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**THE ELITE OF THE MALDIVES:  
SOCIOPOLITICAL ORGANISATION AND CHANGE**

*A Final Thesis*  
*Presented To*  
*The Faculty Committee of*  
**London School of Economics and Political Science**

By  
**Elizabeth Overton Colton**



*In Partial Fulfilment*  
*Of The Requirements For*  
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**Ph.D**

In  
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## ABSTRACT

*This thesis examines the elite of the Maldivian Islands, during a period of great technoeconomic change from 1976 until 1983. This ethnographic study is concerned with the nature of the Maldivian national elite, in particular the reiterative evidence of both repetition and change in its sociopolitical organisation. The first part of the thesis presents the principles of the study and introduces the ethnographic setting of the elite of Maldives. The Preface establishes the historical and methodological foundation of the study. Chapter 1 outlines the foci of the thesis and places it within a general anthropological framework. Chapter 2 places the elite within the context of the Maldivian geographical setting, history, and classification systems.*

*The second part of the study sets out the basic building blocks of the elite system. Chapter 3 essentially defines the Maldivian elite and describes the stratification system, politics, and the economic basis for the elite's power. Chapter 4 presents the basic building blocks of kinship and affinity--including sibling group, affines (especially brothers-in-law, lianoo), and friendship. Chapter 5 focuses upon the special role of the "house" as the basic political unit of the Maldivian elite.*

*The third part of this thesis discusses the use of the elite system over time. Chapter 6 provides a detailed description of the "political game", including the importance of protocol, ritualistic functions, and government service. Chapter 7 details the means of social control, including the rewards and punishments for the elite. Chapter 8 describes the patterns and cycles of political conflict within the Maldivian elite system.*

*The conclusion argues that the complex Maldivian elite system, with its evidence of change at the time of this study as a result of complex processes of modernisation in combination with a clear repetition of patterns and reiterative cycles over time, presents a model of evolutionary replication of a sociopolitical system.*

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# PREFACE

## i. Discovering Maldives

Maldives, the tiny country in the middle of the Indian Ocean, that coral archipelago of the legendary “two thousand isles”,<sup>1</sup> that “*terra incognita*”,<sup>2</sup> is arranged like a garland in a double chain of coral atolls stretching almost five hundred miles from seven degrees north to nearly one degree south of the equator.

For at least two millennia,<sup>3</sup> the Maldive Islands, or *Dhivehi Rajje*, as the country of Maldives is called in the Maldivian language (*Dhivehi*),<sup>4</sup> have been known to geographers,<sup>5</sup> cartographers,<sup>6</sup> traders,<sup>7</sup> sailors,<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> T.W. Hockly’s (1935) travel account picked up on this ancient description of the Maldive Islands--The Two Thousand Isles: A Short Account of the People, History and Customs of the Maldive Archipelago.

<sup>2</sup> “That terra incognita”, that unknown land, is how Hockly (1935), who visited Maldives in 1926 and 1934, opened his book describing his visits to the relatively unknown Maldivian archipelago.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 1 for a “Brief Chronology of Maldivian History”. Also, see Forbes (1980) for a list of chief resources for Maldivian history, and see Maloney (1980:28-133) for an outline of Maldivian history.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 2 for a “Glossary of Key Dhivehi Words and Expressions” used in this thesis. Also, see related Appendix 3 for other Dhivehi words in a “List of Maldivian Elite Kinship Terminology”. Also, see the appendix of the Hakluyt Society’s (Gray) translation of Pyrard (1887; rpt.1971, Vol.II, Part II:405-422) for a “Dictionary of Some Words of the Maldive Language” compiled first by Pyrard in the seventeenth century with “modern” vocabulary added in this 1887 edited translation. For other vocabularies of the Dhivehi language, see Christopher (1841); Kilagefanu (1883); Maniku & Disanayake (1990). See also Maloney (1980) for his linguistic analysis of Dhivehi spread throughout his ethnography, including several glossaries and lists of word derivations. Reynolds (1978) also traces the linguistic strands found in the Maldivian language.

<sup>5</sup> See the appendix of the Hakluyt Society’s (Gray) translation of Pyrard (1887;1971 rpt., Vol.II, Part II:423-92) for “Early Notices of the Maldives”, including references from geographical works, including the first century (A.D.) Periplus (Pyrard:426) geography of the Indian Ocean; the second century Geographia of Ptolemy (Claudius Ptolemaeus) (Pyrard:426); the fourth century works of Ammianus Marcellinus (Pyrard:426-7); and the eleventh century Alberuni (Pyrard:430-31). See translations of The Periplus of the Erythrian Sea (1974) and the Geographia of Ptolemy, Ptolemaeus (1883). See accounts of later expeditions by Agassiz (1902); Gardiner (1902a; 1902b); Horsburgh (1832); Moresby (1836); Young & Christopher (1836). For an excellent geographical survey of all the Maldive Islands, see the West Coast of India Pilot (1975), which I carried with me everywhere on my voyages throughout the Maldives Archipelago.

and a few other adventurers, as well as more recently to numismatists and philatelists collecting the rare coins and stamps of this tiny country.<sup>9</sup> For many, Maldives was only a remote, and often dangerous, archipelago along the ancient sea route from Arabia and Africa in the West, to China and the Spice Islands in the East. From the accounts of a few intrepid travellers, such as the renowned adventurer of the fourteenth century, Ibn Battuta of Tangier,<sup>10</sup> who went out of curiosity to see the Maldivian Islands, the sea-land of “two thousand

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<sup>6</sup> Cartographers from early times have included the Maldivian Islands on their maps of the world. The island-state was situated in the centre of the Indian Ocean and trade routes crossing that ocean from China and the Moluccas in the East to Arabia and Africa in the West. In earlier centuries, this archipelago was often given more prominence by cartographers on their maps than its actual size deserved because its geophysical bulwark of coral reefs represented a major obstacle for ships sailing in the Indian Ocean dhow trade between China and Africa/Arabia. For example, the 1740 “Asia” map by Daniel de la Feuille of Amsterdam places the “Isles Maldives” in the central and dominant position on the map as they straddle the “Equateur ou Ligne Equinoctiale” crossing the only “Ocean” named on the map.

<sup>7</sup> Again, see the appendix of the Hakluyt Society’s (Gray) translation of Pyrard (1887; rpt. 1971, Vol.II, Part II:423-92) for “Early Notices of the Maldives”, including the descriptions made by such early Arab traders as the ninth century (A.D.) Suleiman the Merchant (Pyrard:428-9); the tenth century Abu’l Hasan Ali (called El Mas’udi) (Pyrard: 429-30); and the twelfth century Edrisi (Pyrard:431-2). For accounts of the ancient dhow trade of the Indian Ocean, also see The Periplus (trans. 1974) and more detailed bibliographic notes below.

<sup>8</sup> It was, of course, the sailors and traders of the Indian Ocean who brought back descriptions to the geographers and cartographers usually working at home in Arab and European countries, India, and China. The best known sailor’s account of Maldives was by the Frenchman, Francois Pyrard of Laval, who had set sail in 1601 from St. Malo on the ship Corbin, which later was shipwrecked in the Maldivian Islands in 1602. Pyrard managed to be rescued and later taken to Male’ to become an adviser of the Sultan, and he lived in Maldives for almost five years until 1607. See the Hakluyt Society’s (Gray) translation of the 1619 third French edition of Pyrard’s (1887; rpt.1971, Vol. I & Vol. II, Part II) remarkably detailed account of his life in Maldives.

<sup>9</sup> See Reynolds (1993:67-9) for bibliographies on Maldivian numismatics and philately.

<sup>10</sup> The famed Arab traveller, Ibn Battuta, visited the Maldivian Islands in 1343 A.D., staying over a year as adviser to the Vizier, the husband of the ruling Sultana, and also marrying a Maldivian woman. He left for Ceylon in 1344 A.D., returning to Maldives in 1346 A.D. to see his son who had been born after his earlier departure. Later, Ibn Battuta wrote that he wanted to return again to Male’, but feared the ire of the Vizier. Along with Pyrard’s later account of Maldives nearly three hundred years afterwards, Ibn Battuta’s was the best, most detailed description of life among the elite up to the date of this thesis. See Ibn Battuta (Gray’s translation of 1882; and Gibb’s translation of 1929). Also, see excerpts of Ibn Battuta’s account of Maldives in the Hakluyt Society’s (Gray) translation of Pyrard (1887; rpt.1971, Vol.II, Part II:434-68). Maloney’s (1980) ethnography also contains many references to Ibn Battuta.

islands” was simply described as “among the wonders of the world”.<sup>11</sup> For such travellers who actually visited the capital island of Male’, Maldives has long been recognised as “a little civilisation”<sup>12</sup> at the crossroads of the ancient sea routes. The name Maldives also evoked images of strange magic practices, dagobas from a forgotten Buddhist era,<sup>13</sup> miniature mosques, orchid-lined streets, walled sultans’ palaces, beautiful ruling queens,<sup>14</sup> and easy marriage customs.<sup>15</sup> To others, such as the sailors<sup>16</sup> and traders of the monsoon-borne dhow-trade of

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<sup>11</sup> This is how Ibn Battuta described the reason for his curiosity to visit the Maldivian Islands: “These islands are among the wonders of the world: they number about 2000” (Pyrard, 1887, 1971, Vol. II, Part II: 436).

<sup>12</sup> See below in Chapter 1, and also see Maloney (1980: 134-210)’s discussion of the history and justification for calling Maldives “a little civilisation”.

<sup>13</sup> For discussions of the Buddhist period of Maldivian history, see again Maloney (1980: 72-97) and Pyrard (1887, 1971, Vol. II, Part II: 423-33). Also, see Allen (1983); Maniku & Wijayawardhana (1986); and Reynolds (1978; 1984; 1991). Thor Heyerdahl visited Maldives in the 1980s and published *The Maldivian Mystery* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1986) concerning his theories about pre-Buddhist settlements in Maldives. Maloney (1980: 28-71) also discusses theories about the pre-Buddhist period in the Maldivian Islands.

<sup>14</sup> Many of the early accounts of Maldives (see Pyrard, 1887, 1971, Vol. II, Part II: 423-92) remarked on the existence of female rulers in the Maldivian Islands. Since the time of the conversion of Maldives to Islam, there were four ruling Sultanas, cited in the *Tarikh* (1153-1821) chronicle of Maldivian rulers. See Bell (1921; 1940) and Maloney (1980). See below chapter 3 for further discussion.

<sup>15</sup> Again, both Ibn Battuta (1882; 19290; and in Pyrard, 1887, Vol. II, Part II: 454-62) and Pyrard (1887, 1971, Vol. I) mentioned the ease with which one could marry (and divorce) in Maldives.

<sup>16</sup> For an account of Maldives by a sailor later than Pyrard (seventeenth century), see the twentieth century accounts by the Australian sailor-adventurer-writer, Alan Villiers (1952; 1957; 1958).

the Indian Ocean,<sup>17</sup> Maldives was an island-kingdom of hardy navigators, treacherous reefs, pirates, and a few valuable trade items--ambergris,<sup>18</sup> tortoiseshell,<sup>19</sup> rare shells, wooden lacquerware, and the cowries long used as money<sup>20</sup> in the Indian Ocean region.

Lexicographers might recall Maldives as the location of the language from which the word "atoll" derives.<sup>21</sup> Charles Darwin even made

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<sup>17</sup> See Toussaint (1966) for his History of the Indian Ocean. Also, see The Periplus, which was the original first century (A.D.) geography of the Indian Ocean. Villiers' (1952) first book was titled The Indian Ocean by its British publishers (Museum Press) and then re-titled Monsoon Seas by its American publishers (McGraw-Hill). For descriptions of the Indian Ocean trading system, see Hourani's (1950) Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times and Martin & Martin's (1978) Cargoes of the East. For descriptions of the Indian Ocean dhow, see Hawkins (1977); Howarth (1977); and Villiers (1958). See Koechlin (1979) for a description of the Maldivian sailing ships once involved in the Indian Ocean trading network. For a recent account of the historic Chinese participation in, even domination of the Indian Ocean trade during the Ming Dynasty, see Levathes (1994), When China Ruled the Seas, in which Maldives is cited as a customary port of call for the emperor's fleet. This account (Levathes 1994:138-40,149) describes the valuable ambergris and the abundance of cowrie shells and coconut trees found in Maldives during the period, 1405-33 A.D.

<sup>18</sup> Ambergris is the grey, waxy substance secreted by the sperm whale and found in relative abundance floating in the seas of Maldives. Historically, it was prized as an aphrodisiac and a substance used in making perfumes. Levathes (1994:139-40) reports that the Chinese of the fifteenth century found the ambergris available in Maldives well worth its weight in silver. Also, see Pyrard (1887, 1971, Vol.I:229-30). To this day, in many places, especially in Arab countries, ambergris is still quite valuable as an aphrodisiac. In 1977, for example, while I was conducting fieldwork in Maldives, a large slab of ambergris was found in Maldives and then sold in Saudi Arabia for a large sum of money. See Colton (1977b).

<sup>19</sup> See Pyrard (1887, 1971, Vol.I:240-41). Also, see Colton (1977u) for a discussion of these historic trade items from Maldives, the rising demand for tortoiseshell with the late twentieth century tourism, and the threat to the turtle population of the Maldives Archipelago.

<sup>20</sup> See Pyrard (1887, 1971, Vol.I:236-40) description of the Maldives' wealth in the little cowrie shells. See Heimann (1980) for a discussion of Maldives' role as the major cowrie exporter of the Indian Ocean until the late eighteenth century when coins became the dominant currency (instead of the traditional cowrie-shell-currency) of the region, and Male' then became a seldom visited port of the Indian Ocean.

<sup>21</sup> Atolhu is the Maldivian word for "atoll" from which the English word derives. It means a circular coral reef or string of coral islands surrounding a lagoon.

special mention of the Maldivian Islands in his study of atoll formation.<sup>22</sup> For oceanographers and geologists, the Maldivian archipelago affords ideal examples of that very evolutionary phenomenon of coral atolls.<sup>23</sup>

Geopolitically, this tiny country in the centre of the Indian Ocean, has long attracted the attention not only of ancient traders but also, more recently, European colonial powers, beginning with the Portuguese in the sixteenth century.<sup>24</sup> Since the nineteenth century, the Maldivian Islands have been familiar to some British government officials, first through Maldives' attachment as a British Protectorate from 1887 until 1965,<sup>25</sup> and later as the site of one of Britain's last outpost military bases--the post-World War II airfield resembling a giant aircraft carrier on Maldives' southernmost island, Gan in Addu Atoll, abandoned by

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<sup>22</sup> See Darwin (1842, 1889:44-55, 141-5). Darwin cited the Maldivian atolls as what he called the "classic type" of atoll formation--the gradual building up from the ocean floor of layers and layers of the remains of sea polyps, eventually creating atolls visible on the ocean's surface. Thus, according to Darwin, the Maldivian Archipelago, which gradually evolved over millions of years, built up from the floor of the Indian Ocean as a range of atoll formations, represents the classic type of gradual evolution. (The Maldivian Archipelago is in many places more than a mile above the ocean floor). The other type of atoll formation, described by Darwin as contrasting with the Maldivian classic type, usually found in the Pacific Ocean, is the result of volcanic eruptions from which the remaining craters form atolls. That represents the catastrophic type of evolution.

<sup>23</sup> See Gardiner (1902a) for an account of the British Cambridge scientific expedition of 1899-1900. Also, see Gardiner's (1902b) discussion of Darwin's theory of the formation of coral atolls as evidenced in the Maldivian Archipelago. See Agassiz (1902) for an account of the first American scientific expedition to Maldives, and Stoddart's (1966) account of a 1964 British expedition to Addu Atoll. See Cousteau & dirole (1971) for the account of Jacques-Yves Cousteau's oceanographic expedition to Maldives in 1967.

<sup>24</sup> See Maloney (1980:98-133) and also Pyrard (1887, 1971, Vol.I) for accounts of the Portuguese invasion of Maldives in the sixteenth century.

<sup>25</sup> See Horsburgh (1832), who was shipwrecked in Maldives and for whom a northern atoll was later named by the British. Also, see Moresby (1836) and Young & Christopher (1836) for early nineteenth century accounts of visits to Maldives. The best accounts in terms of ethnographic detail were provided by the official British Archaeologist of Ceylon and Maldives, H. C. P. Bell (1883; 1921; 1940). His work on Maldives ranks along with Ibn Battuta and Pyrard before him as the most comprehensive up to the date of this thesis.

the British in early 1976.<sup>26</sup> In the last decades of the “cold war” between the post-World War II superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, Maldives was of global strategic importance because of its position in the Indian Ocean.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, readers of adventure novels might remember the Maldivian Islands as the exotic setting for some of Hammond Innes’ stories.<sup>28</sup>

Other than these examples, relatively few travellers ventured to that isolated country until after late 1972, when Maldives opened its first tourist resorts and started commercial air service into the airport adjacent to the capital island. Tourists began coming, most by air and a few on yachts, from all over the world to enjoy the pleasures of the Maldivian Islands. In less than a decade, the exotic names of the early Maldivian resort islands--*Kurumba, Bandos, Baros, Villingili, Velassarau, Farukolufushi, Furanafushi, Kuramathi, Meerufenfushi, Emboodhoo, Ihuru, and Vabbinfaru*--rapidly became passwords among seekers of the world’s last treasures in tropical remoteness, clear and unpolluted seawater, untouched coral reefs, and quiet, unspoiled, beaches.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See Reynolds (1993:53-9) for a bibliography of documents pertaining to the British-Maldivian negotiations and agreements over the southern island of Gan. Also, see Colton (1977c; 1977d; 1977f; 1977k; 1977r); Forbes (1977); and Maloney (1976) for reports on the aftermath of the British abandonment of its base on Gan.

<sup>27</sup> For discussions of the superpower rivalry over the Indian Ocean, including Maldives, see Adeney (1975); Anand (1976); Bezboruah (1977), as well as the Area Handbook for the Indian Ocean Territories (1971). Also, see Colton (1977c; 1977d; 1977r; 1978g; 1978j; 1979a; 1979b; 1980d; 1981a; 1981b; 1982); Colton & Klinger (1980); Davis (1986); Forbes (1977); and Maloney (1976).

<sup>28</sup> Innes’ (1965) novel, The Strode Venturer, is a fictionalised version of the southern Maldives’ rebellion and secession from the Republic of Maldives. It is based on the true story of Afeef Didi (see below) and his short lived Suvadiva Republic in the early 1960s. Also, see Innes (1970).

<sup>29</sup> For examples of the variety of travel books and guides which have been published about Maldives since tourism began there in 1972, see Bergagni (1981); Colton (1978f; 1980c); Ellis (1992); Fouquet (1985); Government of Maldives (1983a; 1983b; 1990); Maniku, Saleem, Maniku & Shareef (1977); Maniku (1980); Schmidt (1981; 1990); Valentin (1984); and Willox (1990). For articles discussing the impact of tourism in Maldives, see Colton (1977a; 1977n; 1977s; 1977t; 1977u; 1978i); Forbes & Ali (1978); and Revkin (1991).

Achieving dramatic success in tourism by the early 1980s, the Maldivians began confronting new problems--the onslaught of the outside world and the attendant potential threat to their traditional Maldivian culture. In the early 1990s, environmentalists and the Maldivian government were gravely concerned that increasing global warming could lead to extinction by inundation of the entire archipelago of the Maldivian Islands.<sup>30</sup>

My own discovery of the Maldivian Islands occurred before they opened themselves up to tourism, when I was engaged in one of my favourite pastimes--perusing maps of the world. It was in 1970, while poring over a map of the Indian Ocean, that I first became consciously aware of the archipelago of Maldives right in the middle of the ancient routes of the dhow-trade. I looked up the country's name in *The Encyclopedia Britannica* (1965, vol.14: 692-3) and found only a short citation mentioning the fourteenth-century traveller, Ibn Battuta, as one of the last visitors known to have written about this remote country. I was fascinated to find a place in the late twentieth century where there still existed such islands and people about whom so little was known. I knew immediately I wanted to visit this strange place.

Although for years my journey remained only a dream, finally, in 1976, I reached my destination, beginning my anthropological study in Maldives when tourism was in its early stages. My long trip out, most of which had taken place only in my imagination, had become, for me, a treasure hunt. At the end of my quest, I found completely circular

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<sup>30</sup> The government of Maldives under President Maumoon Gayoom has become increasingly alarmed about scientific and media reports that global warming could lead to the total inundation of the Maldivian Islands, and the President and other Maldivian officials have spoken often about the environmental threat in a variety of international forums since the early 1990s. President Gayoom has expressed his concern to me in private telephone conversations in 1990 and 1993. Also, see Revkin (1991) for a brief account of the problem.

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rainbows dipping into multi-coloured seas and tiny, palm-covered islands with beautiful, pure white, sandy beaches, where people lived their uniquely Maldivian way of life. Yet the end of that journey marked only the beginning of a long sojourn in a very strange society and the start in unravelling the mysteries of Maldives.

## ii. Preparation for Fieldwork in Maldives

The following is a chronology of my longtime fascination with the Indian Ocean, the dhow-trade, the Maldivian Islands and the steps preparatory to my fieldwork in Maldives.

In the early 1950s, when I first studied world geography, among the places that most fascinated me were then-Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and the Indian Ocean. Those far-away places seemed so wonderfully exotic to me, at the age of nine, that I even then fantasised that someday I would go there.

In 1968, while teaching English as a U. S. Peace Corps volunteer in Kenya, I visited the then-remote Indian Ocean island of Lamu,<sup>31</sup> historically a major African entrepot and one of the most important of the old Arab-Swahili societies. I was fascinated then to learn about the ancient Indian Ocean dhow trade that had been important to much of the world for more than two millennia. The next year, in 1969, I lived and taught on that island off the coast of East Africa, and further developed what became my lifetime interest in the Indian Ocean and the monsoon-borne dhow trade.

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<sup>31</sup> See Forbes & Ali (1980) for a discussion of the historical links between Maldives and East Africa, in particular Lamu Island. See Prins (1965) for a detailed ethnography of the maritime culture of Lamu and its historically important position in international trade. Also, see Martin & Martin (1978) for a general discussion of the role East African ports, such as Lamu, played in the Indian Ocean trading system.

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It was in 1970, as I described earlier, that I first “discovered” the Maldivian Islands on a map of the Indian Ocean and determined to go there someday. The next year, 1971, I began graduate studies in anthropology<sup>32</sup> and decided that when I did fieldwork ultimately for my doctorate, I would most like to go to the Maldivian Islands, where there appeared, then, to have been no other anthropological fieldwork. I began searching for anthropologists who might have worked in the region, and at the London School of Economics, where I was already considering pursuing my doctoral studies, I found Dr. Maurice Bloch, who had conducted fieldwork in Madagascar.<sup>33</sup> I wrote Dr. Bloch in 1972, and first met with him in London in January of 1973 to discuss my interest in working with him and conducting fieldwork in Maldives. Although Dr. Bloch’s work up to then in Madagascar<sup>34</sup> seemed to be quite different than what we expected I would find in Maldives, he was interested in supervising my work in this other area of the Indian Ocean and agreed to accept me as a student for the coming academic year.

In the summer of 1973, just before I began graduate studies in social anthropology in London, while on a trip through India and Sri Lanka, I learned that for the first time there were some commercial flights to Maldives from Colombo. I tried unsuccessfully to get a seat, but all the flights on the small planes were already fully booked with European tourists and travel agents. As I later learned, that was only the first full year of operation for the Maldivian tourist industry.

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<sup>32</sup> I first did two years of graduate work in anthropology at Vanderbilt University and earned a master’s degree (M.A.) there in 1973.

<sup>33</sup> Bloch’s ethnography of the Merina of Madagascar, *Placing the Dead* (1971), had just been published when I began looking for an anthropologist who had worked in the Indian Ocean region and with whom I might do my doctoral studies.

<sup>34</sup> See also Bloch (1971a; 1971c; 1973).

After passing my qualifying examinations at the London School of Economics in the summer of 1974, I spent the year of 1975 and a few months in early 1976 working as an anthropologist in international development planning at the United Nations in New York City. The fact that I had not been able to go straight to do fieldwork because of lack of funds and had instead found this other interim employment turned out to be a fortuitous detour for my eventual work in Maldives.

Maldives was a member-state of the United Nations, having joined immediately upon its independence from British protectorate status in 1965, but I was at first informed upon inquiring there that no Maldivians had attended the U.N. for a number of years. Then in September of 1975, I learned from the U.N. Protocol Office that, quite unexpectedly, a Maldivian delegation of two men had arrived to attend the Thirtieth General Assembly.<sup>35</sup> I sent a letter to these Maldivian delegates, explaining that I would like to conduct anthropological fieldwork in their country, but had no idea how to proceed, and expressing my interest in meeting them.

The next day I received a call from the number-two-delegate, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who spoke excellent English, saying that he and the head of the delegation, Ahmed Kandi Maniku Ismail, would be pleased to meet me that day in the U.N. Delegates' Lounge to discuss my plans. This was the beginning of my long relationship with the first two Maldivians I had ever met.<sup>36</sup> Maumoon began teaching me the

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<sup>35</sup> That year, 1975, the United Nations was launching the Decade of Development (and Maldives was then categorised as a developing nation).

<sup>36</sup> One year later, Maumoon Gayoom and his family welcomed me to Maldives, and I became "attached" to their house, Enderimaage. Right after I left the field in 1978, he became the President of Maldives. Also, years later, Kandi's wife, Moomina Haleem Ismail, took refuge in my London flat for the first year of her exile from Maldives. (See below for more details).

Maldivian language, *Dhivehi*, and introducing me to his culture.<sup>37</sup> He and I spent time together almost every day while he was in New York that autumn of 1975, from mid-September until late November, when they left to return home to Maldives.

From April to June of 1976, I worked again at the London School of Economics under Dr. Bloch's guidance in preparation for going to Maldives. Also, while in London, at the School of Oriental and African Studies, I continued my study of the Maldivian language (*Dhivehi*), under the unique scholar of the *Dhivehi* language, Professor Christopher Reynolds.<sup>38</sup>

In August of 1976, I headed towards Maldives, stopping first in Colombo, Sri Lanka, which was the primary launching point for Maldives.<sup>39</sup> I spent a few days there in the Sri Lankan capital<sup>40</sup> attempting to meet as many people as possible who knew anything about or had visited Maldives. Even in the neighbouring country of Sri Lanka, the Maldivian Islands were still viewed as remote, exotic, and very mysterious. Several people, mostly Sri Lankans and a few foreigners, warned me to be careful of the political situation in Maldives,

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<sup>37</sup> Maumoon Gayoom had himself begun studying his own language while he had recently been exiled to an outer island in Maldives. His recent systematic study of *Dhivehi* and his previous experience as a teacher in Nigeria contributed to his being an excellent teacher for me.

<sup>38</sup> Reynolds, primarily a Sinhalese scholar, was at the time in the process of compiling a comprehensive *Dhivehi*-English dictionary, which has not yet been published. Later, however, Reynolds (1993) compiled an excellent comprehensive bibliography of Maldives. See also Reynolds (1975; 1978; 1984; 1991) and Forbes & Reynolds (1987).

<sup>39</sup> There were also, by then, less frequent flights to Male's Hulule Airport in Maldives from Trivandrum, Kerala, in southern India.

<sup>40</sup> Also, as an American citizen, I took the safety precaution of registering at the U.S. Embassy in Colombo, as I would be living in Maldives, where there then were no diplomatic missions resident in that country.

reputedly dictatorial, highly secretive, and sporadically erupting into coups and mobs.<sup>41</sup>

On September 5, 1976, I flew for the first time to the Republic of Maldives.

### **iii. Arrival and First Impressions**

My first flight to Maldives took a little over two hours, flying southwest from Colombo, Sri Lanka. I was on my way, at last, to begin nearly two years of intensive social-anthropological fieldwork in the mysterious Maldivian Islands. I had no idea what to expect. I was so excited, and I could not believe that, finally, I would reach the place about which I had been dreaming for years.

After take-off, the small, fourteen-seat, propeller-plane immediately left Sri Lanka's emerald green coastline of coconut plantations and rice paddies. (Later, when I returned after spending time in the minuscule islands of the Maldivian archipelago where there was really only "seascape", this same landscape would appear to be vast and endlessly green, not the island that it actually was). The little aircraft cruised at fourteen thousand feet over a vast expanse of water, the beautiful Indian Ocean, shimmering silver, blue and golden in the afternoon sun.

About ten minutes before landing, tiny specks began appearing below us on the azure sea's surface. At first I mistook them for the shadows of small clouds. Then, as a long string of them became visible--strung out like pearls on the sun-glistening water--I realised that they were

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<sup>41</sup> My sources were some Sri Lankan and other nationals (American, British, and French diplomats) resident in the Sri Lankan capital. Most of them had knowledge based only on hearsay; only a very few had by that time actually visited Maldives. Several diplomats even offered me unsolicited instruction on how to avoid crowds and what to do if mobs took over in the Maldivian capital as they had been known to do in the past.

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some of the coral islets of Maldives. Suddenly, everywhere below us were circles upon circles of tiny landscape and surrounding vast seascape.

The plane swooped down above the white bits of land, each surrounded by clearly discernible concentric circles of beautifully coloured water, radiating out in deepening shades of blues and greens. Palm trees became visible on the islands, and some, which I learned later were the recently built tourist resort islands, were adorned with thatch-covered bungalows. We passed over what was then a short landing strip<sup>42</sup> on Hulule Island, then the country's only commercial airport serving all Maldives.

On our right, as we were flying south to turn for landing, was a large squarish island,<sup>43</sup> the capital Male'. It was covered with white, neatly arranged buildings and divided by straight streets, some bisecting the island. Just below Male', the plane made its turn over a wide channel through which a large ship was passing. The channel divided two atolls, North Male' and South Male', whose distinct, reef-bound outlines were clearly visible.

Now, flying back towards Hulule Airport, I could see that inside the large lagoon of North Male' Atoll stretching north of Male' Island, the water was covered with sailboats, or *dhoni*, as the lateen-sailed fishing boats are called in *Dhivehi*. They were everywhere--some anchored off islands, others sailing between them, a few in the open sea outside the atoll's outermost reef, but most inside the lagoon. At that time, almost

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<sup>42</sup> Five years later, through a huge development project involving local land-reclamation labour, the entire airport island was doubled in size to 11,000 feet.

<sup>43</sup> Originally, it would have been roundish, but with constant government-sponsored land reclamation, Male' was squared almost to the edge of the reef.

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all the *dhoni* had sails (five years later, most were mechanised and had no sails). Small, ocean-going freighters (most of which I later learned belonged to the small, but prospering, government line, Maldives Shipping Limited) were moored in the lagoon, which was actually Male' harbour, between the capital island and the airport island.

Stepping from the plane into the sunshine and sea breeze, I was overwhelmed by the quietness of my surroundings. Some Maldivians, all very short and dark-skinned wearing neat shirts and long trousers, were standing under palm, mango and breadfruit trees beside the runway. Not far beyond them was water in every direction. Just off the runway were three billboards advertising Air Maldives, Air Ceylon, and Indian Airlines.<sup>44</sup>

I followed the other passengers towards a small building with the words "Hulule Airport" printed across the front. Above it was the striking Maldivian flag--a large red border encasing a green square with a white Islamic crescent in the centre. Inside the airport building, some tourists were arguing with officials in a futile effort to get their passports stamped with a Maldives seal. In those days there was no such immigration formality, and no stamps for entry and exit existed in Maldives until 1979. There were only health requirements for cholera and small-pox vaccinations.

As I waited in line to present my yellow international health-certificate, several smiling Maldivians approached me and asked where I wanted to go, each naming a different resort island (in Maldives

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<sup>44</sup> Air Maldives has been changed to Maldives International Airlines, and Air Ceylon to Air Lanka.

there was only one resort to each island). These young men were hawkers for the different resorts (“fishing for tourists”, as they later described their occupation). The “airport liaisons”, as they were formally called, met every flight to take respective “clients” (as resort guests were always labelled) whom they “lured” from the planes, by boat, to the resorts the liaisons represented. That day they were obviously surprised when I told them that I would be going first to Male’ and was expecting to be met by some Maldivian friends. When they realised that I would not be a “catch”, they shifted their attention to a German couple, who apparently had come to Maldives without any knowledge of where to stay. (Most tourists came in large travel groups from Europe). The “tourist-fishermen” began their competitive bidding (“baiting”) ritual, vying to lure the Germans (*Gerumanu miihun*) to their particular resorts.

