 25 January 1821, p. 162.

47 *Ibid.*, Latorzée to Gamin, 4 January, 1821, p. 158.

48 Gerbeau, 'Quelques Aspects de la traite illégal', pp. 275-282.

outer Seychelles islands as depots for Mauritius-bound slaves, *Le Succès* was not one of their number. When it was sighted close to the island of Alphonse by the *Menai*, *Le Succès* was in all probability bent on using the island for watering or provisions.

While other sightings of slavers did take place around the Amirantes and Alphonse islands,⁴⁹ these offer little indication that depots were being established there.

Moresby himself admitted that, after going through the papers found aboard *Le Succès*, he had changed his original opinion. Instead of using the Amirantes to acclimatise its slaves, *Le Succès* – Moresby now surmised – must have been one of the slave ships that often made a stop-over at these islands for watering. His fellow naval officer, Captain Maynard, added that ‘almost all Slave Vessels, during the Southerly monsoon, touch at some of the Amirantes’.⁵⁰ Another reason why Bourbon-bound slavers might have valued the outer Seychelles is that they offered a degree of protection, not just from storms, but also from anti-slaving patrols. Moresby’s account of the forty-one-hour-long chase of *Le Succès* reveals that slavers thought it a good idea to sail towards these islands when spotted, presumably with the intention of wrecking their chasers, who were bound to be less familiar with the reefs than they were, or to hide themselves or their slaves on the islands.⁵¹

If it can be shown that none of the slave ships discovered in the Amirantes, nor searches of the islands themselves, indicated to Moresby and his men that slaves were being held in depots on these islands in the early 1820s, then the question becomes central of why Farquhar was so convinced that this was the case and why such efforts were made to prove his hunch was correct. Since the evidence at our

49 African Institution, *Sixteenth report of the directors of the African Institution: read at the annual general meeting, held on the 10th day of May, 1822* (London, 1822), Appendix K, 2, Deposition of Lieutenant Greville, of his Majesty’s Ship *Menai*, in the Instance Court of Vice-Admiralty, at the Island of Mauritius, pp. 137-139.

50 Parliamentary Papers 1825 XXVII, 12, Secretary Canning to Sir Edward Thornton, Foreign Office, 28 May 1824, No. 37, Enclosure C, Report of Lieut. Maynard, respecting Slave Vessels, p. 45.

51 African Institution, *Sixteenth report of the directors of the African Institution: read at the annual general meeting, held on the 10th day of May, 1822* (London, 1822) Appendix K, 2, Deposition of Lieutenant Greville, of his Majesty’s Ship *Menai*, in the Instance Court of Vice-Admiralty, at the Island of Mauritius, pp. 137-139.

disposal comes in such small and disjointed fragments, one must attempt to consider the fullest range of possibilities. One such possibility is that there were distinct political advantages to be gained by emphasizing the alleged role of slavers operating in the outer islands of the Seychelles. Firstly, by foregrounding the outer Seychelles, Farquhar was able to further distance the root of the problem from his government's expected sphere of control and to provide a reasonable explanation for the inability of authorities in Mauritius to tell new and old slaves apart. The emphasis on the difficulties caused by developments taking place on the distant outer limits of Farquhar's sphere might thus have served the purpose of staving off the increased pressure from London he was under upon his return to Mauritius in 1820. Secondly, and in keeping with his more concerted efforts to prevent slaving at Madagascar than at Mauritius itself, by focusing abolitionist efforts on distant locations, Farquhar could afford to exhibit a degree of tact in his dealings with his Mauritian subjects, many of whom continued to depend on the slave trade for their economic wellbeing. Thirdly, legal requirements were also important. For slavers to be legitimately tried in the British Vice Admiralty Court in Mauritius – in preference to local Bourbonnais courts, which never condemned any slavers – it had to be shown that French ships had also utilised other British territories or planned on introducing slaves there. If authorities in Mauritius had any genuine hope of ending the slave trade, they could not expect to prevent slaves from entering their own island if they were still being smuggled in large numbers to neighbouring Bourbon, with which Mauritius had a constant two-way flow of trade and travel. In this regard, any Mascarene slaver facing prosecution by a more serious court than those local to Bourbon was a step towards the ultimate goal. Whether Bourbon-bound slavers could be proven to have had sufficient involvement with British territories in any given instance was a technical obstacle to be overcome in the courts. With this imperative in mind, it is obvious that the outer Seychelles fitted the bill admirably.

Again, the case of *Le Succès* is highly suggestive. Despite the protests of the slavers themselves, it was decided that the case could be heard in the British Vice Admiralty Court on the basis of their having been found close to the outer Seychelles islands and the reasonable suspicion that they had used these islands at least for watering, as well as the fact that their financiers had raised the possibility of importing the cargo

of slaves to Mauritius.⁵² A running theme in the prosecution, despite the official correspondence indicating that the intent was always to deliver slaves to Bourbon, was that the ship appeared to be intent on introducing slaves to Mauritius, via depots on its dependencies. It was heard that Lieutenant Grenville of the *Menai* considered ‘that the course she was steering was much too far to the eastward for a direct course to Bourbon, as it would have taken her direct for the island of Rodrigues ; and therefore considers she was not intended for a French colony.’⁵³ Farquhar was, at this time, still maintaining to London at least, if not the authorities in India he sought assistance from,⁵⁴ that Mauritius did not have a slaving problem. It was a further convenience therefore to highlight that he and the naval squadron had expended all their efforts to capture slavers and only found French ones operating in British territories. In the case of *le Succès*, then, Farquhar managed to secure a much needed judicial victory – not on his seemingly non-existent Mauritian slavers, but on those bound for Bourbon – by casting the spotlight on the outer Seychelles.

To foreground the political advantages to be gained from an emphasis on slave depots in the outer Seychelles is not to argue that these depots – whose existence appears not to be borne out by the record – were a wilful and politically-motivated fabrication by Farquhar upon his return to Mauritius. While Barker suggests that Farquhar intentionally misled Moresby in a number of instances regarding the most important locations in which to search for Mauritian-bound slavers,⁵⁵ from his position, it was possible to believe that such depots existed or were being planned, and given the obscurity of the trade and related operations in the outer Seychelles, the extent to which it might have been occurring was unknowable. The vigour with which this possible avenue was pursued on the basis of such little evidence in the early 1820s, however, was most likely a direct effect of the advantages it offered to Farquhar’s government.

52 African Institution, *Sixteenth report of the directors of the African Institution: read at the annual general meeting, held on the 10th day of May, 1822* (London, 1822) Appendix K, 1, Statement of the Judge of the Instance Court of Vice Admiralty at the Mauritius, William Telfair, 8 May 1821, pp. 134-137.

53 *Ibid.*, 2, Deposition of Lieutenant Greville, of his Majesty’s Ship *Menai*, in the Instance Court of Vice-Admiralty, at the Island of Mauritius, pp. 137-139.

54 Barker, *Slavery and Antislavery*, p. 32.

Despite not finding evidence of large depots of Mauritius-bound slaves in the outer Seychelles, Moresby and his team were to find in these islands a traceable link to the true routes that brought slaves to Mauritius. They were also to discover that the lines between French use of the outer islands as provisioning or watering spots and the more complicated, indirect trade to Mauritius could at times be blurred, indicating the ongoing economic and social connections between Mauritius and Bourbon almost ten years after their political split.

While Bourbon-bound ships saw the Amirantes as provisioning stations, they were known at times to take advantage of the opportunity to sell part of their slave cargos to Seychellois slave owners and traders operating on these same outer islands. The principal islands of the Amirantes – Poivre, Desroches, D'Arros and St Joseph – all housed transitory populations of slaves sent from Mahé to fish or grow crops. The islands owned by Madge – Desroches and Poivre – grew mostly cotton, while those owned by private individuals grew food crops. These supplemented Mahé's food stores, but also attracted slavers seeking provisions. One example of a provisioning French slaver selling slaves to Seychellois operators occurred in 1823, when the *Hirondelle*, which had been damaged on the shoals near Alphonse, headed to D'Arros for assistance.⁵⁶ There, the ship spent 28 days being repaired and, according to Moorsom, sold a portion of the slaves whom it was carrying to Bourbon. This group of slaves were taken by their new Seychellois owner to Mahé. It was from here that they would either be sent for transfer after a period of acclimatisation or be expected to replace those who were being sent to Mauritius, whether legitimately or illegally.

The links between the Amirantes and Mahé and the other inner islands of the Seychelles were to focus the attention of naval squadrons on the inner islands, revealing far more about how slaves actually arrived in Mauritius. What Moresby and his men found when they arrived at the inner islands was an active traffic in slaves being imported, not immediately to Mahé, but to the surrounding inner islands

⁵⁶ Parliamentary Papers 1825 XXVII, 12, Secretary Canning to Sir Edward Thornton, Foreign Office, 28 May 1824, No.37, Enclosure C, Report of Lieut. Maynard, respecting Slave Vessels, p. 45.

of Praslin, La Digue and Silhouette. It was also clear that these shipments were coming via the outer islands. When the *Delight*, commanded by Lieutenant Hay, landed at Mahé in June of 1821, Mrs Madge had apparently joked that Hay had arrived just three hours too late to witness the *Coureur des Seychelles* unloading a large cargo of slaves on La Digue. Her husband, embarrassed, told her to hold her tongue and not speak of matters that she did not understand.⁵⁷ Details of this landing, and other noted ones – such as that of the *Coureur des Seychelles* again landing Mozambican slaves on Silhouette in 1823,⁵⁸ and two cargoes of Malagasy slaves, one from eastern and one from western Madagascar, being landed on Praslin in the same year⁵⁹ – remain absent from archival records. The practical transactions and movements preceding these landings thus remain largely a matter for speculation. What is clear is that the plethora of islands that surrounded Mahé in layers of varying distance, themselves sometimes inhabited and attracting legitimate traffic to and from the inner islands, would certainly have enabled slavers to creep closer to their ultimate destination and acquire information on the presence of anti-slaving cruisers, Madge or his gendarmes. Moresby noted that while he was in Mahé in July 1821, he learned that one such slaver had been hovering a few days in the Amirantes, awaiting his departure, before giving up and eventually changing course for Bourbon.⁶⁰

Thus, in the early 1820s, while continuing to overestimate the role of the outer Seychelles in the direct trade to Mauritius or Bourbon, British authorities were forming a clearer understanding of the fact that transfers of registered Seychellois slaves to Mauritius accounted for the bulk of slave imports for sale there, and that such transfers did not amount to the simple movement of excess slaves, but rather to the last leg of a still ongoing slave trade which responded to enduring Mauritian and Seychellois demands. Writing from Mauritius in 1823, Moorsom pointed out that ‘slaves so continually transferred hither from Seychelles, have been carried thither by French Vessels [...] or, what amounts to the same thing, that the new Slaves

57 Parliamentary Papers 1826-1827 VI, 90, Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee, Mauritius Slave Trade. Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee, 13 May 1826, pp. 52, 68.

58 UKNA CO 172/38 Byam, Three Years in Administration, 1 September 1823, p. 279.

59 Ibid.

60 Parliamentary Papers 1827-1827 VI, 90, Mauritius Slave Trade. Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee, 13 May 1826, p. 68.

remain at Seychelles while the old are sent hither'.⁶¹ Moorsom was of the opinion that the slave trade into the Seychelles to feed the transfer system was more the work of Bourbonnais ships, such as the *Hirondelle*, calling at the Amirantes than the result of the exertions of Mauritian and Seychellois slavers. In fact, the evidence concerning the illegal trade contains more instances of slaves being carried into the Seychelles by the Seychellois themselves and, to a lesser extent, Mauritians, although these were all large shipments of slaves being deposited on the inner islands, a practice more likely to be detected and recorded.

While it must be admitted that the records pertaining to the Seychellois slave trade in the 1820s are far too sparse to offer a full picture of how slaves were imported, those that do exist concern primarily shipments of slaves being carried to the inner islands from East Africa or Madagascar by the same ships – as opposed to groups of slaves being picked up on the Amirantes islands. The following section will address these recorded instances and explore what is known of the modalities through which slaves were introduced to the Seychelles for acclimatisation or for replacing transferred slaves.

Methods of Supplying the Seychelles and Methods of Acclimatisation

Throughout the period of legal slave trading, Seychellois links with East Africa had remained strong, with captains like Dupont leading the way with his *Instruction du plan de la côte d'Afrique* (see introduction p.14, and chapter 3, p. 100), which had offered vital information on the logistics of slaving between Ibo and Zanzibar.⁶² These links with East Africa remained intact after Farquhar's measures began to deter Mauritian slavers from importing large shipments of east Africans and Malagasy slaves. Unlike their Mauritian counterparts, Seychellois traders were able to continue applying their acquired knowledge to the task of importing slaves into their own islands. One case – uncovered some years later, following an investigation into the identities of slaves transferred to Mauritius – revealed that an unspecified

61 Parliamentary Papers 1825 XXVII, 12, Canning to Thornton, 28 May 1824, No. 37, Enclosure B. Moorsom to Cole 17 November 1823, p. 45.