Suddenly, much to my relief, out of the crowd appeared my Maldivian friend, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. I was both somewhat surprised and very relieved to see him. Although he had written asking me to let him know when I would be arriving and I had cabled him my flight details from Colombo, I had not been sure if he would really be there to meet me.

Maumoon was smiling and looking quite different from the way I remembered him in New York a year earlier. There he had appeared rather stocky for his relative shortness, always dressed in somber, dark, unfashionable suits. Here in Maldives, he seemed slimmer, not at all short among his own people, though much shorter than I and the Europeans. He was wearing pressed, long grey trousers with a freshly ironed white cotton shirt worn over the waist of his trousers.

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Maumoon greeted me by giving me the honorific Maldivian handshake--after gripping my hand firmly, he then raised his thumb and outstretched hand back towards his forehead and nose as a sign of respect. He then introduced me to his wife, Nasreena, dressed in neat bell-bottomed slacks and a floral long-sleeved blouse, also worn outside, over her trousers. Accompanying them on this outing were her sister, Farisha (nicknamed Fari), dressed as Nasreena; the sisters' brother, Abbas; Fari's husband, Ibrahim Samari Maniku; and their late sister's husband, Heena. I thought it odd, when Nasreena pointed out another man standing in a nearby group of men and said that he was Maumoon's brother, Abdulla Hameed, but the latter did not speak to us and appeared not even to acknowledge us.<sup>45</sup>

After Maumoon gave some quiet orders to a few workmen to carry my bags to the jetty (there were no porters *per se*, as there were in the neighbouring South Asian countries), we all boarded a motor-launch. In addition to our own small party, there were a number of other Maldivians aboard. Some were in Western-style clothes like Maumoon and his family, but several were wearing traditional dress--men in long sarongs (*mundu*) and short-sleeved overshirts (*libas*) and a few women in long dresses (*digu hedun*)--some were of plain dark colours while others were of large floral prints, all with rounded open necks and wide scalloped collars. A few older women were wearing colourful overblouses, one a bright red and another a bright blue, with gold and silver-threaded embroidered open necks and gold cuffs, called *karufehili libas*, over skirts of wide black and white horizontal stripes, called *feyli*.

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<sup>45</sup> I soon learned in Male' that members of the Maldivian elite seldom ever publicly greeted or acknowledged any personal connections in public. There was always said to be the fear that conversations and greetings might be misconstrued by passersby and reported as political to higher authorities. Because of this general fear and especially fear of talking with foreigners (see discussion below in chapter 2), it was remarkable that Maumoon Gayoom and his wife's family publicly welcomed me to Maldives, about which most members of the Male' elite would have heard by the next day, if not that night.

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A few of the women wore necklaces of large gold coins and the traditional veil (*buruga*) wrapped around the tops of their heads and hanging down on their shoulders but with their faces uncovered.

Immediately, I began to realise, as we sat on the boat and I began observing the people, that there was a distinctly Maldivian appearance--distinguishable from their neighbours and ancestral relatives, Indians and Sri Lankans. Almost all Maldivians were short (most then under five and a half feet, and many under five feet tall) with very black hair, and most were very dark-skinned. They had a variety of facial features, and some had very curly hair, others with very straight hair, and many with beautiful straight white teeth. Like their language, which is Indo-European from Sanskrit but with a great abundance now of Arabic influence, Maldivians' facial features reflect the long history of their country's interaction with all the other cultures involved in the Indian ocean trading network--Indian, Singhalese, Malay, Chinese, Indonesian, Arab, Persian, Portuguese, East African, and even, as some of the Maldivian elite claim, some French blood. Sitting shyly apart from the rest of the Maldivians was a small cluster of women with remarkably similar features but rather different from the others. Each was wearing a tightly wound piece of cloth made to look like a flower above one ear (called a *ruma*). I was told that these women were descendants of the people believed to have been the aborigines of Maldives, the people originally of Giravaru Island on the far southwestern rim of North Male' Atoll.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> According to legend, these aborigines, believed to have come from southern India thousands of years ago, were inhabiting Maldives when the Singhalese prince, Koimala, and his bride drifted over from Ceylon and became the first king and queen of this remote archipelago. A few years before I arrived in Maldives, these people had all been forcibly removed from their native Giravaru and re-settled on Hulule Island. The year after I arrived, they were removed again, to Male', when the project for modernising the airport island began in 1977. See Maloney (1980:274-78) for more about the Giravaru people and also (Maloney 1980:28-47) for a more detailed account of the Maldivian origin myths and legends.

The ride from Hulule to Male' took twenty minutes. Headed south, we passed between the island of Funadu, used for freight storage and for oil storage tanks, and on our right, Dhunidhoo, used by the police as a prison. Sailboats and motorboats skirted past us. The buildings along Male's waterfront became distinct. Freshly whitewashed with blue- or green-trimmed doors and windows, many were crowned with Maldivian flags to indicate that they were government offices. A number of modern motorboats and a few small yachts were anchored on the eastern half of the front, but the western half was lined with the traditional wooden sailboats used by the fishermen.

We pulled into a jetty to the west of the fishing boats. Again, Maumoon gave quiet orders for my bags to be taken somewhere. Then we all walked inland along narrow, cleanly swept streets of hard-packed coral sand. A few cars, bicycles and motorcycles passed by us, but the island seemed very quiet. Walls (*faaru*) lined the streets. We passed through a wooden door in one of the walls and came into a large courtyard, which was in the back of their house-compound (*ge*), called Enderimaage. (I recognised the name as the address to which I had sent letters informing Maumoon of my arrival plans).

The courtyard was shaded with coconut palms, betelnut palms, mango, breadfruit, papaya, and banana trees. I was introduced to Nasreena's mother, Hava Manike, widowed for only two years, and Abbas' wife, Zahema (nicknamed Zahe), and all their children (Maumoon and Nasreena's then three: Dunya, Yumna, and Faris; Abbas and Zahe's two; Abbas' two older ones by an earlier wife; and Fari and Samari's two) and a number of servants (many of whom were children and a few older persons, who I later learned were visiting-islanders).

Room was made for me on a large swing, called *ndoli*, which I was told was a basic piece of Maldivian furniture used as both a seat and a bed and found in the courtyards as well in inside rooms of most houses. I was given a chilled glass of yellow *meva* fruit juice and a plate of cold, spicy, fried fish balls and small sweet coconut cakes. Maumoon told me that they had arranged a room for me to rent at a "hotel" (a two-room guest house in the middle of Male') and that my bags had been sent there. It was very peaceful as we sat talking in the breezy, tree-shaded courtyard. Then in the darkening evening as the sun set, the soothing wail of Muslim prayers could be heard from a nearby mosque.

All at once, everyone hurriedly excused themselves without explanation, walked quickly into the house, and left me sitting alone on the swing, wondering what was transpiring. Through the open window of what seemed to be a dining room, I could see several of the family eating very fast, pushing food into their mouths with their hands. (Like many other peoples of South Asia, Maldivians eat only with their right hand). A few minutes later, they returned to me and explained that they had rushed off to break their day's fast. It was the month of *Ramazán*, as the Maldivians call the Muslim period of Ramadan. Almost immediately, there began to be lots of noise coming from the street--cars, horns, motorcycles, and voices--and, yet, it remained subdued and relatively quiet in the courtyard of Enderimaage where we continued sitting. My hosts explained that at night during *Ramazán*, the people of Male' feasted and celebrated until early morning. The racket was a strange contrast to the initial peacefulness I had sensed upon arrival.

My host, Maumoon, asked if I would be interested in going that evening to a local musical concert. Of course, I was thrilled at the idea that I would get to see and hear such a performance on my very first

night. I assumed the concert would feature “traditional music”, but, much to my surprise, when we reached the open-air theatre of the girls’ high school, I discovered their music was electric-rock played by young men wearing modern bell-bottom trousers and starched, white, unbelted overshirts. They were playing the latest hits from America and Europe, including John Denver’s “Country Road”, as well as music by Abba, and the audience of Maldivians cheered them on.

Afterward, I was introduced to several other Maldivians, all of whom also spoke excellent English. I found myself wondering what life would be like for me here over the next couple of years, and marvelling already at this unusual little island and the sea-world surrounding it.

Thus began my fieldwork on the capital island of Male’ in the Maldivian Islands--a study of amazing contrasts in a very old, remote, yet globally connected, society of the Indian Ocean.

#### **iv. Fieldwork, Continuing Involvement, and Other Research**

Over the next nineteen months--until April of 1978--I lived in the Republic of Maldives and carried out anthropological fieldwork, having my residence in the capital, Male’, and making visits to outer islands throughout the country. As I will explain below, I became a true participant-observer in the elite society of Maldives. Although I rented my own separate accommodation (several short-term rentals at first and eventually a little flat at a house called “Oceanic Villa” on the western end of the island), I was attached to Maumoon Gayoom’s wife’s family’s house called Enderimaage. I usually visited there several times a day, and my mail came to that address. I was also a daily participant in the life of other houses: Mandueduruge, belonging to Rasheeda Mohamed Didi; her brothers’ other houses, including Karankage; and Manduge, where Habeeba and her husband Zubair

lived with their children and her old mother, Titi Gomaa, one of the last living princesses.

Everyday I also visited many other people during the day and especially in the cool evenings, as was the custom, in many other houses belonging to the elite, all living in the capital. I either rode my bicycle<sup>47</sup> or walked daily around the capital island early every morning and throughout the island's streets during the days and nights when I was in Male'. Also, at the invitation of members of the elite with access to boats and islands, I often accompanied them on excursions (evening outings, Friday picnics, and even holiday trips) to outer islands--tourist islands, distant inhabited islands and some uninhabited islands throughout the archipelago. A couple of times I managed to get rides on small planes to visit Addu Atoll in the south.

Immediately upon arrival in Maldives, I resumed my studies of the Maldivian language with several teachers, including not only continuing with Maumoon Gayoom when he was free, but also with other learned Maldivians whom he had recommended: Sheikh Mohamed Jameel, Aminath Hussein, Habeeba Zubair, Fatimath Anees Didi, and later Mohamed Waheed. I learned to write the script, called *Thaana*, and I was able to read some. I studied the Maldivian language throughout my years of fieldwork and later in London when some members of the Maldivian elite shared my home (see below). Most members of the Maldivian elite spoke English, however, and they often used English even among themselves.

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<sup>47</sup> At that time, relatively few members of the elite had cars. Most either walked or rode bicycles around the capital island. Maumoon and Nasreena arranged for me to buy my own bicycle, and I left it at their house, Enderimaage, on my departure.

Daily life among the elite of Maldives is similar to elite life in many other places (except that the scale of Male' was very small, existing then on a densely populated one-square-mile island).<sup>48</sup> At that time, the members of the Maldivian elite spent their time working in government offices in the mornings, running the government from both their offices and homes, managing their households with the help of numerous servants, talking, gossiping, scheming (politically and romantically), educating the young, praying, courting and making love, and going from house to house to discuss, observe, and stay abreast of the affairs of the capital's elite.

I lived among the elite as they lived and collected data daily on the kinship system as well as all other aspects--economic, political, religious, and social--of that society. Sometimes I used tape recorders for special interviews and discussions and transcribed the tapes, but, most importantly, I daily kept very detailed field-notes and journals on all aspects of my daily research and life in Maldives and especially among the elite. (I continued this practice of keeping notes about Maldives for years after my fieldwork in the country when I remained intensely involved with Maldivian elite society, as I will describe later in this Preface. Even years later, whenever there has been renewed contact, I have kept detailed notes about what I have learned about the Maldivian elite).

Soon after I arrived in the field in 1976, I was notified that I had been awarded a grant for doctoral fieldwork from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. The original title of my proposed eighteen-months' fieldwork was "Traditional Society and

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<sup>48</sup> Later, with the international telephone and Maldivians having enough money from tourism to travel and set up living abroad as well, they have maintained communication among the elite all over the world. See Colton (1995a).

Processes of Change in the Maldives Islands: The Social Impact of Tourism”, which I had submitted to the Wenner-Gren Foundation months before I went to the field.

The focus of my study changed, however, when I discovered that there was a more immediate topic at hand--that the elite stratum of the country lived on the capital island where I was living, that this elite was the group to whom I had been given a unique entrée, and that politics was the chief preoccupation of that elite, indeed its *raison d'être*. I realised that I had a rare opportunity to focus upon this national political elite and, thus, the elite's control of tourism, was only a component of the overall focus.

A bit of background is helpful here to explain how my orientation changed. Before originally going to Maldives, I learned that tourism had only just begun there. Realising the long isolation of the country, isolated at least from global tourism, I assumed that this fledgling tourist industry would have a marked effect upon the traditional society, including the marriage and kinship system, class system, religion, labour and migration patterns, education, patterns of conflict, values, and cultural horizons. I went into the field expecting to find that tourism was one of the major agents of change, and once at work in Maldives, I began to identify many effects of tourism in all aspects of the socioeconomic organisation.

I found, too, that many of the effects I was observing in that country were different from those observed in other places where tourism had been studied as an agent of change. Maldives had a unique advantage that protected much of the society from some of the harsher effects of tourism. In the Maldives Archipelago, of the 1196 islands (the unofficial count in the late 1970s), only 210 were then inhabited, leaving

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almost a thousand for other purposes. The original founders of the tourist industry in Maldives decided to take advantage of this unusual opportunity and built their tourist hotels, resorts as Maldivians call them, on separate uninhabited islands.

Observing the tourist industry in operation in Maldives, I saw that it was controlled by a small group of people, whose chief director was the country's ruler, and that they were adapting this new industry in many ways to traditional Maldivian patterns of living. What became most interesting for me to study was not so much tourism alone and its effects, but rather how the Maldivian elite was coping with tourism and other developmental-economic changes. Thus, from the beginning of my fieldwork, the primary focus of my research changed, and the fledgling tourist industry became only one aspect of my study. I realised that what I was really studying was the sociopolitical organisation of the Maldivian elite in whose midst I was living.

It should be noted that because of a serendipitous set of circumstances, from the very beginning of my stay in Maldives, I enjoyed an advantage that no other foreigner living there had. (At the time I arrived in Maldives, I found several other anthropologists and other scholars at work in the country).<sup>49</sup> My close association with the two-man Maldivian delegation at the U.N. had provided me with an

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<sup>49</sup> Clarence Maloney, an American anthropologist residing in southern India, had made several short visits to Maldives and published several articles about Maldives (1974; 1976; 1978a; 1978b). Later, Maloney (1980) published a general ethnography, *People of the Maldive Islands*, which provides a useful survey of the country as a whole, focusing much more on the "islands" and history than on the elite of the capital. Also, Danish anthropologists, Annagrethe Ottovar (1980) and her husband, Nils Finn Munch-Petersen (1982), were working in 1976-77 on southern islands. James Heimann (1980), an American anthropologist trained in Denmark, and his Danish wife, Kirstin Heimann, were also working during 1976-77 in the southern atolls, as well as British scholar, Andrew Forbes (1977; 1980; 1987), and his Kenyan wife, Fawzia Ali (1978), who was particularly interested in the historical Indian Ocean connections between East Africa and Maldives (see Forbes & Ali 1980). A German student, Norbert Schmidt, also came to Maldives in 1977, and has since published a guidebook (1981; 1990).

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unparalleled entree into the lives of the Maldivian elite. It was known among the members of the elite that one its own, Maumoon Gayoom, had known me as a friend elsewhere and obviously respected me enough to go himself publicly with his wife and family to welcome me upon arrival at the airport and into their household, at great risk of stirring up gossip and malicious accusations about their friendship with a foreigner.

Clearly, however, although I had that unusual toehold in Maldivian society, as a “mere” anthropologist, I remained not important enough, according to standards of Maldivian protocol, to be included on any official lists for Maldivian elite functions. Later, more than halfway into my first year of fieldwork, for a quite unexpected reason, I began receiving a few invitations to special elite functions, and suddenly the world of the Maldivian elite became clearer. Again, serendipitously, I had achieved my new status, one that was important and useful to the elite in Maldivian society, by officially registering as a journalist with the government<sup>50</sup> and then by having published a few news stories.<sup>51</sup>

After more than six months of fieldwork, I suddenly discovered that by writing immediately publishable articles about events related to my research, I had a current value to the Maldivian elite, which is above all, ethnocentric, and concerned always with its political world. I then

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<sup>50</sup> This letter, written in 1977, formally notifying the Maldivian government that I wished also to work as a journalist writing articles about Maldives, was in addition to my original letter of registration written in 1975, stating that I wished to live and work there as an anthropologist. I had written both letters at different times upon the advice of my friend, Maumoon Gayoom. In each case, the government’s Department of External Affairs responded positively to my requests with official letters from the Minister, as Maumoon had told me was important to obtain before proceeding.

<sup>51</sup> See Colton (1977a-u) in Bibliography for the early news articles published about Maldives. See also Colton (1978b-j,l-m); 1979a-b; 1980a-d; 1981a-b; 1982) and Colton & Klinger (1980) for later news articles.

became even better known and actually accepted by the Maldivian elite as “the journalist”.

My writing as a journalist gave me a legitimate role in the Male’ society and thus a position which allowed my inclusion in elite functions and activities. Basically, the Maldivian leaders and government were very pleased to have a foreigner living among them and writing news reports about their country that gave them publicity they had never had in the regional and world press. By helping give Maldives status in the outside world, I was accepted and accorded a position in the Maldivian elite.

As I look back on my first long period of fieldwork in Maldives, I realise that if I had not fallen into this occupation, which provided me a status and prestige in their society, I could never have achieved the depth and breadth of my research and thus my resultant thesis. As only an anthropologist, I would never have been included in the official side of Maldivian elite life, and would not have had the unique opportunity to learn about the Male’ elite. It was not the usual combination of roles for an ethnographer, and nor was it planned, but it provided the opportunity to do in-depth fieldwork in an elite society that would not, otherwise, have been open to an outsider. I became a true participant-observer in a society that has, historically, allowed very few outsiders an inside view.

During those first years of my fieldwork in 1976-1978, I had the amazing good fortune (from the point of view of an observer of change) to be in Maldives when several events occurred that signalled the beginning of major techno-economic change. And because I was by 1977 seen to have a contributing role in the elite society, I was invited to attend the celebratory rituals and observe the Maldivian reactions

to these inaugural events. These major events included the following: the opening of Maldives' satellite earth station and its modern telecommunications system in May of 1977;<sup>52</sup> the arrival of the first commercial jetplane in Maldives and the inauguration of the Maldives International Airlines with its jet service to Sri Lanka in November of 1977;<sup>53</sup> the opening of the country's first factories, fish-canning, in 1977;<sup>54</sup> and the opening of Maldives Television on March 29, 1978.<sup>55</sup> Also, I was living in Maldives when other unusual events took place, including: in late 1976, only four years after the country had opened its doors to international tourists, a tourist committed the only murder that had occurred in the country for many years;<sup>56</sup> in 1977, the overnight conversion of the written language from the traditional, unique Maldivian script called *Thaana* to a modern Roman script;<sup>57</sup> the government's rejection in 1977 of what was then a huge offer of one million dollars from the Soviet Union to lease Gan airfield;<sup>58</sup> the discovery by a fisherman in 1977 of a large block of ambergris floating in the Maldivian seas, and its subsequent sale by an entrepreneurial member of the elite in what was then the largest single

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<sup>52</sup> See Colton (1977e; 1977l; 1977p; 1978g; 1995a).

<sup>53</sup> See Colton (1977a; 1977t; 1978g; 1978i).

<sup>54</sup> See Colton (1977r; 1978g).

<sup>55</sup> See Colton (1978b; 1978g; 1995a).

<sup>56</sup> A young German man murdered his German girlfriend. He was then tried in Maldives and banished for life to a remote island. There he was converted to Islam and married a Maldivian woman. This incident and the growth of tourism in general caused alarm in Maldives and led to the government enacting a "ban on hippies" in 1977 (see Colton 1977n; 1977s; 1978f; 1978g).

<sup>57</sup> This was a dramatic example of how the President rules by fiat in Maldives--an order is given and action must be taken across the country immediately.

<sup>58</sup> See Colton (1977c; 1977k; 1977r; 1978g).

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monetary transaction made by a Maldivian;<sup>59</sup> tourism figures jumped from a few thousand per year to twenty thousand during the time of my fieldwork.<sup>60</sup> All these “events” were truly historic markers occurring while I lived with the Maldivians and learned about their traditional and modernising society.

In October of 1977, the President of Maldives, Ibrahim Nasir, who had ruled the country for twenty years without ever having given an audience to any non-official foreigner (official including ambassadors and senior United Nations representatives), suddenly agreed to grant me the first ever such interview.<sup>61</sup> Although I never met him again while he was ruling the country,<sup>62</sup> he apparently then approved my inclusion in a number of exclusive elite activities.

I was able to study the elite as a community--the political core--at the national level. In a society in which every feature was intertwined with, and indeed governed by, politics, I observed how the elite was directing, coping with, and adapting to modernisation and change, including tourism, mass communications and all other aspects of technological development.

I spent nearly two years (1976-78) living in Maldives; I re-visited there on five different occasions in late 1978, 1979, 1980, and 1983; and since then, I have maintained very close ties with Maldivians who have

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<sup>59</sup> See Colton (1977b; 1978g).

<sup>60</sup> See Colton (1977t; 1978f; 1978g; 1979a; 1980c; 1980d; 1981a; 1981b; 1982).

<sup>61</sup> For excerpts from that interview, see Colton (1977d; 1977r; 1978g).

<sup>62</sup> The only other times I met Ibrahim Nasir was when I went to interview him in Singapore in April 1980 (see Colton 1980b) and once, synchronistically, when I unexpectedly bumped into him arriving at London's Heathrow Airport in late 1980.

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visited me in England and the United States, as well as meeting me elsewhere around the world, including Switzerland, Egypt, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Yemen, and Kuwait. Interestingly, my contact with Maldivians outside Maldives while I was again living in London, from 1978-1983, was nearly as intense as it might have been in Maldives, probably even more so in terms of information they divulged about the political workings of their elite society. During those years, when several Maldivians lived with me in London and many others visited me, I learned a great deal about Maldivian elite life because the life they had left behind was all they wanted to talk about when abroad. And, equally important, these travelling members of the elite always felt much more free to talk about politics when they were outside Maldives.

I moved from Maldives on April 2, 1978, only four days after the opening of the Maldivian television service.<sup>63</sup> Later that week, I stopped in the Seychelle Islands, far to the west of Maldives, and there located the man who had led a rebellion against the Maldivian government in Male' in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Abdullah Afeef Didi,<sup>64</sup> a southern Maldivian from Addu Atoll, had, with his wife and children, been living in exile in Seychelles since 1963.

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<sup>63</sup> I had arranged my departure date to fall after the opening of the television because I wanted to observe the celebration of the event and to observe any immediate effects. The very next evening after the opening, as I made my usual rounds of visits throughout Male', I noticed that most of the elite houses I visited had their doors locked if they owned a television set. The reason was to keep "ordinary people" from wandering in off the streets and watching their television sets. Up to that night, doors of houses, both elite and non-elite, in Male' were never locked.

<sup>64</sup> I spent two days, April 7-8, 1978, in Seychelles visiting Afeef Didi and his family at their house on Mahe' Island. It was then that he recounted to me the long story of how he had been President of the former, secessionist Suvadiva Republic from 1959 to 1963, when the southern Maldivian islands had claimed independence from the rest of Maldives, ruled by the Male' elite.

In June of 1978, President Nasir suddenly announced that he would retire from office at the end of his second five-year Presidential term expiring the following November. The Majlis (called the People's Parliament in English) then nominated Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, and, as the sole nominee, he was elected by the populace in a national referendum in July to succeed Nasir as President of the Republic of Maldives.

During August and early September of 1978, I returned to Maldives for a short visit.<sup>65</sup> I then moved back to London, where I began organising my fieldnotes, working with my adviser, Dr. Bloch, at the London School of Economics, reflecting on all my research and experiences in Maldives,<sup>66</sup> and planning my thesis, while at the same time beginning employment in international television and radio news. By that time, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research had generously awarded me another grant, this one to help fund the writing of my doctoral dissertation. At the same time, I

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<sup>65</sup> At that time I was commissioned to write a chapter about events and trends of the past year in Maldives for the Asia Yearbook 1979 (Colton 1979a), published by the Far Eastern Economic Review. The year before, after I suggested to its editors that they should include a chapter about Maldives, the article I wrote for the Asia Yearbook 1978 (Colton 1978g) introducing the long-ignored nation became the first detailed account of Maldives to appear in such a pan-Asian publication. Many Maldivians said how very pleased they were for their country finally to be included amongst the rest of the Asian nations in such an annual review. Also, while in Maldives on that first return trip in August-September of 1978, I laid the groundwork for and conducted a preliminary survey among government departments for a project, "Survey of Island Women", which was later carried out by a non-profit U.S. aid-organisation, the Overseas Education Fund, in collaboration with the Government of Maldives (1980).

<sup>66</sup> In November of 1978, I presented a paper to the Graduate Anthropology Seminar at the London School of Economics as the first academic examination of my data after returning from the field. The topic I selected was "Banishment in the Maldivian Islands and the Maldivian Concept of 'Beeru', the Outside World" (Colton 1978a). In December of 1978, I delivered a general lecture on Maldives (Colton 1978k) to the Asia Society in New York City. Early in the following year, I presented another paper to the Anthropology Department at the LSE, this one on the subject of "Maldivian Lists and Functions for Delimiting the Elite" (1979c). In 1979-80, I provided assistance to the World Bank team preparing its first economic report (see World Bank 1980a; 1980b) on Maldives, which had joined the international bank in 1978.

immediately became the “home-away-from-home” for visiting Maldivians.<sup>67</sup>

In November of 1978, I made a brief but very special trip back to Maldives--to attend the inauguration<sup>68</sup> of my friend, the new President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom on November 11th, Maldives’ Republic Day. I was very glad to be able to be there when he was sworn in at one minute past midnight, and the President and my other Maldivian friends were definitely pleased that I had made the effort to fly there for the historic event.<sup>69</sup>

In August of 1979, I returned again to Maldives.<sup>70</sup> During that visit, I was able to observe my old friend, now almost a year into the Presidency, and his family in their new roles. I realised then that his relationships with his affines, since he had become President, were

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<sup>67</sup> Immediately upon my arrival back in London that September of 1978, one of my close friends from Maldives also arrived to take a course. The husband of the new President’s wife’s sister, who had also lived in the same house, Enderimaage, with Maumoon Gayoom and his family, Ibrahim Samari Maniku was my constant companion in London from London until late December 1978. During that time, also, his and Maumoon’s brother-in-law, Abbas Ibrahim, also came for a short course in London and spent a great deal of time with me. As I was beginning to learn, most Maldivians overseas were very eager for conversation about their home country.

<sup>68</sup> See below Chapter 6 for a detailed description of both the celebratory reception prior to the inauguration and the event itself.

<sup>69</sup> Following that trip, I wrote the biographies of both Maldivian Presidents Nasir and Gayoom for the Reuters World Leaders Biographies (Colton 1978m). See also Colton (1978d; 1978i; 1978j; 1979a).

<sup>70</sup> Again, I was able to finance another trip to Maldives with commissions for articles, including an article for the Far Eastern Economic Review (Colton 1979b), as well as the annual chapter for the Asia Yearbook 1980 (Colton 1980d) and also one for the biennial comprehensive All-Asia Guide 1980 (Colton 1980c), for which I had written the book’s first-ever chapter on Maldives in its 1978 edition (Colton 1978f).

similar to that of the former President and his wife's siblings, which I had observed during my fieldwork.<sup>71</sup>

At the end of that visit in 1979, I left the country on the plane that carried the President as he embarked on his first diplomatic trip overseas since taking office nine months earlier.<sup>72</sup>

My fourth trip back to Maldives in the two years since I had moved from there was for a month in April of 1980.<sup>73</sup> The night before I left Male' at the end of that trip, I went to say good-bye to President Maumoon Gayoom and the rest of his family. While there at their house (then the Presidential residence of Theemuge) that Saturday night, April 26, Maumoon informed me that his brother-in-law, Ilyas Ibrahim, who was then head of National Security, and the security guards had foiled a coup-plot (see Colton 1980a) in which mercenaries had been hired and sent to Maldives disguised as divers the preceding February. The President explained that since then, Ilyas and National

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<sup>71</sup> In February of 1980, I presented a paper (Colton 1980e) entitled "The Paradox of Affinal Dependence in Maldivian Politics" to the Graduate Anthropology Seminar at the London School of Economics.

<sup>72</sup> Historically, a number of Maldivian rulers, Sultans, had been ousted from power when they went abroad, usually on Haj, pilgrimage, to Mecca. Thus, this new President Gayoom waited almost a year to get his hold on power before travelling abroad. This 1979 trip was the first such ever made by a Maldivian head of state. He and key members of his cabinet were enroute first to Libya for its independence celebrations, then to the Non-Aligned Summit Conference in Havana, then to the United Nations General Assembly in New York, and finally to the Vienna headquarters of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Under the direction of this new, cosmopolitan President Gayoom and his like-minded ministers, the Government of Maldives was seeking to make its place in the world of nations and also to solicit foreign aid. For discussions of Maldives' foreign policy under Gayoom, see Colton (1978i; 1978j; 1979a; 1979b; 1980d; 1981a; 1981b; 1982; 1995a); Davis (1986); and Didi (1991a; 1991b).

<sup>73</sup> I returned for a month to write several articles, including the chapter on Maldives for the Asia & Pacific Annual Review 1981 (Colton 1981a); the Maldives chapter for the Asia Yearbook 1981 (1981b); to prepare an article about Maldives for The National Geographic (the story was later "killed" by the editors for "political reasons", and only the photographs were much later used in a more general story on Indian Ocean nations); and to plan articles for the May 28, 1980, Financial Times "Survey of Maldives" (see Colton & Klinger 1980).

Security had been working with the mercenaries to learn who was behind the plan. They now believed the plotters to be former President Nasir and his in-laws, as well as, they said they suspected, others close to him and the former First Lady. President Gayoom and his brothers-in-law (*lianoo*) that night suggested I take a detour on my way home to London and fly to Singapore to interview for publication former President Nasir at his residence there and ask him about his alleged involvement. They also suggested that while in Singapore I could get an interview with the Maldivian shipping magnate, Ali Maniku, to be used in some of the various articles I had been commissioned to write.<sup>74</sup>

Immediately after leaving Maldives, I flew to Colombo, Sri Lanka, where I visited with some Maldivian friends who helped put me in direct touch with the Maldivians in Singapore. On April 30, I went to Singapore to conduct interviews with ex-President Nasir and the former First Lady, Naseema Mohamed Nasir, and also with the Maldivian shipping magnate,<sup>75</sup> all then resident in Singapore.

The former President denied involvement in any coup-plot against Gayoom's government, and I filed the story to Reuters in London. At the same time, just a day after I had left Maldives, Gayoom's government began its "witch-hunt" against the "criminals", allegedly all the family, affines and friends of the former President and his wife. As

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<sup>74</sup> See Colton (1981a; 1981b) and Colton & Klinger (1980).

<sup>75</sup> My interview with Ali Umar Maniku, the Maldivian shipping magnate, was published in "The Financial Times Survey: Republic of Maldives" (Colton & Klinger 1980). That day in Singapore was the first and only time I ever met Ali Maniku because he directed Maldivian shipping from his Singapore residence and was hardly ever in Maldives during the time of my residence and visits in Maldives.

soon as my article was published by Reuters,<sup>76</sup> as the messenger of the former President's denial, I was "implicated" and my name dragged, much to my surprise, into the political furor in Maldives. Even though my longtime Maldivian friend, President Gayoom, had suggested and urged me to do the interview, I was then accused of sympathising with the alleged plotters because I had published Nasir's statement of denial. At the time, I had no idea that Maldives was once again at the beginning of a long, national "witch-hunt" (see below Chapter 8).

During the next year and a half, my comprehension of and initiation into the life and thought of the Maldivian elite took a quantum leap. Following my visit to Singapore, I developed a friendship with the former First Lady and was privy to her accounts of many of the incidents and her feelings leading up to her divorce as well as her daily reactions to the witch-hunt then being carried out against all her family back home in Maldives. Also, I then developed strong, new friendships with other very knowledgeable Maldivians--Abida Ford in southern England and the shipping magnate's son, Mohamed Ali, in London--both of whom, though having lived in Britain for many years, maintained strong ties with Maldivian family and friends.

A turning point in my understanding of the Maldivian elite came the summer of 1980, when several Maldivians in exile turned to me, as the only foreigner they knew and, obviously, felt comfortable with, to take free refuge in my flat in London. For the next year and a few months, several members of the Maldivian elite were continuously living, one after another and sometimes together, in my flat, and others made it a meeting place and base in London for the next three years until I

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<sup>76</sup> See Colton (1980b).

moved from London to Egypt in 1983. During that time, they all talked incessantly about Maldives, and they included me in their conversations as if I were one of them, even though I was considered only a listener and a kind of sounding board. This experience clearly proved to me the value of extended research and immersion in the society one studies as a social anthropologist.