62 SNA, A11, Constant Dupont, *Instruction du plan de la côte d'Afrique*, 1811.

number of slaves had been bought in Mozambique by Pierre Langlois and carried to Silhouette on the *Coureur des Seychelles* in May of 1823.⁶³ Later in the same year, Dupont himself was rumored to have recently introduced 200 slaves from the coast of Africa to the Seychelles.⁶⁴

Besides purchasing slaves from Bourbon-bound slavers in the Amirantes, as in the case of the *Hirondelle*, and carrying out their own voyages to East Africa, Seychellois dealers in the 1820s also obtained slaves for Mauritius through other means. In this regard, Madagascar appears to have become an important source of slaves for the Seychellois. It has already been noted (see above, p. 153) that at least two shipments of Malagasy slaves had been delivered directly to the Seychelles in 1823,⁶⁵ both by a Mauritian captain, Dodero, but there also existed a perhaps more common trend of Mauritian slavers delivering Malagasy captives up to the outer Seychelles.- Writing in 1822, Edward Byam, Chief of Police at Mauritius, reported that several ships had been suspiciously absent from Port Louis for long periods of time – much longer than seemed warranted by the relatively straightforward voyages for goods to Madagascar and the outer Seychelles islands that they declared they would undertake.⁶⁶ In 1822, the *Couronne* and the *Clelie* spent 116 and 111 days, respectively, ostensibly voyaging to Madagascar for common trade goods. According to Byam, both journeys could have been completed in about a quarter of the time. Likewise, Pouspenadin, a man he knew as a ‘Malabar’, spent two months trading between the Seychelles and Madagascar and then returned to Mauritius with four slaves already attached to owners there. The ship under his command, the *Deux Amis*, was one of the many which, according to Byam, participated in a rather suspicious traffic between Madagascar and the outer Seychelles. The persons and ships involved were listed by the Chief of Police: almost all of them had a known history of slave trading. Aside from bad reputations and voyages lasting much longer than necessary, the cargoes unloaded from these ships also hinted at the real nature of their operations. In 1822, having closely watched 87 of these ships trading with

63 UKNA CO167/100, Cole to Hukisson, 16 May 1828, Enclosure 14, Statements by Augustine Ribaud and Roquelaure Louis, Port Louis, 6 June 1827.

64 UKNA CO 172/38 Edward Byam, Three Years in Administration, 1 September 1823, p. 279.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid, pp. 257-259.

both Madagascar and the outer Seychelles for a period of nine months, Byam noted that only 29 brought back rice or cattle – standard commodities of Madagascar – while the rest appeared to carry goods hailing from the outer islands of the Seychelles, indicating their most probable last ports of call before returning to Port Louis. These goods consisted of salt fish and turtle meat, coconuts, coconut oil or ballast made from coconut, all items which could be purchased from the transitory populations of Seychellois slaves who were stationed on the estates of the outer islands in the 1820s. None of these were particularly profitable imports. But it was the six ships which carried only cheap ballast or raw coconuts after being at sea for between three and six months that made it clear to Byam that their earnings were coming from another source, since the expense of the voyages clearly outweighed any potential income to be derived from these products.

If – as it appears very probable – these ships were indeed depositing Malagasy slaves in the Seychelles, then the question must be asked of whether such operations were taking place in the inner or outer islands. There are no complete shipping records listing vessels that arrived in, and left, Mahé in the 1810s or 1820s, and so there is no clear way of establishing whether these Port Louis-based slavers avoided the inner islands of the Seychelles, or, if not, whether they went directly to the inner islands or rather utilised the Amirantes and other outer islands as a stepping stone for importation there. The fact that the names of these suspicious vessels do not figure in Seychellois records or in reports sent from those islands is not particularly indicative, given the dearth of available information. Other fragments of evidence are more useful in suggesting that these ships did not actually visit the inner Seychelles. The *Couronne* and the *Clelie*, in particular, are noted to have periodically called at Port Louis for refurbishments and repairs between their long voyages.⁶⁷ This is especially significant, since such work could have been easily carried out at Mahé or Praslin, islands which – as we know – boasted shipbuilding, repair and servicing industries.

The fact that these ships were involved in purchasing slaves directly from Madagascar before arriving at the outer islands was clear to Byam. In his view, the ships first called at Bourbon, where they prepared themselves for trading at

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 258.

Madagascar by exchanging European manufactures for metallic money at a rate which only just prevented a loss. The coins, more abundant in Bourbon than in Mauritius (where paper money was becoming popular), were required to buy slaves and other goods in Madagascar, but not necessarily the salt fish or coconut of the outer Seychelles with which the ships often returned to Mauritius. In Byam's view, these known Mauritian slavers were not involved in the taking of slaves to Mahé and/or their transfer to Mauritius. Rather, they sold the slaves in the outer islands to Seychellois traffickers whose job it was to ship them to the inner islands for acclimatisation.⁶⁸

What little is known about the outer Seychelles in the 1820s reveals that these islands could easily be used for the buying and selling of slaves and for making arrangements for their transportation to the inner islands for the purpose of acclimatisation. Upon being questioned about his efforts to deter the trade, Knowles, the Registrar of Slaves in the Seychelles in 1821–1826, admitted that he never once visited any of the outer islands, and that the returns of slaves occupied there were submitted by the proprietors of land on these islands who mostly resided in Mahé.⁶⁹ In essence, what Knowles admitted was that there were no checks to ensure that slaves on these islands were the same as those previously listed, as opposed to new ones, and that the word of the owners was being taken at face value. Knowles did not even know if these proprietors ever visited the islands or if they employed agents to do so. The owner of D'Arros, Robert Young, resided in Mahé but made regular visits to his plantation on the more distant island and brought his own slaves back and forth without checks.⁷⁰ These circumstances clearly opened up a world of opportunity for slavers using the islands, though the specific ways in which slavers took advantage of these opportunities remain difficult to ascertain.

68 Possible exceptions were the *Union* and *Marthe*, which were suspected by Byam of participating in both the transportation of slaves to the Seychelles and the transfer of slaves from the Seychelles to Mauritius. UKNA CO172/38 Byam, *Three Years in Administration*, pp. 261-262.

69 UKNA CO 167/139, Knowles Examined, 1826.

70 Parliamentary Papers 1826 XXVII, 295, Darling to Bathurst, 5 May 1819, No. 20, Enclosure 1, Madge to Chief Secretary of Government, 24 June 1819, p. 104.

Evidence is to be found, however, that D'Arros, in particular, was an important location for relaying slaves into Mahé. The best description of activity surrounding the island comes, as is often the case for the Seychelles, from a report concerning an unusual event, in this case, an act of piracy committed by slavers in 1819.⁷¹ The ship concerned, *La Favorite*, was itself not destined for the Seychelles, but rather for Bourbon, and it was probably one of those slave ships which used the Amirantes for provisioning. *La Favorite* was captured by a French naval vessel. The narrative of what occurred once *La Favorite* reached D'Arros on its escorted journey back to Bourbon permits us to draw some comparatively solid inferences about the regularity with which slavers may have called at the Amirantes and Aldabra, the relationships they may have had with proprietors and slaves on the islands and the kinds of opportunities available to them there.

In March of 1819, Governor Mylius of Bourbon wrote to General Darling, informing him that a ship which appeared to be a stolen Seychellois vessel had been wrecked on the Bourbon shore, near St Gilles, by a rabble of incompetent sailors acting without an experienced captain or pilot. Ninety slaves had been introduced into the island from the vessel, while the Mauritians responsible had escaped with them into Bourbon.⁷² Enclosed was a copy of his strongly worded proclamation to the inhabitants of Bourbon, warning them against purchasing these slaves and giving a brief, but emotive, account of the circumstances under which the ship had arrived. According to the intelligence available to Mylius, the two Mauritian culprits had not only stolen the vessel in which they had arrived and wrecked, but left its owner and the French naval officer who had been put in charge of bringing them to justice 'abandoned on a rock [...] without assistance or any means of existence!'⁷³ Darling immediately wrote to Madge demanding an explanation and Madge was thus forced to document the whole episode.

71 Parliamentary Papers 1826 XXVII, 295, Darling to Bathurst, 5 May 1819, No. 20, Enclosures 1-5, 104-111.

72 Parliamentary Papers 1826 XXVII, 295, Darling to Bathurst, 5 May 1819, No. 20, Enclosure 1, Mylius to Darling, 4 April 1819, p. 76.

73 Parliamentary Papers 1826, XXVII, 295, Darling to Bathurst, 5 May 1819 No 20, Enclosure 3, Mylius, Proclamation à Habitants de Bourbon, 31 March 1819, p. 77.

According to the statements of several witnesses and victims of the crime, gathered by Madge and forwarded to Darling, *La Favorite* had been seized at sea by Captain Frappas of *Le Lys* in December 1818. Having removed the commander and first sailors of *La Favorite*, Frappas put an officer of *Le Lys*, Monsieur Lelieur, on board the capture slaver to convey it with its crew and slaves to Bourbon, with instructions to stop for water at the first opportunity. This happened to be the island of D'Arros. Attesting to the means of survival available to cargoes of slaves brought to the Amirantes for water or awaiting news on the state of the inner islands prior to entry there, the crew and slaves of *La Favorite* were ordered to dig wells separate to those on the Young habitation. After a few days, just before *La Favorite* was ready to sail, the slavers, led by Messieurs Barnet, Pradel and a deserter from *Le Lys*, Prejeau, regained control of *La Favorite* and its cargo of slaves and attempted to make a quick escape, leaving Lelieur on the island. Being poor sailors they struck a reef on their exit, destroying the ship. Miraculously, they managed to get themselves and all of the slaves back to D'Arros unharmed.

The pirates then spent a month on D'Arros, keeping Lelieur a prisoner and subsisting on food from the Young estate, which they had now also taken over. Early in February 1819, Mr. Young himself, who owned both D'Arros and neighboring St Joseph, arrived for a routine visit in his ship, *L'Esperance*, to find the wrecked *La Favorite* on the reef. Mr. Pradel came to the ship in a boat to explain that they had been wrecked. Here some interesting discrepancies in the statements of the Seychellois seamen come to light. Mr. Benioton, the second officer of *L'Esperance*, casually stated that Pradel told them there and then that he had been employed on the slaver *La Favorite* and that they had been seized by *Le Lys* and ordered to D'Arros for water. On the other hand, Young, the owner of the islands, claimed that it was not until the next day, when he went ashore, that he discovered that *La Favorite* was a seized slaver. Upon learning this, he explained, he confronted the slavers, who apprehended him and made him a prisoner, keeping him isolated from Lelieur. The next day, a party of eight of *La Favorite*'s slavers, armed with muskets and cutlasses, took possession of *L'Esperance*, bringing Benioton and the rest of the Seychellois crew on shore. Three days were spent provisioning the ship with the water and stores it needed to convey its human cargo to Bourbon, a task which Young's own slaves on D'Arros were compelled to carry out and one which was undoubtedly familiar to

them. Then the slavers left, taking with them all of the surviving slaves from their original cargo, as well as Prejeau, the deserter of *Le Lys*. Lelieur, Young and their crewmen, as well as Young's slaves from his estate, were left to watch *L'Esperence* sail past the wreck of *La Favorite* and disappear to the south. Lelieur noted in his statement that the slavers were able to gain some unspecified information from Young which led them to believe that sailing direct in a southerly direction to Bourbon at this time would be dangerous; he therefore believed that, on the basis of this, they were headed first to Madagascar.

It was not until the eighteenth of March that a ship arrived to the rescue of Lelieur, Young and company. This was the known slaver *Courrier des Seychelles*, captained by Langlois, who had been asked to call at D'Arros by Mr. Young's worried family members. Desperate to leave the island, Lelieur, one of his officers and the boatswain of *La Favorite* left aboard the *Courrier des Seychelles* in the direction of Aldabra. In his account, Lelieur glossed over what happened next, but he noted that, at Aldabra, they met a Monsieur Descouble, commanding a ship apparently owned by Monvoisin, to whom Langlois gave a boat and arms. After their shared ordeal, Lelieur now allowed the boatswain of *La Favorite* to leave with Descouble. Lelieur, who of course owed his life to these men, gives no indication of what either Descouble's ship or the *Courrier des Seychelles* were actually doing at Aldabra. From Aldabra, Lelieur proceeded to Mahé, where he learnt that Frappas and *Le Lys* had already called there with the captured captain and the first officer of *La Favorite*, who had both escaped with the assistance of some Seychellois inhabitants. Young and his crew had also already arrived after being picked up by the slave trader Tirant on 1 April.⁷⁴

The reason that this complex case has been examined in detail is that it offers glimpses into some of the factors that enabled slavers operating in and around the Amirantes islands to conduct their trade. The case shows that on D'Arros, and perhaps on other inhabited outer islands too, there were means of sourcing enough water and provisions to feed more than 100 slaves for a month and to enable the slaver that carried them to embark on the journey to Bourbon or, at least,

74 Parliamentary Papers 1826 XXVII, 295, Darling to Bathurst, 5 May 1819, No. 20, Enclosures 1-5, 104-111.

Madagascar. Local slaves were able to assist in the processes of provisioning and preparing the ship for embarkation. The fact that the slavers were able to gain significant information from Young about the best course to take from the island speaks to one of the principal benefits of the Amirantes when being used as a provisioning point and strengthens Moresby's claim that ships were able to wait at these islands to hear that it was safe to proceed to Mahé. In itself, this may have been a sufficiently enticing reason for slavers to call at the closer Amirantes, like St Joseph and D'Arros, which were only two or three days sail away from Mahé. The openness with which Pradel admitted his occupation to Benoiton is not especially surprising, given that all the three vessels and captains encountered by Young and Lelieur in the Amirantes and Aldabra archipelagos were known slavers. Langlois and Tirant had brought slaves to Mahé and Mauritius in the years of French rule; in later years, both would be refused entry into Mauritius on account of suspicious slaves being transferred. Descouble, whom Lelieur ran into at Aldabra and with whom the last remaining slaver, the boatswain of *La Favorite*, finally escaped, was no exception. The ship he commanded at Aldabra was the *Constance* – which, contrary to what the authorities surmised, was in fact only managed by Monvoisin, but owned by a Seychellois widow, Madame La Vene. Five months after the events, the ship, still commanded by Descoubles, would be captured surreptitiously importing slaves into Mauritius, admitting to his capturers, after ten long hours, that there were two new African slaves stuffed into caskets beneath a pile of sails on board the ship that had been taken from him.⁷⁵

The fact that between December 1818, when he took part in the seizure of *La Favorite*, and his deliverance to Mahé in April 1819, Lelieur only encountered known Seychellois slavers passing through these archipelagos does indicate that traffic in these areas was likely to have been dominated by a slave trade conducted in large part by such Seychellois as were bringing slaves to the inner islands. Young's produce on D'Arros and the tortoises of Aldabra provided cover for ships travelling to these locations. While these islands could support temporary camps of slaves destined for any part of the Mascarenes, the aims of the Seychellois traders interested in providing their own islands or Mauritius with acclimatised slaves, however, was

75 Parliamentary Papers 1826 XXVII, 295, Darling to Bathurst, 17 August 1819, No. 20, p.111.

to bring these captives to the inner islands. Quite tellingly, after his death, Robert Young himself was named by one informant to the Commissioners of Eastern Inquiry in 1827 as having been directly involved in regularly landing new slaves in Mahé while he owned D'Arros.⁷⁶

The best indication that processes of acclimatisation were generally confined to the inner islands (with the possible exception of Young's estate on D'Arros) is provided by the investigation into the case of Pierre Langlois's introduction of slaves on the *Courrier des Seychelles* in May of 1823.⁷⁷ In the pursuit of evidence against slavers, slaves themselves were very occasionally consulted. Suspicions arising from the seizure of three Seychellois slaves who did not match their descriptions after being transferred to Mauritius resulted in an opportunity for two of them, who had been given the names of Augustine Ribaud and Roquelaure Louis, to provide information on how they had arrived in the inner Seychelles before being shipped Mauritius. It is unclear why these two slaves were chosen – out of the 79 Seychellois slaves who had been rejected by Mauritian customs up until 1826 – to give statements to the court of Vice Admiralty, instead of being simply returned to the Seychelles as their peers were. Nevertheless their statements are especially important, since they are one of the handfuls of slave testimonies available for the study of the Seychelles' slave trade.

The two slaves apparently stated that they had been selected from a group of young males at Mozambique and formed part a large, but unspecified, number of slaves who had been sold by Portuguese merchants to Langlois and then taken aboard the *Courrier des Seychelles*. The journey they undertook is not described in the summary of the two slaves' accounts, which also make no mention of whether they stopped en route. When they were eventually landed on Silhouette – where Langlois and other known slaving families, such as the Hodouls and Savys, owned land – the slave who would be given the false identity of Roquelaure Louis spent only one night on the island, before being smuggled into Mahé the next day and kept at the house of Madame Langlois, Pierre's mother. After a few days there, he was taken to the Langlois family estate in the south of the island. Perhaps the slaves who were to

⁷⁶ Johnstone, *Reveil Seychellois*, p. 39.

⁷⁷ UKNA CO 167/100, Cole to Hukisson, 16 May 1828.

be kept with the family, at least for a while, warranted a less strict surveillance than those who were earmarked for quick sale. As for the slave who would be dressed up as Augustine Ribaud, he was kept on Silhouette in the Tirant plantation. Tirant and his sons were still prolific slavers at the time: in 1826, one of them would be caught serving as an officer aboard the *Chicken*, which ferried ‘Malay’ slaves from Southeast Asia to Mauritius.⁷⁸ On the Tirant plantation, Ribaud spent several months learning to speak Creole and how to work the fields to Tirant’s own benefit. He apparently remembered the passing of the New Year, which indicates that he spent at least seven months on Silhouette before being smuggled by Hodoul to a secret location in the woods of Mahé. Here, the fully acclimatised slave waited a few more days before being sold to none other than Quinssy. Later, Roquelaure and Augustine were both sold to separate owners but transferred together to Mauritius.⁷⁹

This example suggests that groups of slavers worked together to acclimatise slaves, scattering them around their own estates on the islands surrounding Mahé before smuggling them to Mahé itself to find buyers. By the time Quinssy purchased his slave from Hodoul, Roquelaure was fully acclimatised, fit for both personal use or for transfer to Mauritius. The fact that the two slaves in the case under discussion spent three years in the Seychelles – from 1823 to 1826, the year when they were transferred to Mauritius – suggests that slaves were not necessarily purchased by Seychellois dealers for immediate transfer to Mauritius and that, on the contrary, they could be put to work for long periods of time before being transferred. It remains to be discovered whether slaves were sold with existing 1815 papers sourced by Hodoul, Tirant and the likes, or whether it was the responsibility of the buyer to match them with their own registered slaves, should they choose to transfer them. In this particular case, it could well be that Quinssy already held papers for an Augustine Ribaud since part of the suspicion surrounding the case was that the *juge*

78 Parliamentary Papers 1829 XXV, 292, Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry upon the Slave Trade at Mauritius, p. 33.

79 After hearing these brief statements, the court decided it could not continue with the prosecution against the owners who had transferred the slaves, Mademoiselle Valley and Monsieur Marcy. While courts did sometimes permit evidence from slaves to be heard, too much rested on their word in this case, and since it was deemed that slaves could not possibly understand the nature of an oath, the case was dismissed. UKNA CO 167/100, Cole to Hukisson, 16 May 1828, Enclosure 14 Statements by Augustine Ribaud and Roquelaure Louis, Port Louis, 6 June 1827.

de paix had himself already transferred a slave to Mauritius by that name a few years earlier.⁸⁰

Many questions remain surrounding the various processes and steps through which slaves were transmitted through the Seychelles to Mauritius and Bourbon. If slaves were purchased in the Amirantes by Seychellois dealers – either from Mauritian traders who delivered entire shiploads of Malagasy captives, or from Bourbon-bound slavers who parted with small numbers of their human cargoes while they provisioned – then how were these slaves being paid for? It is also unknown whether slaves were sold to land-owners on the Amirantes, such as Young, or whether they waited on these islands for dealers from the inner islands to arrive. The other modes of trafficking slaves to the inner islands leave as many gaps in our understanding of their operations. How common was it for Bourbon-bound slavers to trade some their slaves to the Amirantes, as *L’Hirondelle* did? Also, how did the volume of the mostly east African slaves brought by Seychellois traders compare with the quantities of slaves delivered to the Amirantes by Mauritian slavers?

What is clear, though, is that, in the 1820s, when the Seychelles became the most significant provider of slaves for the illegal trade to Mauritius based on the transfer system, at least three separate networks of trade brought slaves to the outer islands – particularly the closer Amirantes, like D’Arros – and that, from such outer islands, slaves were conveyed, primarily by Seychellois traders, to the inner islands. These three networks consisted of (a) voyages made by the Seychellois to East Africa, often via the Amirantes and Aldabra, (b) the small numbers of slaves that could be sold by Bourbonnais traders and (c) the introduction of slaves, particularly those of Malagasy origin, but undoubtedly east Africans as well, to the Amirantes by Mauritian traders. Some of these, like Dodero, showed that Mauritians could also trade directly to the inner islands. It is also clear that, from the outer islands, mainly Seychellois traders brought slaves to the inner islands surrounding Mahé, where acclimatisation most frequently took place. From here they smuggled their captives in small quantities to Mahé, where they made quick sales of slaves who could either

80 Parliamentary Papers 1826 XXVII, 205, No.1 Returns Relating to the No. of Slaves shipped from the Seychelles Islands - continued, p. 22.

be put to work on Seychellois estates, replacing those who had been sent to Mauritius, or, in many cases, be dispatched to Mauritius themselves.

The second half of the 1820s witnessed the demise of the slave trade to Mauritius. This was driven in no small part by the Commission of Eastern Inquiry, appointed in October 1826 to investigate the suspected complacency of Mauritian authorities towards the slave trade. One of the results of the pressure applied by this body was an attack on the Seychelles' transfer trade. Perhaps in preparation for the Inquiry, Madge was replaced by his sub-Agent, George Harrison, in August, officially on account of his having purchased slaves from the *Marie Louise*.⁸¹ By December, the Seychelles had received a notice from Mauritius instructing that all movements of slaves between the Seychelles islands themselves were to cease.⁸² If proprietors wished to transfer slaves between the internal islands, they should now seek permission from the Governor of Mauritius. This was ignored, but it did set the tone for the coming measures that would spell the end of the transfer system entirely. Harrison was stripped of his powers to grant licences for the movement of slaves soon afterwards.⁸³ In March 1827, it was ruled that only personal domestic slaves could accompany individuals travelling from the Seychelles to Mauritius. Harrison was instructed to remove licences from anyone who attempted to sell domestic slaves in Mauritius, effectively reducing the transfer trade to naught.⁸⁴ By this point, slaves were rarely seen to enter Mauritius at all, as the authorities on the island began to respond to the Commission's initiatives.

The Amirantes continued to be used as provisioning points by Bourbon-bound slavers, as illustrated by a report indicating that the *Victor* had done just that in the summer of 1828. By this point, however, being under serious scrutiny, Mr Lefevre – the inheritor of Young's estate on D'Arros – had to claim that he had been forced to

81 SNA B2/26 Blane to Harrison, 8 August 1826.

82 SNA B2/42 Blane to Harrison, 5 December 1826.

83 SNA B2/41 Blane to Madge, 5 December 1826.

84 SNA B3/16 Telfair to Cardew, 29 March 1827.

cooperate for the four days that the slaver had remained on the island.⁸⁵ A protector of slaves, James Dowland, was appointed to establish a modicum of law and order in the Amirantes in 1829. While he remained without the resources to improve the situation for slaves consigned to the Amirantes and was himself desperate to be spared the misery of these isolated outposts and return to Mahé, his presence undoubtedly deterred slavers from operating here.⁸⁶ Unknown – though presumably decreasing – numbers of slaves passed through the outer Seychelles until the early 1830s, when the slave trade to Bourbon, too, began to contract as a result of effective abolitionist measures finally beginning to take effect there.

The most significant contribution to the illegal slave trade of the Mascarenes on the part of Seychellois dealers is undoubtedly to be found in the transfer loophole. The 3,246 slaves who are recorded as having been transferred from the Seychelles to Mauritius fall far short of the actual number of slaves who were traded to, through and from the Seychelles throughout the period of illegal trading. Although the ultimate numbers and, more importantly, the personal stories of the new slaves who were dragged past Mauritian customs officials under false names and identities are destined to remain shrouded in mystery, it must be recognised that the Seychellois factor significantly shaped the workings of the illegal slave trade to the Mascarenes, from its criminalisation in 1810 to its demise in the late 1820s-early 1830s.

Moreover, from c. 1820, the Seychelles can be rightly regarded as the centre of a vast and multi-directional network involving slavers from across the entire breadth of the Mascarenes, as well as areas of slave supply in both East Africa and Madagascar. Participants in the network utilised the distinctive features of the inner and outer Seychelles to play a vital role in the illegal slave trade to the British and French Mascarenes. Insofar as the former are concerned, the Seychellois transfer system alone permitted the introduction of perhaps one third of all of the slaves illegally imported into Mauritius during the repressive 1820s.

85 SNA B4/57 Cole to Harrison, 6 August 1828.

86 SNA B5/38 Dowland to Cole, 11 June 1829.

Epilogue: The Seychelles and the Suppression of the East African Slave Trade

The Seychelles' final engagement with slave trading in the Indian Ocean was their use by the British Navy as a resettlement location for so-called 'Liberated Africans' during its anti-slave trading campaigns in the second half of the nineteenth century. The islands absorbed over 2,500 liberated slaves into an apprenticeship scheme similar to the one to which the archipelago's own slaves had been subject for four years after emancipation in 1835. The significance of the Seychelles in the western Indian Ocean's anti-slaving experience of the 1860s extended beyond the islands' purely logistical role; indeed, events there can be shown to have informed British policy on the ultimate fate of liberated Africans throughout the remainder of the campaign, well into the 1880s. Experiences in the Seychelles made it clear that simply freeing liberated Africans into a Christian society was insufficient to promote the values and meet the expectations of the campaign. It was the problems that came to the fore in the Seychelles that convinced British authorities that the east African coast required specific, missionary-run settlements for liberated slaves which would replicate the role played by Freetown, in Sierra Leone, in the absorption and Christianisation of liberated slaves during the Atlantic anti-slaving campaign.¹

Having made considerable progress in wiping out slave trading to Mauritius and its other colonies, as well as those of other European countries throughout the Atlantic during the first half of the nineteenth century, Britain sought to attack slave trading beyond its European manifestations. The northward traffic of east African slaves from the Omani-ruled Swahili coast, principally Zanzibar, to the Arabian markets became a focus of British anti-slaving effort from c. 1860. During the two decades that preceded this direct naval intervention, it was consistently estimated by British officials in Zanzibar that between 15,000 and 20,000 slaves per year were introduced to that island and that, of these, about 10,000 were exported.² Historical estimates demonstrate that the majority of the slaves exported from Zanzibar and Kilwa were

1 For freed slave settlements in Sierra Leone, see Padraic X. Scanlan, 'The Colonial Rebirth of British Anti-Slavery: The Liberated African Villages of Sierra Leone, 1815–1824', *The American Historical Review*, 121, 4 (2016), pp. 1085–1113.