First, Moomina Haleem Ismail, the former Minister of Health in Nasir's government, who had been sentenced to banishment and then pardoned, fled into voluntary exile and arrived in London in July, taking refuge with me on July 23, 1980. Except for a short period at the end of August, when she went to look for a job in Kuwait, Moomina stayed at my flat until April 8, 1981, when she returned to Kuwait to work as a nurse, and some years later moved to Sri Lanka.<sup>77</sup>

During this period, the former First Lady, Naseema Mohamed (Nasir), moved out of the former President's flat in Singapore and came to visit Moomina and me in London for several weeks in August of 1980. (Naseema, Moomina, and Abida had all been best friends since early childhood in Maldives and during schooling in Ceylon, and they made my London residence their new meeting place abroad). Later, in April of 1981, Naseema returned again to England and moved into my flat, then dividing her time between my place and Abida Ford's house in

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<sup>77</sup> Moomina Haleem Ismail has remained in "voluntary" exile in Colombo, Sri Lanka, all these years to the present, and in August 1995, she and some of her family visited me for the first time in the United States. She still fears that if she returned to Maldives, she would get into immediate political trouble for talking openly about politics.

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Southampton until the end of August of 1981, when Naseema moved to Australia.<sup>78</sup>

At the same time, Mohamed Nasir, a son of the former President (by his marriage prior to his last one to Naseema), had moved to London and also spent much of his time at my flat with me and the other Maldivians from August of 1980 until he moved from England in September of 1981.<sup>79</sup>

Throughout this period, a number of other Maldivians visited me in London. At one point, another son of former President Nasir, Ahmed, along with his wife (and the husband's child by his first wife, the sister of his second wife), appeared on my doorstep, also seeking temporary refuge after the former President allegedly disowned them in Singapore. On still another occasion, the current President Gayoom's most powerful brother-in-law, Ilyas Ibrahim, along with President Gayoom's longtime best friend and then his Foreign Affairs Minister, Fathulla Jameel, arrived together for tea while the exiles were downstairs in the flat. (Such a situation would have appeared comic if everything involving Maldivian politics at that time had not been so serious).<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Eventually, the former First Lady Naseema Mohamed returned to Maldives, at first taking a government job in the hospital and now running a guest-house in Male' and living a quiet life.

<sup>79</sup> Four months later, early in 1982, I received word that Mohamed Nasir had died tragically in the Netherlands. The Amsterdam Police said the cause of death was suicide.

<sup>80</sup> For the Maldivians living with me, and for myself when I was not at work and home with them, the talk was never of anything but Maldivian relationships, politics and intrigue. They talked constantly, not seeming to care that I, a foreigner, an outsider, heard everything. I had, obviously, become accepted as a kind of honorary insider. Sometimes when I was exhausted from all the company, I would escape alone to visit Abida and Douglas Ford in Southampton and later in Canterbury, where we would end up spending all our time again talking only of Maldivian relationships, politics and intrigue.

Because of the perception promoted in Maldives then that I was “harbouring criminals” (the alleged coup-plotters), I was warned by visiting Maldivians and by others telephoning and writing from Maldives<sup>81</sup> not to consider returning for a visit to Maldives until I was told it would be safe for me to do so. Essentially, I was told I was considered a “*persona non grata*” for political purposes. Many Maldivians explained to me that it was “all political”, that I must understand that my old friend, Maumoon Gayoom, now the President, needed scapegoats to seal his hold on power, and it was useful for him then to make me one of them during this national frenzy of political conflict.

Finally, in early 1983, I received word from the President that I would be welcome to return to my “home” in Maldives. My friend, Ali Maniku, the son of the shipping magnate and then a student in London, encouraged me to accept the Presidential offer and to go as soon as possible to Male’. Thus, my last visit to Maldives was in March of 1983.

On that visit, I was treated with remarkable hospitality by Maldivians, who housed me as a guest on a nearby tourist island, Villingili, and entertained me in their houses on Male’. The President himself ordered that I be brought by special boat to his official office in the centre of Male’, and there in the open entrance on the main waterfront of the capital island, Maumoon stepped out to welcome me formally in the middle of the day for all passersby to see. “All was forgiven” when I was formally received at both the Office of the President and

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<sup>81</sup> Letters were hand-carried out of Maldives for fear of government tampering with the post, and any phone-calls were usually made by Maldivians working as international operators on behalf of a friend who might want a message relayed. If a call was made directly from someone in Male’, then the conversation was oblique and in a kind of code.

later at the family's Presidential Residence. These were his gestures to demonstrate to the Maldivians that I was no longer considered a "culprit" in the political turmoil of the early 1980s. President Maumoon Gayoom, while not apologising *per se*, essentially explained that his having allowed me to become one of the scapegoats, a temporary *persona non grata*, was simply a necessary political action at the time of a great national crisis. Obviously, he believed he had to do that to prove his strength by turning against his old foreign friend.

The knowledge and understanding I gained of Maldivian elite society those five years after I left my formal fieldwork in Maldives in 1978 proved to be essential in providing "the other side of the picture", in showing the process of Maldivian political life, which I would have been unable to describe ethnographically after only two years in Maldives before the "rest" happened. Perhaps the members of the elite talk so intimately with me because, though I remain an outsider, a non-Maldivian, I have been the very rare person who knows their society, is genuinely interested in the details of their lives and society, and with whom they can discuss not only things they would discuss with their closest Maldivian family and friends, but more importantly, things they would not want to discuss with any other Maldivians because of their political fears. I have sensed that I have been made privy to the real secrets of Maldivian elite society, and I am honoured.

#### v. Special Explanatory Note Regarding This Thesis

This doctoral thesis in social anthropology analyses ethnographic data gathered over several years in the 1970s and early 1980s. The intensive fieldwork in Maldives was carried out from September of 1976 until April of 1978. Two return visits to the field were conducted in late 1978, and once again each year in 1979, 1980, and 1983; and I

conducted extensive research among travelling and expatriate Maldivians in London from 1978-1983.

The original drafts for this thesis were written from 1978-1981, culminating in my submission of a draft to my thesis adviser, Professor Maurice Bloch, in September of 1981. An audio tape of the invaluable suggestions he made at that time has provided important guidance for me as I returned to work again on the thesis in the summer of 1993 when I returned to London for library research and finally completing it now in the summer of 1995.

In editing and re-writing the 1981 draft at this much later date, I have continued to focus only on the material gathered at that time and followed the original suggestions made by Professor Bloch. Also, as I elaborate upon in chapter 1, I believe my thesis has been enhanced by the theoretical discussions that have been taking place in anthropology and other fields between the writing of my first draft and my completion of the thesis at this time.

The only updated materials on Maldives included in the thesis are the relevant bibliographic references published later. It is my belief that an examination of the data gathered during those years until 1983 should remain independent of any new data relating to the changes in Maldives since that time. Even though much has indeed changed since then, from all I know now about Maldives, I believe that my analysis of the Maldivian elite and politics has remained valid, even with major population growth and techno-economic changes in the society. I would like very much now to make a return visit and do a new study, nearly twenty years later.

As for the gap in time between my completing my fieldwork in 1978, completing the first main draft of my thesis in 1981, last visiting Maldives in 1983, and now submitting the finished thesis in 1995, I believe there are several valid explanations. First, I was eventually just overwhelmed by my involvement with my subject matter, and I believed it was important to take a long break from analysing it. I was also extremely concerned about how to present my material without harming the subjects, all my friends. At the same time, I also immersed myself in my other career as an international journalist, and from 1981 through 1991, I was on assignment all over the world covering major political events. It was not until I began teaching again, that I had the opportunity to re-focus upon this thesis. Throughout this time, though, I have remained actively in touch with Maldivians around the world, and they are still very much a part of my life.

A paramount reason that it has taken me so long to return to completing this thesis was my concern and reluctance to write about my Maldivian friends, who are the main members of this elite. There is only one small elite in Maldives; it is the national elite, and identities cannot be protected without fictionalising the entire country. I have agonised for years over how to write about these people, my informants and friends, without revealing their identities as my specific sources. I have concluded that even the removal of all names would be transparent since there are only a limited number of persons in each role in the country, and I certainly cannot hide the name of the country upon which this thesis focuses.

Throughout the thesis, I have included direct quotations that I had noted from various of my many sources. In many cases, however, I have not cited the name of the source because, while spoken by a particular person, the statements and conversations reflected general

opinions of many members of the elite--not just one individual. I know this failure to name sources is unusual, but I feel I must provide some degree of protective anonymity to my sources. Also, it is important to note that throughout the thesis, I have put a number of English words and expressions in quotations, again without citing sources because they were generally used by members of the Maldivian elite in their own daily conversations, which were often in English or *Dhivehi* mixed with English.

I believe, now, that enough time has passed that I can submit this thesis without harming anyone, and I am hopeful that Maldivians will appreciate and also find merit in the thesis not only as an accurate analysis of Maldivian elite society but also as a historic document and account of Maldives at a critical time in the country's history. As I have tried to represent Maldivian elite society the way members of that elite present themselves, I hope that they will find this a fair analysis of the way their elite society works over time.

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# **PART 1**

## ***PRINCIPLES AND ETHNOGRAPHIC SETTING***

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# *Chapter* 1

## OVERVIEW: INTRODUCTION TO THESIS

### **I.1 A WARNING--THE CLUE TO MALDIVIAN ELITE SOCIETY**

For years after I first discovered Maldives on a map and began dreaming of going there to conduct anthropological fieldwork, I had hoped to meet a Maldivian prior to going to the field. That proved difficult as there were, then, relatively few Maldivians abroad in places, such as Britain, Europe and the United States, where I was at the time. Finally, in the autumn of 1975 at the United Nations in New York City, I met a Maldivian diplomat, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, and he became my first teacher about Maldives. He was not only a multilingual diplomat but also a religious scholar and thoughtful politician. Later, Maumoon's family welcomed me to Maldives, and their house, called Enderimaage, in Maldivian capital of Male' became my "home away from home" throughout my fieldwork in his country, and soon after I moved away in 1978, he became the President of the Republic of Maldives.

At the time I met Maumoon Abdul Gayoom in 1975, he was the second-ranking member of the two-man Maldivian delegation to the United Nations General Assembly. He described himself as an "outsider" in the Maldivian government, and even prided himself on being a Maldivian rebel who had only the year before spent several months banished to a remote island on charges of conspiring against the government. He said he had spent that time in banishment studying the Maldivian language and the history of Maldives and also thinking

about the Maldivian political system. He confided in me, then, that he planned someday to be President of his country.<sup>1</sup>

I told him that I hoped to conduct my doctoral research in Maldives, beginning the next year--to carry out an ethnographical study, focusing on the impact of tourism. He felt that tourism had not had much of an impact, and, instead, urged me to plan to live in the nation's capital, Male', and study the social organisation of the people living there. He believed I would find the people of the capital the most interesting. He began teaching me the Maldivian language (*Dhivehi*) and, at the same time, as we began meeting daily in the U.N. Delegates' Lounge for my *Dhivehi* lessons, he also began introducing me to his culture and teaching me about the stratification system as evidenced in the language.

Very early in our relationship, during those near-daily lessons at the United Nations headquarters that fall, Maumoon Gayoom often emphatically told me that Maldives was basically a non-violent society. Much later in our lessons, however, when outlining the history of his country, he somewhat reluctantly admitted to me that his country's first President Ameen Didi had, in 1953, been stoned and beaten to death. Then my new friend, Maumoon, warned me: "Remember, I told you that there is no violence in Maldives. But I must warn you not to ask about politics. Study our customs and social organisation, but don't get involved studying about politics. That's the one area about which people can become violent, and I wouldn't want anything violent to happen to you".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In private conversations in the U.N. Delegates' Lounge, September-November 1975.

<sup>2</sup> Maumoon Abdul Gayoom in New York City, November 1975.

In the spring of 1976, while back again at the London School of Economics preparing for my fieldwork, I reported to my academic adviser, Dr. Maurice Bloch, the Maldivian's warning as part of the ethnographic information I had thus far gleaned about Maldives. Dr. Bloch then correctly pointed out that my Maldivian friend, probably inadvertently, had given me a key clue to Maldivian society--that politics could be its most important aspect and the one I just might end up studying.<sup>3</sup> He was right. Once in the field, while I was investigating other aspects of the Maldivian elite society in the capital Male', I was continually led back to politics as the organising principle for all else. I learned that, like my first teacher who later became his country's ruler, the other Maldivians in the nation's elite spent most of their time thinking, talking, speculating, even dreaming, about the politics of their country.<sup>4</sup> Some Maldivians were even what one might call "political philosophers" as they were so analytical and philosophical about the nature of politics. At least one Maldivian even threatened me if I should divulge the source of my political knowledge: "If you ever write my name in your book or indicate you got any of this political information from me, I'll kill you".<sup>5</sup> Such threats notwithstanding, the politics of the elite of Maldives became the main subject of my research.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. Maurice Bloch in London, April 1976.

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, my first Maldivian teacher, Maumoon Gayoom, avoided discussing these aspects of his society with me once I arrived in the country. It was too dangerous politically for him to reveal that he had talked so much about the country's politics with a foreigner. Only occasionally would he allude to things he had told me about Maldivian politics when we first met in the U.S. Yet there was always a silent understanding between us in Maldives that he knew I remembered what he had told me.

<sup>5</sup> This threat was made to me in Male' in 1977 by "a good friend" after this person had been sharing many political opinions with me.

<sup>6</sup> Obviously, by the time such threats were made to me, politics and this politico-centered elite were already the subjects of my research, especially since persons like this threatening one talked of hardly anything but politics of Maldives, the elite.

## 1.2 FOCI OF THESIS

This thesis focuses on the elite of Maldives, as studied during intensive fieldwork from September of 1976 until April of 1978, and through continuing observation of the Maldivian elite from 1978 to 1983, both from abroad and during five more visits over that five-year period. The thesis covers the period of the final years of President Ibrahim Nasir's rule and the first years of President Maumoon Gayoom's rule. In an effort to maintain the integrity of the data collected during that period, this thesis does not focus on any later developments in Maldives.

Prior to this thesis, there have been only three other in-depth, published accounts of the Maldivian elite because very few foreigners in history have been known to be allowed to live among the elite of Male'. The first known account was written in the fourteenth century by the Arab traveller, Ibn Battuta<sup>7</sup> of Tangier, who, out of curiosity, went to visit the Maldivian Islands and lived in the Maldivian capital (advising the husband of the ruler, then a Sultana, and marrying a Maldivian woman) from 1343 A.D. to 1344 and again, briefly, in 1346. The next, and probably the most invaluable, account was written in the early seventeenth century by Francois Pyrard de Laval after being shipwrecked in Maldives in 1602 A.D. and living in Male' until 1607.<sup>8</sup> He learned the Maldivian language and also became an adviser to the ruler, then a Sultan. Pyrard's account is so detailed that it would

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<sup>7</sup> See Ibn Battuta's travel writings in the translations by Gray (1882) and Gibb (1929). Excerpts are also found in Appendix A (Early Notices of Maldives) of Gray's 1887 translation of Pyrard, Vol.II, Part II, pp.434-468.

<sup>8</sup> See A. Gray's 1887 Hakluyt Society translation of Pyrard's The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval: To the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil, Vol.I (pp.ix-lviii, 1-325) and Vol. II, Part II (pp.348-354, 359, 362-508, 528-536).

qualify as an ethnography. The third major account of the Maldivian elite was the work of H. C. P. Bell,<sup>9</sup> a British civil servant in the Colonial Government of Ceylon. He made three short visits to Male', the first in 1879, and again, serving as Archaeologist of Ceylon and Maldives nearly forty years later for a month in 1920, and also briefly in 1922. He then devoted much of the rest of his lifetime until his death in 1937 to bringing together his own notes with other research and historical accounts of Maldives to write a comprehensive monograph, published posthumously in 1940.<sup>10</sup>

It is noteworthy that the views of Maldivian elite society found in all three of these earlier accounts (Ibn Battuta, Pyrard, and Bell), spanning six hundred years (from 1343 to 1922), bear remarkable resemblance to each other and, also, to much of what I found in the late twentieth century.<sup>11</sup> In all, there are emphases upon these same characteristics of Maldivian elite society: centralisation of the Maldivian national political system; the strong sense of Maldivian nationalism; the centralisation of all trade through Male'; the authoritarian nature of the central government in Male'; a rigid stratification system with a tiny elite at the top; the critical and politically tenuous relationships between the rulers and their siblings, their other kinsmen, affines, and their few close advisers, often wealthy lower-status traders; the relatively high status of women; and an

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<sup>9</sup> See Bell's accounts of his 3 brief visits (1883; 1921; 1940), the latter being a composite monograph of Maldives.

<sup>10</sup> See the biography of Bell, *H.C.P. Bell: Archaeologist of Ceylon and the Maldives* (1993), written by his granddaughters, Bethia N. Bell and Heather M. Bell. In addition to telling the story of Bell's life, the work includes five chapters on Maldives.

<sup>11</sup> Actually, I never read complete copies of any of these accounts until after I had written the first main draft of this thesis in 1981, and I am glad of that because then my observations were not affected by their much earlier ones. That is why it is remarkable that their observations of the elite in Maldives were so similar to what I found hundreds of years later.

extreme suspicion of foreigners.<sup>12</sup> In all cases, too, the writer-observers were welcomed as guests of the rulers (or other high-ranking members of the elite), learned at least some of the *Dhivehi* language, lived among the elite, and essentially became participant-observers in Male' elite society. The work of the three earlier writers has proved invaluable for my understanding the past of Maldives and its elite society prior to the time of this study. In addition, Maloney's (1980) general ethnography of Maldives has been most useful as a survey of the country as a whole.<sup>13</sup>

An unexpected benefit to the hiatus in my work on this thesis (between the time of my first drafts and now completing the thesis) is that new theoretical discussions have arisen in anthropology which provide frameworks to subsume my findings. At the time I wrote my first draft of this thesis in 1981, there were a number of observations about Maldivian elite society which I found difficult to present within the context of then current anthropological discussion. Of particular concern were my findings on the critical role of houses in Maldivian elite society, the relationship between Maldivian landscape/seascape and the elite world-view, and a clearly evident combination of both repetition and change in the sociopolitical system. Also, it was clear that in examining Maldives, in particular the capital island of Male',

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<sup>12</sup> Remarkably, too, many of the details of daily life among the Maldivian elite recorded in these earlier accounts are similar to what I found during the period of my study. It would be interesting at some point to make a detailed comparison of all these four accounts--stretching from Ibn Battuta's in the fourteenth century, through Pyrard's in the seventeenth century, through Bell's in the late nineteenth-early twentieth centuries, and this study made in the late twentieth century.

<sup>13</sup> While very helpful as a general ethnography of all the Maldivian Islands, Maloney's *People of the Maldivian Islands* has little about the Maldivian elite except a general sketch of the political system (1980:175-210). Most of his account concerns valuable historic, linguistic and ethnographic material he gathered about the islanders in the outer atolls where he spent the most time during several brief visits to Maldives in 1974, 1975 and 1976.

home of the Maldivian elite, I was looking at a highly complex, diverse and cosmopolitan society--a civilisation, albeit very small.<sup>14</sup>

Now there are a number of relevant discussions in anthropology which are concerned cross-culturally with these same phenomena and problems which I encountered in Maldives. In particular, the recent discussions of “house-societies”<sup>15</sup> and of “landscape”<sup>16</sup> as cultural construct both provide appropriate forums in which my findings among the elite of Maldives can enter. Likewise, Barth’s (1993) work in Bali, in which he focuses on process and strategies, seeking to find the “imperfect patterns”, while at the same time acknowledging the “dissonant conditions and disordered circumstances” (Barth 1993:7),<sup>17</sup> provides a useful theoretical model for analysing complex societies such as that found in Maldives. Also, of immense value is the theoretical work of Bourdieu (1984; 1990b) with its focus on “*habitus*”,

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<sup>14</sup> Maloney (1980:134) made the same observation and cited previous references to the Maldives as “a little civilisation”. Although his ethnography was officially published in 1980, I did not obtain a copy until a few years later. As I had longtime felt that Male’ was such “a little civilisation”, I was heartened to find corroboration for my viewpoint in what Maloney wrote: “We are justified in ranking the culture of the Maldives as a civilisation, which is technically defined as having urbanisation, writing, calendars, structured law, a state system, substantial buildings and specialists in such areas as religion and trade. The Maldives has had only one town” (city, the capital island of Male’) “where all these flourished, Male’, but still the culture merits ranking as a little civilisation” (Maloney, 1980:134).

<sup>15</sup> Claude Levi-Strauss (1979, 1982) launched the discussion of “house-societies” (societes a maison), and I discuss below its relevance to this thesis.

<sup>16</sup> For example, see Eric Hirsch and Michael O’Hanlon’s (1995) newly edited collection of papers on The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives of Place and Space as well as the earlier Landscape: Politics and Perspectives edited by Bender (1993). These collections of papers draw attention to the often critical relationship between people’s “landscapes” and their world-perspectives, as well as emphasising the political and often gender-based nature of the cultural construct of “landscape”. See below in both this chapter and in Chapter 2 for discussion of the the relationship between the geophysical and political “landscape/seascape” of Maldives and the Maldivian elite’s “world-view”. Also, see Appendix 7 for a Diagram Illustrating the World-View of the Maldivian Elite.

<sup>17</sup> Barth (1993:7-8) suggests that “Such models become believable if we can show how the observed degree of coherence is brought about and reproduced in the lives of people, through processes involving those people’s own ideas and activities”.

or “the logic of practice”,<sup>18</sup> and the recognition that our anthropological analyses need encompass all forms of human communication, strategies and symbolic representations. Also, the recent interdisciplinary work on “complex replicative systems”, such as that of Csanyi (1989),<sup>19</sup> coming out of the original “General Systems Theory” (Bertalanffy 1968), is of value in approaching the evidence of reiterative change and repetition of the sociopolitical system of Maldivian elite. At the same time, the postmodern trends recognising dissonance and disorder, which are components of complex replicative systems, and emphasising indigenous categorisation are welcome perspectives for viewing the elite of Maldives. All of the above offer analytical tools that help in understanding Maldivian society.

From the beginning of my work in 1976, I have attempted to understand and discuss the Maldivian elite society using their indigenous categories and concepts. Members of the Maldivian elite are highly analytical of the world around them. They themselves always seek to discover the underlying political motivations for all actions. Throughout this thesis I have sought to present the sociopolitical organisation of the Maldivian elite and discuss their highly political society as members of that elite themselves discuss their society and

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<sup>18</sup> Bourdieu in *The Logic of Practice* (1990b:52-65) utilises the concept of “habitus” in a variety of contexts, but basically defines it as structures established by practice and strategies or “a system of acquired, permanent, generative dispositions” (1990b:290).

<sup>19</sup> Csanyi in his work on “Cultural Evolution” uses the general model of self-organising systems and proposes that society can be considered “a complex replicative network” (Csanyi 1989:161) in which there is continual replication and change. See also Dalenoort (1989) and Laszlo (1991).

cultural representations throughout their daily lives.<sup>20</sup>

At the time of this study, there were a number of indigenously appreciated phenomena and characteristics of the Maldivian elite that seemed to be paramount in their view of their own society. These included the following: the belief that they the elite were highly civilised and members of a unique, historic, little “civilisation” set apart by seas from the rest of the world; a metaphorical, political, and actual connection between the country’s “landscape” (seascape or geophysical characteristics) and the elite’s world-view; the existence of a historic stratification system<sup>21</sup> in which a relatively tiny elite<sup>22</sup>, distinct from the rest of the Maldivian population, controlled the entire country politically and economically; the chief concerns of this elite, essentially a politico-centric group, were politics (*siyassat*) and power (*baaru*), maintained by an ideology that only the high-ranking *beefulun* elite could rule; the basic unit in the political system was the house (*ge*), which encompassed both one’s kinship and affinal relations and served as the basic form of one’s identification,<sup>23</sup> and alliances, or connections (*gulhumeh*), were created between houses and families (*aila*) through marriage (*kaivani*); an extremely strong sense of national

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<sup>20</sup> I should note here that by the time of this study, 1976-1978 (-1983), most members of the elite were fluent in English and even spoke it often among themselves. In fact, many younger Maldivians used English to avoid having to speak in the stratified Maldivian language. While I studied *Dhivehi*, even learning to write the old script, and could understand and speak much of the language during my fieldwork, many of my conversations with Maldivians were in English because they seemed to love discussing their society and describing the endless politicking in English. They used both *Dhivehi* and English words, often interchangeably, for their indigenous categories and concepts.

<sup>21</sup> For the different ranks, levels of society and political system, Maldivians traditionally used the word *daraaja*, meaning “degrees” or “levels”, but now in the government, the English word “hierarchy” is generally used.

<sup>22</sup> See below for discussion of all the Maldivian words for the elite.

<sup>23</sup> The translation of the oldest extant Maldivian writing on the copperplate (*loamaafaamu*) from 1194 A.D. (AH 592) refers to the identification of a person by his family’s domicile (see Maniku & Wijayawardhana 1986:iv).

identity;<sup>24</sup> a wariness, suspicion, and fear of anyone or anything from “outside” (*beeru*), beginning with those “outside the house” to “foreigners” from “outside Maldives”; the important political role of the “outsiders”, the affines--the brother-in-law (*lianoo*) and sister-in-law (*fahari*), as well as the use of kinship and friendship as other political tools; the important politico-economic role of rich traders (*beekalun*), originally the rulers’ trusted servants who were then allowed to become advisers and traders; the dominant position of the “government” (*sarukaru*) in everyday life and the importance of government service (*sarukaruge vazifa*) for membership in the inner elite; the use of land (*bing*) and government position (*sarukaruge vazifa*) as rewards, and, as contrastive punishment, the constant threat of banishment (*aruvaalun*) from the capital island; their ideology of non-violence<sup>25</sup> with sporadic violence erupting in politics through cycles of political conflict; and a recognition by Maldivians themselves of the constant reiteration of patterns of repetition and change over generations in their society. These indigenously highlighted characteristics appeared, in my view, to be the central elements of the Maldivian elite society.<sup>26</sup> The relationship among all these phenomena is the subject of this thesis.

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<sup>24</sup> Again, the translation of the 1194 A.D. writing on the copperplate (*loamaafaanu*) indicates that while Islam was not yet then “established as a unifying factor, language (*Dhivehi*) and the all-pervading political power of the ruling king held it as one integral state” (Maniku & Wijayawardhana 1986:iii). These translators went on to say that the text likewise indicates that “Maldivians of the period were more conscious of their national identity than conformity with tradition in faith” (Maniku & Wijayawardhana 1986:iv).

<sup>25</sup> Maldivians believe themselves to be basically “gentle” (*madu maitheri*) and “peaceful” (*amaankan*). See more detailed discussion below in Chapters 7 and 8.

<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, I later realised that all of these features of Maldivian society were those emphasized by my first Maldivian teacher, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, in New York in 1975 when he was far away from home and I had not yet even visited his country.

Most importantly, Maldivians recognise and constantly acknowledge the existence of a stratification system<sup>27</sup> in which the people of their country are hierarchically ranked, with an elite uppermost and distinct from the rest of the population. This elite is only a very small percentage of either the capital's or national population.<sup>28</sup> Maldivians, both inside and outside the elite, speak of an elite, the power-holders, including all those in and out of power, which make up a larger elite that is always distinct from the rest of the population. Essentially, I am translating and operating with Maldivian words and concepts that delineate levels and degrees of elite membership, including the following: *sarukaru* (government); *kurige sarukaruge* (former government); *beefulun* (highest rank in the stratification system, the traditional aristocracy, the traditional political elite); *ganduvaruthere beefulun* (meaning the *beefulun* of the palace, the royals, the highest tier of the *beefulun* rank); *sarukaruge beefulun* (government people); *bodethi beefulun* (big people, people in power); *izzaitheri beefulun* (distinguished high-ranking people, dignitaries); and even *bodung* (simply meaning the big people).

<sup>27</sup> Initially, before I went to the field and knew that there was such a stratification system in this Muslim society, I assumed that much of my focus would be upon the ideological problems inherent in the existence of hierarchy in Islam. Prior to leaving for fieldwork, I even prepared a paper for an LSE fieldwork seminar on "Significant Problems of Muslim Caste: An Approach to the Study of the Maldivian System of Social Stratification" (Colton 1976). (Also, see Bailey 1957; Barth 1960; Brown 1970; Bujra 1971; Dube 1969; Kutty 1972; Mines 1972). Yet, once in the field, I found that members of the Maldivian seemed to acknowledge no ideological problem nor experience any practical problems as Muslims with the existence of their traditionally rigid stratification system, which may, indeed, have come from an ancient caste system brought from India. (See Dumont 1970 for the classic study of caste in general, and see Maloney 1980:274-308 for a discussion of the historic evidence for an ancient caste system in Maldives). The current stratification system is rigid in the overall division between the elite and the "ordinary people" (*miihun*), but there is fluidity of movement for individual *miihun*, who manage to become *beekalun* (the middle group) and over time become accepted temporarily as members of the elite. Eventually, through marriage to the traditional elite (*beefulun*) their children become *beefulun* by blood and by language. See chapters 3 and 4. The powerful *beekalun* often overcome the stigma of lower status within the stratification by speaking only in English and thus avoid having to use the stratified Maldivian language.

<sup>28</sup> The actual members of the widest defined core of the elite might at most range between one and two hundred people plus spouses and children, for a maximum of about one thousand people at the time of this study. See further discussion below in Chapter 3.

In distinguishing an elite within Maldivian society, therefore, I am presenting a general category representing indigenous ways of speaking about their society that Maldivians themselves recognise and conceptually utilise in their daily lives. I have then used the English word “elite” and tried to distinguish that with such adjectives as “inside” and “outside” as the Maldivians themselves do for clarification.

I have conceptualised the Maldivian representation of “elite” along general lines of sociological-anthropological discussions of elites, in particular Bottomore’s recently revised *Elites and Society* (1964; 1993) in which, following Mosca(1896; 1939) and Pareto(1915-19; 1963), distinctions are made between levels of political involvement, i.e. between the “political class”, and the “political elite” (Bottomore 1993). The former includes “all those groups which exercise political power or influence and are directly engaged in struggles for political leadership”, including the counter-elite (Bottomore 1993:8). Then within the larger “political class” is the “political elite”, which is “a smaller group, the political elite or governing elite, which comprises those individuals who actually exercise political power in a government at any given time” (Bottomore 1993:7). I believe the earlier distinctions (Bottomore 1993:7-8, following Mosca 1896 and Pareto 1915-19) first between the lower stratum non-elite and the higher stratum elite, and then the sub-components within the overall elite--“the governing elite” and “the non-governing elite”--best describe the situation in Maldives as it was at the time of this study.

For purposes of analysis, I have called the entire “political class”, including all members of both the governing and the non-governing elite, the “elite of Maldives”. This would include those members of both the higher groups in the hierarchy, the *beefulun* rank (the

traditional aristocracy) and the *beekalun* (the new middle class, but traditionally an in-between category to which special members of the *miihun* class, a trusted servant/political adviser or wealthy traders, were elevated), and all those who have held power but who may be in or out of power at any particular point in time. What is called the governing elite by Bottomore (1993:7-8), following Pareto (1915-19;1963) and Mosca (1896;1939:50), Maldivians would call the government (*sarukaru*). In Maldives, as in many elite societies elsewhere, the lines differentiating levels of insidedness and outsidedness within the Maldivian elite are extremely fluid and vary over time.

The almost exclusive interest of the Maldivian elite is politics (*siyassat*),<sup>29</sup> and, ideologically, it is considered the exclusive domain of the elite. Politics is all-encompassing--everything is viewed as political, related to competition for power, position, and influence within the elite in particular and, thus, within the country inasmuch as the elite control the rest of the country economically and politically. I have, therefore, described the elite society of Maldives as “politico-centric”. Members of the elite live, breathe, eat, copulate, procreate, think, and even dream, politics. It is the nearly obsessive focus of their lives. Central to this politico-centeredness is the political role then played by every other aspect of elite life.