2 Beachey, *The Slave Trade of Eastern Africa*, p. 48.

destined for other locations on the African coast. These exports have been estimated at 7,400 and 4,000 slaves per annum, respectively, during the latter half of the nineteenth century.³ The number of slaves being exported to Arabia and the Persian Gulf, which would become the central concern of the anti-slaving squadrons that took liberated slaves to the Seychelles, numbered by comparison about 4,000 per year.⁴ About 70-80% of this traffic went to Muscat or Sur, while roughly 20% was destined for other ports on the Red Sea and Hadhramaut coasts.⁵

The driving factors behind Britain's interference in what they termed the 'Arab trade' have attracted much debate.⁶ While this debate falls outside the scope of this dissertation, there is no doubt that the anti-slavery campaign owed much to both a perceived sense of humanitarian duty and an imperial agenda that sought to expand British politico-economic influence. Since the Moorsby treaty of 1822, the sultanate of Oman had agreed to accommodate a resident British official to ensure the treaty's prohibition of selling slaves to Europeans was upheld. In 1841, however, increasing ambition in the region resulted in a permanent post being created for a British consul. The position was taken up by Colonel Atkins Hamerton, who was to monitor French activity on the island, as well as the slave trade generally, and to seek to strengthen the British alliance with the Omanis.⁷ As an extension to Moorsby's

3 Austen 'The 19th Century Islamic Slave Trade from East Africa', pp. 28-29. Martin and Ryan estimate that 4,000 slaves per year were exported north from East Africa during the 1840s, rising to over 6,000 after 1850. See E.B. Martin and T.C.I. Ryan, 'A Quantitative Assessment of the Arab Slave Trade'. Sheriff, however, argues that these figures are themselves inflated due to their including exaggerated British reports; see *Slaves, Spices and Ivory*, pp. 40-41.

4 Austen 'The 19th Century Islamic Slave Trade', p. 29.

5 J.B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1889* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 414-417.

6 For example Coupland's early work attributes anti-slaving efforts in the Indian Ocean to humanitarianism (R. Coupland, *East Africa and its Invaders* [Oxford, 1938] and *The British Anti-Slavery Movement* [Oxford, 1933]), while Moses Nwulia maintains that humanitarianism was a tool to mask self-interest; see *Britain and Slavery in East Africa* (Washington, 1975). In more recent work Lindsay Doultou considers that a perceived national identity based on a sense of duty to Christianise and 'civilise' was prominent in Britain during the second half of the nineteenth century and that this was inseparable from imperial objectives; see "'The Flag That Sets us Free": Anti-slavery, Africans and the Royal Navy in the Western Indian Ocean' in R. Harms, B.K. Freamon and D.W. Blight (eds), *Indian Ocean Slavery in the Age of Abolition* (London and New Haven, 2013).

7 Christopher Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade* (London and New York, 2012), p. 232.

treaty, Hamerton began negotiating his own treaty with Sultan Said. The Sultan had relocated to Zanzibar in 1832, making it the centre of the Omani Empire and taking advantage of its growing clove plantation sector, which itself consumed tens of thousands of slaves annually. The slave trade north, however, was still an integral part of Zanzibar's economic structure. Reluctantly, and with all his own additional terms rejected, Sultan Said buckled under British pressure and agreed to accept a meagre £2,000 a year to abolish the slave trade out of Africa.⁸ Finalised in 1847, the Hamerton treaty saw the prohibition of any slave trading outside of the Omani territories in East Africa. It was on the basis of this treaty that the British navy was now legally able to seize dhows trafficking slaves from East Africa to the Persian Gulf. Significant naval intervention in this trade, however, did not materialise for almost a decade.

After the illegal trade to the Mascarenes had been effectively brought to a halt in the 1830s, anti-slaving activity in the Indian Ocean during the 1840s and 1850s was primarily focused on the exportation of slaves from Portuguese territories in Mozambique, which supplied Brazil and Cuba after Portugal's ban of 1836.⁹ The British Navy also kept a close eye on the French *engagés* system, which had replaced illicit trading to Réunion (as Bourbon was to be named after 1848). While, after emancipation, Mauritius had replaced its reduced labour force with indentured labourers sourced from British territories in India, the French at Réunion recruited workers from their newly acquired possessions of Nosy Be and Mayotte, as well as Mozambique and Zanzibar, where their connections had remained intact since the times of legal slave trading. Workers recruited in this highly questionable fashion were advised upon their acquisition by the French that, though they were ostensibly free workers, they had nonetheless agreed to exchange a certain number of years' labour for nominal wages or basic provisions.¹⁰ Also important, of course, were Livingstone's 1850s African expeditions, which turned the attention of the British public and government to both the scale of the east African slave trade and the opportunities for colonisation and Christianisation in the interior of the continent, providing much of the public enthusiasm for the anti-slaving effort on the east

8 Beachey, *The Slave Trade of Eastern Africa*, pp. 50-54.

9 Coupland, *The British Anti-Slavery Movement*, p. 196.

10 Campbell, 'Madagascar and Mozambique in the Slave Trade', p. 170.

African coast.¹¹ It was in the wake of these events, in 1858, that an anti-slaving squadron was finally established to tackle the trade to the Persian Gulf. Until 1883, about seven ships and 1,000-1,500 men patrolled the north-western Indian Ocean, capturing whatever slave dhows they could,¹² and seizing from them a little less than 1,000 slaves per year.¹³

The matter of where to resettle liberated slaves was a serious problem for the naval squadron. Unlike in the Atlantic, where Freetown could be counted upon to absorb freed slaves, there was no such place in the Indian Ocean. In the absence of a dedicated location, captains were at least expected to ferry liberated Africans to British ports.¹⁴ Since the initial focus of anti-slaving vessels had been, since the 1830s, the southward traffic to the Atlantic, seized slaves were at first sent to the Cape.¹⁵ This proved highly impractical, however, once the focus of naval efforts became the northbound trade out of Zanzibar. Ships could spend weeks travelling to the Cape, while high numbers of slaves died on board and while other slaving dhows took advantage of the anti-slaving ships' long absences.

From c. 1860, Bombay and Aden became popular destinations for disembarking freed slaves further north, but these two ports were not without problems. Despite missionary efforts to teach carpentry and other skills to about 200 liberated Africans hosted in an asylum established in the 1860s at Nissack, to the north of Bombay, sufficient employment could not be found for the majority of the c. 2,500 Africans who were taken there between 1865 and 1869. Most found it impossible simply to survive. Beachey notes that of 1,000 freed slaves surveyed in Bombay in 1870 more than 700 had died within five years.¹⁶ Conditions in Aden – and particularly on the crowded island within the harbour which was to become known as 'Slave Island' on account of the large numbers of freed Africans who were sent there – were no better.

11 Raymond Howell, *The Royal Navy and the Slave Trade* (London, 1987), p. 18.

12 Beachey, *The Slave Trade of Eastern Africa*, p. 56. See also George L. Sullivan, *Dhow Chasing in Zanzibar Waters and on the Eastern Coast of Africa* (London, 1873).

13 Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory*, p. 41.

14 Matthew S. Hopper, *Slaves of One Master: Globalization and Slavery in Arabia in the Age of Empire* (New Haven and London, 2015), p. 169.

15 Beachey, *The Slave Trade of East Africa*, p. 85.

16 Ibid.

For instance, it was recorded that 35% of the 6,000 Africans delivered to Aden between 1865 and 1869 had died within a year from a particular lung disease that swept the peninsula.¹⁷ Survivors generally failed to find suitable employment, and some were even re-enslaved as servants after a period of being apprenticed.¹⁸ Captain George Sullivan, of the anti-slaving squadron, noted that slaves routinely ‘disposed of’ at Aden did not necessarily remain there and could later be taken to Bombay or even Mauritius or the Seychelles themselves.¹⁹ By 1870, the British representatives at Aden were advising the naval squadron not to deliver any more liberated Africans there.²⁰

It was largely because of the appalling state of health and environmental conditions in Bombay and Aden that the Seychelles became an attractive alternative as a place of resettlement for more than 2,500 slaves between 1861 and 1872.²¹ Unlike in the two former locations, where it was not uncommon for even apparently healthy slaves to succumb to disease shortly after their arrival, the healthy environment of the Seychelles saw sick slaves recover rapidly. The skills and experience of quarantining and recovering sick persons coming by the shipload from East Africa still existed in the Seychelles, kept alive by its frequent use as a leper colony for slaves from Mauritius and its other dependencies since 1829.²² Natural conditions which had favoured the Seychelles for these purposes had not drastically changed either. By the mid-nineteenth century, the Seychelles were even more sparsely populated than they had been during the last years of the active illegal slave trade. In 1840, there were just over 4,000 people on the islands and because of the abundance of seafood, animal husbandry had not been taken up to any large degree, leaving fresh waters unspoiled. The Seychelles were also free of the kinds of health problems that Mauritius regularly suffered from, notably the 1855 cholera epidemic and the malarial fever that swept the island in 1867, and that discouraged resettlement plans

17 Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, p. 169.

18 Beachey, *The Slave Trade of Eastern Africa*, p. 86.

19 Sullivan, *Dhow Chasing in Zanzibar Waters*, p. 269.

20 Beachey, *The Slave Trade of Eastern Africa*, p. 87.

21 Scarr, *Seychelles since 1770*, p. 70.

22 Amenah Jahengeer-Chojoo, ‘Exilés et oubliés: les lépreux de l’île Curieuse,’ in Teelock and Vernet, *Traite, esclavage et transition vers engagisme*, pp. 112-122.

there.²³ Sullivan noted of Mahé that it was ‘admirably situated for keeping a supply for the ships, which generally come to this island to refit, and also for giving the men leave, it being the only place on the coast where it is safe to do so; for it is an exceedingly healthy island, which cannot be said of any part of the coast or the islands near to it, unless it is the Commoro Island, “Johanna” [Anjouan], but there the filth and consequent diseases among the natives render it dangerous to give leave to crews.’²⁴ The resettling of liberated Africans during the 1860s was not the only instance in which the British had taken advantage of the cleaner environment of the Seychelles during this period. Missionaries taken ill in Zanzibar, in particular, were sent to the Seychelles for their own recovery.²⁵ And it was from Zanzibar itself that the recommendation for the use of the Seychelles was made when, in 1858, the British consul there learned of their prospects.²⁶ The first officially directed landing of liberated Africans in the Seychelles took place two years later, in May 1861, when 200 Africans taken from a dhow in the Mozambique Channel were landed on Mahé.²⁷

Economic conditions in the Seychelles also attracted British officials, since it appeared that a local demand for plantation labourers would ensure the employment of liberated Africans, thereby reducing the cost of their maintenance. Between 1865 and 1870, the cost of what little care was offered to the 2,197 liberated Africans taken to Aden amounted £16,000.²⁸ In the Seychelles, the costs of provisioning and care became the responsibility of the planters to whom liberated Africans were leased. The Seychellois planters’ attitudes towards liberated slaves had much to do with the failure of the earlier apprentice system and the general decline it had brought in its wake. Launched in 1835, the year in which the 1833 abolition act was finally applied to the Seychelles, the apprentice system had had a very brief life, being abandoned as early as 1839, three years short of its proposed end. The system, ultimately, had failed to live up to expectations and to prepare former slaves to become voluntary, paid workers.

23 Beachey, *The Slave Trade of Eastern Africa*, p. 87.

24 Sullivan, *Dhow Chasing in Zanzibar Waters*, p. 135.

25 Beachey, *The Slave Trade of Eastern Africa*, p. 88.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 87.

27 Scarr, *Seychelles since 1770*, p. 69.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 87.

According to the letter of the scheme, ex-slaves were required to work seven and a half hours per day, six days a week, for their masters, while being free the rest of the time to work for themselves on allotted plots. If the apprentices so chose, they could also work additional hours for their masters at a wage of 1 shilling per hour.²⁹ A number of additional restrictions and regulations blurred the boundary between apprentices and slaves. Apprentices, for example, were not permitted to leave their plantations after dark and they could be flogged or imprisoned for failure to work or breaching other regulations. Frequent reports of cruelty, desertions and attempts to buy one's own freedom also informed the understanding that the apprentice system throughout the empire was little more than an extension of slavery. The Caribbean colonies were first to abolish it: all of the British possessions there had done so by the end of 1838. Mauritius had twice refused to do the same, but, by February of 1839, it too was forced to declare its apprentices free from their work obligations. Former apprentices in the British Mascarenes were offered new work contracts, and some accepted, or were tricked or coerced into taking them up, but the ex-apprentices in the Seychelles seemed to have found other ways to make ends meet, subsisting on fishing, hunting bats and planting their own crops on abandoned plantations or on the uncultivated mountains – encouraged by the fact that money shortages meant that they could not always be paid for work undertaken³⁰ In a report dated 29th October 1859, Mr Keates, the colony's Civil Commissioner summarises that former apprentices in the Seychelles 'had made the fatal discovery that in these islands life was sustainable almost without the necessity of exertion.'³¹