An especially significant aspect of this general politicisation is the predominant role of the house (*ge*) as an organising principle in Male' elite society. In fact, the house appears to function as the basic political unit of the Maldivian elite. It is the elite's chief means of personal identification. Its role as a political tool seems more

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<sup>29</sup> The Maldivian elite in using the Arabic word, *siyassat*, for politics shows that this is a subject for only the elite to understand, as, traditionally, only the elite could read and speak Arabic.

important than kinship or affinity, which are, indeed, incorporated within the physical and ideational house. From very early on in my work in Male', I recognised the importance of the house for the Maldivian elite, but in writing the original drafts of this thesis in the early 1980s, I had a difficult time articulating this concept within the context of then-current anthropological literature and, consequently, fell back upon attempting to incorporate the phenomenon of houses in Male' within traditional kinship/alliance theories. Yet, they were insufficient for dealing with the complex role of the house in Maldivian elite society. There was not then the breadth of dialogue available in which to express my findings.

Today, the situation is vastly altered. There is now an important anthropological discussion about houses: with the new literature and current theoretical discussions of houses, beginning with Levi-Strauss (1979; 1982: 163-187) first proposing the idea of "house-societies"; Bourdieu's<sup>30</sup> discussions on the importance of houses in society and the intrinsic "inside/outside" nature of houses; and now a variety of recent<sup>31</sup> ethnographic accounts of societies in which houses play a critical role as political, kinship, domestic and ritual entities--including McKinnon's (1991; 1995) focus upon the hierarchical ranking of houses in the Moluccas; Waterson's (1990) examination of the variety of house-societies throughout Southeast Asia and her (Waterson 1990) comparison of the political role of houses in Southeast Asia and Japan; Bloch's recent work (1995) in Madagascar and Janowski's (1995) in Sarawak emphasising the importance of marriage as the foundation of

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<sup>30</sup> See Bourdieu's "The Kabyle House or the World Reversed" 1970; 1990; Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste 1979; 1984; and The Logic of Practice 1980; 1990.

<sup>31</sup> Most pertinent is the recent collection of essays, About the House: Levi-Strauss and Beyond, edited by Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995).

the house; Carsten's (1987; 1995) work in Malaysia highlighting not only marriage but also the importance of the sibling group in the structure of houses; and the work of Hugh-Jones (1995), Lea (1995), and Riviere (1995) in South America focusing upon the metaphorical and ritual roles of houses--all of which are pertinent to my findings in Maldives. Most interesting in these recent examinations (see Carsten & Hugh-Jones 1995) of particular societies in which houses play a pre-eminent role, are both the emphasis on the processual nature of houses and the variety of analytical approaches to the concept of the house as a native category. These perspectives have proved helpful in examining the role of the house in Maldivian elite society and supportive of my findings there.

Now, with these recent discussions on "house societies", it is much easier to talk about my findings in Maldives because there is a debate in which to engage. Like many of the anthropologists contributing to the collection, *About the House* (Carsten & Hugh-Jones 1995), I found the house for the Male' elite to be a dynamic entity, combining a variety of roles--domestic and physical unit, as well as a political, economic, social, ritual, kinship, and religious entity. The house, then, as an entity, and like that of the Tikopia (Firth 1963), is for the Maldivian elite both a physical building and an idea. It is a notional notion that exists processually, physically and ideationally.

### 1.3 OUTLINE OF THESIS:

The first part of this thesis places the Maldivian elite within its geographical and historical framework as well as its ethnographic setting and classification systems. Herein is described the world-view of the Maldivian elite (see Chapter 2). The concept of *beeru* ("outside", or used as slang for a person to mean "outsider") is here

introduced as it is a critical concept governing the classificatory systems of the Maldivian elite. This world-view<sup>32</sup> of increasing circles of outsideness is like the seascape/landscape surrounding a person in Maldives--it radiates out like concentric circles of islands and sea and atolls to increasing degrees of *beeru*, or outsideness. For a member of the elite, the world begins at the centre, where one is inside the walls of one's house in its particular residential ward (*avah*)<sup>33</sup> of the capital island of Male', and all else radiates "outside" from there, including people and places (both sea and land). This world-view metaphorically and actually resembles both the geophysical and political world in which these people live.

The second part of the thesis (including Chapters 3, 4, and 5) delineates the building blocks of the elite system. Herein is included the stratification system as it pervades all aspects of life, including the Maldivian language, politics and the economic basis for the elite's power. The first section (Chapter 3) of this part about the building blocks of the system concerns a definition of the Male' elite over time. The nature of rank in the stratification system is examined here, and a description of the stratification and political systems is presented, as well as the economic basis that defines and maintains the elite of Maldives. This section includes a discussion of how Maldivian politics is linked with the stratification system, the traditionally important role of the lower-class, rich traders, and how the economic basis of elite power has traditionally functioned and is now changing with the advent

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<sup>32</sup> See diagram of world-view of the Maldivian elite in Appendix 7.

<sup>33</sup> The capital island is divided into four administrative wards. Some outer islands are also divided into wards. The ward in Male' traditionally considered the residence of the elite of Maldives was Henveeru, still viewed as such today. With population growth and the expansion of the membership of the elite to include some new *beekalun* as well, some members of the elite now live in the other wards--Galolu, Machangoli, and Maafanu.

of new sources of wealth. Also included is a discussion of the benefits obtained from being in the elite and how that has changed, along with a description of the economic relationship between the capital Male' and the other islands--hence between the Maldivian elite, centered in the capital Male', and the rest of the Maldivians, all the non-elite, those both in Male' and in all the outlying, inhabited islands of the archipelago.

The next section (Chapters 4 and 5) considers the building blocks of the kinship and affinity system of the Male' elite. The building blocks are the house (discussed in-depth in Chapter 5), the sibling group, alliances established through marriage between houses, and friendship. Included in the discussion of building block number one, the houses, is an elaboration of the developmental cycle of how a house is established. That fundamental building block, the house, organises everything, including another building block, which is the sibling-groups. Another critical building block, the alliances between houses, involving the manipulation of affinity, is established through marriage and through the politically critical establishment of the "*lianoo*" (brother-in-law) and "*fahari*" (sister-in-law) relationships. The final, important building block in this system is friendship, in which the kinship term "*gayy*" is used for the close friend or adviser. These building blocks of the kinship and affinity (kinship, house, sibling group, alliances between houses, friendship) all are political tools in the political system of competition. Although the house is the fundamental building block, I have focused upon that in chapter 5 following the discussion in chapter 4 of the rest of the kinship and affinity system, since those are brought together in the house.

This thesis addresses the nature of elites in a politico-centric society organised around houses. The building blocks of kinship and affinity,

including kinship, houses, sibling groups, alliances between houses, and friendship, all are essential political tools in the Maldivian elite's system of competition. Thus, these first and second parts of the thesis lay the groundwork for the presentation of the actual working of the elite society in the final part.

The third part of this thesis presents the uses of this system. This includes discussion of Maldivian elite practices of dependency systems, maintenance of power, social control, banishment and other punishments, paths to power, political conflicts, witch-hunt cycles and the elite's philosophy. First, in chapter 6, there is a description of the way the Maldivian political game is played, with the importance of government service (*sarukaruge vazifa*), the role of protocol and lists (*nantha*) and the political rituals of "functions" (*hafla*). Then, in chapter 7, are discussed the means of social control--the rewards and punishments used historically by the elite to maintain and perpetuate the elite system. In this section the important role of banishment (*aruvaalun*) is described. Banishment is the literal and metaphorical antithesis of the elite ideal of residential membership in Male' among all the rest of the elite. In chapter 8, there are the patterns and cycles of political conflict within the Maldivian elite system in history and during the period of this study. Through illustration by specific cases, it becomes clear in examining the uses of this elite system that all the building blocks of kinship and alliance are the political tools in the political system of competition among the Maldivian elite.

The conclusion argues that there is a combination of reiterative repetition and change in the elite system of Maldives. Also addressed are the patterns and cycles of sporadic political violence in a usually non-violent society which both perpetuate and change the system. The thesis demonstrates that, despite the apparent continuity of the

Maldivian elite system, significant sociopolitical changes began during the time of this study as a result of the complex processes of modernisation. Or, conversely, despite the apparent changes in the system especially during the time of this study during great technoeconomic change, the Maldivian elite system reveals evidence of reiterative patterns and cycles of political conflict, resolution and process continuing and replicating over time.

## *Chapter* 2

### MALDIVIAN ELITE WORLD-VIEW: GEOGRAPHICAL, HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE CONCEPT OF *BEERU*

In order to understand the elite of Maldives, it is first necessary to gain an understanding of the geographical setting, as well as the ethnographic setting of the Maldivian elite, and how that geography has been reflected historically in the elite's outlook toward the entire sociopolitical system of Maldives and the world beyond.

#### **2.1 BRIEF HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY OF MALDIVES:**

The Maldivian Islands are a coral archipelago made up of clusters of islands (atolls) that have historically formed a single national, political entity called *Dhivehi Rajje* in the Maldivian language, or, as Maldivians refer to their country in English, Maldives. The long narrow chain of the Maldivian Islands stretches from 7° 0' North for 512 miles (820 km) to 0°45' South latitude covering an area of about 41,500 square miles (106,000 sq km) with the greatest width being 81 miles (130 km), from 72°31' East to 73°48' East longitude. The country consists of twenty-six natural atolls that are administratively grouped into nineteen atolls (equivalent to any national administrative division such as a state or a province), with the capital island, Male',

designated as the twentieth administrative division.<sup>1</sup> In 1977, the population of the entire country of Maldives was 142,832, and the population of the capital island was 29,522, compared with the 1972 figures of 122,673 for the whole country and 15,279 for the capital, Male'.<sup>2</sup>

In each atoll, there are a number of inhabited islands and even more uninhabited islands. At the time of the residential fieldwork for this study, 1976-1978, the official count was 1196 islands, of which 202 were permanently inhabited. The Maldivian Islands vary in size from patches of coral or small sandbanks, reef patches, and reef rings to actual islands, the longest of which, Gan, in Laamu Atoll, is four and one-half miles long. The capital island of Male' was only one square mile in the late 1970s.<sup>3</sup> Most other islands are much smaller. The total land area is thought to be about 115 square miles (298 sq km), rarely rising to six feet above sea level. The water table is very high on all of the islands.<sup>4</sup>

The Maldives Archipelago is part of the same geological atoll plateau that begins in the south with the Chagos Archipelago, continuing

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<sup>1</sup> See reports of Government of Maldives (1980; 1983a; 1983b); United Nations Development Programme (1966); and World Bank (1980a; 1980b).

<sup>2</sup> See The World Bank's (1980a:119) study, The Economy of the Maldives: An Introduction, for tables showing the Distribution of the Population, 1967-1977.

<sup>3</sup> The Maldivian government later expanded the area of Male' and the neighboring airport island of Hulule in the early 1980s, through reef-reclamation by filling in the surrounding reef with sand and crushed coral.

<sup>4</sup> See World Bank's official report (1980a:1-2).

through Maldives, the Indian island of Minicoy<sup>5</sup>, and India's Lakshadweep (formerly Laccadives) Archipelago.<sup>6</sup> The nearest land mass to Maldives is Cape Comorin, India's southern tip, three hundred miles north, and then four hundred miles east to Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka.

Although always eased by sea breezes, the climate of Maldives is hot and humid and governed by the Indian Ocean monsoons--the southwest monsoon from the end of April until mid-August, and the northeast from September to March. The mean daily temperature varies little throughout the year in Male' from the average of 86°F (30°C), with diurnal variations seldom exceeding 10°F. The rainfall in Male' from 1974-78 averaged 84 inches (World Bank 1980a:2).

There is no written record of the arrival of the first settlers in these remote atolls,<sup>7</sup> but it was thought that there was an original Dravidian population from South India as early as the fifth century B.C., and new archaeological findings indicate that the Maldives archipelago was possibly inhabited as early as 1500 B.C.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps two millenia ago, another wave of settlers, Aryans believed to have come from India and

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<sup>5</sup> Historically, the island of Minicoy, in the north between the Maldives and Laccadives archipelagos, was part of Maldives until the late nineteenth century when it was given to India by the British. See Reynolds (1993:xiii-xiv,1).

<sup>6</sup> The social organisation of Laccadives traditionally was considered similar to that in Maldives. See Dube (1969) and Kutty (1972).

<sup>7</sup> Much of the following paragraphs presenting a brief history of Maldives were written originally in 1977 (see Colton 1978g:255) for *The Asia Yearbook 1978*, which continued to reprint my short account in their annual editions over the years. See below, Appendix 1 for a Brief Chronology of Maldivian History. See also Forbes (1980) for a list of primary Maldivian sources, accounts by foreign travellers and library and museum holdings pertaining to Maldivian history. See Maloney (1980:48-71) for more on the pre-history and early history of Maldives.

<sup>8</sup> See Heyerdahl (1986) and Skjolsvold (1991).

Ceylon, eventually dominated the islands. Fragments of Chinese pottery found in Maldives clearly indicate settlements as early as the sixth and ninth centuries A. D.<sup>9</sup> The first written records<sup>10</sup> from the Maldivian Islands date back to the twelfth century A.D. at the time of the conversion to Islam. The Maldivian language, *Dhivehi*, is Indo-European and based on Elu, an offshoot of Sanskrit. The oldest written form of the language, as well as portions in Sanskrit, are found inscribed on copper plates called "*Loamaafaanu*",<sup>11</sup> which give an account of life in Maldives from as early as the twelfth century A.D. Although Hinduism is thought to have been the religion of the earliest inhabitants of Maldives, Buddhism<sup>12</sup> had long been its state religion until 1153 A.D. when, according to national legend, the king was converted to Islam by a travelling Moroccan saint, Abul Baraakaath Al Yoosuf Al-Barbary. The King, by fiat<sup>13</sup>, then ordered the entire country to adopt the Muslim religion. Today, the Republic of Maldives boasts one hundred percent adherence to Islam.

The *rajja*, the ruling Buddhist king, Koimala, became the ruling Sultan, according to Islamic practice.<sup>14</sup> The dynasties of all the subsequent

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<sup>9</sup> See Skjolsvold (1991) and Allen (1983).

<sup>10</sup> For accounts of the *Tarikh* chronicle and the *Loamaafaanu* copperplates, see Bell (1921), Maniku & Wijayawardana (1986), and Reynolds (1991).

<sup>11</sup> See H.A. Maniku & G.D. Wijayawardhana (1986) and Reynolds (1991).

<sup>12</sup> See Reynolds (1984).

<sup>13</sup> That the entire country was ordered to convert to Islam almost overnight and that it happened by fiat is not at all surprising given the way executive decrees from the President in the late twentieth century also work. During my fieldwork, several events took place literally overnight that were the result of Presidential decree, e.g., changing from the Thaana script to Roman script for writing *Dhivehi*, or banishing political figures. Both Ibn Battuta (1343-46; 1929) and Pyrard (1602-07; 1887,1971) noted this style of ruling by fiat in Maldives.

<sup>14</sup> See Government of Maldives (1983a:27).

sultans and sometimes ruling sultanas, including the names and accomplishments of these Muslim rulers, are recorded in the *Tarikh*<sup>15</sup> of Maldives.

The Maldives government, at that time, was always ruled from Male' by rulers who did not succeed to that position by primogeniture, but by political competition between the great houses. The government, as far back as written records are available, which was the twelfth century, (*Loamaafaanu* and the *Tarikh*--see above) was highly centralised and had elaborate and precise systems of taxation, advisors, national defence, treasury, trade, education, religion, land-grants, justice, and other aspects of national administration.<sup>16</sup>

In 1558, the Portuguese seized control of the country, administering it from Goa, but the Maldivians, under the leadership of Mohamed Bodu Thakurufaan, drove them out in 1573.<sup>17</sup> Even at the time of this study, Maldivians still viewed with anger that fifteen-year period (which, by then, was over four hundred years earlier) when they were ruled by foreigners. The Maldivian leader who led the expulsion of the Portuguese is still considered among the greatest national heroes. With that one exception of true foreign occupation, Maldivians are proud that "Maldives has remained an independent sovereign state throughout its history" (Government of Maldives 1983a:22).

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<sup>15</sup> The *Tarikh* is the chronicle of the Maldivian Sultans (and Sultanas) who ruled over the Maldivian Islands from 1153 until 1821. It was written in Arabic and recorded in Male'. A chronology of these rulers is summarised in H.C.P. Bell (1921, 1940).

<sup>16</sup> See Bell (1883; 1921; 1940); Ibn Battuta ([1343-46];1929); Maniku & Wijayawardana (1986); and Pyrard ([1602-07];1887,1971).

<sup>17</sup> See R. M. Didi's (1995) discussion of this period of "sixteenth century nationalism" in Maldives.

Malabari pirates from the nearby South Indian coast also succeeded for a brief period in 1752 in seizing the Maldivian throne in the capital, Male', sending the Sultan into permanent exile, and destroying the royal palace. Only four months later, however, Maldivians regained control of their Sultanate. Again, to this day, Maldivians are proud of the fact that their country has remained independent of their giant neighbour, India. A Maldivian publication during the current government of President Gayoom made this statement: "The Maldives too has succeeded in remaining entirely Maldivian -- it is the only country in or around the Indian Ocean where there is no distinct Indian community, language or religion. That this small nation situated so close to the subcontinent and at a very strategic position, was able to maintain its own identity as an independent nation fully intact is a magnificent tribute to the ingenuity and far-sightedness of its forefathers" (Government of Maldives 1983a:25).

From 1645, Maldives paid symbolic tribute to the colonial governors of Ceylon in exchange for protection, first to the Dutch and later to the British until Ceylon became an independent nation in 1947. In 1887, Maldives became a British protectorate and remained so until Maldivian independence in 1965. Maldivian ideology does not view the previous status as a British protectorate as a negation of their national sovereignty.

The Sultans (and Sultanas) of Maldives ruled as autocrats until a court rebellion in 1932 led to the adoption of a constitution restricting their powers. A short-lived republican interim occurred in 1953 when Ameen Didi became the first President of the country and set in motion the movement for modernising Maldives. His rule lasted less than a year before a coup returned Maldives to a Sultanate. The last Sultan,

Mohamed Farhid Didi, became only a titular ruler from 1953-1968, while his prime minister since 1957, Ibrahim Nasir, later the President, gained increasing control as the architect of the modern Maldives.

From 1957 to 1965, Maldivians were locked in dispute with the British over the terms for leasing Gan Island in Addu Atoll for a Royal Air Force (RAF) staging base. During that time, the southern atolls, with the suspected encouragement<sup>18</sup> of the British military, seceded from the Maldivian Government. The leader of that revolt was Afeef Didi, whom the British later helped into exile in Seychelles. The dispute with Britain over Gan and the southern atolls was finally resolved and settlement reached on July 26, 1965<sup>19</sup> with the Maldives government under Prime Minister Ibrahim Nasir. On that day Maldives became an independent nation, and the British were granted leasing rights to Gan Island. In the same year, Maldives joined the United Nations. Ibrahim Nasir became President of the second Republic of Maldives on November 11, 1968.

In mid-1978, President Nasir surprised his countrymen with the announcement that he would retire after twenty-one years of rule (first as Prime Minister for eleven years and then as President for ten years). Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, then the scholarly young minister of transport, was elected to succeed Nasir and was inaugurated as President on November 11, 1978. President Gayoom has ruled the

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<sup>18</sup> Members of the Male' elite believed that the British Government encouraged the southern secession. When I met the leader of the secession, Afeef Didi, in Seychelles in 1978, he told me that he also had believed he had the support of the British in the beginning. Later, he felt betrayed when the British entered into an agreement with the Maldivian Government and took him out of the country into exile.

<sup>19</sup> In 1976, after giving one year's notice, the British prematurely terminated their lease of Gan and withdrew the Royal Air Force completely from Maldives.

Maldives continuously since that time, until the submission of this thesis in June 1995.

## **2.2 FROM ISOLATION TO MODERNISATION:**

Maldives is a country whose geography has played a significant role in defining the class system of its people and has contributed to the perpetuation of its sociopolitical system. Maldives' long isolation has been the result of its dangerous reefs in the Indian Ocean, as well as its lack of valuable resources. In the times of the great Indian Ocean dhow trade, sailboats had to pass through the archipelago because of the directions of the monsoons and the need by boats to make port before the long crossing to Africa. The navigators of the dhows were dependent upon the Maldivians to guide them safely through the treacherous reefs of the Maldivian Islands. With the decline of dhow trade, Maldives began to be relatively isolated from the rest of the world. When steamships with deeper draughts began replacing sailing dhows in the Indian Ocean, few ships dared to make the voyage into the area of Maldives reefs, narrow channels and shallow ports, as there was seldom a need to go there.

In the late 1970s, Maldivians were still able to remember when their only links with the outside world were sailing vessels. Although the country opened its first tourist "resort" in late 1972, only small propeller planes brought relatively few foreigners into Hulule Airport Island (the national airport on an island adjacent to the capital) on flights originating in nearby Colombo, Sri Lanka, and Trivandrum, India. At that time, the only other modern means of communication with the outside world was a radio connection with Bombay, India, called "the Bombay link". It was not until 1977, when the Maldives

government opened its satellite-station in Male', that the nation had any modern telecommunications link with the outside world. In late 1981, with the opening of the newly modernised airport at Male', Maldives began to receive jumbo jets direct from Europe for the first time.

In an effort to understand the internal political structure of Maldives, it is important to note that the geophysical characteristics of this archipelago have also apparently affected the pattern of behaviour evidenced among Maldivians themselves. Not only has this country been severed from much of the world by its reefs and lack of enviable resources, but the islands are also widely separated from each other, as are the atolls by deep, wide channels--one measuring fifty miles across.<sup>20</sup>

Sailing between any atoll, one can spend a long time without seeing any land. Sailing in one of the traditional boats from one Maldivian island to another, and especially on a longer trip from one atoll to another, gives one the sense of distance and time that Maldivians always must have felt from other islanders. Even with a good wind, an unmechanized Maldivian fishing boat requires at least six days to sail from the capital island of Male' to the northernmost atoll about two hundred miles away, and sometimes ten days to the southernmost atolls. The reefs are so treacherous, even for the Maldivian sailors who know them, that they cannot be navigated at night. These distances within the country (where historically and well into the 1980s, the

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<sup>20</sup> That is known as the "One and Half Degree Channel" (at one and a half degrees north of the equator) between Laamu (Haddummati) Atoll and Suvadiva Atoll (administratively divided between Suvadiva (Huvadu) North or Gaafu Alifu and Suvadiva (Huvadu) South or Gaafu Dhaalu. The southernmost channel, called the "Equatorial Channel", separating Suvadiva Atoll and Addu Atoll (administratively labelled Seenu Atoll) is also nearly fifty miles wide with only the isolated Fua Mulaku Island (administratively treated as an atoll, Gnyaviyani).

greatest problems were those of communications and transportation within the country), provide partial explanation of why, for instance, the paramount form of punishment in Maldives is banishment, *aruvaalun*, to a distant island far from one's home-island.

### 2.3 MALE', THE OTHER ISLANDS AND THE MALDIVIAN ELITE:

The nation of Maldives is a highly centralised state in which the national elite are resident on the capital island of Male', situated in the center of the archipelago. For members of the elite, there is Male' where they believe the most important people of Maldives live, and then there are the islands and the people of the islands. The elite of Maldives is a politico-centered community within the country it dominates. This national elite occupies the highest rank in the Maldivian stratification system (*daraaja* or now commonly called "hierarchy").

The capital, Male', which has always served as the ruler's island, is culturally distinct from all the other islands spread throughout the country's atolls. Male' is the country's one urban centre where the elite (the highest-ranking "*beefulun*" and the newer middle rank of "*beekalun*") reside, and all cultural, commercial, social and politically significant activities are centred. Probably not coincidentally, Male' is almost geographically the centre of the country. The "islands" and "atolls", as all the rest of the country is referred to by all Maldivians, represent the rural region where most of the country's so-called "ordinary people" (*miihun*, the lowest class, the country's fishermen) live.

The nation's class system is interlocked with this dichotomy between urban Male' and the rural islands. Except on a couple of the southern islands, where members of the ruling families historically were banished, there are no full-fledged members of the elite or highest class, residing on any island other than Male'. At the time of this study, the status-claims of some people from those islands, such as Fua Mulaku, where a few people boasted aristocratic status (*beefulun*) because of their descent from former rulers banished there, were disputed by most Male' elite, usually behind their backs.<sup>21</sup> It is from this urban centre of Male', that the Sultan and his officers (now the President and his civil servants) have held the country under their rule by controlling its external trade, internal commerce, supply of arms, culture, land, religion, justice, little wealth, and favours.

Politics, not kinship, is the organising principle for the Maldivian elite, in particular, and in a general sense for the rest of the country, because of the rulers' control over all the islands and the islanders' need to maintain dependency relationships with members of the elite in Male'. An elite, a political core, controls this tiny country from the capital island of Male'. It is a small community that can be studied at the national level.

Another important factor influencing Maldivian behaviour is the scarcity of land (*bing*). There are only 115 square miles in a relatively far-flung country that stretches more than five hundred miles from north to south and is eighty-one miles wide. Only about 210 of Maldives' tiny islands (from an official total of 1196) were populated with the nation's population of approximately 130,000 in 1976 and

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<sup>21</sup> Members of the Male' elite would say that someone "from Fuamulak or Addu may think they are beefulun, but they aren't really since they are not from Male'".

nearly 150,000 in 1981. The capital, Male', is only slightly more than one-square-mile, following recent reef-reclamation programs, but approximately 35,000 people lived there representing about one quarter of the nation's population.

Given the dense population of the scarce habitable land (*bing*), coupled with the isolation of each population cluster, the Maldivians have developed an unusual degree of internal suspicion and distrust. In creating tension and jealousy (*hasadhaveri*), this factor of land-scarcity is exacerbated by the traditional method for distributing land-rights--that is, by grace and favour of the Sultan (now the President). The traditional method for distributing holding rights to the land, which was thought to be owned by the "government", or *sarukaru* (which was always actually the Sultan, now the President and possibly his few closest advisers), was to parcel it out to favourites for good behaviour, i.e. loyalty (*thedduveri*) to the incumbent powers. This ancient system, through which one person can easily lose his valuable landrights for the slightest suspicion of his disloyalty (in reality, few of the old, landed aristocrats lose their land), seems to breed distrust and fear among one's jealous neighbours and even among family members who all are seeking rights to the vital resource of land.

What is an even greater threat is banishment (*aruvaalun*), especially for the elite in Male'. Banishment cuts them off from the world of Male' where everything important happens and where members of the elite can carefully watch over personal interests. Usually when someone is banished, the family remains in the house on the land in Male', thus securing it until the return of the banished person. But the government can take away islands formerly given to someone in the elite.

In Maldivian society, controlled as it is by a politico-centered elite in the central urban capital, the worst punishment would be banishment. Everything about the Maldivian elite suggests from early childhood training that the worst condition would be to be evicted from one's inner circle, beginning first with one's house and family and radiating out through the surrounding elite, and hurled to the fringes of Maldives. Although children are not banished from Male', often their parents are; thus, they grow up with a dread of banishment. At the same time, youngsters in the Male' elite learn from childhood to believe that the other islands of Maldives, where one might be banished, are inferior to Male'. Elite ideology holds that nothing interesting happens in the islands outside Male'; the people are not cultured there; it is not very civilised in the other islands; the people are only fishermen. Beyond banishment to another island, the worst form of *aruvaalun* would be exile to another country, where people are indeed strange and different, and where one would no longer be involved in the daily political happenings and, therefore, forgotten.

In Maldives there is extreme centralisation. If one is playing the political game in that society, then there is only one place to obtain the prize, and that is in Male'. The most valuable rewards in Maldivian society, which is dominated and controlled by the Male' elite, are to be found in the political system. The game is to get ever closer to the centre. The use of gossip, spying, accusations and sexual one-upmanship are all recognised means for moving towards the goal, or at least, if used adroitly, for staying in the game. This supercentrism derives from the political nature of Maldivian elite society.

It is essential that a powerholder maintain a solid core of political bases--siblings and/or affines, parents if alive, and a few loyal friends.

Members of this core group would help the leader on his/her rise to the top, and once there, they would become essential, serving as tentacles, eyes and ears in the various ministries and departments in which they can be rewarded with good jobs. They operate “spy posts” in the different ministries of the government, reporting back to the leader what people are saying, especially watching for the slightest sign of opposition. The leader’s dependence on this political base puts him in an increasingly delicate situation as he strives to maintain the power he has achieved.

#### **2.4 THE CONCEPT OF *BEERU* (THE “OUTSIDE” WORLD):**

In Maldives there is mostly seascape, and hardly any sense of landscape. The sea is always in one’s vision. From anywhere one stands, or is afloat sailing, the world appears to be one radiating circle after another, concentric circles building out to the farthest point of the sea horizon. Atolls themselves are large circles surrounding smaller circles, or vice versa, small circles radiating out to larger circles, beginning at any island--circles of lagoon, reef, deeper water, other islands, atoll’s edge, deeper sea, all varying in colour and all radiating out from one’s central point of being. (An aerial view of Maldives is amazing, too, in showing this world of radiating circles). This Maldivian seascape/landscape has affected the Male’ elite and actually describes their view of the world. Their world-view can be said to resemble their geophysical environment of radiating concentric circles of increasing degrees of outsideness, difference and danger.

In Male', when one is given a plot of land by the government, the first thing to be built is a wall (*faaru*) demarcating the plot (*goti*).<sup>22</sup> This wall may stay up for years before house-construction begins. It is the initial sign that separates this plot from the outside world. Someday this plot (*goti*) will hold a house (*ge*), and whoever might eventually occupy the inside will be separated from the outside world.

There is a basic word in the Maldivian language that means "outside", and that is *beeru*. The opposite is *ethere* for inside. Beginning with one's house, the world is classified according to those *ethere* and those *beeru*. This kind of classification of inside/outside and insiders/outside radiates from oneself and one's house and one's world in much the same manner as the concentric circles radiating from the islands and atolls of Maldives. Children are taught early that "outside the house" is terrifying. The worst punishment for children is to put them "*beeru geng*" (outside the house). Children of the elite are told that this is what happens to slum children.

The term *beeru* is also used frequently to denote any kind of "outsider", even though formally, the word "*miihun*" (for ordinary person) is supposed to be used with it. Thus, the word *beeru* can be used to mean either the outside or outsider. Most Maldivians say that for an "outsider", the word "beeru" is used only to refer to foreigners; but, in fact, in their daily conversations, they use the term often to refer to various types of outsiders, beginning with anyone outside the walled compound. In Male', people of the house, *gemiihun*, include those servants who sleep there, the members of the family who sleep

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<sup>22</sup> In contrast to the residential patterns of the Male' elite, in the islands there were at the time of this study few walls separating houses and plots of land. Only the few wealthy island-chiefs, who had begun to imitate customs of the capital, had begun in the late 1970s to erect walls around their compounds on the islands.

there, and any siblings who come daily to visit those living in the house, as well as someone special attached to the house (as I was to Enderimaage). To be specific about the upper class people of the house, one would say *gebeefulun*.

The full term *beeru miihun*, meaning “outside person” or “foreigner”, is often simply used in the abbreviated form of *beeru* for various outsiders. Examples of “outsiders” include: those in a ward of Male’ different from one’s own (the four wards of the capital have traditionally been rivals); those non-elite in Male’; those members of the elite who, at any one point in time, are “outside” (considered dangerous opposition to the government); those persons living outside Male’ on other islands; those outside the atoll; and those most *beeru miihun*, foreigners, and sometimes those non-Muslims who are, of course, “outside” the religion. In the Maldivian’s view, each level or farther circle of *beeru* is considered worse, more different from the norm (inside), and potentially more dangerous.

The basic group in Maldivian social organisation is the house, *ge*, including the resident parents, children, sibling groups and current spouses. The house includes the entire compound including courtyard, garden, main physical house structure, any out buildings--all surrounded by a wall (*faaru*). For most Maldivians, anyone outside their basic group is viewed as probably not simply against them but rather, as actively plotting against them. Yet people have to marry *beeru*, dangerous outsiders, affines. Allowing *beeru* (outsiders) inside in such an intimate way is the internal dilemma of any house. Thus, for these affines, spouses and siblings of spouses, the illusion must be created, at least for the duration of the marriage, that these *beeru* are not really *beeru* and that, instead, they can be trusted. The attitude is

then adopted that the members of the house expect loyalty from this outsider who comes to live inside the house with the inside sibling group. Therefore, that affine is addressed in kinship terminology, as brother or sister--*beebe*, *koko*, or *daatha*. The woman who comes in from the outside (*beeru*) as stepmother is often called *daatha* (older sister) to overcome the distrust connotation of the term *don maama* (meaning stepmother, actually “fair”, as in colour, mother, with sense of the “wicked stepmother”, the worst type of “outsider”).