29 McAteer, *Hard Times in Paradise*, pp. 37-38.

30 Ibid., p. 42; Scarr, *Seychelles since 1770*, pp. 58-59.

31 Quoted and further discussed in Webb, *The Story of Seychelles*, p.52.

By this time, following their shift away from the no longer profitable cotton planting and illegal slave trading, such planters as had remained in the Seychelles had already turned their attention to less labour intensive ventures. These largely consisted of coconut harvesting and the production of coconut oil, which was to become the chief export of the Seychelles by the early 1840s.³² Even so, with the ex-apprentices no longer obliged to work, the islands were suffering from a shortage of labour. Mauritius was dealing with its own labour shortage by recruiting indentured workers from India, but the Seychelles were refused this option. After the Indian government temporarily suspended emigration to Mauritius in 1842 on account of the poor treatment of indentured workers, Mauritius undertook to improve the living conditions of its new workforce. Since Mauritius could not guarantee that the Seychelles would live up to the new standards, indentured workers were initially kept away from the archipelago – most of whose inhabitants, in any case, were not in a position to pay for the labourers themselves.³³ Some Seychellois planters did have the means to source their own labourers and pushed for an arrangement similar to that which was benefiting their peers in Bourbon, but Mauritius denied every individual planter's request to transport Malagasy labourers to the islands, since the *engagés* system was hardly distinguishable from slave trading.³⁴

The Seychelles soon fell into decay, with Mylius, the local Government Agent complaining that they were in dire need of labourers, as well as roads, bridges and a hospital, and that the islands had never benefited from any schools or church. As a result of all this, he maintained, the islands had fallen into the 'lowest state of degradation'.³⁵ Expecting nothing from neglectful Mauritius, Mylius sent his emotive complaint straight to London, hoping that officials there would be more moved by his grim descriptions of the state of the islands – islands where it was not uncommon, he wrote, to witness the graves of formerly revered families in the Catholic cemetery being uprooted by abandoned pigs in search of food.³⁶ The islands did receive a clergyman three years later, but nothing in the way of labourers or other resources. By the end of the 1840s, none of the islands' plantations were under

32 McAteer, *Hard Times in Paradise*, p. 42.

33 *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

34 SNA B/13, Secretary to Governor Smith to Mylius, 9 November 1840.

35 UKNA CO 167/212, Mylius to Colonial Secretary, 10 April 1839.

36 *Ibid.*

regular cultivation, while the unmanned infrastructures and natural resources were going to waste. In an unsuccessful 1849 petition demanding Indian immigrants, Seychellois inhabitants predicted that they could easily produce 100,000 *veltes* of coconut oil if they had access to labour.³⁷ As things stood, however, they produced only 7,000, more than half of which was consumed locally.³⁸ This state of affairs continued for the next decade. In 1861, Mauritius, now secure in its own position and having seen that some improvements had been made by the clergyman sent to Mahé, finally allowed the Seychelles to benefit from indentured Indian labourers.³⁹ The cost of transporting them, however, was the responsibility of individual employers, and very few Seychellois could afford it.

It was no surprise, then, that when, in May 1861, the *Lyra* arrived in Mahé with 200 freed Africans needing employment, the latter were readily taken on by planters desperate to inject new life into their empty plantations. Liberated Africans, who were now to be delivered regularly until 1872, were contracted to planters for five years, after which they would be free either to continue working for the planters themselves or to support themselves in much the same way as Seychellois ex-slaves were doing. Their wages at the time were one dollar a month, plus food rations, but they had to provide clothes for themselves from their wages. The aforementioned Sullivan considered the wages paid to liberated slaves in the Seychelles, and the fact that they were not provided with clothes by their new masters, unsatisfactory, but also noted that improvements were being made.⁴⁰ While the situation in the Seychelles was not ideal, liberated Africans there did appear to have a better deal than their peers in Bombay and Aden. The labour of these 2,500 liberated Africans clearly eased the Seychelles' economic troubles that had been worsening since emancipation. Nwulia's review of Seychellois finances indicates that between 1833 and 1838 the islands made £4,406 and spent £15,000, with the deficit – which increased throughout the 1840s and 1850s – being paid by Mauritius. Three years after the first shipment of liberated Africans, though, the coconut plantations reaped

37 McAteer, *Hard Times in Paradise*, p. 57

38 Scarr, *Seychelles since 1770*, p. 68. (1 *velte* = 7.5 litres).

39 UKNA CO 167/427, Stevenson to Colonial Secretary, 2 March 1861.

40 Sullivan, *Dhow Chasing in Zanzibar Waters*, p. 265.

£20,133; and by 1876, the total exports of the islands amounted to £44,255.⁴¹

Unsurprisingly, Governor Stevenson of Mauritius requested that all further freed slaves be sent to the Seychelles.⁴²

In light of this, for a very brief period, the Seychelles appeared to offer the answer to the problem of where to resettle the bulk of liberated slaves and focus efforts at religious conversion in East Africa. This view informed the deliberations of the Clarendon Committee on the East African Slave Trade. Thus, its 1871 report suggested that, while it might be advisable to send some freed adult slaves to work in the expanding clove plantations of Zanzibar as part of a potential agreement with the Sultan to further criminalise slave trading within his African dominions, there was no better place than the Seychelles for liberated slaves. Acknowledging that, particularly with regard to religion, the Seychelles were not perfect, the report by the committee stated that ‘the Church Missionary Society are willing to enter into an arrangement for the superintendence and education of the children at the Seychelles, similar to that entered into with the Government with respect to liberated children at Sierra Leone.’⁴³

Sierra Leone was always the idealised model for both the Admiralty and the missions, who were becoming increasingly interested in the fate of liberated Africans. The intervention of Church authorities was also deemed necessary if the care provided to liberated slaves was to fall in line with the ‘civilising’ values underpinning the abolition campaign. It was precisely this religious emphasis, as well as more practical concerns over the actual working and living conditions of liberated Africans in the Seychelles, which quickly caused the British government’s initial faith in the Seychelles as a resettlement location to wane.

When captains and crews of the anti-slaving vessels began to witness the conditions that liberated Africans were subject to under their Seychellois masters, the Admiralty actually temporarily halted resettlements in 1869. The decision, however, was soon

41 Nwulia, *The History of Slavery*, pp. 195-196.

42 McAteer, *Hard Times in Paradise*, p. 87.

43 Report Addressed to the Earl of Clarendon by the Committee on the East African Slave Trade, 24 January 1870, reproduced in Edward Hutchinson, *The Slave Trade of East Africa* (London, 1874), p. 43.

reverted, and landings of liberated slaves resumed in the Seychelles until 1872, when more serious reports by government agents and missionaries began to emerge. Civil agent Swinburne Ward reported that Seychellois planters were cruel and exacting, and that they punished liberated Africans frequently and harshly for negligence. They were also worked for eleven hours a day and often cheated out of their wages and rations. In sickness or infirmity they were simply left to perish.⁴⁴ With the exploitation of liberated Africans in the Seychelles now obvious, as well as their vulnerability to cruelty by plantation owners, Sullivan concluded that to place them here was ‘little better than condemning them to penal servitude, and is a positive injustice.’⁴⁵ Instead Sullivan repeatedly insisted that they should have a place, in ‘their own country’, where they could be appropriately instructed in Christianity. To some extent, the unsatisfactory conditions prevailing in the Seychelles were a consequence of the delay with which the post of ‘protector of apprenticeship’ was re-established. Sanctioned by Mauritius when permission was first given for Seychellois planters to take on liberated Africans as labourers, the position was not filled until 1873, well after the five-year-long apprenticeships of the first freed slaves were over.⁴⁶ By 1872, the situation in the Seychelles was considered too similar to slavery or the abolished apprentice system to be officially encouraged by government; after that year, no more freed slaves were sent there.

This change coincided with the increasing presence of Christian missions on the East African coast. The Universities’ Mission to Central Africa had relocated to Zanzibar in 1864 and established several stations on the Swahili coast for the purpose of taking on freed slaves. The Holy Ghost Fathers followed suit, establishing a mission at Bagamoyo in 1868.⁴⁷ The importance of Christianising liberated Africans in the campaigns of the late nineteenth century cannot be overstated. The failure of the Seychelles, or its lack of improvement, in introducing liberated slaves to the Christian faith contributed to its demise as a resettlement location and served to highlight the standards and specifications of the particular forms of Christianisation

44 Scarr, *Seychelles since 1770*, pp. 70-71; McAteer, *Hard Times in Paradise*, p. 112.

45 Sullivan, *Dhow Chasing in Zanzibar Waters*, pp. 273-274.

46 McAteer, *Hard Times in Paradise*, p. 87.

47 Beachey, *The Slave Trade of Eastern Africa*, p. 90.

that were attached to the ‘civilising’ ambitions of British foreign policy in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Sullivan wrote explicitly that he believed it was ‘England's bounden duty to give at least two years’ instruction to every adult slave she liberates, and a fair education to the children.’⁴⁸ The Seychelles might have seemed an easier place than Islamic Aden or Hindu-dominated Bombay to achieve this, but the diluted Catholicism that had developed among the dominant classes in the Seychelles, which had been bereft of any church or priest until the 1840s, was to provide its own challenges to religious instruction. The apparent lack of religion and tilt towards superstition and ‘witchcraft’ among the ex-slaves only exasperated the problem. While Sullivan noted that the resident clergyman at the Seychelles, Mr Vaudry, did all he could to engage the local population and newly arrived liberated Africans, his reach was limited ‘for want of assistance’. Not many of the French-descended nominal Catholics or ex-slaves attended the Sunday sermons he offered in English and French. The few children taken into his school provided a captive audience, but, overall, Sullivan considered that, in stark contrast to Sierra Leone, which boasted a Bishop and several clergymen, there was as yet no place for liberated Africans in the Seychelles, or anywhere else on the East coast, where they could be reliably introduced to the Christian faith. If missionaries based in Zanzibar had originally considered the Seychelles a less immoral place than Bombay or Aden,⁴⁹ following his experiences in the Seychelles during the 1860s, Sullivan concluded instead that liberated Africans ‘unlearn nothing that was evil in their former lives, while they increase it tenfold by drunkenness and debauchery of every kind.’⁵⁰ Bishop Tozer, of the Universities’ Mission to Central Africa, visiting the Seychelles from his station at Zanzibar in 1872, echoed Sullivan’s sentiments, noting that nothing at all had been done for the liberated Africans in the Seychelles. One of his recommendations was that the allocation of children and young persons’ to plantations far away from the church at Victoria be terminated and that church education be made compulsory for a few hours a week as a condition of apprenticeship. This, he stated, would bring

48 Sullivan, *Dhow Chasing in Zanzibar Waters*, p. 273.

49 Beachey, *The Slave Trade of Eastern Africa*, p. 88.

50 Sullivan, *Dhow Chasing in Zanzibar Waters*, p. 266.

‘some wholesome Christian influence’ to the entire black population over whom some forms of control were exerted.⁵¹

Although Tozer’s suggestions were never implemented, the Church Missionary Society did attempt to educate some at least of the liberated African children in the Seychelles, setting up Venn’s Town school in 1876. This project was underfunded, though, and after much struggling to keep its pupils from deserting the mission for the vices of Port Victoria, where they were known to become thieves, the school closed down in 1892.⁵² In the mid-1870s, the Church Missionary Society was far more focused on its new establishment of Freretown, near Mombasa, which was steadily becoming the most significant location for the resettlement and Christianisation of liberated Africans in the western Indian Ocean. In 1872, Sir Bartle Frere, the former Governor of Bombay, was sent to negotiate the suppression of the slave trade with the sultan of Zanzibar. He was much in favour of missionary work, and his recommendation that such work be expanded so as to accommodate freed slaves somewhere other than the Seychelles was instrumental in setting up the station that would bear his name.⁵³ By 1875, Freretown had become the principal location for freed slaves, and by 1888 it had received more than 3,000 of them.⁵⁴

Despite the Clarendon Committee having been impressed by the advantages of the Seychelles in contrast to Bombay and Aden, the local circumstances which made the islands appear so inadequate to the likes of Sullivan, Frere and Tozer, who always looked keenly towards Sierra Leone, reveal the central importance attached to the process of converting freed slaves and educating their children in accordance with a particular form of Christianity. The Seychelles example shows that delivering freed slaves to an ostensibly Christian society under British rule, where they had the choice to attend sermons, was not enough. The problem of the experiences of freed slaves in the Seychelles resembling slavery could have been resolved by nullifying the apprenticeship contracts and by permitting liberated Africans to seek employment as entirely free agents or to sustain themselves by fishing or farming on

51 Church Missionary Society Archives, B/OMS/ C MA O 6F/2, Bishop Tozer to Secretary of the Church Missionary Society, 16 October 1872.

52 Scarr, *Seychelles since 1770*, pp. 73-74.

53 Beachey, *The Slave Trade of Eastern Africa*, p. 90.

54 Ibid.

specifically allocated land. This was an option that British authorities never seriously contemplated. On the contrary, their encouragement of the huge efforts involved in establishing missions on the east African coast demonstrates the importance attached to maximising the approved Christian influence among former slaves. This was best achieved in a purpose-built environment, such as the much idealised Freetown, where slaves could be indoctrinated without distraction and temptation and in accordance with the specific values of the coeval 'civilising mission'.

Conclusion

This dissertation has attempted to reframe and broaden existing understandings of the position of the Seychelles in the slave trade of the south-western Indian Ocean, beyond the frequently told story of the islands' involvement in smuggling networks during the illegal trade of the early nineteenth century. My overarching aim has been to demonstrate that the Mascarene-wide trade in slaves was an integral and defining feature of the islands' history, from the time of their colonisation until the demise of the trade in the 1830s. It has also been argued that, throughout this period, the Seychelles played a host of crucial roles in enabling, not just the operations of the Mascarene trade as it existed in 1770, but its continued expansion as well.

By foregrounding the ambitions that animated Charles Henri Brayer du Barré, the main actor behind the colonisation of the Seychelles in 1770, this dissertation has argued that the settlement project can only be understood within the context of the changing nature of the Mascarene slave trade and, specifically, the post-1769 shift towards East Africa as the main supplier of slaves for the French island colonies. Barré's plans – it is now clear – closely followed, or even preceded, unfolding regional commercial dynamics. Barré's dealings in Mozambique at the very end of the 1760s and in 1770 meant that his colonisation scheme was informed by the new possibilities thrown open by the ongoing rise of the slave trade in Portuguese East Africa. His connections with Swahili authorities from 1770, moreover, placed the Seychelles colonisation scheme at the forefront of the developing slave trade between the Swahili coast and the Mascarenes. Arguably, Barré's plan to draw thousands of slaves from Pate, Mombasa or Anjouan helped lay the foundations for the subsequent Swahili contribution to the Mascarene trade. A case can therefore be made for regarding the relationship between the Seychelles and the Mascarene slave trade as having been mutually constitutive from the very beginning of the colonisation of the islands.

The centrality of the slave trade to the early history of the Seychelles has been shown to have extended beyond the direct opportunities that it presented to settlers. Because passing ship captains often exchanged slaves for services and provisions, a large

slave work force came into being on the islands. It was these labourers who enabled a significant expansion of the agricultural sector from the late 1780s. While the cotton production which dominated the islands' economy from the 1790s until the mid-1810s did owe a great deal to Malavois's policies, the settlers drafted from Ile de France and Bourbon also relied on passing slavers to provide the human capital required to kick-start commercial agriculture. For its part, the Seychellois shipbuilding industry which lasted well into the nineteenth century had its roots in the repair industry that quickly developed in response to the needs of slavers calling at the islands from the 1770s onwards. Ship-servicing more generally was easily redirected from the slave trade to the whaling business of the 1820s, which witnessed an influx of mostly American whalers into the islands. Medical and quarantine practices dating to the era of the slave trade were later adapted to provide more permanent quarantine facilities for Mauritius, which continued to send its lepers to the Seychelles.

As a dominant feature of life in the Seychelles, the slave trade came to shape not only the economic, but also the political and cultural climate of the islands. The dependability of the slave trade, for instance, underpinned the Seychelles' repeated attempts to break their political subservience to Mauritius. At the same time, the slave trade informed developing attitudes to work, health, diet and family structure among both the inhabitants of the islands and the slaves left behind by departing ships. To this extent – as chapter 2 has argued – the very social life of the Seychelles was deeply imbricated with the expansion of the Mascarene slave trade and should be regarded, in several important ways, as a by-product of it.

The impact of the Seychelles themselves on the workings of the slave trade of the south-western Indian Ocean is less easily identifiable. The indications, however, are that the Seychelles way station was instrumental in fostering the continued growth of the slave trade between East Africa and the main Mascarene islands between 1770 and 1810. This was especially true of the slave trade out of the Swahili coast, as voyages to these more distant localities are especially likely to have benefited from the possibility of stop-overs in the Seychelles. As has been shown, stop-overs in the Seychelles became especially common in the 1780s. The fact that, during the same

decade, Mascarenian slave voyages to the Swahili coast leapt from 10% of all known voyages to 22-23% is unlikely to have been a coincidence.¹

An understanding among traders that stops in the Seychelles significantly reduced slave mortality and other dangers associated with slaving voyages points to the ways in which the islands enabled an increasingly East Africa-centred slave trade to function. The benefits offered by the Seychelles were varied and catered to all of the needs of slave traders. Chapter 3 has thus outlined the major services that the Seychelles afforded Mascarene slavers. Such services included the replenishment of stores, the repair of ships, accommodation and shelter during enforced waits due to adverse weather conditions and, most importantly, the opportunity for slaves to recover from the hardships of voyages, thereby reducing mortality.

Lack of evidence has made it impossible to uncover the extent to which the increasingly popular option of resting slaves in the Seychelles impacted on rates of mortality, both for individual voyages and for the Mascarene slave trade in general. Its significance, however, is indirectly attested by the fact that many ships appear to have called at the Seychelles primarily for this purpose and by the reputation gained by the islands as an environment conducive to recovering health. In addition to this, slavers seem to have readily accepted the delays and expenses involved in accommodating slaves and crew for stays which were sometimes longer than the sailing time itself. That these delays and additional expenses were regarded as worthwhile suggests that mortality rates during voyages, and shortly after the ships' arrival in Île de France or Bourbon, were greatly reduced by stops in the Seychelles. Improvements in the health of slaves in the Seychelles were attributable to the islands' comparatively low population density, lack of animal agriculture and malaria, the option of quarantining slaves on the archipelago's smaller islands and, significantly, the practice of feeding slaves with tortoise and turtle meat, which alleviated the effects of scurvy. The importance of resting slaves in this manner is also borne out by the considerable number of slave ships that chose to call at the Seychelles throughout the last decades of the legal slave trade. While no conclusive findings are possible on the basis of the limited extant documentation, chapter 3 has

¹ Allen, *European Slave Trading*, Table 9 Slaving Voyages Involving the Mascarenes, 1718-1809, pp. 68-69.

nonetheless argued that in the mid-1780s perhaps as many as two-thirds of the slave ships returning from East Africa called at the Seychelles for refreshment or recovery stops and that this figure is likely to have increased in the 1790s and 1800s as the volume of trade, as well as wartime pressures on shipping, increased.

Despite their fragmentary nature, the records discussed in chapter 3 permitted us to paint a relatively full picture of the circumstances surrounding the slave ships' Seychellois stop-overs and the services they received on the islands. In turn, this enabled us to cast some light on the experiences of slavers, islanders and, to a lesser extent, the slaves themselves within this important branch of the Mascarene network. The services sought out by ships which have left a record of their stays in the Seychelles offer important insights into the perils and hardships of slave voyages between East Africa and the Mascarenes. Some ships struggled into Mahé's sheltered harbour with destroyed masts and battered hulls and scores of their slaves injured and dying from being tossed around on the open sea; others, on the contrary, were suffering from the effects of dead calms that had left them rationing off quickly depleting stores while facing the deadly consequences of malnutrition and scurvy. Even when the weather had been favourable, ships still arrived in the Seychelles full of dead and dying slaves, and sometimes crew and captains, afflicted by *le chéringose*, smallpox and other diseases.

The keenness with which many inhabitants of the Seychelles took to providing for the needs of visiting slavers, often competing with each other and undercutting the Administration in search of money or slaves, showed that the islanders were by no means passive receivers of visiting slave ships. That the Seychellois developed their own slave trade, supplying both their islands and Île de France and Bourbon – an occupation which, according to visiting naval captain Thomas Boteler, consumed the lives of many of the young white men of the islands² – is suggestive of the trade's centrality to socio-economic life in the Seychelles during the period of French rule. Similarly revealing is the fact that all of the ships built in the Seychelles before 1810 were occupied in the slave trade.³ Taking advantage of the islands' abundant and easily exploitable natural food and water resources, other Seychellois were well

2 Boteler, *Narrative of a Voyage of Discovery*, p. 242.

3 Lionnet, *The Seychelles*, pp. 29, 35.

placed to supply these to passing slavers. This continued to be a lucrative activity, along with the gathering of wood for ship repairs or sale, throughout the period of legal slave trading. Other natural conditions obtaining on the islands readily lent themselves to facilitating the trade. These included the lack of cyclones, and the existence of the intermediary islands of the Amirantes and Aldabra groups, which, along with favourable winds, eased journeys to and from East Africa.

While waiting in temporary holdings, slaves themselves occasionally used their stopovers in the Seychelles as an opportunity to permanently escape the lifetime of subjugation, exhausting work and cruelty which awaited them at the hands of Île de France and Bourbonnais planters. In this regard, stops in the Seychelles were at times useful not only to the designs of the slavers but of the slaves themselves. Though slave responses to the experience of voyages through the Seychelles have left hardly any documentary traces, the few recorded instances of resistance indicate the extent to which some slaves were prepared to go to exert their agency within extremely narrow corners and with great risks to their own lives. Thus, on at least one occasion, a ship called at the Seychelles to recover from a suppressed slave rebellion at sea. While the records relating to this rebellion in 1794 are frustratingly scant, its occurrence indicates that the decisive actions of slaves themselves, and in particular the tradition of shipboard rebellions, were not unimportant factors in the perceived need for a way station in the Seychelles.

Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis have demonstrated that the Seychelles became even more important in enabling slavers to convey their human cargoes to Mauritius and Bourbon after the slave trade was criminalised in 1810. Although it had started in the early 1810s, when the slave trade began to be threatened by British authorities, the Seychelles' new function only fully came to life in the early 1820s, following heightened repression on the part of British naval squadrons and more willing prosecutors, both of which necessitated more covert and calculated forms of smuggling. In the 1820s – a decade defined by the abuse of the transfer system – the Seychelles came to occupy a position of crucial importance for the very existence of the Mascarene trade. With direct smuggling to Mauritius proving increasingly impossible, it became essential for slave dealers to first bring their human cargoes to the Seychelles, where they were matched with fraudulent papers and underwent a

process of acclimatisation before being moved to Mauritius, or were used to replace the slaves who had already been transferred. This phase in the illegal trade also saw the Seychelles draw significant numbers of Malagasy slaves into its system of acclimatisation and transfer. This was largely the work of Mauritian traders with strong connections with Madagascar becoming enticed by the opportunities provided by the transfer system via the Seychelles. During this last phase, then, the Seychelles transcended their previous role as a conveyor of almost entirely East African slaves. The significance of the transfer system to the illegal Mascarene slave trade is borne out by the number of individuals whose illegal enslavement was enabled by it. This was perhaps close to 3,000 in the 1820s – roughly one third of the estimated number of slaves introduced into the British Mascarenes in this period.

During what Britain understood to be its last significant battle with the trade within its own slave colonies, the Seychelles' role as a transmitter of illegal slaves was part of an inter-island compact which utilised the full range of Mascarene connections and the logistical possibilities afforded by these hundreds of scattered islands, both inhabited and uninhabited. As a testament to the Seychelles' versatility in the 1820s, the outer islands also served to enable a continuing slave traffic to Bourbon. Not benefiting from the manipulation of the transfer system, Bourbon-bound slavers required provisioning, sheltering, repairs, intelligence and the opportunity to wait for safe passage. These systems and strategies redirected and redefined slave journeys to the Mascarenes from Mozambique, the Swahili coast, Madagascar and perhaps also from India and Southeast Asia.

Recognising the importance of the various enabling roles played by the Seychelles throughout their history as a slaving way station is crucial if we are to form a thorough understanding of the ways in which the Mascarene trade could profitably convey more than 115,000 East African slaves between 1770 and 1810 and between 122,000 and 149,000 primarily east African and Malagasy illegal slaves during the subsequent two decades. In assessing the overall significance of the Seychelles within western Indian Ocean slaving networks throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it has been possible to suggest that, in each phase of the slave trade to which they contributed, the Seychelles and the Seychellois played a far more active, extensive and regionally important role than has been previously

understood. Moreover, the material surveyed in this dissertation shows that the islands' importance grew over time and in direct proportion to the increasing difficulties faced by slavers. By the time the Mascarene slave trade entered its last phase, the Seychelles had become indispensable to the functioning of almost every aspect of covert human trafficking.

Despite the present dissertation attempt at comprehensiveness, there is still much scope for further investigation into many of the questions left unanswered by the patchy evidence we have drawn upon. Barré's dealings in East Africa are said to have resulted in the stipulations of formal contracts between slavers and Swahili authorities. Should these contracts still exist and be uncovered, our understanding of the motivations that underpinned Barré's push for the colonisation of the Seychelles may be greatly expanded. For their part, Portuguese and east African archives (of which this dissertation has made no use for want of time and resources) may help future scholars to establish how far the Seychelles featured in the outward voyages of Portuguese dealers looking to sell Mozambican slaves to the French in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Quinssy's incidental mention of the Portuguese vessel which traded slaves there in exchange for repairs in 1807 indicates that Portuguese and Seychellois links may have extended beyond the one-way traffic of slaves from Mozambique to the Seychelles aboard Mascarene ships that is currently known.

Links between the Seychelles, on the one hand, and India and the Maldives, on the other, are also likely to have been more significant than is presently understood. Although the supposedly faster route from Île de France to India via the Seychelles discovered by Grenier in 1769 was proven to be problematic in subsequent years, it – as Prior's observations attest – was still popular and used by Seychellois traders throughout the era of the slave trade.⁴ At the same time, the fact that the frequent petitions through which residents of the Seychelles requested permission to sell their produce in India were all rejected suggests that much of this trade must have taken

⁴ Prior, *Narrative of a Voyage in the Indian Seas*, p. 67.

the form of smuggling. This, in turn, means that connections between India and the Seychelles are likely to have been intentionally discrete and, therefore, difficult to trace. Still, a more extensive examination of the *déclarations d'arrivée* than it was possible to conduct within the limited timeframe of the present research, as well as a focused search of British, French and Indian archives, might indicate how frequently Seychellois ships were seen in India and whether the trade from India to the Mascarenes made use of the Seychelles route.

If, on the other hand, slavers plying the trade between the Mascarenes and India can be shown to have clung to the traditional route – one that commonly involved a stop-over in Rodrigues – then a study of the services available in the latter island might still be useful in more clearly establishing the specificities of the Seychelles as a slaving station and the practice of making refreshment stops in the Mascarene trade more generally. To this end, further comparisons might be drawn with the experience of ships which transited through the Comoros, Madagascar, or the Chagos group.