Members of the Male’ elite generally distrust everyone outside their core group. They are wary of so-called friends, servants, and neighbours. They feel they can never be certain that these people from the *beeru* are not spies, infiltrators living in their own house, often in the guise of loyal servants. In fact, servants are indeed the source of a great amount of inside information used by political rivals against each other.

Banishment (*aruvaalun*), the ultimate punishment for members of the elite, fits logically into this scheme of *beeru*. The Maldivian elite’s concept of the outside world can be characterised as ever-widening concentric circles of ever increasing degrees of undesirability. The elite’s view of the outside world, radiating farther and farther out from the political centre of Male’, then serves to perpetuate the effectiveness of banishment as a punishment.

## **2.5 CLASSIFICATION OF THE MALE’ ELITE’S WORLD:**

The world-view of the Maldivian elite resembles the surrounding geophysical world of concentric circles of land (*bing*) and sea (*kandu*) radiating out from the centre (see Appendix 7 for Diagram Illustrating

World-View of the Elite). The elite of Maldives divides its world and the people in it into a variety of categories in addition to the basic socioeconomic-political hierarchy. It also classifies the outside world into categories that represent its cultural horizons, and its view of the world is not unlike its geographical horizons. In Maldives, for the Male' elite, the center of the world is the elite society of Male' and from that point radiate out concentric circles.

Thus, for members of the Male' elite, the world of places in Maldives was traditionally divided into a minimum of six worlds of land: first, one's house (*ge*) with the wall (*faaru*) around the house compound; then, the ward (*avah*) of the island in which one's house is located; then, the larger island, Male', the capital; the atolls or rural areas known as *rajjethere* (further divided into two worlds: inhabited islands known as *miihun ulhe rahrah*, or islands with people; and uninhabited islands known as *miihun nulhe rahshe*, or islands with no people; and all foreign lands beyond Maldives. In the latter part of the twentieth century, the Male' elite's world of land increased to eight divisions with the addition of two other important Maldivian land-areas (the tourist islands, called "resorts" in English, beginning in the mid-1970s; and the southernmost Addu Atoll, with Gan Island, from the 1960s through the 1980s).

The classification of sea, or water worlds numbers a minimum of six. There are three areas of the lagoon around each island (*rah*) up to the reef (*faru*) of that island: *mudu* (the clearest, shallowest water at the beach); *vilu* (the slightly deeper, aquamarine water off the beach, clear but light blue/green); and *falhu* (the deepest, bluest water within the lagoon off the island inside its reef). These three concentric circles of different types of water around an island are all bound by an outer

circle of reef (*faru*). There are at least three classifications of the deepest, bluest water *kandu* (sea): *atolhu terege kandu* (the deep, blue sea between islands within an atoll); *maa kandu* (“huge sea”, the deeper sea between the atolls outside the reefs, the channels between atolls); and *beeru kandu* (the wide, open sea outside the atolls of Maldives). Again, a reef (*faru*) encloses the sea within an atoll (*atolhu terege kandu*), and other reefs surround the other atolls, separating them from the *maa kandu* and the *beeru kandu*. The sea (*kandu*) is thus divided into the sea inside atolls, where small boats go and where certain kinds of fish live; and the huge, open sea, both between and outside atolls-- the dangerous deep sea where other kinds of fish live and where, if one dared venture, is the best fishing and the chance of finding valuable ambergris (*maawaharu*) floating on the surface.

Beyond Maldives, the Maldivian world of *beeru* locations has depended upon the trends of the times--in other words, the places with which Maldivians have connections at any point in time, e.g. Colombo, Ceylon (later Sri Lanka), India, Egypt, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, or London.

The first and most important world for the Maldivian elite is Male’, the centre of culture, education, commerce, and government, where all the elite live (except when they are punished by banishment to an outer island or abroad). It is the country’s only urban island, and the wealthiest place in Maldives. Traditionally, the national treasury was located there, and now it is the site of the nation’s state bank. Because of the power (military, political and economic) of the Male’ elite, this island has historically been the *entrepot* for the entire archipelago; only through this port could local, national and foreign trade pass, as well as all modern transport and communications. As one recent Maldives Government publication put it quite unabashedly: “Male’, the capital,

is and always has been the seat of government in the Maldives and the home of the intellectual elite. Economically, its structure is different from the other islands -- for, if the islands depend on Male' for all their trading and administration, Male' depends on the islands for 'its livelihood'(sic)" (Government of Maldives 1983a:5).

Then there are the atolls and islands, the rural areas (*rajjethere*) which are divided into inhabited and uninhabited worlds. The inhabited ones (*miihun ulhe rahrah*), are where most Maldivians live and perform the occupation of the majority of Maldivians--fishing. There is poverty on the islands. The life is "simple" there in the view of the Male' elite, and the people (*rajjethere miihun*) are not considered as civilised like their Male' rulers. All produce, maritime and agricultural, from the islands is fed into Male', and whatever small luxuries islanders obtain, they get from Male'.

Almost all agricultural produce comes from the uninhabited islands (*miihun nulhe rahshe*). There are hundreds of uninhabited islands, though Male' people often maintained that there were not many left--at least not many that were near enough to Male' so that members of the Male' elite could use them for private excursions and picnics on Fridays (the Muslim day of rest). In the late 1970s, they blamed this loss on the tourists for occupying their former picnic islands, not blaming the Maldivian tourist managers for converting some of the once-uninhabited islands into foreign-currency-producing tourist "resorts". Some of the elite lost their uninhabited island-hideaways when the tourist developers started their industry. Yet Male' people (students, office groups, families) still go for outings to find "escape" and "freedom" from the tense, restricted Male' life, on what they think of as their only remaining, uninhabited islands.

The southernmost atolls were traditionally classified among all the other rural areas (*rajjethere*), referred to in English simply as the “atolls” or “islands”. But when Gan was held by the British and when Addu and the other southern atolls revolted from Male’ rule, that region was considered to be a separate world from the other islands and atolls. The people of that area still think of themselves as different from other “islanders”. Yet throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the Male’ government, through its newspapers and other means of propaganda, continued to insist there was no difference between Addu Atoll, where Gan is located, and the rest of Maldives, meaning they should remain poor fishermen the way they were before the British offered them other occupations and sources of outside income. Many Male’ people were envious of the advantages that the Addu people had when the British held Gan in terms of access to new forms of wealth, employment, and material goods. When the British pulled out completely from their base in 1976, the economy of that southern region collapsed because it had become dependent upon the British for their employment and had given up their traditional occupations. After 1978, the new government under President Gayoom began making every effort to bring Addu people back into Maldives by creating new industries in the south to replace what had been lost, yet at the same time not encouraging their independence from the rest of the country.

At the time of this study, tourist resorts represented another world-labelled “resorts”, and have been classified as such from the beginning of Maldivian tourism in 1972. They are for foreigners (*beeru miihun*) and for the new elite of the elite--those few Maldivians owning and managing the resorts. Most resorts have rules stating that no Maldivians, except workers and families (and very close friends) of the managers can visit the tourist islands. This monopoly that the first

tourist managers exercised over the world of resorts was a major cause for the great envy (*hasadhaveri*) that was felt toward them and ultimately destroyed some of them, leading to loss of control of their tourist islands and typically banishment to an outer Maldivian island or, in some cases, exile abroad.<sup>23</sup> Male' people suppose that a tourist resort is a place of license and free-love. Historically, the sultans used to have such islands for their pleasures away from the public eye in Male'.

## 2.6 FOREIGN WORLDS:

Beyond the Maldivian world, there have been other worlds inhabited by Maldivians at different times. The general term "*beeru*" is used to cover all the outside world where the elite study and travel, where ministers go on matters of state, where tourist managers travel to obtain business, and where sailors go on the fleet of Maldives Shipping Company.

In that wide world of *beeru*, there are such recognised and important places as Singapore, which used to be known mainly for shopping, where Maldivian traders could buy cheap goods for smuggling into Sri Lanka. Singapore is where the richest Maldivian lives--Ali Maniku--and during the witch-hunt of 1980-1981, it was considered a dangerous world because the former President Nasir was believed to live there. If any member of the elite was heard to make contact with him, as did Sikka in 1980, he/she could be banished.

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<sup>23</sup> This occurred in the witch-hunt of 1980, discussed below in Chapter 8, "Patterns and Cycles of Political Conflict".

Mecca--another point in the outside world--was once a place only a few of the elite went on Haj (pilgrimage). With the infusion of foreign currency into the Maldivian economy, beginning in the late 1970s, however, many Maldivians, not just the elite, have been able to make the Haj. By the early 1980s, with all the travel being done by the elite, other places began taking on an importance in Maldives. Such newly important places are New York, the site of the U.N. mission; London, a connecting point for businessmen, government officials and exiles on their way to many other places; Geneva with its offshore banking facilities; Libya because of the great influence Libyan money had in Maldives; Cairo (Egypt), as the center of Arab and Islamic culture; Australia where many Maldivians go for higher education; and always Colombo because it was Maldives' chief neighbour.

## 2.7 FOREIGNERS:

Islanders have traditionally been referred to as *beeru* by Male' people, but islanders always referred to Male' people as Male' people and non-Maldivians as *beeru*. My servant, Aziza, kept telling me that her husband's father was a Maldivian, meaning a man from Male', but her husband's mother was *beeru*, meaning that she came from an island, not a Male' person.

To some Male' elite, the word *beeru* does not mean foreigner--it refers to any non-Male' person, especially islanders. Yet most Male' people use *beeru* for foreigners, as does the Maldivian media. There are several words built on the *beeru* base: The word *rajjenbeerun* means "from outside Maldives" or "foreigner". The word *beeru miihun* is the more precise word meaning "outside people", "outsiders", also "foreigners".

A similar word, *beerathehi*, has a special history. First, it is considered a somewhat obscene word, never to be used of the Male' elite. Until the rule of President Ameen Didi, the word was always used for non-Male' Maldivians. It also meant "foreigner(s)" or "stranger(s)". Some people, even at the time of this study, still used it for non-Male' Maldivians--islanders. But the enlightened, first President Ameen Didi, who wanted to develop his country, reportedly said that it was not good to talk of one's own countrymen as if they were foreigners or strangers, especially with such ugly connotations. He attempted to eradicate this use of the word. As Aminath Hussein, the former lover and intellectual confidante of the first President often explained, Ameen Didi felt that it was not right to classify other Maldivians as foreigners just because they were not from Male'. He taught the Male' elite to call islanders *rajjetherage (miihun)*, meaning "inside Maldives"; however, by the time of this study, the old usage still had not been fully eradicated in the more than thirty years since Ameen Didi attempted to change people's prejudices.

The actual word for foreigner is *rajjenbeeru miihe*, meaning "person outside the country", but since, in the past, so few people had contact with foreigners, the word was seldom used. It was against the law for unofficial persons to converse with foreigners until the 1970s when the tourist industry was established. As one *beefulun* woman told me, her grandmother would have been quite surprised to find her chatting with me--a foreigner. The word *rajjenbeeru miihe* was not used much at all until tourists began arriving. Then the Maldivians generally used the English word "foreigner".

A combination of xenophobia, envy, proud independence, a national superiority/inferiority complex, and an ethnocentrism characterise

Maldivians' interactions with all foreigners. To survive in this remote environment, Maldivians have always practiced cunning, trickery, and deception to keep foreigners away, while at the same time capturing a few spoils from the ships of richer countries that sailed too near Maldives. Foreigners who later came in the late twentieth century hoping to cash in on what they envisioned as opportunities in Maldivian tourism learned, one after another, that the Maldivians were in charge and would never tolerate any foreign control in business or politics.

## **2.8 FOREIGN INVADERS:**

Strongly nationalistic and proud of their independence, Maldivians still point with horror to the few periods of foreign domination. The Portuguese were the most hated of the interlopers because they attempted to convert Maldivians to Christianity and came to these little islands with armadas and soldiers clad in armour. In 1558, the Portuguese seized control of the country, administering it from Goa, but the Maldivians drove them out in 1573. Throughout history, pirates, especially from the Malabar coast of southwestern India, harassed the Maldivian Islands, and once in 1752 seized the country by invading the Sultan's island, Male'. Only four months later, Maldivians defeated the usurpers and regained control of their Sultanate. The Maldivians themselves, again because of their own lack of resources and distance from sources of such, have historically preyed on passing ships. Besides their reputation as good navigators, Maldivians were known as pirates, wreckers, and smugglers in the Indian Ocean trading network. Even as late as 1979 and 1980, there were incidents of piracy in Maldives by islanders attacking small foreign boats. Maldivians like

to say that it's a good thing to live next to rich people so you can catch some of the overflow.

## **2.9 BRITISH "PROTECTORATE" STATUS:**

In 1887, through an exchange of letters between the Sultan of Maldives and the British Governor in Ceylon, the Maldivian Islands obtained protectorate status from Britain, continuing to exercise internal control while handing over administration of its foreign affairs to the British colonial government resident in neighbouring Ceylon. Not until World War II, and then again in the late 1950s when the British needed an air base on Gan Island, did the British bother much about the poor islands. What happened between Great Britain and Maldives over the Maldivian island of Gan served to intensify Maldivian xenophobia and certainly still colored Maldivian foreign policy at the time of this study.

## **2.10 CONTACT WITH FOREIGNERS:**

Many Maldivians remarked to me how important it was to realise that only in the past few years had any Maldivians, other than the highest officials, had any contact with foreigners except when they went abroad. Even then, those who were sent for studies in Ceylon and India were kept together in Maldivian groups, in special lodging and had Dhivehi teachers and chaperones with them (laws had actually forbidden Maldivians to talk with foreigners). Only those government officials directly involved with particular foreigners (diplomats or sea captains) could talk with foreigners, and only certain official Maldivians could meet people from ships.

The Maldivian education system actually taught Maldivians (and their elders instilled in them from early childhood) to hate and fear foreigners because most were Kaffirs, the highly pejorative Muslim term for infidels. While the entire country has long had mosque schools, it was not until the 1960s that the government established English-language primary and secondary schools for the elite on Male'. Traditionally, only the wealthiest members of the elite sent their children abroad for education in places like Ceylon, India and Egypt. At home, Maldivians were taught to hate and fear even foreign Muslims because they were foreign, and most were treated as if they were Kaffirs, though they were not.

At the same time, there was a prestige factor for those few members of the elite who travelled abroad for study, pilgrimage or business. Traditionally, for them and for a very few respected foreigners like Ibn Battuta, Maldivians used the Arabic word *sayyah* for travellers, or the Dhivehi word *dhaturu veriya*, meaning "an authority on journeys" (*dhaturu* meaning journey or trip, and *veriya* meaning authority). Travel brought prestige because the traveller had survived the dangers of going among foreign peoples in foreign lands. Some Male' elite were called *dhaturu veriya* even when they travelled to other distant islands within Maldives, which, again, implied the foreignness of those *rajjethere* outside Male'.

## 2.11 RELIGION, CONVERSION AND INFIDELS:

For centuries, the Maldivians participated in the Indian Ocean dhow trade. Sailing boats had to pass by these dangerous reefs on their way in search of the treasures of the East, but because of the Maldives' relative isolation and their lack of valuable national resources,

Maldives, historically (as discussed earlier), had little experience with colonialism or any other form of foreign domination. Even their conversion to Islam was legendarily peaceful and involved the arrival of only one foreigner, not armies on *jihad* (“holy war” under Islam).

To be a Maldivian one must be a Muslim. The Republic of Maldives is one of only two countries in the world (at the time of this study, Saudi Arabia was the only other) that can claim its population is one hundred percent Muslim. The ruler of Maldives is believed to be chosen by God, and is the religious leader in the country.

It has long been Maldivian law (and is now a part of the modern Constitution) that every Maldivian citizen must be of the Islamic religion and that no non-Muslim can become a Maldivian citizen. Similarly, any foreign man marrying a Maldivian woman must first become a Muslim in order for their children to be Muslims according to Islamic law. The same does not apply to a foreign woman marrying a Maldivian man (since the woman’s religion does not matter in Islam in determining the religion of the children), but if a foreign wife also wanted to become a Maldivian citizen, she would have to adopt the faith of Maldives. All children born to Maldivians, therefore, are Muslim since at birth they inherit the religion of their father.

The only religious threat to the national Islamic faith, established since 1153 A.D., came from the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. In 1551, Sultan Hassan IX announced that he wanted to renounce Islam for the Christian faith of the Portuguese. This angered the Maldivians so much that he was driven from the country, fleeing to Cochin in India. There he was baptized into the Christian faith by Francis Xavier. In order to force the Maldivians to convert to his new religion, he then went to

Goa and obtained the support of Portuguese leaders. They gave him two ships to invade Maldives so that he could seize all the high officials and nobles and bring them to Cochin for baptism. Instead, the Maldivians attacked the two ships, killing all the people on board.

Finally, in 1558, a large Portuguese armada conquered Maldives, killing its ruler, Sultan Ali VI. Portuguese officers were dispatched to many islands to secure the entire archipelago by preaching Christianity to the islanders, according to Maldivian history. The Portuguese began moving south and finally arrived in Male', attempting to convert the elite of the country. In 1573, a band of Maldivian guerrillas from the north who knew the reefs, with armored assistance from Malabar from India, landed in Male', killing the Portuguese leader, and drove the Portuguese and their Christian religion away from the shores of Maldives. This period of foreign domination is still viewed as the lowest point in Maldivian history.

Since that time, there has been no major threat to Maldivian religion. Early in the 1970s, when an American Bible-carrying ship arrived in Maldives and started distributing a few Bibles, it was asked to leave the country. Based on that experience, Maldivians said on occasion that, if they had to be aligned with a superpower, they would choose the Soviet Union because it did not try to impose its religion as the United States had done by sending that Bible ship.

## **2.12 HAJ AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD:**

In 1976, when I arrived in Maldives, I was informed by a Sheikh, who had made the *Haj* (Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca), that there were only about twenty-three people in the country who had been on Haj.

Beginning the next year, wealthy Maldivian businessmen began chartering planes and arranging for large groups to go on Haj. Previously, it had been an individual matter, only for the rulers and the very rich.

Going on Haj, though very important for a ruler as the leader of the faith in Maldives, was frequently a very dangerous venture, often signaling the end of a reign. In the old days, going by sailboats moving with the Indian Ocean monsoons, the entire pilgrimage would require at least a year away from Maldives--a minimum of six months to Haj, and a minimum of six returning to Male'. The trip followed this route: by sailboat to Colombo; by sail to Madras or Bombay; by sail to Jeddah on the Red Sea; and finally by caravan to Mecca, sometimes returning by the east coast of Africa to collect slaves and other goods. Sometimes a Sultan would go on Haj and never return, either because he died (often of yellow fever) enroute, or because word reached him that he had been overthrown. Often Haj presented an opportune time for a brother or cousin of the Sultan to take over the throne.

### **2.13 THE BORAH OCCUPATION:**

For nearly a hundred years, lasting from the mid-nineteenth until the mid-twentieth century, a group of Borah traders from Gujarat, India, lived in Maldives and dominated Maldivian trade. The Borah community was finally ousted from Male' by Nasir (then Prime Minister) in the 1950s. During their commercial occupation in the capital, there was a Maldivian law that the Borahs were not allowed to mix with the Maldivians except for business, and they could not be on the streets of Male' after 5:30 in the evening. The Borahs were required to stay inside their shops and their houses (built above the

shops) from 5:30 p.m. until sunrise. Thus royal women were safe to go without their veils once it was dark and no foreign Indian Borahs were on the streets. In fact, the entire time the Indian traders lived in Maldives, they were not supposed to have any social intercourse with Maldivians, other than buying and selling in the Borah shops. As one Maldivian man, who later became personal secretary to the President, explained, if a Borah had come to his house, he would have had to keep him standing at the door. It was against the law to invite the Borah, or any foreigner inside. Of all the Borahs, only one was reported to have married a Maldivian *beefulun* woman and was allowed to stay when all the others were ejected in the 1950s.

#### **2.14 CATEGORISATION OF GROUPS OF FOREIGNERS:**

Before the arrival of tourists in the 1970s, Maldivians had few concepts for groups of foreigners. If people happened to know that someone came from a particular place, then they might be called by that name, e.g. *India miihe*, *Ceylon miihe*, now *America miihe*, *Gerumanu miihe*, *Italy miihe*, etc. After the British were in the Maldives during World War II, when any foreigners wearing long trousers came to Male', they were called *Ingresi miihun* (English people), whether they were English or not. The Portuguese, who had come in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and later the Indian Borahs, were the only other foreigners remembered as a group before various groups of foreigners began coming as tourists in the late twentieth century. The *Portuguesa miihun* were always remembered for their cruelty, just as they were on the East African coast, even four hundred years later.

## **2.15 CATEGORISATION OF MALDIVIANS WHO HAVE LIVED ABROAD:**

In Maldives, Maldivian people are also classified by where they have spent time abroad--for example, where they studied or according to their occupation. For instance, the Maldivian people who studied in various countries are sometimes called “the French”, “the Russians”, “the Australians”, “the Egyptians”, or “the New Zealanders”, all places where a number of Maldivians went for studies in the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s. Most elite who studied abroad spent at least some time in schools in Ceylon, so that is not used as a designation, nor is India.

One reason for identifying people in this manner is that it explains why they might behave differently than the Male’ norm. Overseas education became both a symbol of prestige and a kind of stigma; therefore, identifying people by where they had studied outside Maldives set them apart in both a positive and a negative way. Also, in Maldives because many people share the same name, many methods are employed to identify a specific Mohamed or Aisha. People are identified not only by where they studied, but also by occupation, or by which house they are attached to, which island they come from, or which sport they play. For instance, there are many Naeem’s, so the one who studied in France is called French Naeem; the one who had pilot training is always called Pilot Naeem; another is Army Naeem; while still another is Newspaper Naeem. And everyone in the Male’ elite recognises the difference among all the Naeems.

## 2.16 THE TOURIST INDUSTRY AND CHANGING VIEWS OF FOREIGNERS:

By the time of this study, at the beginning of tourism in the late 1970s, the power elite needed the tourists (just as they have always needed their own Maldivian outsiders, the islanders) to produce capital to maintain the elite of Male'. However, with the development of the tourist industry, the Maldivians have had to accommodate somewhat to foreigners--the tourists--people from the outside (*beeru*), the very group of people they have always been taught to hate and fear. The problem then became how to perpetuate distaste for and condescension of tourists, as they have done in the past toward both islanders and other foreigners without allowing people to show their fear and hatred of foreign tourists.

Because there is so little land in Maldives, this country had no need to assimilate foreigners. The foreigners assimilated in the past were completely incorporated as Maldivians. Accordingly, the Maldivians devised a system of putting tourists away on separate islands. The method proved useful for perpetuating xenophobia--by preventing most Maldivians from mixing with the foreign tourists who are said to be immoral--wearing little if any clothes and drinking alcohol. In a way, too, despite a law banning their entry, having the loathed "hippies" in Maldives helped demonstrate how barbaric foreigners are. The fact that one of these "hippie travellers" murdered another one in 1976 in Maldives proved the point. But the murderer, who was banished to an island, was converted to Islam, married a Maldivian woman, and was thus civilized by Maldivian religion and life, very different from the Germany where he grew up and which produced his murderous instincts.

Even among those Maldivians who spent years away from Maldives but were back living in Male', there was pervasive xenophobia. One very high-ranking government official, who had spent years abroad studying and working, constantly warned me that I should be careful not to hang around with the foreigners living in Male' (not the tourists but the international development workers) because the ones the Maldivian government had invited to work there, he said, "are all working against us". Another highly educated teacher, who had spent many years studying abroad and even in Male' mixed frequently with foreigners, often said of the expatriates living in Male', "They hate us. They are all against us".

Several Maldivian diplomats sent to the United Nations in the late 1970s (Maumoon Gayoom, Fathulla Jameel, and Hussain Haleen) all studied at the ancient centre of Islamic learning, Al-Azhar University in Cairo, where they became fluent in Arabic. This background stood them and their country in good stead as they reached out to other Islamic countries, especially the oil-producing ones. Islamic brotherhood has been used by the Maldivians as a means of obtaining aid from those wealthy Muslim countries. Indeed, Maldives before the rise of OPEC had steered a more independent foreign policy, maintaining friendly relations with any other country, including Israel, which they finally severed in 1976 under pressure from Libya and Islamic oil-producing countries.

In the 1970s, a commitment to national development and modernisation became a necessity for any power-seekers in Maldives. While there might have been conflicts within subgroupings of the elite (between the commercially oriented and the more religiously oriented, or between the older and younger civil servants, better and less educated, Western

and Islamic educated, or between houses), everyone in the ruling elite appeared set on the path of modernising their country. Yet, given the long history of xenophobia, this new national approach to welcoming anything foreign required a major change in the traditional attitude towards foreigners.

To understand the Republic of Maldives, and especially its elite, in the 1970s and the early 1980s, it was this very contrast--between a long history of relative isolation and increasing contact with the rest of the world--that must be considered. It was especially important for understanding the actions of the elite--the politicians who were trying to develop and modernise their country, but at the same time remain basically xenophobic and distrustful of the outside. They were proud of the Maldivian way of life, their little civilisation that they developed for millennia without external foreign influence. Yet they wanted to have what they considered the best of the outside. Indicative of the Maldivian attitudes at the time of this study was a statement in 1977 in an editorial in the English-language newspaper *Moonlight Weekly* that revealed their dilemma: "Maldives has had many years of peaceful isolation--but we were so isolated that we were almost left behind in the global rush for progress. Who in the world likes to be left behind? No one does"! Maldivians have always had a kind of love-hate relationship with the outside world, with foreigners, with *beeru*. They have always sought to remain strongly independent yet they have wanted to take what they believe is the best from the foreign world.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> This rather paradoxical relationship of the Male' elite to the outside world was apparent to me from the beginning of my work there. It was also noted in the much earlier accounts of Maldives by Ibn Battuta in the 14th century and Pyrard in the 17th century.

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**PART 2**

*BUILDING BLOCKS  
OF THE  
ELITE SYSTEM*

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# Chapter 3

## DEFINING THE ELITE: STRATIFICATION, POLITICS AND THE ECONOMIC BASIS OF POWER

### **3.1 THE ELITE**

The elite of Maldives is the highest stratum of Maldivian society that has traditionally included all persons exercising political power and influence. Members of the Maldivian elite reside in the centre of the country, on the capital island of Male', traditionally known as the Sultan's island, or the home of the elite, from which they rule the rest of the far-flung archipelago. The bulk of Maldivian society (the islanders or fishermen and the non-elite living on Male'), is dominated and controlled by this politico-centred elite. While this elite directs and influences all social, cultural, economic, political, religious and commercial affairs of the whole country, its central focus is politics.

At the time of this study, the elite of Maldives comprised probably a maximum of one thousand people, including spouses and children, with the core being only about one hundred persons. Their primary residence was the capital island of Male' of which the total population then was approximately thirty thousand to thirty-five thousand, and the population of the country at that time ranged from 130,000 to 150,000. Thus, the elite was in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as it always was historically, only a very small percentage of the populations of both the capital island and the country as a whole.

The elite *beefulun* dominated the country politically and economically throughout history since the first Sultans in the twelfth century through the establishing of constitutional government in 1932 and until the establishment of the Second Republic of Maldives in 1968. The *beefulun* rank itself was also divided into three groups: *Manipulu* (a royal person or of royal descent); *Saeed beefulun* (descendant of the Prophet Mohamed); and *Didi* (non-royal *beefulun*, traditionally a mixture of royal family marrying into lower class).

The elite is generally referred to as *bodung*, or the “big ones”, the “power-holders”, the “nobles”. The great majority of the Maldivian population, the non-elite, those with no political power, mostly living on all the outer islands and also many working on Male’, are called simply the people, or *miihun*. The elite group both historically and in the latter part of the twentieth century included the higher ranking *beefulun* and a few “trusted”, usually entrepreneurially successful, *beekalun*, former *miihun* who became accepted as special members of the elite. Traditionally, the ideology held that only the *beefulun* could be concerned with politics (*siyassat*). Members of the elite were the only segment of the society to have access to higher education (above the basic mosque schooling). The elite had the means to travel abroad and obtain education and learn languages outside Maldives even before the Maldivian government introduced English-language education into the elementary and secondary schools on Male’; the elite were educated in Male’ to prepare them to go abroad for their higher, university education.

The *bodung* or *bodethi beefulun* (meaning “big high-ranking people” or “the people in power”--an expression also used by children to speak of the older people in the elite houses) was concentrated and organised

around the politics in the capital and included loosely both those in and out of power. Those in power are the *sarukaru* (the government) and those out of power are *kurige sarukaruge* (the former government). Another expression delineating the ruling core of the elite was *iizzaitheri beefulun*, meaning the “distinguished *beefulun*” or “dignitaries”, and *ganuwaru beefulun* (royals, people of the palace). For example, when President Gayoom’s government came to power, the government of his predecessor, President Nasir, was formally called “*Nasiruge sarukaruge beefulun*” (the high-ranking people of Nasir’s government). But when people wanted to disparage the people who had been in Nasir’s government, they used the pejorative expressions “*Nasiruge gaayy miihun*” (Nasir’s close ordinary, low-class people) or “*Nasiruge miihun tha*” (Nasir’s crowd of ordinary people).

The political elite revolves about the central leader of the country, who is the President today and was formerly the Sultan. The elite includes those supporting the leader at any particular point in time, and those who are in opposition, usually acknowledged as such by being banished or under house arrest. Political opponents always face the strong likelihood of banishment from Male’ to an outer island, far away from the centre of political life in Maldives. Later this banishment becomes a badge of honour, demonstrating that they were the elite opposition.

The inner power elite is made up of the President, his cabinet, his personal advisers, senior civil servants (directors of departments which are under the Office of the President, deputy ministers under cabinet ministers) and rising young undersecretaries and their spouses (only as appendages), except for the spouses of cabinet ministers. According to the current Constitution of Maldives, the Citizens’ Majlis is nominally the main legislative body of the government. It is comprised of forty-

eight members--two elected from each of the nineteen administrative atolls and Male', plus eight Presidential appointees. The President is nominated by the Majlis, and then the single nominee is voted on nationally by referendum for a five-year term.

### 3.2 STRATIFICATION:

Historically, Maldivian society has been divided into two hierarchical groups. First there is the *beefulun* (singular *beefuleh*), the nobles who were said to be descendants of either royalty (*Manipulu*) or from the Prophet Mohamed (*Saeed beefulun*) or from mixed royal blood (*Didi*). Within the *beefulun* class, members are further distinguished as either royalty (through grandchildren of Sultans) or plain nobility, those who are farther removed from recent Sultans. Traditionally, there has been only one other major group: the *miihun* (singular *miiheh*), meaning "men" or "people", called "the commoners". This group includes everyone who is not a member by birth (or in some cases, through marriage) of the elite, or *beefulun*. Within the *miihun* class, there is a higher class--the *beekalun* (singular *beekaleh*), which is a kind of middle rank that is achieved, not ascribed, into which certain respected *miihun*, the ruler's favorites (such as trusted servants, now successful businessmen or teachers) could rise.

The Maldivian hierarchial system was once a more rigid system of stratification, according to members of the old elite. Traditionally, there was a variety of basic expressions of what some Maldivians called a "caste system" evidencing "caste" relations through an idiom of ranking found in language, clothing, kinship terminology, terms of address, deference behaviour, gift-giving and commensality. At the time

of this study, language, feasts and ceremonies still provided clear demonstration of rank relationships, as did marriage patterns, residence patterns, and occupational relations.

The political elite of Maldives includes *beefulun* and some *beekalun*, but no *miihun*. If a *miiheh* should break into the elite, he would have been classified automatically as *beekalun*. It is possible, though extremely difficult, for an “islander”, a non-Male’ person to become a member of the elite, but first he must have moved to the capital island. Actually, at the time that a *miiheh* is considered a member of the elite, that *miiheh* is considered *beekalun* and is then spoken to and spoken about in *beekalun* language. When that same *miiheh* falls from grace, people then revert to using *miihun* language to refer to that same person.

Even under the traditional system, some people were political powerholders who were not *beefulun*: they were the *beekalun*. The historic role of the *beekalun* in the Sultanate was that of palace servants. The old *beekalun* category was not inherited. Presumably, they were the equivalent anthropologically of eunuchs.<sup>1</sup>

*Beekalun*, which is an achieved status, can sometimes be passed down to children by virtue of its privileges, at least while the *beekaleh* parent is alive. Before going to the field, my English teacher<sup>2</sup> of the *Dhivehi* language, had said that foreigners, such as teachers, technicians, and diplomats, are all placed in this *beekalun* category, but in the field I

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<sup>1</sup> As noted by Professor Maurice Bloch in discussion with me regarding the Maldivian stratification system, in particular, the Maldivian beekalun in 1981.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Reynolds at the School of Oriental and African Studies in May 1976.

learned that even foreigners in those special categories had to gain Maldivian “respect” before they were considered *beekalun*. Most foreigners are simply given the lowest, ordinary *miihun* status. (According to Christopher Reynolds<sup>3</sup>, the only foreigners to be granted the status of *beefulun* were royalty like Queen Elizabeth II of Britain. Later, however, I learned that when the Maldivian *beefulun* were staying in my house in London, they referred to me then as *beefuleh* in their conversations with other Maldivians. When I asked them how I had achieved this high status, they explained that it was because they had accepted my generous hospitality and were staying in my house).<sup>4</sup>

### 3.3 POLITICS:

Throughout Maldivian history, until the late 1960s, politics was considered the exclusive sphere of the *beefulun* rank (members of the Male elite use the English word “caste”). Although Sultans usually had a few loyal *miihun* (promoted to *beekalun*) around them as guards, no one ever thought that the rule (*verikun*), the power and control of politics, could ever be held by anyone who was not *beefulun*. Probably, in fact, the Sultans chose these loyal *miihun* to surround them because ideologically they were safe, whereas they would always be suspicious of any *beefulun* around them. For instance, the *banderigemanikufaan*, who was always to be a *beefulun*, slowly gained more power, especially when he was able to leave the country and obtain education, which he then used upon return to draw more and more power to himself.

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<sup>3</sup> During my Dhivehi lessons with Christopher Reynolds at The School of Oriental and African Studies in London, May 1976.

<sup>4</sup> Moomina Haleem and Mohamed Nasir, both *beefulun*, said this when I had overheard them speak of me, their hostess, as *beefuleh*, the person who was giving them sanctuary, in London, 1980-1981.

Eventually, the Prime Minister, a position which was the modern successor of the Treasury-keeper, became the actual ruler of the country, while the last Sultans sat as only titular heads of the symbolic Sultancy.

The word used by Maldivians for politics is the Arabic *siyassat*, which Maldivians say shows how the concept was thought to involve only a small percentage of the people, thus they used Arabic as a sign that ordinary people did not even understand the concept. Sultans had power (*baaru*) to do what they wanted as long as they could hold onto the rulership (*verikun*). As a former *miihun*, later a *beekalun*, who became very powerful in President Gayoom's government because he was *lianoo* to the President, said: "I will do what I want now that we have the rule (*verikun*)".

Even at the time of this study, when there were very powerful *beekalun*, both in the Gayoom government and those banished because of their power in the previous Nasir government, the ideology remained that only *beefulun* could actually rule. Often it was said by members of the old elite and the non-elite--but not, of course, the new *beekalun* who were desperately trying to take some of the power--that the reason for the problems in this new government (and in the previous one) was that non-*beefulun* (in other words, *miihun* who had risen to the status of *beekalun*) had too much power and did not know how to behave as rulers. This ideology was so strong that even though they often would say "history repeats itself", they overlooked the fact that their history, when *beefulun* ruled entirely, had been one of turmoil politically with constant coup-plots, suppression, banishment, and witch-hunts.

One *miiheh*, now *beekaleh*, who lived abroad and whose family was increasingly involved in political activities, said she is not interested (though she is, very much) in politics. She said she frequently wrote to her family warning them, cryptically, to keep away from politics because it is only for *beefulun*. She was the *fahari* (sister-in-law) to a man who held a high position in government and who was becoming involved in tourism, and she frequently advised him to forget about politics and leave it to the *beefulun*.

*Beefulun* believed that no one who was not born a *beefulun* (neither *beekalun* nor *miihun*) could ever rule. Many of my *beefulun* informants believed this, as one *beefuleh* clearly stated regarding an aspiring *beekaleh*: “He would never be accepted as President because he has no history, no background. He is not *beefulun*”. Many *beefulun* said it was “blood” and remarked that the “new people” (the *miihun* turned *beekalun*) were trying to “use” the *beefulun*, but that the *miihun* would never accept the new people because they did not have *beefulun* blood.

### 3.4 STRATIFICATION AND LANGUAGE

The Maldivian language, *Dhivehi*, is hierarchical.<sup>5</sup>

One of my *Dhivehi* teachers began his instruction with this statement: “To understand Maldivian culture, you must learn first about the class differences in the language. Though there have been many changes in

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<sup>5</sup> My first teacher of *Dhivehi*, Maumoon Gayoom, began his lessons by telling me that I had first to learn about the class differences, the historic national hierarchy, before I could learn the language.

Maldives, these class differences in the language have remained”.<sup>6</sup>

The Maldivian language is divided into levels to match those socioeconomic political classes operating in society. There are three forms of language to distinguish a person’s hierarchical group. All verbs have three forms. When speaking of someone else, the form of the verb is used that applies to the class of that person. The third person is used for the second and third person reference. When speaking of oneself, the third form (*miihun*) of the verb is always used, even by the ruler, since one must always sound humble when speaking in the first person. There are also three forms of each pronoun, the use of any one depending on the “class” of the person to whom one is speaking for the first and second person, and of whom one is speaking for the third person. Different termination words are added to questions, again depending on whom one is addressing. There are also different forms of greetings for each class of Maldivians.

In *Dhivehi*, there are certain idiomatic expressions that refer only to the *beefulun* or imply some characteristic of the *beefulun*. For instance, the word *reethi*, translated as “beautiful” in the sense of “refined”, is used to describe only the kind of language, the honorific speech, of a *beefuleh*. Maldivians say they were talking “beautifully”, meaning all of them were *beefulun* and were speaking in that language. *Beefulun* say that their own *beefulun* language, as distinct from the rest of the *Dhivehi* language, is “beautiful”, and, likewise, they say it is they who speak “beautifully”. Another example is the expression meaning “to make gifts”, which actually means “to do presents to a *beefuleh*”.

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<sup>6</sup> Sheikh Mohamed Jameel made this statement in English when I began studying *Dhivehi* with him when I arrived in Male’ in September 1976. He was a *beefuleh* and then considered one of the most learned people in Maldives. He often repeated this injunction as did others in similar ways, including Aminath Hussein.

### 3.5 KINSHIP AND STRATIFICATION:

Some of the kinship terms distinguish between the two major ranks of *miihun* and *beefulun*. Because the *beekalun* class is an achieved status, there is no distinction for this group in most kinship terminology, and the kinship language for them is the same as for *miihun*. According to the traditional Male' elite, the reason for these distinctions is that in one "family", because there is such a high divorce rate and persons marry into other classes, there might be different classes represented. The word for kinsman, *thimaage*, is always followed by the appropriate distinction, either *miiheh* or *beefuleh*. The same is also done for the word *gaayy*, meaning either a close relative or a close friend. The word for "woman of the *miihun*" is different from that for "wife of a *beefuleh*".

The terms for mother and father are the same for both classes, while the terms for both male child and female child are given class distinctions. Any parent, whether *beefulun* or *miihun*, speaks of his own child as *dhari*, but in speaking of another's *beefulun* children one must add the appropriate term, *dharifulu*. The same terms for younger brother (or sister), uncle, aunt, grandfather, grandmother, grandchild, elder brother, elder sister, younger relatives and older relatives are used for both classes. The only distinctions in these terms, including those for mother and father, occur when one is speaking of a prince, princess, queen, or king.

Maldivians claim kinsmen in both classes, though even some old *beefulun* still maintained that they did not "mix with" *miihun*. Both hypergamy and sometimes hypogamy have been practiced by Maldivians. There are still remnants of deference behaviour existing

between the strata. One was expected to stand up for male *beekalun* and any *beefulun* of either gender.

Among the elite of the Maldives, there was elite endogamy. There is no rule of preferred marriage, except that no one wishing to remain in the elite would marry outside it. A Male' woman of either class may marry into the other elite group, as long as the man is considered a Male' man. A Male' woman would not normally marry an islander, unless he had become accepted as a new member of the elite through education and residence in Male'. A Male' man, on the other hand, who could also marry up or down within the elite, could also marry ordinary island women. He may or may not bring her to Male'. Such a marriage usually takes place when a Male' man is banished to an outer island. A child inherits his father's rank unless his mother is also influential or formerly a member of royalty. Children grow up in an elite society, but once they become adults they must manage on their own to remain true members of the elite.

### 3.6 GOVERNMENT UNDER THE SULTANATE:

In traditional Male' elite society, which was not thought to have changed much before the 1950s, there were clear symbols to distinguish the elite. For example, only members of the elite could wear shoes, carry torches (true fire-torches for lamps or later flashlights), and only their women could remain in purdah. In houses, there were different seats of different heights and sizes for different ranks.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Bell (1921:31). Here also Bell wrote that Pyrdard's (1887;1971) descriptions of social customs from his 1602-07 stay in Maldives were very similar to and could apply to the times of Bell's visits in 1879 and 1920.

In Male' during the time of Sultan Shamsuddin, just before the court rebellion occurred demanding the drafting of a constitution, government was considered a relatively simple affair, Maldivians say, under an autocratic Sultan who reportedly slept all day and stayed up all night handling affairs of state and socialising. There was only one government office before the Constitution, called the *Bodubanderige*, where the national security guard office is today. The *Bodubanderige* was the Treasury, where all the documents and money were stored. The head of that office was the treasurer (*banderi manikufaan*, *Bodubanderi manikufan* or *Bodubanderi kilegefenu*), always *beefulun*. With him were a few government servants, such as the *Hangubeekalun*, who escorted the Sultan, like modern national security guards, and the *Kudibeekalun*, who lived in the palace and assisted the Sultan. Both these groups were *miihun* who had been promoted to *beekalun*. They received a *bodu handu* (rice allowance). *Bodu handu* was given to people according to their status. Some people did little work to receive it.

The Treasury Officer (*bodubanderi manikufan* or *bodubanderi kilegefenu*) was very powerful, because he was in charge of collecting customs from the islands. After the constitution was drafted in 1932, the officials were the Sultan, or *rais*; the prime minister, or *boduwazir*; the chief justice or *fandiyaru manikufaan*; the treasurer or *banderige*. In the beginning, the Sultan was more powerful, but later the Prime Ministers gained education and took more power. As Maldivians often said in the late 1970s, "The last Sultans just sat and were Sultans". People always believed that the leader was chosen by God.

There were also five titles which could be bestowed by the Sultan: *rannabaderi kilegefaan*; *fasshana kilegefenu*; *doshimayna kilegefenu*;

*faamulaceridayri kilegefan; maafari kilegefan*. The royal family (families) *ganduvaru beefulun* were thought to maintain power by being related by blood to the Sultan, who was believed to be chosen by God and, therefore, had all the power. The Sultan's greatest strength, Maldivians said, lay in being able to banish the opposition, by the power of family position, and the members of the royal family clung to their power through relentless plotting and cunning.

The *hangubeekalun* (servant-escorts of the Sultan) were predecessors of the *sifaing*, modern-day security guards. Traditionally, and still today, many security guards (*sifaing*) came from the island of Kuludufushi in Haa Dhaal Atoll in the north, where people are noted throughout Maldives for being the tallest and strongest. The security guards appear to be unusually larger than the ordinary Maldivians.

Before modern times (which, according to Maldivians, began for Maldives in the late 1950s and 1960s), the *beefulun* did not work but got handsome allowances, down to the third generation descended from a Sultan (i.e., through the Sultan's grandchildren, and sometimes further down through the fourth and fifth generation). They received rice, sugar, housing and many other allowances. Many still do under Presidential rule.

In the pre-Constitution days, the government was believed to be the Sultan and sometimes the more powerful *bodubanderi manikufan*. Now the government includes the President, or the *rais*, the *vazirunge majlis* (the cabinet ministers, all appointed by the President), the *raiyyathunge majlis* (elected parliament), and a few others, as people say, meaning the *lianoo* (the brothers-in-law of the ruler, i.e., the brothers of the President's wife) or close friends or close lieutenants, trusted *beekalun*.

### 3.7 WOMEN OF THE ELITE

Women have traditionally played a very influential role in Maldivian political life.<sup>8</sup> In the past women were allowed to become ruling queens, Sultanas. History records<sup>9</sup> reigns of four different female rulers, who ruled the entire country alone as Sultanas. Rehendi Khadija, for instance, was perhaps the most famous because of her tactics in seizing power. As one Maldivian woman, who was involved in politics, described Rehendi Khadija: “She was queen. She took it seven times. No one gave it (the power and the rule) to her. She would murder husbands and brothers to get it. She ruled overall thirty years. She was very scheming”.

But in recent years, as the Maldivians have attempted to bring their religious practice into line with other Islamic states, it has become constitutionally illegal for a woman to be elected President, though she may hold any other office in the country. Some women were working to change this law.<sup>10</sup> In early 1978, for several weeks the English-language weekly (*Moonlight Weekly*, Jan.-Feb., 1978) carried editorials about why women should be allowed to run for President since they were free to hold any other Maldivian office and, indeed, were said to be equal to men in the Constitution. That newspaper was published by the most powerful women in the country at that time, including the wife of the President (then Nasir) and her friends (the Minister of Health, the Director of Information, and the Director of Tourism)--all

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<sup>8</sup> See e.g. Ibn Battuta, writing in the fourteenth century, and Pyrard, making his observations in the early seventeenth century.

<sup>9</sup> See the chronology of the *Tarikh* in Bell (1921; and 1940).

<sup>10</sup> See Didi (1992) on “The legal status of women: the Maldivian experience” and (1993) on “Written and unwritten laws”.

of whom were later banished or went into exile or were generally suppressed by jealous men of the later Gayoom regime. Through their editorials, they urged in vain that the law be changed to open the highest position in the country to both genders, as it had been in the past, when there had been no laws to prevent a powerful woman from seizing power.<sup>11</sup>

In the Majlis election for the President in 1978, many believed that had it not been for that law preventing women from being President, the Health Minister, Moomina Haleem Ismail, would have received many votes and perhaps would have won the election. Many people considered her the most powerful person in Maldives at that time. She herself later said she believed that these reports and the fact that she was so popular (having been so generous with ordinary people through her long years as Matron of the Hospital and then as Minister of Health and a Member of the Majlis) were what frightened the new President's *lianoo* (brother-in-law), Ilyas, the other member of Parliament from Male', so much that he had become determined to destroy her political career.

For years she and Ilyas were the two elected-members of Parliament from Male', and in every election she came first, receiving more votes than Ilyas. Long before the current President was elected to this post, he told me, in fact even before I went to Maldives, that Moomina was the most powerful woman in the country and one of the most popular politicians. It was also he who first told me that, though a Muslim

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<sup>11</sup> Those women also often privately noted how neighbouring South Asian nations (India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, the latter two of which are also Islamic) have had female rulers in modern times.

country, women had no trouble in Maldives. He said “We have always been different about women”.<sup>12</sup>

Traditionally, it is said by Maldivians, women were given much higher status in the Muslim religion than is acknowledged in modern times. The Koran gave women property rights and stated that men had to shelter them. In Maldives, until very recently, there was no other form of education except religious. Children were taught religion in their houses by the women along with older men (grandfathers). Female members of the Maldivian elite often quoted the Koran as saying that “heaven is in the feet of the mother”. They say, and their history demonstrates, that they have always believed women are important and have rights just as men do.

Even the early Arab travelers who visited Maldives and wrote about their experiences in that strange land always praised the women of Maldives and talked about their uniqueness. Among the earliest of these accounts was one written by Abu'l Hasan Ali, called El Mas'udi,<sup>13</sup> in the tenth century when Maldives was still Buddhist. Mas'udi remarked on the peacefulness of the kingdom that was ruled by a queen: “They are all very well peopled, and are subject to a queen: for from the most ancient times the inhabitants have a rule never to allow themselves to be governed by a man” (Pyrard, 1887, 1971, Vol.II, Part II:429).

The renowned world traveller, Ibn Battuta, came to Maldives in 1343 A.D. and ended up marrying several Maldivian women and staying four

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<sup>12</sup> From conversation with Maumoon Gayoom in New York in 1975.

<sup>13</sup> An excerpt of this early account can be found in Albert Gray's Hakluyt Society 1887 translation (reprint 1971) of The Voyage of Francois Pyrard (1602-1607), Vol.II, Part II, pp.429-430.

years. He wrote this: "Any newcomer who wishes to marry is at liberty to do so. When the time comes for his departure, he divorces his wife, for the women of the Maldives do not leave their country... The women of these islands do not cover the head: the sovereign herself does not so... I have not seen in the world any women whose society is more agreeable. I had many wives in the Maldives" (Ibn Battuta, 1929; Pyrard, 1887, 1971, Vol.II, Part II:442-446).

Another source was the French sailor, Francois Pyrard de Laval, who was shipwrecked in Maldives in 1602 and remained in the country five years. He also wrote about Maldivian women: "The King asked me about the royal courts of France, and I narrated to him what was going on in France. The queen and princesses and other ladies inquired much of the queens and princesses of France and how many wives the king had. But chiefly they desired to know how ladies conducted affairs of love--for they cared to talk and hear of nothing but love" (Pyrard, 1887, 1971, Vol.I:243).

During the time of my fieldwork, several of the last princesses in Maldives taught me about traditions for women and the changes that had occurred in their lifetimes.<sup>14</sup> For example, there was never purdah as such in Maldives because it was not for religious reasons but only for the women of the royal family. Even during the days of Ibn Battuta, women did not have to be veiled. Traditionally, even into the days when Aminath Hussein (born in 1916), Habeeba Hussein (born in 1932) and Habeeba's mother Gomafulu (born 1912) were young women, they (and all the women of the royal family) had to be carried around in the covered box, the *kimakolu*. Royal men were also carried in it,

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<sup>14</sup> My chief informants were Habeeba Hussein and Aminath Hussein, whose mothers were princesses during the last days of the Sultanate.

but they could go out in public if they wanted. Also, when royal women went out by day (and any other women who wanted to do the same), they wore the *boduburuga* (big veil), covering their faces and bodies. At the time of this study, there was one woman left in Male' who could still be seen wearing this veil as she walked along the streets amidst laughing children.

Habeeba boasted of being the first woman to go without the veil. Aminath, her *fahari* (sister-in-law), said actually it was not exactly Habeeba's idea, though she liked to brag that she led the women's liberation movement in Maldives. Aminath said that when Habeeba was a little girl, on the coronation day of Sultan Hassan Nooradin, Habeeba's father Hussain Habeeb, whose great friend the Prime Minister Hassan Farhid Didi had suggested it, took his young daughter, Habeeba, boldly through the streets of Male', walking and not riding in a *kimakolu*. (The elite's exclusive use of automobiles in Male' later was similar to the traditional royal use of the *kimakolu*). People were shocked, according to Habeeba and Aminath. They had never seen this little girl. It also caused great embarrassment to Habeeba's mother's family, from whom her father was divorced. Habeeba's mother, Gomafulu, was a daughter of Sultan Shamsuddin, against whom the court rebellion of 1932 had occurred.

The first day royal women were allowed to go freely without wearing a *boduburuga* or free to walk without a *kimakolu*, was on the first Jamhuria (Freedom Day, Independence) when the first republic was formed by President Ameen Didi in 1953. Aminath and Habeeba, who had been brought back from their Colombo schooling for the occasion, said they walked about freely and unveiled that day just like ordinary women.

According to Aminath Hussein, in the old days a few royal women went abroad for medical treatment, usually to Colombo or India, sometimes to Egypt. Some also went on Haj, pilgrimage to Mecca. But women did not go abroad to study until the middle of this century, and then only a few until the past decade. The first woman to study abroad was Fatimath Ibrahim Didi, daughter of the former Prime Minister Ibrahim Ali Didi and a princess Gulestan Imaddudin, who died in Egypt. (Fatimath was the wife of Ahmed Zaki, the former Prime Minister, who was banished by Nasir and later served as Ambassador to the United Nations, while Fatimath remained at home). Fatimath was born in Colombo and raised by her parents in Egypt where her father was in a kind of exile at the time. She studied in Egypt until her mother died and her father brought her home to Male', stopping enroute one year in Colombo, where she also studied. Fatimath (born in 1919) left Egypt when she was about thirteen. Therefore, it was said that Fatimath was not really the first woman to have been sent abroad for studies because she was born abroad and happened to study there.

Habeeba Hussein, granddaughter of one of the last Sultans, was really considered the first woman to be taken abroad for study. Her father took her when she was about eleven years old for six years to Hyderabad, India, where she studied English and Urdu.

Most people said that it was Ameen Didi, the first President, who was personally so fond of women and believed in their potential as citizens--not only as lovers--and wanted to modernise his country, who introduced education for women in Male'.

It was frequently said among the Maldivian elite that there is always a woman behind any political trouble, meaning that one man envies

another for having a certain woman whom he wanted or whom perhaps he once had, but lost. The first President, Mohamed Ameen Didi, was reported to have alienated most men in his elite circle because he took everyone's wives and daughters, surrounding himself with women. It was said that the problem between President Nasir and his cousin, Abdul Majeed Mahir, whom he banished on several occasions, was caused by Mahir's wife, Ameena, the beautiful, only-daughter of the first President. She worked very closely with Nasir as his personal secretary until her husband was brought back from banishment, and then the two of them were accused of plotting against Nasir.

Women were always believed to be behind many of the political problems in the late 1970s and early 1980s because the men then holding power were said to have been jealous of the men in the former regime who had certain women. The former President's personal secretary, Ilyas, was thought to be jealous first of the President's wife, Naseema, for stealing the President's attention but also envious of the President Nasir, an older man, for having this young woman, Naseema, whom Ilyas always adored.

Women are very important in the sibling-groups and houses that dominate Madlivian political life. Female siblings often remain together in their parents' house, whether mother's or father's house or both, if no divorce. And their husbands move in to their houses, if their house is powerful politically or has more space, and then may form the basic core of affines for a political aspirant's power base. In such cases, the women would hold great controlling power over the directions their husbands' political careers might take.

### 3.8 RELIGION AND POLITICS:

Historically, Islam has been used by the government<sup>15</sup> to preserve the status quo, especially in the islands. There is a law against discussing religion in any way that would appear to be questioning the religion. According to the current Constitution, the President of Maldives is not only the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces but also “the supreme authority to protect and propagate the religion of Islam in the country” (Government of Maldives 1983a:29).

*Danabeekalun* are learned men, the intelligentsia, originally meaning those learned in religious matters. The status allowed them membership within the elite, but it could not be inherited. Children of *danabeekalun* had to achieve that status also through education, originally in religious affairs. In the late 1970s, the *danabeekalun* of Male' included Maumoon Gayoom, Zahir Hussain, and Fathulla Jameel (all of whom studied at Al-Azhar University in Cairo), as well as the fathers of Maumoon and Fathulla, Ahmed Shathir (also former students at Al-Azhar), and Mr. Shihab's father. Habeeba, who was considered a leading female cultural and intellectual leader at the time of this study, was not considered *danabeekalun* because she was a woman and thus not learned in religion. Women learned to read the Koran and practice the religion, but they were not traditionally trained as scholars.

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<sup>15</sup> Maloney (1980:211-41) devotes an entire chapter of his ethnography to the role of Islam in social control, especially over the islands. A subsequent chapter (Maloney 1980:242-73) concerns the role of magic, what he calls “the old religion”.

### 3.9 ECONOMIC BASIS OF ELITE POWER:

Maldives is a maritime nation, and its economy is completely dependent upon the sea, both traditionally with fishing and trading and now in modern times, beginning in the 1970s, with the nation's three vital industries: fishing, shipping, and tourism. The Maldivian elite has controlled both the traditional and modern economic systems because the elite (traditionally the *beefulun*) of Male' held the positions of political power that perpetuate its maintenance of control over the economic resources of the archipelago nation. Members of the elite were given and inherited government allowances of funds and rice, and they maintained attachments to islanders who brought them produce from the rural areas and to rich traders who contributed to their support.

At the same time, traditionally a very few *miihun* who were originally trusted servants of the ruler became *beekalun* and allowed to go into trade as long as they supported the ruler politically and financially. (*Beefulun* considered trade beneath their rank). This was how certain *beekalun*, who became traders (which *beefulun* traditionally would not do) in the twentieth century began to amass fortunes and survived by giving both political and financial support to the ruler in return for political protection and trading rights.

Such relationships between the politically powerful *beefulun* rulers and a few rich *beekalun* traders (originally trusted servants, later advisers) were mutually advantageous. Loyal attachment to the ruler was the only way the trader could do business, and the ruler needed the wealth of the traders to hold on to power. Through such relationships, wealthy and trusted *beekalun* could begin building up their own houses and

continue to exercise power through marriages and business enterprises of their children. For example, among the chief *beekalun* traders and advisers for the first President Mohamed Ameen were the following: Mohamed Kaleyfan, founder of Hikifinifenmaage House and father of President Nasir's wife, Naseema; Ibrahim Abbas, founder of Enderimaage House and father of President Gayoom's wife, Nasreena, and father of Ilyas Ibrahim, who served both President Nasir and President Gayoom; and Umar Maniku, founder of Kolige House and father of Ali Maniku (who became shipping magnate and chief financial supporter of the next two Presidencies) and daughter Nasira, who married Ilyas Ibrahim (see diagram, Appendix 6).

Maldives is a nation distinctly divided economically between the one urban/commercial centre, which is the capital island of Male', and all the outlying rural areas (*rajjethere*), which include all the other islands in the archipelago.<sup>16</sup> There were always great differences between these two sections of this nation-state (Male', the capital, and "the islands" [*rahrh*], the rest of the country), but in the 1970s and early 1980s at the beginning of major modernisation, the differential rates of socio-economic change were dramatic.<sup>17</sup>

In this extremely centralised country, Male' was always the seat of government, the home of the political elite, which controlled most international and internal trade as well as all island administration.

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<sup>16</sup> During the British occupation of Gan Island in Addu Atoll, where a major Royal Air Force base was built after World War II and maintained until 1976, that atoll and Gan Island in particular were together considered another distinct area. Once the British abandoned the base, however, that southernmost region returned to being just another of "the islands", as all the islands, atolls, outside Male' are always called.

<sup>17</sup> See the World Bank (1980a; 1980b) studies in comparison with the 1966 report of the United Nations Development Programme.

The Maldivian government, formerly the Sultanate, has always appointed administrators (atoll chiefs, island chiefs and any other administrative post) in all inhabited islands.

Male' was always dependent on the islands for all its produce for both domestic consumption and export, including the following: food (fish, fruits, vegetables, millets), commercial dried fish called "Maldivian fish" (skipjack tuna traditionally supplied to the Indian Ocean dhows and still exported throughout the Indian Ocean region, especially to Sri Lanka), coconut palms (for timber for boat-building and construction of houses, for thatching, for food, oil and coir), coral for making building-lime, weaving (mats and cotton cloths traditionally worn by the elite), the cowry shells, which the government for centuries supplied to the Indian Ocean dhow trade as its money, and other rarer sea "treasures" (including ambergris and tortoiseshell) sold to the foreign dhow-traders.

Different islands specialized in different occupations, crops and crafts, and all were primarily dependent on fishing. The islands were also the only source of the labourers for domestic work in Male', for sailing the Maldivian boats and for fishing. At the same time, the islanders were dependent on the elite of Male' to buy their goods, to give them room and board when they came to sell their goods or to work in Male', and to grant them a variety of favors, including appointing them to positions of power on their home-islands.

Traditionally, islanders have worked to attach themselves to the important houses of Male', and the elite of the houses have worked to maintain generations-long ties to different islands in order that the islanders then bring food and fish to them and work for months,

sometimes years, in their houses while waiting to return to their islands. One of the main ways these links have been established, between members of the Male' elite and particular islands, has been through banishment.

When a member of the Male' elite was banished to a particular island, he/she would then be cared for by the islanders, sometimes for years. When that banished member of the elite was allowed to return to Male', his house would become a center for any of those islanders when they would come to Male'. Historically, islanders were not allowed to stay on the capital island without having a member of the elite as his/her sponsor. Thus, in exchange for that vital favor, islanders brought food and supplies and became servants in the houses of Male's elite.

The rulers of Maldives--the Male'-based government, formerly Kings and Sultans, now Presidents and the surrounding elite-- through an intricate system of spies and informers not only in Male' but also on all the islands throughout the archipelago, have assured the perpetuation throughout history of the commercial, economic and political pre-eminence of Male' as the main trading center and point of contact with the outside world. The national arms supply and treasury were traditionally under the direct control of the Sultan and remained so under the modern President. There was no way any one, an islander or even any member of the elite, could carry out business of any kind without the ruler's approval and immediate knowledge. All goods, including the small amount of gold brought by foreigners to purchase Maldives goods, passed under the direct control of the ruler and his top advisors.

Islanders have had no way to accumulate much capital. Even in the case of boat-building for their fishing, islanders have been almost completely dependent upon members of the elite to provide the capital to build seafaring vessels. In providing the capital, the members of the elite then maintained ownership of the boats and thereby controlled all the profits from fishing and trading.

Similarly, because the traditional system of land-ownership placed all rights and control in the hands of the rulers, members of the elite struggled for favor with the ruler, hoping to be granted leasing rights to plots on Male' and, as importantly, to uninhabited islands for cultivation. Awards of leasing rights on islands throughout the country provided additional means for capital formation because of the value of the coconut palm and other crops.

This traditional method of distributing land-rights, both on Male' and in bestowing uninhabited islands on important families that were allowed to keep them for generations, also created another way (besides through banishment to outer islands), in which particular members of the elite have been able to establish long-term relationships with islanders on the adjacent inhabited islands. Not only can those members of the elite finance the local boat-building, profit from the harvest of coconut palms and other crops, and from the making of building-lime, but also they maintain free "vacation" islands for their families over generations. They can go for picnics on the uninhabited islands and they can always be welcomed "like royalty" on the nearby inhabited islands and stay for weeks of rest, relaxation and even special therapy at the hands of the island-masseuses, herbalists and magic-workers. This became another reason that members of the

elite did not like to risk losing their leasing-rights to outer islands by crossing the rulers.

Later, at the time of this study, families who had rights to uninhabited islands could obtain permission to convert them into tourist resorts. Islanders, who do not have such rights, obviously do not have that option.

Only recently did a few, lower rank people living in Male' begin to build up capital through new means, including shipping, tourism and other trade, which at first the many of my informants among the old, high-ranking *beefulun* scorned as trade beneath them. An example is Maldives' first and only "millionaire" at the time of this study, Ali Maniku, who founded Maldives Shipping. He started with capital his father Umar Maniku began amassing as a trader and loyal adviser under the first President Ameen Didi. With that base, Ali Maniku financed the development of the tourist industry working directly with the ruler (first President Ibrahim Nasir and later President Maumoon Gayoom), essentially bankrolling the little country with his shipping fortune.

Interestingly, Ali Maniku, while actually the (financial) power behind the Presidencies of Nasir and Gayoom, managed to steer relatively clear of the political scene in Male', not only because his financial capital has been so critical to financing modern Maldives, but also because he has stayed abroad, residing in Singapore. From there he has run his company that was registered and officially "headquartered" in Maldives and purported to be the Maldivian government shipping line. Both Presidents Nasir and Gayoom have been completely dependent upon him for major contributions (along with, of course,

now foreign aid) in financing their governments, the country, and all the modernisation projects.

The launching of the tourist industry in Maldives, with the late 1972 opening of the first two resorts, was probably the most important factor in catapulting Maldives towards modernisation. As early as 1976, tourism already appeared to be the most important agent for change in Male'. To the casual observer, this would not have seemed to be the case at first because the tourist resorts had been built on uninhabited islands and, thus, it appeared superficially that tourism was not affecting the local population. Many other Maldivians acknowledged that tourism was the greatest force for change: the arrival of tourists from all over the world for the first time had brought not only a local demand for a basic infrastructure to handle the business, but also new ideas and new consumer needs.<sup>18</sup>

Initially, the founders of the tourist business in Maldives were Ali Maniku and his brothers, along with the brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law of President Nasir. Thus, starting in 1972, and continuing into 1980 (when the abortive coup-attempt occurred and the then former President's in-laws and wife's friends were blamed), that small group, mostly *beekalun*, got richer and aroused more and more envy among other members of the elite.

Before retiring from the Presidency in 1978, Ibrahim Nasir had several important Presidential bills passed by the Majlis that would affect the future of the tourist industry. One required that by July 1, 1980, all tourist resorts having more than twenty beds must be state-controlled

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<sup>18</sup> See *Asia Yearbook 1978* (Colton 1978g:255).

with a minimum fifty-one percent government share. At the same time, he legislated that any “privately” owned land on which a tourist resort had been built would become government property and the current owners compensated.<sup>19</sup> Concurrently, Nasir created a new Department of Tourism and Foreign Investments under the direct control of the President’s Office.