The nature of the documentation relating to slave trading practices within the Seychelles – often consisting of scattered, incidental mentions appearing in letters and reports concerning other matters – means that there is undoubtedly more information to be uncovered. In particular, records held in Réunionnais archives may reveal further details about how Bourbon-bound slavers who utilised the outer Seychelles during the later years of the illegal trade interacted with Seychellois operators or other participants in the transfer system. Since much of the Seychellois trade took a clandestine form, unofficial family papers – should they ever be uncovered – would naturally hold out the promise of greatly advancing our knowledge of slaving activities on the islands, as well as the institution of slavery itself.

While there are a number of scholarly works which deal with the institution of slavery within the Seychelles, it is to be hoped that future studies might be able to cast a sharper light on the relationship between passing slave ships and the dynamics of Seychellois slavery. Questions such as whether slaves in transit were not only sold but also leased out to proprietors in exchange for provisions or accommodation, as per Barré's suggestion, have a direct bearing on our understanding of the ways in

which stop-overs in the Seychelles affected the profits of the trade. They will also result in a better grasp of labour relations on the islands, and expand our limited knowledge of how slaves experienced their time in transit. This possibility – coupled with the fact that Seychellois dealers, in particular, may have benefited from setting fit slaves to work on their own plantations during long stays in the Seychelles – meant that, for numerous captives, the first experiences of slave labour, or at least institutionalised plantation-based chattel slavery on French soil, took place in the Seychelles themselves. Naturally, the ways in which slaves first came to terms with the institution that would later dominate their lives are bound to prove of great interest to students of slave experience in any part of the Mascarenes.

The institution of slavery bears heavily on popular memory in the Seychelles. The subjects of plantation labour, domestic service and, especially, sexual abuse within the latter setting have all surfaced in the ‘*moutya*’, memorialising songs which are often still sung on the islands to the accompanying beat of the frame drums that travelled with slaves from the Swahili coast.⁵ Existing histories of Seychellois slavery have explored some of these *moutya* themes; others – such as journeying, distant origins and the arrival of ships – are still awaiting to receive detailed scholarly attention and be connected to new historical approaches to the slave trade to, or through, the Seychelles. Compared with Mauritius and Réunion, few explorations into the memory of the Seychelles’ history of slavery have been attempted.⁶ It is to be hoped that the present research may prove useful in stimulating advances in this direction and in encouraging Seychellois scholars to explore the impact of the slave trade on the social memory of the islands.

This dissertation has sought to locate the development of slaving activity in the Seychelles within the transnational network of the Mascarenes over a considerable

5 Marvelle Estrale, *Moutya: A Compilation of Lyrics with an Introduction* (Victoria, 2003).

6 Partial exceptions are Benedict and Benedict, *Men Women and Money in Seychelles*, and Prenda Choppy’s introduction to the printed version of a play centred on the experience of Seychellois maroons: Prenda Choppy, ‘Komanter’, in Prenda Choppy (ed.), *Kastor: En pyes mizikal par Patrick Victor* (Victoria, 2007), pp. 8-22.

period of time. These aerial mappings, however, should not overshadow the importance of trying to understand how such general phenomena marked the experiences of the people who lived through them. Thus, insofar as it has proved possible, this dissertation has also sought to bring to the surface what traces have been left of the personal experiences of slaves who arrived in, or passed through, the Seychelles. Sadly, mere morsels of evidence – bare statements of fact which inform us, for instance, about the thirteen sick slaves left behind in the Seychelles by the *Général Isidro* in 1804 or the six Mozambicans who slipped away from the *Olympe* ten years earlier (see chapter 3, pp. 89-91) – constitute almost all written trace of the individuals caught in the Mascarene slave trade. Even so, the emergence of a more humane understanding of the slave trade in this region requires us to correlate ‘cold’ accounts of trade development with these brief flashes of personal experience. While these single sentence human stories offer so little to draw upon, they remind us of the need to understand the slave trade as a vast composite of tragic human experiences, unique to locations, communities and individuals. Even if informed guesses are all that we will be able to produce, questions of how the Mascarene trade was experienced in particular localities at particular times are worthy of our best efforts. Thus, the Seychelles should not simply be regarded as the best means by which slavers eased and enabled voyages to East Africa, but as an arena of unique experiences for those undergoing the journey to the Mascarenes. Piecing together a detailed and nuanced image of the trade across all of the places and communities it touched, is essential if we are to form a fairer understanding of the region’s past. Such efforts are demanded, if not by the lasting impacts of the forced migrations of hundreds of thousands of people, then by the immense experience of suffering that was generated and spread throughout the south-western Indian Ocean for more than a century by the Mascarene slave trade.

Sources and Bibliography

Archival Sources

Seychelles National Archives (SNA)

Series:

- A Official Documents of the French Period 1771-1810
- B Official Correspondence of the British Administration 1811 -1913

Mauritius National Archives (MNA)

Series :

- F Gouvernement Républicain: Guerre et Marine
- HA Miscellaneous British Government
- IA Miscellaneous.
- OA Gouvernement Royale: Divers
- OB Gouvernement Royale: Conseil Supérieur et Juridiction Royale
- OC Gouvernement Royale: Guerre et Marine
- TB Papers for Rodriguez, Seychelles and The Minor Dependencies (1771- 1872)

Archives Nationales de France, Paris (ANF)

- Archives d'outre-mer

Series :

- C Inventaire des archives coloniales
 - C3 – Ile Bourbon 1614-1789
 - C4 – Ile de France 1714-1810
 - C7 – Guadeloupe (includes some information on Mascarenes) 1649-1876
- F Documents Divers
 - F3 - Collection Moreau Saint Méry 1727-1799

National Archives of the UK, London

Series :

CO Colonial Office Records

CO 167 - Colonial Office and predecessors: Mauritius Original Correspondence, 1778-1951

CO 172 - War and Colonial Department and Colonial Office: Mauritius, Miscellanea, 1810-1947

CO 414 - War and Colonial Department: Commissioners or Eastern Inquiry, Cape of Good Hope, 1805-1830

CO 415 - War and Colonial Department: Commissioners of Eastern Inquiry, Mauritius, 1826- 1828

Church Mission Society Archives, Birmingham

Series

OMS – Overseas Missions 1803-1934

British Parliamentary Papers

1824 XXIV, 295, Communications from and Instructions to Naval Officers, relative to Suppression of Slave Trade, 1823-24.

1825 XXVII, 12, Correspondence with Foreign Powers on Slave Trade, 1824-25 (Class B).

1825 XV, 311, Correspondence with Naval Officers and Governor of Mauritius on Slave Trade in Mauritius, Madagascar, and Coast of Africa.

1826 XXVII,295, Papers relative to Slave Trade at Mauritius, Bourbon and Seychelles, 1811-17.

1826 XXV11, 352, Papers relative to Slave Trade at Mauritius, Bourbon and Seychelles, 1818-25.

1826-1827 VI, 90, Select Committee on Mauritius Slave Trade: Minutes of Evidence.

1826-1827 XVIII, 110, Return of Number of Islands under Dependencies of Mauritius, and Naval and Military Establishments.

1827 XV, 2, Slave Trading and the State of Slaves at the Mauritius.

1828 XXV, 20, Accounts relating to Slave Trade in Island of Mauritius.

1828 XXV, 206, Correspondence relative to Seizure of Slaves coming from Seychelles to Mauritius.

1829 XXV, 292, Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry upon the Slave Trade at Mauritius.

Published Primary Sources

African Institution, *Sixteenth report of the directors of the African Institution: read at the annual general meeting, held on the 10th day of May, 1822* (London, 1822).

Boteler, Thomas, *Narrative of a Voyage of Discovery to Africa and Arabia* (London, 1835).

Fauvel, Albert-Auguste, *Unpublished Documents on the History of the Seychelles Islands anterior to 1810* (Victoria, 1909).

Grant, Charles, *The History of Mauritius, or the Isle of France, and the Neighbouring Islands; from Their First Discovery to the Present Time* (London, 1801).

Grenier, Jacques-Raymond, *Mémoires de la campagne des découvertes dans les mers de l'Inde* (Brest, 1772).

Holman, James, *A Voyage around the World, Including Travels in Africa, Asia, Australia America etc from MDCCCXXVII to MDCCCXXXII* (London, 1835).

Hutchinson, Edward, *The Slave Trade of East Africa* (London 1874).

Owen, William, *Narrative of Voyages to Explore the Shores of Africa, Arabia and Madagascar* (London, 1835).

Prior, James, *Narrative of a Voyage in the Indian Seas in the Nisus Frigate during the years 1810 and 1811* (London, 1820).

Rochon, Alexis-Marie de, *Voyage à Madagascar, à Maroc et aux Indes orientales*, Vol 2, (Paris, 1801).

Sullivan, George L., *Dhow Chasing in Zanzibar Waters and on the Eastern Coast of Africa* (London, 1873).

Unienville, Baron d', *Statistique de Île Maurice et ses dépendances* (Paris, 1838).

Secondary Sources

Allen, Richard B., *Slaves, Freedmen and Indentured Labourers in Colonial Mauritius* (Cambridge, 1999).

European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500-1850 (Athens, OH, 2014).

‘Licentious and Unbridled Proceedings: The Illegal Slave Trade to Mauritius and the Seychelles during the Early 19th Century’, *Journal of African History*, 42, 1 (2001), pp. 91-116.

‘The Mascarene Slave-Trade and Labor Migration in the Indian Ocean during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries’, in Gwyn Campbell (ed.), *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (London and New York, 2004), pp. 33-50.

‘A Traffic Repugnant to Humanity: Children, the Mascarene Slave Trade and British Abolitionism’, *Slavery & Abolition*, 27, 2 (2006), pp. 219-236.

‘The Constant Demand of the French: The Mascarene Slave Trade and the Worlds of the Indian Ocean and Atlantic during the 18th and 19th Centuries’, *Journal of African History*, 49, 1 (2008), pp. 43-72.

‘Suppressing a Nefarious Traffic: Britain and the Abolition of Slave Trading in India and the Western Indian Ocean, 1770-1830’, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 66, 4 (2009), pp. 873-894.

‘Satisfying the “Want for Labouring People”: European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500-1850’, *Journal of World History*, 21, 1 (2010), pp. 45-73.

‘Slave Trading, Abolitionism, and “New Systems of Slavery” in the Nineteenth-Century Indian Ocean World’, in Robert Harms, Bernard K. Freamon and David W. Blight (eds), *Indian Ocean Slavery in the Age of Abolition* (New Haven and London, 2013), pp. 183-199.

Alpers, Edward, *Ivory and Slaves: Changing Pattern of International Trade in East Central Africa to the Later 19th Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1975).

East Africa and the Indian Ocean (Princeton, 2009).

The Indian Ocean in World History (Oxford, 2014).

‘The French Slave Trade in East Africa (1721-1810)’, *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 10, 37 (1970), pp. 80-124.

‘Madagascar and Mozambique in the Nineteenth Century: The Era of the Sakalava Raids’, *Omalý sy Anio*, 5, 6 (1977), pp. 36-53.

‘A Complex Relationship: Mozambique and the Comoros Islands in the 19th and 20th Centuries’, *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 41, 161 (2001), pp. 73-95.

‘Becoming “Mozambique”’: Diaspora and Identity in Mauritius’, in Vijaya Teelock

- and Edward Alpers (eds), *History, Memory and Identity* (Port Louis, 2001), pp. 117-155.
- ‘Flight to Freedom: Escape from Slavery among Bonded Africans in the Indian Ocean World, c.1750–1962’, *Slavery & Abolition*, 24, 2 (2003), pp. 51-68.
- Alpers, Edward, and Gwyn Campbell, ‘Introduction: Slavery, Forced Labour and Resistance in Indian Ocean, Africa and Asia’, *Slavery & Abolition*, 25, 2 (2004), pp. ix-xxvi.
- Anderson, Clare, *Convicts in the Indian Ocean: Transportation from South Asia to Mauritius, 1815-53* (Basingstoke and New York, 2000).
- Armstrong, James C., ‘Madagascar and the Slave Trade in the Seventeenth Century’, *Omalý sy Anio*, 17, 20 (1983), pp. 211-233.
- Austen, R.A., ‘The 19th Century Islamic Slave Trade from East Africa (Swahili and Red Sea Coasts): A Tentative Census’, in William G. Clarence-Smith (ed.), *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (London and New York, 1989), pp. 21-44.
- Barassin, Jean, ‘La Révolte des esclaves à l’île Bourbon (La Réunion) au XVIIIe Siècle’, in Catherine Méhaud (ed.), *Mouvements de populations dans l’océan Indien* (Paris, 1979), pp. 357-391.
- Barker, Anthony J., *Slavery and Antislavery in Mauritius, 1810-1833: The Conflict between Economic Expansion and Humanitarian Reform under British Rule* (London and New York, 1996).
- Beachey, R.W., *The Slave Trade of Eastern Africa* (New York, 1979).
- Benedict, Burton, *People of the Seychelles* (London, 1966).
- ‘Slavery and Indenture in Mauritius and Seychelles’, in James L. Watson (ed.), *Asian and African Systems of Slavery* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 135-168.
- Benedict, Marion, and Burton Benedict, *Men, Women and Money in Seychelles* (London, 1982).
- Bose, Sugata, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2006).

Bradley, J.T., *The History of the Seychelles* (Victoria, 1940).

Brown, Mervin, *A History of Madagascar* (Cambridge, 2000).