Very recently another means of achieving power has opened up in Maldives: bringing in foreign aid, as the current President Maumoon Gayoom and his Foreign Minister, Fathulla Jameel, were doing under former President Nasir. The persons managing this, essentially those with better education and knowledge of the important languages (English and Arabic) in the aid-donor-nations, gain power not by personal wealth formation but because they become invaluable to the country by virtue of their ability to attract such newly vital foreign assistance.

When Maumoon Gayoom became President of Maldives in 1978, one of his first promises was to begin work to develop the outer islands, the atolls, all the areas outside Male’. He called it his top priority, but the economic differences between the capital island and all the other islands have only multiplied with the advent of modernisation and the accumulation of foreign currency and the resultant expanded capital formation by the elite with the development of new industries and foreign aid.

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<sup>19</sup> See *Asia Yearbook 1979* (Colton 1979a).

### 3.10 A CHANGING STRATIFICATION SYSTEM:

What seemed to be happening by the late 1970s was that the old *beefulun* were coming under stress<sup>20</sup> from the new class of people, *beekalun*, the entrepreneurial *miihun* who had achieved status through wealth in Male'. The reason for the emergence of this new class was the changing resources (including tourism, education, foreign aid, trade, and other changing resources), which the traditional *beefulun* had not managed to monopolise because of their original ideology that *beefulun* did not become personally involved in trade. Thus, beginning in the early 1970s, changes in the Maldivian stratification system began to take place in that more and more *beekalun* began to be "accepted" into the elite. This occurred at the same time that, as with many other aspects of the elite society, there was apparent continuity through the use of language<sup>21</sup> and other traditional signs of the old hierarchical order of Maldives.

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<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, President Gayoom even felt a need to distance himself from his beefulun status and in the Maldives Government publication (1983a:26) was written in English: "Mr. Gayoom, born to a middle class family..." despite his birth as a beefuleh.

<sup>21</sup> Beginning in the 1970s, the educated young *beekalun* started the practice of speaking only in English with each other and with members of the *beefulun* class to avoid having to speak in either the inferior language of the *miihun* or to be spoken to in inferior language. My informants said outright that they spoke English because they "did not want to be spoken to in an inferior language." This practice continued and was becoming commonplace among most of the young people going abroad for education.

## Chapter 4

### KINSHIP, AFFINITY AND FRIENDSHIP: POLITICAL TOOLS OF THE ELITE

#### 4.1 LOYALTY AND RELATIONSHIPS

The Maldivian political elite is always in flux. Members say that no one individual can completely depend on another. Relationships are situational. There are, however, expected forms of behaviour and expected ties of personal loyalty (*thedhuveri*) for certain categories of persons related to one either consanguineally, affinally, or as friends. This personal loyalty is considered quite different from political loyalty. One expects *thedhuveri* (loyalty) from parents, siblings, children, spouse and close friends. One uses these various relationships unless/until it is discovered that one can no longer rely on receiving the expected behaviour, expected *thedhuveri*. The ideology is strong that one expects loyalty from these relations, but in practice loyalty is seldom preserved in the relationships of the Maldivian elite because of politics. Yet, members of the Maldivian elite learn to be realistic about their expectations even though they persist in saying that one's family gets ultimate loyalty. As one elite person of an old *beefulun* and highly political family expressed it, "No loyalty is ultimately expected. So be loyal only to yourself. Why lose yourself for another's career?"

## 4.2 THE BUILDING BLOCKS:

In Male' kinship and affinity, the building blocks are the child-parent and sometimes the grandparent relationships; the sibling group; the current husband-wife relationship; the affines (brother-in-law, or *lianoo*; sister-in-law, or *fahari*; the spouses of one's spouse's siblings, or *delianoo*; and sometimes the parents of one's spouse); and close friends. The kinship and affinity system of the Maldivian elite is centered around its houses,<sup>1</sup> its sibling groups,<sup>2</sup> and its affinal alliances, or connections (*gulhumeh*), created through marriage. All these, along with close friendships, are the basic political tools of the Male' elite. Kinship, marital alliances, and friendships provide the means through which political power and elite status are achieved and maintained.

## 4.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ELITE KINSHIP SYSTEM:

For the Maldivian elite, simplicity is the best word to describe the elite's approach to kinship, and situational is the simplest way to describe the functioning of the system of kinship, marriage, residence, divorce, inheritance. In Maldives, the kinship system of the elite works differently from that operating among the other levels of society and especially outside Male'.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 5 ("Houses: The Basic Political Unit of the Maldivian Elite") for a more elaborate discussion of houses.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 4 for a Chart of Some of the Prominent Houses and Sibling Groups of the Male' elite during the time of this study.

<sup>3</sup> See Maloney (1980:309-51) for an excellent, detailed account of Maldivian kinship in general and especially for an analysis of the several historic kinship and linguistic influences evident in contemporary Maldives. But he does not distinguish much between the elite and the non-elite in his categorisations of the system; thus, often what he describes as the kinship system of Maldives does not apply to the practice of the Maldivian elite.

The kinship<sup>4</sup> of the elite is characterised by these traits: essentially a bilateral reckoning of consanguinity; an ideal of elite endogamy (preferably only *beefulun*, but more and more including also *beekalun*); consideration of the family (*aila*) as those members of one's house (*ge*), hence, house exogamy, marriage prescribed outside one's own house; prohibition against marrying anyone called by a kinship term for either a sibling or a parent (see Appendix 3); creation of the fiction of kinship for affines through the use of kinship terminology (see Appendix 3); an Islamic patrilineal ideology over strong matrilineal (see below) tendencies with status derived from mother if higher ranking; ideology of patrilocality but in fact residence based entirely on ideally perceived circumstances over time; Islamic rules of inheritance but with flexibility built in for circumstances, especially for the women of the family (*aila*) and house (*ge*); Islamic laws of marriage<sup>5</sup> (a man may have four wives at once if he can afford them; and the man is the only partner who can actually declare a divorce); and an extremely high divorce rate.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to other groups within the society (see Maloney 1980:331), where there is little lineage depth, among the Maldivian elite, especially the old *beefulun* and especially the *ganduvaru beefulun* (royal families), there is often a strong sense of bilateral descent evidenced in mental, oral and written storage of knowledge about one's antecedents, both kin and affine.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 3 for a List of Maldivian Elite Kinship Terminology.

<sup>5</sup> See Didi (1992;1993) and Maloney (1980:334-43) for more detailed discussions of marriage laws and customs.

<sup>6</sup> See Maloney (1980:343-48) for figures and discussion of this Maldivian phenomenon. Maloney suggests that the high divorce serves an adaptive purpose in releasing tension in a generally non-violent society.

<sup>7</sup> Among the Male' elite, there is usually at least one member of each house/ family per generation who is the keeper of the genealogical knowledge.

The kinship system of the Maldivian elite with its base in Male' was built upon and represents an adaptive re-combination of several earlier systems:<sup>8</sup> most recently Arab, North Indian and Dravidian.<sup>9</sup> Maloney (1980:309-51), who is talking about the kinship system as generally found throughout Maldives, describes what is practiced as a "resolution" (Maloney 1980:309) of the confluence of the three sharply distinct systems.

The distinctive elements from the three systems evident in the Maldivian system are: an ideology of patriliney from the millenium-long Arab/Islamic overlay as well as from the older North Indian/Aryan influence; similarly from the Arab influence, a practice of marrying any cousins, particularly parallel cousins; from the North Indian influence through Sri Lanka, the use of both Indo-Aryan and Dravidian words in the kinship terminology (Maloney 1980:310); and, finally, what appears to have been a Dravidian foundation with basic terminology for kin and affine and an original classification of kin into marriageable and not-marriageable categories through preferential cross-cousin marriage rules. Likewise, a strong and ancient tradition of matriliney<sup>10</sup> appears throughout Maldives and among the Male's elite, although, ideologically, the Male' elite say they trace descent patrilineally, as in both the Arab and North Indian kinship systems. But in practice, the

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<sup>8</sup> See Maloney (1980:309-51) for a detailed discussion of the inferred historical development of the various kinship systems in Maldives. He cites linguistic evidence as well as the practical working of the contemporary system to demonstrate the historic antecedents.

<sup>9</sup> On the Dravidian system in neighbouring Sri Lanka, see the classic works by Leach (1961) and Yalman (1967), and also Leach (1979).

<sup>10</sup> Many of the earlier reports (see appendix of "early notices" in Pyrard 1887, 1971, Vol.II, Part II:423-68) about Maldives cited the evidence of what was described as a matrilineal society. Also, recent translations (Maniku & Wijayawardhana 1986:iii) of the ancient text found on the twelfth century copperplates (loamaafaanu) indicate a purely matrilineal mode of descent, which is significant because the extant loamaafaanu (dated 1191 A.D.) were from the period when the Islamisation of Maldives had only just begun.

maternal line is often as important if not more so than the paternal line in Maldives.<sup>11</sup>

Even among the Male' elite with its strong Islamic ideology,<sup>12</sup> there is evidence both in kinship and residence patterns of a strong matrilineal<sup>13</sup> foundation. At the time of this study, while the ideology was that status was paternally conferred, it was clearly the case that children of high-ranking (*beefulun*) and lower-ranking (*beekalun*, or rarely, *miihun*) inherited the status of the mother and were spoken to in the language of the *beefulun*.

The entire kinship system of the Maldivian elite works to take full advantage of whatever is the best opportunity for success in the sociopolitical system. In other words, a couple in which the woman was a *beefulun* by birth and the father a *beekalun* (achieved status or possibly second generation whose father had become a *beekalun*) might move into the bigger, wealthier house on the paternal side yet raise the children as *beefulun* from the maternal line. This is common practice and appears to be the mechanism by which a *beekalun* man or woman

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<sup>11</sup> See Maloney (1980:311-15). Pyard (1887,1971,Vol.I) made many references to the strong matrilineal influence in Maldives. This aspect of Pyard's seventeenth-century account (stating that the mother's status was as critical as the father's) was later disputed by Bell (1921:31) who stated emphatically that all status came from the paternal side, which was, obviously what he was told by the male rulers with whom he met during his month-long return visit to Male'in 1920. Maloney (1980:318-19) pointed out that Pyard lived in Maldives for several years and clearly had evidence for what he described. The same was true during the time of this study in spite of the fact that ideologically strict members of the elite denied the matrilineal influence.

<sup>12</sup> For discussions of other non-Arab Islamic kinship systems in the region, see Brown (1970) on the Sultanate of Brunei, Miller (1976) on Kerala (Southern India) Muslims, and Mines (1972) on Indian Muslims.

<sup>13</sup> For ethnographic accounts of the matrilineal system in the neighbouring Laccadives, see Dube (1969) and Kutty (1972). Also, see Schneider & Gough's (1961) comprehensive work on Matrilineal Kinship as well as Schneider's (1984) later A Critique of the Study of Kinship, which helps in looking at a society such as that of the Maldivian elite in which there is evidence of a variety of systems re-combined into the workable system of that society.

can, through marriage to either *beefulun* man or woman, ensure that the children will become high-ranking *beefulun*.

In the Maldivian elite society of Male', the term for kinsperson (*thimaage*) is used for blood relations. *Thimaage* applies to anyone related consanguineally, bilaterally reckoned. But the word when used in reference to a particular person is always followed by a term denoting the particular kinsperson's rank (*beefuleh*, *beekaleh*, or *miiheh*). Who one refers to as *thimaage* at any single point in time depends, however, on the individual situation--in other words, whether one dares to or even wants to claim kin to a particular person. An understanding of the *Dhivehi* kinship terms used by the Male' elite is necessary for understanding the political system, as well as the kinship and affinity relations.<sup>14</sup>

To distinguish relations in reference, not in address, people use the name of the house (see below Chapter. 5) to which the person belongs if that is sufficient for pinpointing the person, or simply describe the relationship (my father's sister or the son of my sister Fatimath). There is no special term of reference for any such nephews or nieces. The reference is "she (he) calls me aunt" (*alhugandut bodu dhaiitha marshatt kiakuje*). The address is *koko*, the same for a younger sibling, or the person's name or often nicknames in families. In the islands, people refer to and address anyone older in the society (that island) by name plus *dhaiitha* (sister) or for men the name plus *beebe* (brother). That is not practiced by the elite in the capital Male'.

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<sup>14</sup> See Appendix 3 for a List of Maldivian Elite Kinship Terminology.

#### 4.4 SIBLING GROUPS:

A basic building block of the kinship system is the cognative, sibling group.<sup>15</sup> The kinship terms for siblings (*daatha* for older sister; *beebe* for older brother; and *koko* for both younger sister and younger brother) are used to address not only one's own cognative group but also to address one's spouse's siblings as well as cousins in any direction. Thus, the brother-in-law (*lianoo*) or sister-in-law (*fahari*) in address become sister (*daatha* or *koko*) or brother (*beebe* or *koko*).

Members of the Male' elite said that it was their siblings whom they could most trust and from whom they expected the more constant loyalty. During the period of a marriage, a spouse expects to obtain the loyalty also of the spouse's siblings (*lianoo* and *fahari*). Thus, the sibling group of one's spouse can become a critical core of support for a political leader. Also, the spouse of one's spouse's sibling, or one's *delianoo*, is also considered a potential loyal ally during one's marriage to that spouse.

#### 4.5 AFFINAL RELATIONS:

For the purposes of this thesis, the term affinity means alliance through marriage (*kaivani*). In the Maldivian elite, the basic form of political alliance is established through marriage. The affines are those in-laws attached to a person through marriage. In the Maldivian elite, those usually include the spouse's siblings and parents as well as sometimes the spouse's in-laws (those married to the spouse's siblings). Because of the existence of legal polygyny, with the Islamic allowance

<sup>15</sup> See Appendix 4 for a chart of some of the important sibling groups of the leading elite houses in Male' at the time of this study.

of possibly four wives for one husband, and also the prevalence of multiple marriages for both genders in Maldives, one can have many affines at once and over time. The affinity matrix in Maldivian society can become complex due to the high rates of divorce (*wari*) and re-marriage.

Both marriage and divorce are considered fairly easy procedures, both legally under Maldivian law and customarily.<sup>16</sup> The male suitor must obtain permission<sup>17</sup> from the father (or legal guardian, nearest male kinsman) of the bride-to-be. Once the father, or guardian, has granted that consent, then the bride states her *rang* (gold), the brideprice (*rangkiun*), the amount of bride-money (*mehir*), required of the groom-to-be.<sup>18</sup> That *rangkiun* (bride-price) is considered only a symbolic token, usually only a nominal amount of money, ranging anywhere from five to seldom over one hundred rupiahs. As several of my female *beefulun* informants said, the *rangkiun* (brideprice), or *rang* (gold), was “only a token because no one can pay what a woman is worth”. One such high-ranking *beefulun* woman who “married down”, marrying a *beekalun*, asked for only five rupiahs in *rang*. Also, by tradition, the groom also gives the bride three pieces of cloth, enough to complete a full national dress--a large piece of fabric for the dress, a small piece for the head veil, and a third piece to make an under-skirt.

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<sup>16</sup> See R.M. Didi's recent discussions (1992; 1993) of legal and customary procedures for marriage and divorce and their implications for the status of women in Maldivian society.

<sup>17</sup> Many of my informants said that in the old days, the suitor would send someone or write a letter to the father of the woman he wished to marry.

<sup>18</sup> Once he had obtained permission from the father or the male guardian, the suitor had to send two witnesses to the woman asking for her *rangkiun*, for her *rang* (gold), how much she was asking in gold, money now. Once she named her *rang*, she could not marry someone else until the suitor let her go. Then the witnesses would ask if she was then pregnant, and, if yes, then the marriage would be off.

Weddings are usually prepared very quickly on short notice for elite marriages in Male'.<sup>19</sup> The Justice Minister appoints a preacher, who is considered a special person but can be any man who is known to be knowledgeable in religion.<sup>20</sup> The ceremony consists of the following: The bride and her female friends and family stay inside an interior room of the house. The groom and his male friends and family stay in a large exterior room (outside from the women's inside room). The men recite prayers (*solawat*) for some time. Then the preacher states that the a particular man's son is now married to another man's daughter. At this point, the preacher offers advice to the groom, who is then confirmed as the husband. Afterwards, the original two male witnesses (the ones who asked the bride's *rang* initially) escort the husband to be presented to his wife waiting in the interior room. The witnesses say to him, "This is your wife." They then instruct the woman in how to behave as a good wife and admonish her to be good and obedient to her husband. The witnesses finally advise the husband and the wife not to hit each other. Afterwards, tea is served first to all the *solawat* (prayers-reciting) men, and then lots of food is served to other guests. In the meantime, female friends of the bride help pack her suitcases and have them delivered by servants to the groom's house. If one of the married couple is very high-ranking and at all close to the President, they then ask permission to make a courtesy call at the Presidential Residence after the wedding reception. Later, other friends of the bride often prepare a smaller party that night at the groom's house to celebrate the arrival of the newlyweds there.

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<sup>19</sup> Several of my informants said they would decide on one day finally to get married to someone and then the next day the wedding would take place.

<sup>20</sup> For example, Maumoon Gayoom, before he became President, was appointed by the Justice Minister to perform some marriages because of his religious knowledge and because of a special relationship he might have had to the bride or groom.

According to Maldivian law, based on Islamic law, divorce can occur easily if the husband says to the wife, “You are divorced”, or “You are not my wife”, three times. Women can apply to a court to obtain divorce, or, more commonly, as many of my female informants said, wives who want divorces learn to manipulate the situation to push their husbands to divorce them. There is even a saying describing the latter technique: “*Ambiwarikura ishtashi kolu*” (“The wife doing the divorcing by pulling the little hairs (of the husband”). By law, after divorce, women cannot remarry for three months. In addition to the political factors involved, the ease with which one can either marry or divorce contributes to the traditionally high rates of serial marriage and divorce among the Maldivian elite.

Affinal relations involve behaviour and obligations that are expected, though not named by any single term. There are terms for male and female affines, all the wife-givers who gave their sister in marriage to a man, the husband. *Lianoo* is the term for brother-in-law, male affine--the brother of the wife. *Fahari* is sister-in-law, female affine--the sister of the wife. All the people related by marriage are also either *lianoo* (males) or *fahari* (females), and sometimes the word *lianoo* is used in general for all affines. *Delianoo* are two men who share the same *lianoo*, in other words they have married sisters and thus they have the same *lianoo*, the brother of their wives. But often when one man gains power, he and his *delianoo* will become known as *lianoo*. The term is then used in a negative sense, often out of envy, towards people in power. It is assumed that the *lianoo* or *delianoo* do not deserve the favours and advancement they are receiving and only receive them because of their *lianoo* relationship.

In the political system, the *lianoo* is the most critical relationship. Thus the significance appears to be linked to the instability of marriage.

Examples of the uses of the terms by the President and his affines can be shown in the two recent Presidencies (see Appendix 5 for a list describing key Presidential relations for all three Presidents of Maldives, and see Appendix 6 for a diagram of the same). President Ibrahim Nasir married Naseema Mohamed. Her brothers, Naseem and Saleem, became *lianoo* to Nasir. Naseema's sister, Saleema, became *fahari* to Nasir. Saleema's husband, Razak, and Naseema's husband, Nasir, the President, were *delianoo*, because they married sisters and had the same *lianoo*. As the affines gained more and more power from their sister's husband, people began referring to the *delianoo*, Nasir and Razak, as a negative status. The male term, *lianoo*, also began to include all Nasir's affines, all his wife's siblings, siblings' spouses, and parents, again in a negative sense, implying that all of them had acquired undeserved positions and power because of their sister's position as First Lady of Maldives.

A similar pattern can be seen with the succeeding President's affines. Maumoon Gayoom married Nasreena Ibrahim. Her brothers, Abbas and Ilyas, became *lianoo* to Maumoon. Her sister, Farisha, became *fahari* to Maumoon. Farisha's husband, Ibrahim Manik, and Maumoon became *delianoo* because they shared *lianoo* as they had married sisters. In fact, before Maumoon became President, the two of them talked sometimes about how they had to protect themselves from their *lianoo*, the brothers of their wives, who appeared to be trying to control them. Once Maumoon became President, he and Ibrahim Maniku were usually referred to as *lianoo*, again as a pejorative term.

The *lianoo* and *fahari* relationships imply reciprocal support, allegiance, and a kind of truce against political competition and slandering one another. It is here where the best politician can play the Maldivian political game most adroitly. The stronger one in the relationship can

demand loyalty, but he is then expected to give favours to his supportive *lianoo* and *fahari* once he achieves high office. If one or the other fails to provide the proper kind of support base, which is expected to be reciprocal, then the relationship might be broken. It is here where one might begin to observe who in the Maldivian political game is truly strong--the leader who can use his *lianoo* or *fahari* relations until they begin to drag him down with their expected demands for favours, and then sever that tie, usually by divorce (*wari*).

The same kind of affinal relations and obligations of loyalty are also expected, though never depended on, from a child's spouse and a spouse's parents. A son's wife is simply called *koko* or her name plus the term *koko*, and the same term is used for the daughter's husband, thus giving children-in-law, kinship terms. A spouse's mother is addressed as *maii*, meaning maternal or main or head. Sometimes the term for elder sister (*daatha*) is added, and in more recent times, some also call this person *mama* (the same term for mother). She is referred to as *maydaitha* (spouse's mother). A spouse's father is addressed as *beebe* (elder brother), and again in recent times sometimes as *baappa* (father). He is referred to as *bafakalegee*. *Kalege* means "respectable".

#### 4.6 FRIENDSHIP:

A successful political leader in Maldives can build on three bases, preferably all, for the foundation of his support--blood family of siblings and parents; affines, especially brother-in-law and sister-in-law; and close friends. In building this base of supporters, this third group, of friends (*gaayy*), is an important source from which to draw "outside" support. A *gaayy* is someone very close, who does not fit into any of the cognitive or affinal categories. The relationship is very similar to that expected of one's *lianoo* or *fahari*, but it is probably slightly more

tilted in favour of the politically strong man. A *gaayy* is usually a close friend, often cultivated since school days.

Another example of a *gaayy* relationship is one described earlier as being originally *delianoo* (though now referred to negatively as *lianoo*), and that is the relationship between the current President Maumoon Gayoom and his wife's sister's husband, Samari. Before Maumoon became President, he and Samari lived in the same house and a strong bond developed between them, but one in which there was never any question that Maumoon, the older and politically stronger one, had the greater influence. When referring to someone as *gaayy*, the class-denoting term (such as *miiheh* or *beefuleh*, or *rahtehi* meaning friend) is used to show there is no kind of consanguineal or affinal tie. From these terms, denoting hierarchy and friendship, the hierarchical nature of the relationship can be determined.

#### 4.7 KINSHIP, AFFINITY AND POLITICAL POWER

For the political elite who dominate Maldivian culture in every way, there is one apex, formerly the position of Sultan and now the President, the attainment of which, either actually or through close linkage, is the singular goal. To achieve this position, it is essential to have the support of affines. However, because of the very high divorce rate in Maldivian society, it is extremely difficult for a person to maintain strong affinal links over any sustained period of time. Also, upon reaching the apex, the very affines who helped establish and maintain a person as President ultimately are viewed as destructive to the President's hold on the very position he has worked so hard to attain.

Both ideologically and in practice, affines are critical to the rise of a political leader and thus can contribute greatly to the downfall of the national leader. Affinal dependence, then, is a paradox. The ideology is that people believe that affines ultimately pull a leader down. For example, the general view of the former President Nasir, before he left office was: “Nasir was a good man until he married Naseema (his third wife) and got under the bad influence of all her family. They dragged him down”.

Later, of the next President, Gayoom, it was generally said: “Maumoon is a good, man, but his advisers his wife’s brothers Ilyas and Abbas (and to a lesser extent, his wife’s sister’s husband Ibrahim Samari Maniku) are a bad influence. They will drag him down”. Also, in practice, affines first assist with their loyal support, while later, once their affine, is seated at the helm they take advantage of their proximity. They often act, using his name, without his knowledge and outside the leader’s orders. Subsequently, the leader defends his affines against criticism by saying that his brother-in-law, his closest affine, is the country’s best administrator and deserves his position. Such was the case with President Gayoom in the early years of his Presidency.

The paradox of affinal dependence in Maldivian politics lies basically in the following: the person achieving the rank of President, formerly Sultan, is dependent on the strong support of affines (who have no other allegiances) to reach that goal and to remain there. It is quite possible that the members of a set of affines might change with divorce. At any time, the leader (or at lower levels, the members of the elite striving to attain the position later), depend on a set of loyal affines for core support. Yet, affinity itself is always viewed as a temporary state, inherently prone to friction and likely rupture. Ultimately, a ruler knows he cannot depend on loyalty from affines, yet

that is the very demand that is put on the relationship by powerholders; thus, the ruler's own position is always tenuous, based on an extremely fragile base.

Maintaining a core of loyal, supportive affines, is very difficult because of the prevalence of divorce, the disloyalty that pervades the elite society, and the consequent distrust of all others, including their affines and ultimately their siblings. But for the person who can maintain a set of loyal affines in spite of all the social factors working against this achievement, reaching the apical position of President of Maldives, there remains the inherent danger that the same group that brought and maintained him in power, will, in the end, bring his downfall. This appears true not only on the ideological level (at which other members of the elite always blame a ruler's downfall on affines), but can be demonstrated empirically.

As affines begin to take advantage of their special relationship to the ruler, because he is dependent on maintaining their support, especially in the early period of his reign, he cannot reprimand or banish them, as he might others who appeared to be undermining his position. However, as the affines assume more and more power, other members of the elite become increasingly resentful and jealous. Tension builds--and, finally, the leader can be ousted by groups who have rallied against the increasing power of his affines. It can then be said that although the top man himself was once good, his affines destroyed him by taking advantage of him and bringing him down.

In examining this aspect of Maldivian sociopolitical organisation, it is important to show how the manipulation of affines is the logical strategy pursued by aspirants to the highest political position in their society. The system itself leads to a high divorce rate, because the

*lianoo* often put the leader (or any politically ambitious member of the elite) under such pressure that he blames his spouse, the sister--always the person in the middle on whom it might even be argued that the most pressure is placed. It also logically can lead to the downfall of the very person who has used the system to his advantage. The nature of the obligations (the behaviour expected between affines) logically forces the strong player in the end to break the alliance or risk failure in the one important political arena.

To build a political career, it is essential to have a core of affines, including also those *gaayy* (close friends), from whom affinal obligations may be expected--who give full support until the relationship is broken. If one's affine is also the affine to another powerful person or is sibling to another, then one cannot expect indefinite success. Split affinal loyalties can defeat a potential leader.

An example of split loyalties arose from the position of President Gayoom's *lianoo*, Ilyas, whose *lianoo* (brother of his wife) was Ali Maniku, the richest man of Maldives. Once Gayoom became President, there appeared at the beginning to be a resolution of his split affinal loyalties by the clever way Ilyas played all sides.

Ilyas, an elder brother of President Gayoom's wife, Nasreena, had also been the closest adviser to the former President Nasir. Later, it was his support in the Majlis for his affine, Gayoom, after Nasir's announcement of retirement that brought the former to the Presidency. Ilyas then became the closest adviser to the new President, because the President was most indebted to him. Not only was Ilyas the wife-giver, but also previously had been economically supportive when Ilyas was in favour with the former President Nasir and Gayoom was "outside", sometimes banished or imprisoned. It was Ilyas who many critics said

would drag down this new President. (When Ilyas was chief secretary to the former President, it was never said that Ilyas would bring down Nasir. Of Nasir, it was said that his *lianoo*, his wife's brother, would be his downfall).

This adviser to both Presidents was married to the sister of the wealthiest Maldivian, whose shipping fortune has reportedly kept the government afloat for years. In this marriage between Ilyas and Nasira (sister of Ali Maniku) there were never any children, but Ilyas, the *lianoo* to both the richest man and the current President, never divorced her. It was doubtful that he would want to sever a marriage that gave him Ali Maniku as *lianoo*. The two of them were the only two who were very close to former President Nasir who survived well into the new regime of President Gayoom.

Marriage-alliances also reveal the changing needs of a political leader. For instance, in the case of the first President Mohamed Ameen Didi (who established the first republic in 1953, lasting less than a year), his interest essentially was in establishing alliances with important royals--not the immediate Sultan's family, but those with close royal lines. Maldivian political organisation at that time was still close to its royal roots, the dynasties. It had been a relatively short time since the court rebellion of 1932 when Sultan Shamsuddin was forced to give up some of his powers to the nobility (*bodung*), meaning only *beefulun*. Ameen Didi had wielded power in the country for some years as prime minister before 1953, when he said he wanted to establish a modern republic and be its President, not a Sultan.

This first President (a *beefuleh*, but not royal), from an important shipping family (meaning they controlled the shipping), first married Fatimath Saeed of a royal line with two influential brothers and a

sister, Mariyam Saeed, (who later married the second President Nasir). Later, when Ameen Didi no longer appeared to need their political assistance, he divorced her and married Aminath Didi, another woman of royalty, also with two influential brothers, Hussein Zaki and Ibrahim Zaki, as well as a sister, Don Didi, who had been married to the Sultan Designate, Abdul Majeed. Ameen Didi soon divorced her and remarried his first wife, Fatimath, bringing her brothers, Ibrahim Shihab and Adnan Hussein, into his cabinet.<sup>21</sup>

At the same time, Ameen Didi maintained as “lover” and confidante, another royal woman, Aminath Hussein, who was the best educated woman in the country and who was elected the first female member of the Majlis. Ameen Didi built a large new house for Aminath Hussein and her family, including her sister, Aishath Zubair, who later became the second wife of the second President Nasir. Aminath Hussein’s mother was a princess and her father, an intellectual and chief justice, had been considered an outstanding leader for years.

During Ameen Didi’s brief reign as President in 1953, while still married for the second time to Fatimath, as allowed under Islamic law, he took a second wife, Zubaida Mohamed Didi, who also had two important brothers, Ismail Mohamed Didi and Moosa Mohamed Didi, both politically important. Eventually, the eldest brother of Ameen Didi’s longtime wife, Fatimath, turned against him. Perhaps by taking a second wife, Ameen Didi had misjudged his other *lianoos*’ loyalty.

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<sup>21</sup> Both brothers, Ibrahim Shihab and Adnan Hussein, known in Maldives as “the vicars of Bray” for their slippery ability to survive politically, later managed to obtain positions in the cabinets of both succeeding Presidents and managed to have another sister, Mariyam Saeed, married once to the next President Nasir.

Former President Ibrahim Nasir really began his political career in 1953 following the ouster of the first President and the re-instatement of the Sultan. Nasir became Prime Minister in 1957 and virtual ruler of the country while the last Sultan remained titular head until Nasir arranged to have himself elected President of the new Republic of Maldives in 1968. He served two five-year terms as President of Maldives, announcing his retirement in mid-1978, in time for his successor to be chosen by the Majlis and elected in a national referendum.

After leaving office in 1978, he and his third wife and their children moved from Maldives to Singapore. The new Maldives government immediately began a “witchhunt” against him, his chief associates (excluding his former personal secretary, Ilyas, and his former shipping minister, Ali Maniku), and his wife’s family.

Finally, in 1980, his *lianoo*, Naseem, was alleged to have plotted a coup with the help of Nasir to overthrow the government. Nasir denied any involvement and turned against his wife’s family, blaming them for all his problems. By the end of that year, he and his wife were divorced, and he was on the run from the Maldives government, though apparently no longer accused of involvement in the coup plot, but for allegedly misappropriating government funds.

Through President Nasir’s twenty-five-year political career, he had three wives in successive marriages. In each case, during the time-period of each marriage, the wives’ siblings and siblings’ spouses served as the core of his support groups. Nasir himself had only one sibling, a woman who was little known and never married well, according to Maldivian elite standards. His closest kinsmen were all rivals--in 1956, he ordered his father’s brother to remain in Ceylon in permanent exile.

His father's sister's son, Ahmed Zaki, remained Nasir's chief rival, until Nasir finally banished him in 1975 (see below, Chapter 8).

Clearly, for building and maintaining a political base, this very successful Maldivian politician was essentially dependent on loyal affines. He had no sibling-support base and certainly could not expect support from his closest kinsmen.

Nasir was the son of a *beefuleh*, but not one of the royal family. His father's family had been a long line of successful ship-owners of the second tier of the aristocracy. Nasir's mother was an islander, thus born a *miiheh*, from the southern atolls, whom his father had married during banishment.