Campbell, Gwyn, *An Economic History of Imperial Madagascar, 1750-1895: The Rise and Fall of an Island Empire* (Cambridge, 2005). 'Madagascar and the Slave Trade, 1810-1895', *Journal of African History*, 22, 2 (1981), pp. 203-227. 'Madagascar and Mozambique in the Slave Trade of the Western Indian Ocean 1800-1861', *Slavery and Abolition*, 9, 3 (1988), pp. 166-193.

'The Structure of Trade in Madagascar, 1750-1810', *International Journal of African Studies*, 26, 1 (1993), pp. 111-148.

'Introduction: Slavery and other forms of Unfree Labour in the Indian Ocean World', in Gwyn Campbell (ed.), *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (London and New York, 2004), pp. ix-xxxii.

'Africa, the Indian Ocean World and the "Early Modern": Historiographical Conventions and Problems', in Toyin Falola and Emily Brownell (eds), *Africa, Empire and Globalization: Essays in Honour of AG Hopkins* (Durham, NC, 2011), pp. 81-92.

'The Question of Slavery', in Abdul Sheriff and Enseng Ho (eds), *The Indian Ocean: Oceanic Connections and the Creation of New Societies* (2014), pp. 123-149.

Campbell, Gwyn, and Edward Alpers, 'Introduction: Slavery, Forced Labour and Resistance in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia', in Edward Alpers, Gwyn Campbell, and Michael Salman (eds), *Slavery and Resistance in Africa and Asia* (London and New York, 2005), pp. 1-19.

Carter, Marina, and Hubert Gerbeau, 'Covert Slaves and Coveted Coolies in the Early 19th Century Mascareignes', *Slavery and Abolition*, 9, 3 (1988), pp. 194-208.

Chandra, Satish (ed.), *The Indian Ocean: Explorations in History, Commerce and Politics* (New Delhi and Newbury Park, 1987).

Chaudhuri, Kirti N., *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge and New York, 1985).

Choppy, Prenda, 'Komanter', in Prenda Choppy (ed.), *Kastor: En pyes mizikal par Patrick Victor* (Victoria, 2007), pp. 8-22.

Clarence-Smith, William G., 'The Economics of the Indian Ocean and Red Sea Slave Trades in the 19th Century: An Overview', in William G. Clarence-Smith (ed.), *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (London and New York, 1989).

Coupland, Reginald, *The British Anti-Slavery Movement* (Oxford, 1933).

East Africa and its Invaders (Oxford, 1938).

Dayer, Louis, *Les îles Seychelles. Esquisse historique* (Fribourg, 1967).

Debien, Gabriel, 'Journal de la Traite de "La Licorne" de Bordeaux au Mozambique (1787 - 1788)', *Caribbean Studies*, 19, 3-4 (1979), pp.89-123.

Doulton, Lindsay, "'The Flag That Sets Us Free": Antislavery, Africans, and the Royal Navy in the Western Indian Ocean', in Robert Harms, Bernard K. Freamon and David W. Blight (eds), *Indian Ocean Slavery in the Age of Abolition* (New Haven and London, 2013), pp. 101-119.

Durup, Julien, *Histoire de La Digue* (Victoria, 2009).

'Slavery in Seychelles 1770-1976', paper presented at the conference 'L'esclavage et ses séquelles: mémoire et vécu d'hier et d'aujourd'hui', Port-Louis, 1998.

Estrale, Marvelle, *Moutya: A Compilation of Lyrics with an Introduction* (Victoria, 2003)

Filliot, Jean-Michel, *La traite des esclaves vers les Mascareignes au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1974).

Histoire des Seychelles (Paris, 1981).

Les Seychelles et la Révolution française (Paris, 1989).

Fuma, Sudel, *L'esclavagisme à La Réunion, 1794-1848* (Paris, 1992).

Freeman-Grenville, G.S.P., *The French at Kilwa Island: An Episode in Eighteenth-Century East African History* (Oxford, 1965).

Gerbeau, Hubert, 'Quelques aspects de la traite illégale des esclaves à l'île Bourbon au XIXe siècle', in Catherine Méhaud (ed.), *Mouvements de populations dans l'océan Indien* (Paris, 1979), pp. 273-308.

'L'océan Indien n'est pas l'Atlantique. La traite illégale d'esclaves à Bourbon au XIXe siècle', *Outre-mers. Revue d'histoire*, 89, 336-337 (2002), pp. 79-108.

'La traite illégale aux Mascareignes des années 1810 aux années 1840. Le cas de l'île Bourbon', in Vijaya Teelock and Thomas Vernet (eds), *Traites, esclavage et transition vers l'engagisme. Perspectives nouvelles sur les Mascareignes et le sud-ouest de l'océan Indien* (Réduit, Mauritius, 2015), pp. 46-57.

Harms, Robert, *The Diligent: A Voyage through the Worlds of the Slave Trade* (New York, 2002).

Hopkins, Antony (ed.), *Globalization in World History* (London, 2002).

Hopper, Matthew S., *Slaves of One Master: Globalization and Slavery in Arabia in the Age of Empire* (New Haven and London, 2015).

Howell, Raymond, *The Royal Navy and the Slave Trade* (London, 1987).

Jahengeer-Chojoo, Amenah, 'Exilés et oubliés. Les lépreux de l'île Curieuse,' in Vijaya Teelock and Thomas Vernet (eds), *Traites, esclavage et transition vers l'engagisme. Perspectives nouvelles sur les Mascareignes et le sud-ouest de l'océan Indien* (Réduit, Mauritius, 2015), pp. 112-122.

Johnstone, Denise, *Reveil Seychellois: Life in Seychelles 1770-1903* (Victoria, 2009).

Kelly, J.B., *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1889* (Oxford, 1968).

Larson, Pier, *History and Memory in the Age of Enslavement: Becoming Merina in Highland Madagascar, 1770-1822* (Portsmouth, NH, 2000).

'A Census of Slaves Exported from Central Madagascar to the Mascarenes between 1769 and 1820', in Ignace Rakoto (ed.), *L'esclavage à Madagascar. Aspects historiques et résurgences contemporaines* (Antananarivo, 1997), pp. 131-145.

'The Route of the Slave from Highland Madagascar to the Mascarenes: Commercial Organization, 1770-1820', in Ignace Rakoto (ed.), *La Route des*

esclaves. Système servile et traite dans l'est malgache (Paris, 2000), pp. 119-180.

‘The Origins of Malagasy Arriving in Mauritius and Réunion: Expanding the Mascarene Slavery’, in Vijaya Teelock and Edward Alpers (eds), *History, Memory and Identity* (Port Louis, 2001), pp. 195-236.

‘La diaspora malgache aux Mascareignes (XVIIIe et XIXe siècles) : notes sur la démographie et la langue,’ *Revue Historique de l’Océan Indien*, 1 (2005), pp. 143-155.

Lionnet, Guy, *The Seychelles* (Newport, 1972).

‘Castor’, *Seychelles Culture*, 19 (1974) p. 2.

‘Les Premiers Marrons’, *L’Echo des Îles* (August 1979), p. 6.

‘Figures du Passé: Castor’, *L’Echo des Îles* (November 1991), p. 21.

Lloyd, Christopher, *The Navy and the Slave Trade* (London and New York, 2012).

Machado, Pedro, ‘A Forgotten Corner of the Indian Ocean: Gujarati Merchants, Portuguese India and the Mozambique Slave Trade’, in Gwyn Campbell (ed.), *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (London and New York, 2004), pp. 17-32.

Mann, Michael, *Sahibs, Sklaven und Soldaten. Geschichte des Menschenhandels rund um den Indischen Ozean* (Darmstadt, 2012).

Martin, E.B. and T.C.I Ryan, ‘A Quantitative Assessment of the Arab Slave Trade of East Africa, 1770-1896’, *Kenya Historical Review*, 5, 1 (1977), pp. 71-91.

McAteer, William, *Rivals in Eden: The History of the Seychelles Part 1, 1742–1827* (Victoria, 2008).

Hard Times in Paradise: The History of the Seychelles Part 2, 1827–1919 (Victoria 2008).

To Be a Nation: The History of the Seychelles Part 3, 1920-1976 (Victoria, 2008).

McPherson, Kenneth, *The Indian Ocean: A History of People and the Sea* (Delhi, 1998).

‘Cultural Exchange in the Indian Ocean Region’, *Westerly*, 29, 4 (1984), pp. 5-16.

- ‘Processes of Cultural Interaction in the Indian Ocean: An Historical Perspective’, *The Great Circle*, 6, 2 (1984), pp.78–92.
- Miers, Suzanne, ‘Slavery: A Question of Definition’, in Gwyn Campbell (ed.), *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (London and New York, 2004), pp.1-16.
- Munthe, Ludvig, Charles Ravoajanahary, and Simon Ayache, ‘Radama Ier et les Anglais: les négociations de 1817 d’après les sources malgaches’, *Omalysy Anio*, 3, 4 (1976), pp. 9-104.
- Newitt, Malyn, *A History of Mozambique* (London, 1995).
- Nicholls, Peter, ‘Meet the Maroons: Runaway Slaves of the Seychelles, 1768-1839’, MA diss., University of Kent, 2013.
- Nwulia, Moses D.E., *The History of Slavery in Mauritius and the Seychelles 1810-1875* (Rutherford, NJ, 1981).
- Britain and Slavery in East Africa* (Washington, 1975).
- Payet, Jaques V., *Histoire de l’esclavage à l’Île Bourbon* (Paris, 1990).
- Pearson, Michael, *The Indian Ocean* (London and New York, 2008).
- Peerthum, Satyendra, ‘Determined to Be Free: *Marronage* and Freedom in Mauritius’, in E. Kofi Agorsah (ed.), *Freedom in Black History and Culture* (Middletown, CA, 2001), pp. 104-127.
- Romaine, Alain, ‘Le Saturne. Sur le traces enfouies d’un négrier’, in Vijaya Teelock and Thomas Vernet (eds), *Traites, esclavage et transition vers l’engagisme. Perspectives nouvelles sur les Mascareignes et le sud-ouest de l’océan Indien* (Réduit, Mauritius, 2015), pp. 30-39.
- Scanlan, Padraic X., ‘The Colonial Rebirth of British Anti-Slavery: The Liberated African Villages of Sierra Leone, 1815–1824’, *The American Historical Review*, 121, 4 (2016), pp. 1085–1113.
- Scarr, Deryck, *Slaving and Slavery in the Indian Ocean* (London, 1998).
- Seychelles since 1770: History of a Slave and Post-Slavery Society* (London, 2000).

- Shepherd, Gill, 'The Comorians and the East African Slave Trade', in James L. Watson (ed.), *Asian and African Systems of Slavery* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 73-99.
- Sheriff, Abdul, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770-1873* (Oxford, 1987).
- 'Introduction', in Abdul Sheriff and Engseng Ho (eds), *The Indian Ocean: Oceanic Connections and the Creation of New Societies* (London, 2014), pp. 1-8.
- 'Globalization with a Difference' in Abdul Sheriff and Engseng Ho (eds), *The Indian Ocean: Oceanic Connections and the Creation of New Societies* (London, 2014), pp. 9-41.
- Teelock, Vijaya, *Bitter Sugar: Sugar and Slavery in 19th Century Mauritius* (Moka, 1998).
- Toussaint, Auguste, *Histoire de l'océan Indien* (Paris, 1961).
- Histoire des îles Mascareignes* (Paris, 1972).
- A History of the Indian Ocean* (London, 1966).
- History of Mauritius* (London, 1977).
- La route des îles. Contribution à l'histoire maritime des Mascareignes* (Paris, 1967).
- 'Le trafic commercial des Seychelles de 1773 à 1810', *Journal of the Seychelles Society*, 4 (1965), pp. 20-61.
- Valette, Jean, *Etudes sur le règne de Radama Ier* (Antananarivo, 1962).
- Vaughan, Megan, *Creating the Creole Island: Slavery in 18th-Century Mauritius* (Durham and London, 2005).
- Vernet, Thomas, 'Le commerce des esclaves sur la côte Swahili, 1500-1750', *Azania*, 38 (2003), pp. 69-97.
- 'Slave Trade and Slavery on the Swahili Coast, 1500-1750', in P. Lovejoy, B.A. Mirzai and I.M. Montana (eds), *Slavery, Islam and Diaspora* (Trenton, NJ, 2009), pp. 37-76.
- 'La première traite française à Zanzibar: le journal de bord du vaisseau

l'Espérance, 1774-1775', in Chantal Radimilahy and Narivelo Rajaonarimanana (eds), *Civilisations des mondes insulaires (Madagascar, canal de Mozambique, Mascareignes, Polynésie, Guyanes)* (Paris, 2011), pp. 477-521.

Vink, Markus, 'Indian Ocean Studies and the "New Thalassology"', *Journal of Global History*, 2, 1 (2007), pp. 41-62.

Wanquet, Claude, 'Le peuplement des Seychelles sous l'occupation française. Une expérience de colonisation à la fin du XVIIIe siècle', in Catherine Méhaud (ed.), *Mouvements de populations dans l'océan Indien* (Paris 1979), pp. 187-208.

'La traite illégal à Maurice à l'époque anglaise (1810-1835)', in Serge Daget (ed.), *De la traite à l'esclavage. Actes du colloque international sur la traite des noirs, Nantes 1985* (Paris, 1988), pp. 451-466.

Watson, James L., 'Slavery as an Institution, Open and Closed Systems', in James L. Watson (ed.), *Asian and African Systems of Slavery* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 1-15.

Webb, A.W.T., *The Story of Seychelles* (Victoria, 1964).