Nasir's first wife was of the highest tier of the *beefulun* class. Her name was Aishath Zubair, and her mother was a princess living in one of the last Sultan's palaces. In the early 1950s, when the Sultancy was declining but the old royals were still trying to hold on to power in Maldives with their last tight grips, she was a useful spouse because of the affines she could provide. Her twin brother, Abdullah Zubair, was married to Habeeba, the daughter of another princess. One of Aishath Zubair's sisters, Aminath Hussein, was the most powerful woman in the country (at the time) and was the lover and adviser to the country's first President. Another sister, Titi Gooma, a princess, had been married to the Sultan Designate, Abdul Majeed, and another sister was the daughter of Prime Minister Ibrahim Ali Didi. When Nasir married this first wife, Aishath Zubair, and had a son, Ahmed, they lived in a large house (called Sosunge) built by the first President for Nasir's wife Aishath's sister, Aminath (the lover of the first President), and her siblings and siblings' spouses, all of whom were royalty.

After Nasir became prime minister, he divorced his first wife, Aishath Zubair. Their son spent his life going back and forth between his two parents, later becoming an important supporter of his father in the last years of his rule. The son had a circle of friends, all of whom in the later years of Nasir's rule were given positions as junior secretaries, on their way up the political ladder of the Male' elite.

Later, Nasir married another *beefuleh*, Mariyam Saeed, the sister of Fatimath, one of the first President's widows and the half-sister of the late first President's lover, Aminath Hussein (who herself was the full sister of Nasir's first wife). Mariyam Saeed's two brothers (the ones nicknamed ("the vicars of Bray")), Ibrahim Shihab and Adnan Hussein, former *lianoos* of the first President and members of his cabinet who had turned on him, were potential rivals to Nasir, as they had been to his predecessor, Ameen Didi, also their former *lianoos*. Nasir and Mariyam Saeed had two sons, Mohamed and Ali, who after their parents' divorce, spent their lives going back and forth between the two. The spouse's siblings again helped Nasir as a core of supporters during that period, but later he divorced her. (His former *lianoos* remained in his cabinet but were obviously weakened without the marital tie between them and the President).

After his second divorce, Nasir became friendly with Ameena Mohamed Ameen, the only child of the late first President, and soon she became his private secretary (her mother was the sister of Nasir's second wife). Many of my informants said that Ameena never forgot the rumour that Nasir had been involved in overthrowing her father, and eventually she was accused of plotting a coup to overthrow Nasir in 1967.

By the time of his third marriage in 1969, President Nasir wanted to modernise the country and begin building his wealth. At this time he

was also ill, and a young Maldivian nurse, Naseema Mohamed, who had just returned to her homeland after her education in India and Ceylon, began nursing him. Nasir fell in love with her and soon married her. She was a much younger woman, one of the best educated, brightest women in the country, whose father was a self-made man, a former *miiheh*, who had become a *beekaleh* through trade and having served as a trusted servant to the former first President. This new wife, besides being charming and delightful company for the lonely President, provided an especially formidable core of affines because her parents had never divorced and all seven of their children had been raised with a sense of strong family loyalty, even with a slight family prejudice against the higher class (*beefulun*) children who had sometimes appeared to treat her and her siblings as inferior only because of their birth. One of these siblings explained that their parents never let them go to play with other children, because in others' houses they feared they might be treated like servants by someone, so they always had others come to their house. Their father had made enough money in trade to send his children for private education in Ceylon and India. Eventually, after their eldest sister married the President, some of them were given scholarships by the government to study abroad (as Naseema herself had been given by Ameen Didi because of her father's loyalty).

Naseem, the eldest of Nasir's new *lianoos*, was very ambitious and intelligent. For some years he had been interested in bringing tourism to the beautiful beaches of Maldives, and in 1972, soon after his sister's marriage to the President, he became one of the founders of the Maldivian tourist industry because of his connection with the President. Later, in 1980, Naseem was sentenced to life imprisonment for plotting the overthrow of the government which succeeded that of his sister's former husband (see below, Chapter 8).

President Nasir's new wife Naseema's youngest brother, another *lianoo*, was away studying medicine in Australia during Nasir's Presidency, but the fact that this brother had received a scholarship because of his connection was used as one of the examples of the many favours handed out to the wife's family. In 1980, that former *lianoo* of Nasir's was imprisoned for eleven years for allegedly conspiring with his brother. (Both were later released).

The President's wife's sisters (*fahari*) were all also well-educated, dynamic and very modern in their outlook. One, Saleema, was a businesswoman (the first in Maldives), which aroused considerable envy among less successful entrepreneurs. In 1980, she was banished for life to a distant island for allegedly plotting with her brothers. She and her Ceylonese husband, Razak, were attacked for the commercial advantages they allegedly received while their sister's husband ruled. Two other sisters were given special scholarships and returned to good positions in Male', one of them providing a husband as another loyal supporter during Nasir's rule.

The following is a summary of what happened to all the former President Nasir's affines after he stepped down and the "witchhunt" of 1980 (described in more detail in Chapter 8) began: Nasir and his wife, the former First Lady, Naseema, were divorced in 1980; Nasir and his two children by that wife continued living in Singapore, essentially running from the incumbent government; his former wife, Naseema, went into exile first in England, then in Australia and Colombo, and years later, returned home to Maldives, took a job and became involved with the current President's brother as a protective measure; Nasir's former wife's father was sentenced to banishment for ten years (he was then 70) to a distant island, but later brought home; Nasir's former *lianoo*, Naseem, was sentenced to life-imprisonment but

was also later allowed to return home; Nasir's former *lianoo*, Saleem, was banished for ten years but the sentence was later cut short; Nasir's former *fahari*, Saleema, was first banished for life but later allowed to return home; her Ceylonese husband, Razak, Nasir's former *delianoo*, took their children and his wife's youngest sister to live in Sri Lanka out of reach of Maldives; Nasir's former *fahari*, Assima, once rising in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was at home but without a government job for some time; Nasir's other former *fahari*, Waseema, once rising as a radio and television broadcaster, was also for some time at home without a government job; and the wife of his former *lianoo*, Naseem, was at first banished and later returned. As I seek to demonstrate in the chapter on "Patterns and Cycles of Political Conflict" (Chapter 8), this pattern also was followed after the first President was overthrown, and after other "coup-plots".

A ruler's affines (both *lianoo*, wife's brothers, and *fahari*, wife's sisters) become enmeshed in the ruler's affairs while one is in or out of power. Behind the witchhunt of 1980-1981 was the former President Nasir's personal secretary, Ilyas, the *lianoo* of the current President. Some say that he was always jealous of Naseema for absorbing the President's attention in 1969 when they were married. Until that time, Ilyas had been the favourite. Still others believed that Ilyas was always jealous of President Nasir himself for having Naseema, adored also by Ilyas and who had at one time turned down overtures from Ilyas' brother, Abbas. It was this *lianoo* of the current President who has led the heaviest attack on the former President's affines, now former affines.

The history of the current President Gayoom's relationship with his affines began when he was a single young man studying in Egypt. He received word from home from a very wealthy and influential *beekaleh*, another self-made *miiheh* who also had loyally served the first

President, that he was sending his daughter, Nasreena, to study in Cairo. He requested Gayoom to watch over her in the great city. The studious young Gayoom, already the leader of the circle of Maldivian friends who had spent years living and studying in Cairo, was considered the best educated Maldivian even then. His father, known as *Sidi* because he was a *Sayyid beefuleh* (a high-ranking person claiming descent from the Prophet Mohamed) and a *Danabeekaleh* (learned man, religious scholar), had been a chief judge. They were *beefulun*, even claiming descent from the Prophet, but with no money in the family. Gayoom eventually married this young daughter of the newly-rich man, the wardleader, now his *bafakalegee* (wife's father, father-in-law) who had written him in Egypt.

Gayoom's wife, Nasreena, not only had a wealthy and influential father, but also two brothers, Abbas and Ilyas, both of whom were very influential, astute Maldivian politicians. The elder brother was the chief adviser to the President in power at the time of Maumoon's marriage. That brother, Ilyas, was also an elected member of parliament (Majlis). The other brother, Abbas, a highly political wardleader like his father, had been viewed as a threat to the former President because of his influence among *miihun* and his outspoken criticism of President Nasir. When the latter announced his retirement in 1978, Gayoom's two *lianoo* and also his own brother began campaigning for him in the Majlis. He already had strong popular support in contrast to his chief rivals, one of whom was Naseem, the tourist entrepreneur and the *lianoo* to the retiring President. Maumoon Gayoom, upon his election, was greatly in debt politically to his *lianoo*. Then, according to all reports, they were dragging him down by taking advantage of him, acting outside his knowledge. Through his *fahari*, Nasreena's sister Farisha, Maumoon also had a *delianoo*, who was also *gaayy* to Maumoon, and that was the younger, thoughtful

Samari, a *miiheh* become *beekalun*, who was then high in the administration of Radio Maldives.

If my analysis is correct, President Maumoon Gayoom, in order to survive would someday have to prove to his *lianoos* that he is in charge and, as President, does not have to return obligations equally. Otherwise, they could eventually cause his demise as ruler.

Gayoom's problems with his *lianoos* were many, and he probably knew he would have to deal with them. First, he and his wife were close friends, very much "in love", and he considered himself "modern" (which meant then in Maldives, where divorce was the traditional practice, being one who would not divorce). Secondly, it was known that since ascending to the Presidency, there had been constant friction between him and his *lianoos*, with complaints that he was not going far enough, for instance in his government's "witchhunt". And his wife, their sister, had been in the middle, being attacked from both directions, like her predecessor, Naseema. Perhaps because of President Gayoom's great popular support, eventually he would be able to overturn his wife's brothers without divorcing her and demonstrate that he does not need those *lianoos*. That would be unusual but possible. Perhaps the real issue would be where the First Lady Nasreena's ultimate loyalties were shown to lie. All previous ethnographic evidence and patterns indicate they would eventually lie with her siblings unless her husband could win her over completely to his side and to the value of maintaining a new kind of marriage that outweighed the power of the wife's brothers over her and her husband.

#### 4.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF AFFINITY AND THE KINSHIP SYSTEM:

In examining the data collected on the kinship and affinity system of the Male' elite, it became clear that this elite had long practiced a form of cross-cousin marriage based probably on an ancient Dravidian kinship system as Maloney (1980:309-351) postulated must have existed in old Maldives. This old system with its matrilineal implications is contrary to the dominant Muslim ideology, now nearly a thousand years in Maldives. Islam is paramount ideologically as the foundation for the ruler and elite's continuing rule over the country. Yet examination of the data on elite kinship and marriages (the composition of the houses, to be described in the next Chapter 5) reveals that there was still (at the time of this study) a consistent pattern of cross-cousin marriage and that this type of preferential marriage occurred frequently among the elite, although they did not acknowledge the existence of this marriage pattern.

It was originally suggested by Professor Maurice Bloch<sup>22</sup> upon examining the data, that it appeared that one important term was missing--that for "cross-cousin"; however, after years of my continual questioning of members of the Male' elite on this matter, I was consistently told there was no term for "cross-cousin". Nonetheless, the conclusion cannot be avoided that in the kinship and affinity system of the Male' elite, the term *lianoo* (the term for brother-in-law) operated<sup>23</sup> something like that of cross-cousin/brother-in-law in some societies of the region.<sup>24</sup> In a true Dravidian system, the brother-in-

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<sup>22</sup> In discussions between Professor Bloch and myself in London, when I presented the original draft of this thesis in September 1981.

<sup>23</sup> This was corroborated by Professor Bloch in a personal communication, February 1995.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Dube (1969); Kutty (1972); Yalman (1967).

law term is highly ambiguous because it is the same term that is used for cross-cousin. In the Male' elite, the term *lianoo* (and *fahari*) have been shown to be highly ambiguous.

The Male' elite clearly demonstrate such ambiguity in this relationship, though they do not acknowledge it, and they call their *lianoo* by the kinship term for brother (*beebe* or *koko*) and their *fahari* by the kinship term for sister (*daatha* or *koko*). The way in which the Male' elite use the kinship term in address to the brother-in-law is typical in Dravidian kinship terminology, especially in Singhalese systems (Yalman 1967). In such Dravidian systems, one calls the person "cousin" in descriptive terms and not in terms of address, which, in itself, is significant because it shows the ambiguity of the system. Thus, in the Male' elite, the same ambiguity of the system indicates that what is actually occurring is not as straight forward as the members of the elite society say.

Assuming this conclusion is correct, that in the Male' elite the *lianoo* is the operative equivalent of "cross-cousin" (despite the missing terminology and the ideological denial), then this has tremendous importance. It would suggest, therefore, that the role of the kinship terminology, the whole of the kinship system, is centered around alliance and that, therefore, my conclusion about the significance of affinity is almost given in the nature of the kinship system. Clearly, the way in which the Male' elite played their politics was by using, principally, what I have called their links to affines in general (including, as they do, as many of their in-laws as possible) and, most importantly, their specific links to brothers-in-law, *lianoo*, of their own generation. If this is true, as this thesis proposes, this pulls together the entire system into a focus on this critical political-kinship-affinity mechanism.

## Chapter 5

### HOUSES: THE BASIC POLITICAL UNIT OF THE ELITE

In the kinship and affinity system of the Maldivian elite, the building blocks are the house (meaning both physical structures and the families of the houses), the sibling group, alliances (*gulhumeh*) between houses, and friendship. The kinship and affinity system of the elite of Maldives is centered around these building blocks: the houses that make up the elite, the sibling groups of the elite, the affinal alliances created through marriage, and friendships. In effect, the kinship and affinity system is contained within the ideational house.

The basic building block of the Maldivian political system of the elite is the house (*ge*). For the elite, the house is both a physical entity and a symbolic representation of the “family”, all those relations of kinship and affinity from whom one expects loyalty (*thedhuveri*) during which time one is a member of a house. The membership of the house changes over time. Alliances are established between the important houses of the elite through marriage. The house includes all those living there who are attached either consanguineally or affinally and claim membership through identifying one self as a member of that house.

The political foundation of the elite is built from these kinship/affinal houses. The elite rely politically on members of their own houses to achieve and to maintain power. The houses are more important than the totality of blood relations because the blood relations might be

spread out through various houses and thus dissipated in strength of bonds. In other words, resident sibling relationships in the houses provide more political power to the elite than blood relations outside the houses.

The “family” of a house is completely dependent upon the continuing good favour of the government to remain in that house on that property. The government (*sarukaru*) essentially controls each house because the land is given to particular families by grace and favour, formerly of the Sultan, now of the President and his government. It is the government that ultimately owns the physical structures as well as the land on which they are built. The great elite houses were given to favourites of the rulers as was the land a gift for use over time. People have usufruct rights to the trees on the land, but cannot take even the trees with them if they have to leave. Traditionally, houses of the elite were government houses maintained by the government through allowances inherited by the *beefulun*. Later, President Nasir began requiring that members of the elite pay at least a nominal rent to the government for continued occupancy of old *beefulun* houses. Yet still the elite houses are essentially maintained through inheritance of the usufruct of the property and through continuing government pensions and allowances.

### 5.1 THE HOUSE FOR THE MALE' ELITE

Physically, the house (*ge*) for the Male' elite included the entire compound of the plot of land on which one dwelled. As mentioned earlier, the first thing done when given a plot of land was to build a wall (*faaru*) delimiting the property. Later, a house was built inside the walled courtyard. Other courtyards might be contained inside the house as well as other out-buildings, sometimes for housing servants and

sometimes for a separate kitchen. For the elite, there was always at least one separate, sandy courtyard (usually at least two separate ones for the men and the women) for bathing, called the *gifili*, which was actually the toilet area, where people also went privately to pray. In the houses of some royalty, as in Manduge, there were underground pools also built for bathing. The entire property, or plot, was called a *goti*, and the entire compound, everything within the property lines, including the outer wall, was considered the house, *ge*.

Houses and walls were traditionally built of crushed coral with stone-like blocks inside coconut wood foundations and finely crushed coral smoothed over the outside. The elite houses were white-washed with the wooden window frames painted blue or green. Few houses were higher than one story, though some owners were wealthy enough to add higher stories. By the late 1970s, with the influx of foreign currency and the Maldivian access to shipping, some of the wealthier members of the elite were able to begin importing steel, glass, and concrete for building larger, higher houses. Inside the houses, there was relatively little decoration and limited amounts of furniture, except in a few of the old royal houses. The houses of the elite traditionally included gardens of flowering shrubbery and shade trees.

For the Male' elite, the house was the primary place to spend time, either at home or visiting in others' houses. During the day, it was thought to be too hot for the elite to be outside. Doors were traditionally unlocked, and visitors simply wandered into the front receiving rooms, sometimes made a noise with their throat, and began looking around for the residents. Servants (islanders), were usually sitting or leaning against walls throughout the house and would notify the residents of any visitors, calling out the name of the visitor if recognised or the word "*beeru*". In the evenings, the Male' elite would

often sit in their courtyard-gardens, talking and swinging with companions in a wide swing (*ndoli*) or sitting in lines of seats made of rope (called *jolii*). In some of the older houses of the elite, there were large porches over the courtyard, and sometimes ping-pong tables would be installed for games in the evening. Later in the night, when it was much cooler and dark enough outside for privacy, members of the elite might walk along the streets or go shopping in the commercial center of Male'.

The house was the private world of the Male' elite. There was a distinct difference between the public behaviour outside and the private behaviour inside the house for members of the elite. Outside they were very formal, reserved, and cool. For most visitors (considered *beeru*) to houses, the elite maintained their very formal facade. Inside their houses, with the members of their families and with close friends, they were very relaxed, affectionate, warm, jovial, and playful.

Members of the Male' elite, at the time of this study, long after the introduction of the telephone, often sent handwritten notes between houses. Servants would be dispatched to deliver messages of all kinds from one house to another.<sup>1</sup>

The house was the center of life. Children of the elite were kept in the house except when they were taken to school by servants, and most members of the elite privately practiced their religion in their houses. Inside the house was where the Maldivian elite truly lived--slept, talked, prayed, gossiped endlessly, napped throughout the day, went to

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<sup>1</sup> Sometimes, for example, I would receive several notes a day delivered to my lodging by others' servants, and in turn I would dispatch my messages by eager runners (on foot or bicycle).

sleep late at night, made love, ate, washed, plotted political schemes, listened to the radio and, after 1978, watched television.

## 5.2 MEMBERSHIP IN THE HOUSES OF THE MALE' ELITE:

Alliances established through marriage (*kaivani*) are the foundation of the Male elite's houses, and thus the root of its political system. The high frequency of divorce (*wari*) creates instability and establishes the importance of the resident sibling-group as the core of the house.

There is no Dhivehi word for family, only the Arabic *aila*, used mainly for important families with a long history and an important house with which the word becomes synonymous. Sometimes the Urdu word *khandan* is used for long family line or like a dynasty, including ancestors, for the most "distinguished" families. Ideologically, it was the custom for a woman to go into her husband's house, but it was acknowledged that, in practice, couples reside in the house that is the most politically powerful, the wealthiest, or the one with the most space at that particular time. Like so much of Maldivian social organisation, patterns of residence are situational--dependent on the wealth and status of the individual family and its situation at the particular time when a couple is seeking housing.

It is said that if one person's house is better and more comfortable, then that is where the couple goes. For example, Mariyam Ameen, the sister of the first President, inherited Aage, across the street from her father's other house Atarrige, which her brother inherited. (Their father was Ahmed Dorschemenakilegefaan, once a prime minister, and the brother of Abdul Majeed, who had ruled the country in the 1940s). Thus, when she married Ahmed Hilmy Didi of Akakage, to which many

children of that leading house had claim, she and Hilmy moved to her father's better, more comfortable and spacious house.

As another example, Ibrahim Rasheed went to his wife Shareefa's father's house, Karankaage, which was bigger, more comfortable, and to which only one daughter had a claim, compared with Ibrahim Rasheed's father's house, Mandueduruge. The latter house was to be divided among three children, and though it was owned by a *beefuleh* and Shareefa's, Karankaage, by a *beekaleh* (her father having been a wealthy trader and favorite of the ruler), Ibrahim Rasheed decided it was better for him to move in with his wife. When his father died in 1967, Ibrahim Rasheed locked up the house (Mandueduruge) and everything in it and requested the court to inventory these assets in order to assess the value for division.

Later, after the inventory of all the deceased father's assets, Ibrahim Ibrahim gave his part of the house (Mandueduruge) to his only sister Rasheeda (who is still unmarried) and persuaded their brother Ismail to give her his part as well. Thus Rasheeda now owns the house, having received it as a gift from her brothers. Ibrahim Rasheed felt that he was well set with his wife's house, and Ismail took the money that was Rasheeda's share in return for his part of the house. Both brothers had government salaries and potential for government pensions plus other land that produced rent. Rasheeda, however, always remained the ward of her elder brother, Ibrahim, as long as she remained unmarried. Their father, Mohamed Didi, had been very rich as a result of being frugal, and because he had been banished often, the people from the islands brought him lots of produce which he could eat and sell. He always held a government job when he was not in banishment, and when he died, his surviving last wife, who had no children, received one hundred rupiahs a month from the government

as the widow of a minister. This provision would continue as long as she did not remarry.

When a wife's family's house is more powerful, the couple goes there. For instance, Maumoon Gayoom moved into Enderimaage, the house of his wife Nasreena Ibrahim's father, even though Maumoon was a *beefuleh* and Nasreena's father was only recently deemed (shown by the use of *beekalun* language and deference) a *beekaleh* before his death.

In the case of Moomina Haleem, *beefulun*, and her husband, Kandi Ismail, a *beekaleh*, they had a number of residences before settling in her family's house. They were married in February of 1970 and went first to the house that Kandi had built because Moomina said it had more conveniences than her family's old house. (Also, there were many other people then living in the latter). Thus, their first residence was a case of virilocality. They later decided they were spending too much money and could make money renting that house to foreigners. They moved in January of 1971 to Kandi's family's house compound. Kandi then converted an apartment at his father's house, Ronuge, and the couple, Kandi and Moomina, lived there. (Later, when they moved again, they rented that apartment as well).

One day Kandi's *dhobi* (washerman) came by the house to say he felt bad about Moomina's living there because she was *beefulun*, and that was said to be humiliating because such a low-status person had even remarked upon the class differences in Moomina and Kandi's marriage. She did not mix much with Kandi's family because, unlike in *beefulun* houses like hers where men and women ate together, at Kandi's

*miihun-beekalun* house<sup>2</sup>, the women ate separately, so she had brought her own servants, and the young couple ate in their flat.

On one occasion, the couple attempted to eat together with Kandi's stepmother, but she said there was no room at the table, presumably because she believed the women should eat alone. So Kandi "went wild", as it was later described, and said they would leave, which they did in a couple of days. They then moved to Nooraanee Villa, where Moomina's mother had moved after a disagreement with her own mother in their house, Nooraanee, where Moomina had grown up. Moomina's mother had requested that land from the government in the early 1960s because her husband, Moomina's father, had land but she did not.

In Ameen Didi's time, he knew that there were troubles between Ameena Hussein (Moomina's mother) and Aminath Abdulladidi (Moomina's mother's mother)--both women were very stubborn. He reportedly gave Nooraanee to the daughter, Ameena, but for some reason he did not include the registration of the house on the land. Later it was finally registered in the grandmother's name, and was still held by her at the time of this study. Upon her death, it was to be divided among her children: Siti (mother of Kuda Siti, who was married to Ibrahim Shihab); Ameena Hussein (Moomina's mother, with four other children); and Ibrahim Rasheed (who had one daughter then in India and one son and his wife's huge house, Karankage). One member of the family said, "What happens to it then will depend on

<sup>2</sup> Kandi's father was brought up by Atariige people (meaning the house of Ameen Didi's family), and he was sent to Madras to study with Ameen Didi and then on to Colombo for more schooling. Later he started his own business. Along with Shareefa's father, Hassan Kaleyfan, and a Ceylonese named Hasham, in Colombo, Kandi's father founded the MNTC (the Maldivian National Trading Company). Thus Kandi's father, though born a miiheh, became a beekaleh, as did his son.

who will give what. Aameena will definitely give her share to Mohamed Haleem (her youngest son who lives there now with one of his wives and his Thalassemic children) because he has nothing”.

In the late 1970s, Moomina and Kandi lived in her family’s house until she went into exile (after being banished, then pardoned) and Kandi was banished to a distant island. Their four children remained there with Moomina’s mother and father while both parents were away. Moomina said that living at home all those years (while first she was Matron of the Hospital, later a Member of the Majlis, then also Minister of Health, and eventually under house arrest), worked well for her because she then had people to take care of her children. She and Kandi, with all their success and involvement in tourism during the Nasir government, were able to build an upstairs on her mother’s house and make other additions. As for her other siblings, the eldest brother had his own house, where his wife and children lived while he was banished. Her one sister, Maumoon (nicknamed Mana) Haleem, had been banished, too, and her children were being raised by both her own mother and mother’s cousins as well as by her husband’s mother and sisters (the husband has been imprisoned for life).

When Mana Haleem and her husband, Ahmed Naseem (brother of then First Lady, Naseema Mohamed Nasir) had first married, they had lived in a house owned by her elder sister, Moomina Haleem Ismail, near their elder brother’s house. Then Mana and her husband, Naseem, with all the money they had made in tourism, built the most “beautiful” (according to modern Maldivian taste) house in Male’, but envy grew rapidly over that. During their banishment, it was empty. Moomina’s other brother, Hussain Haleem, was then in a kind of exile as a First Secretary in the Maldivian Mission to the United Nations in New York.

When at home, Hussain Haleem and his wife lived in Moomina's old house which Mana and Naseem had vacated. Prior to that, when they were first married, they lived with his eldest brother because Hussain's wife's house was full of children and affines. Mohamed Haleem, who may be banished now, was living with his grandmother in their old house, Nooraanee, but she became annoyed with Mohamed's wife, whom she considered rude, only an islander, not *beefulun*, with no manners. The old grandmother moved out of her own house and moved to her son, Ibrahim Rasheed's, wife's house.

House names become identification labels for members of the elite as well as for rising *beekalun*. Members of the elite agree that the house is the most important means of identification. For example, a daughter of President Gayoom said that her parents' original house, Enderimaage, was the way she identified herself, more so than as the child of her father. In reference, not address, some people are always referred to by their house name (never to their face), as was Aminath Hussein and Ameena Hussein's father, Bodufengwaluge Sidi. But his sons (Mustafa lived there and the other son, Mujthaba, until 1979 lived in Bombay handling Maldives Shipping), who both owned the house after his death, were not referred to as Bodufengwaluge in the late 1970s even though they were said to want to be distinguished in that way. Mustafa, especially, who had Presidential ambitions, enjoyed going to islands where his father was warmly remembered (old Bodufengwaluge Sidi was often banished) and used his father's name to become popular himself. Possibly, if someone asked, "Which Mustafa" (which is a question often asked in conversation about anyone under discussion, and then a label is needed), then perhaps one would say Bodufengwaluge Mustafa, but usually in his case just saying Mustafa Hussein would do.

In the case of K.U.M., Kolige Umar Maniku, Kolige is the name of his house. He came as a *miiheh* years ago to Male' from an island during the time of Abdul Majeed and later Ameen Didi and started with small trading. Then he began building capital through trade (when the old *beefulun* still thought trade was beneath them) and slowly built his house and business and his fortune, becoming in his time the richest man in the country. In address, people always called him Umar Manik. His name was not really KUM, but like many *beekalun* businessmen, he used those initials for his business--all his shops and lorries had K.U.M. written on them. By the time of this study, his house was considered the richest in the country, not only because of the old man, the founder, but also because of his son, Umar Ali Maniku, who started with his father's capital and became the country's first millionaire by building up the Maldives Shipping Line and controlling it from Singapore. People always refer to anyone living there or attached to the house as Kolige.

Some people who were once referred to according to one house, when they move, experience changes in reference terminology as well. The old house name is dropped from their reference as with Tuta Gomaa Fatimath (Mrs. Ahmed Zaki) who used to live in Manduge, where Habeeba now lives with her mother Tuta Gomaa Fulu. Formerly Tuta Gomaa was called Manduge Tuta Gomaa, or Manduge Fatimath. Now she lives in her husband's house.

Maldivians say there are two reasons house names are used in reference for some people: first, the house name itself may be famous and thus attaches prestige to the person; or secondly, since many people have the same name, using the house name is a way to distinguish one from another. To distinguish relations in reference, not

in address, people use the name of the house to which the person belongs if that is sufficient for pinpointing the person.

### 5.3 SIBLING GROUPS AND HOUSES:

A foundation of the house is the sibling group, which has already been described as a basic building block of the kinship system. The following section will describe the composition<sup>3</sup> of the important sibling groups of the leading elite houses at the time of this study. Included will be examples of such basic sibling groups and the affines<sup>4</sup> that were “temporarily” attached to them and their houses.

The first group revolved about the house, Enderimaage, the original residence of the current President Maumoon Gayoom and his wife, Nasreena, and their family. Later during Gayoom’s Presidency his immediate family resided first in the official private home of the President, a house called Theemuge, and later moved into Muleeaage, the official residence of the former President Nasir. But, for purposes of identification, Gayoom, his wife and their children retained their attachment to and their identification with Enderimaage.

Originally, in Enderimaage, Nasreena’s father, Ibrahim Abbas, was married to one woman for many years, and they had four children: two older sons, Abbas and Ilyas; two younger daughters, Nasreena and Farisha; and a fifth daughter who died (though not so young that she had not had time to marry; her husband, Heena still spent much time

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<sup>3</sup> Also see Appendix 4 for a chart of the most prominent houses of the elite during the time of this study.

<sup>4</sup> See also Appendix 5 for a list and Appendix 6 for a chart showing the key Presidential relationships.

at their house and was taken care of in terms of jobs and money by his former *lianoo*). The father, Ibrahim Abbas, was a self-made man, a former *miihun*, who rose to *beekalun* status, achieved through success in trade and then using that economic power to become a political leader in his ward, Maafaanu (one of the four wards of Male', and Maafaanu was a relatively newer residential area and away from the old centre of the aristocratic ward, Henveeru). He became very powerful in his ward, and his sons have followed in his path in dominating that ward.

Ibrahim Abbas was a trusted servant of the first President and later the last Sultan. He was given a plot of land, where he built the house which his wife and children still own. Late in life he married another wife, but he never brought her to live in Enderimaage. According to his daughters, his second marriage was devastating to their mother, who wept for months and hid in her room whenever the second wife was brought to their house. The father had one child by his second wife, but she was not part of the house group of original siblings, though she came to visit. His first wife still lived there at the time of this study. Then the father and his first wife, Hava Manike, the mother of this sibling group, went on pilgrimage to Mecca, which was the ultimate sign of his success showing that he was wealthy enough to perform this important religious duty. While returning from Haj in 1974, the father died.

The second son, Ilyas, who as the chief assistant and personal secretary to former President Nasir, also married a sister of the richest Maldivian, Kolige Ali Maniku. He moved out of his family's house, Enderimaage, and into her father's house, Kolige, where her rich father was still alive. His wife, Nasira Maniku, the sister of the richest Maldivian, Ali Maniku, visited Enderimaage infrequently, usually only

when someone was sick. Every day, however, Ilyas visited Enderimaage, which was a short distance from where he lived, three or four times a day to talk with his mother and to sit talking with his sisters and brother and his sister Nasreena's husband, Maumoon, and basically to watch over the house and to watch over the activities of his brother and his sisters' husbands. Ilyas, though not living at Enderimaage, supported it financially while the rest of his siblings and affines were in hard times economically because of their political troubles.

Later this pattern changed when Maumoon Gayoom became President. First, not long after his sister's husband, Maumoon, became President, Ilyas took a second, much younger wife, while keeping the first one as well. Then he and his new wife moved into his *lianoo's* Presidential residence, Theemuge. After that, he only visited his first wife and her family's house daily. This demonstrated his independence from his *lianoo*, Ali Maniku, but maintained the tie through continuing the marriage and visits. Later, he and the younger wife moved into a new house that Maumoon had been building for his family before he became President. When he moved into the Presidential residence with his sister and her husband, the President, and later when he moved into the President's other house, Ilyas was clearly saying that he considered his *lianoo*, the President, to be stronger than his other *lianoo*, the shipping magnate. But all the gossip held that these actions, apparently taking advantage of his relationship to the President, were more signs of the destruction he would be expected ultimately to bring to his *lianoo*, the President.

The Enderimaage elder son, Abbas Ibrahim, and eldest child in the family, had been in and out of political trouble for years. He spent time in what he described as "torturous imprisonment" for allegedly being involved in a coup-plot in 1967, and again in 1974 was banished

along with his sisters' husbands, Maumoon and Samari, for alleged involvement in another plot. He was very critical of President Nasir's government and was said to talk too freely for Male'.

Yet despite this, Abbas Ibrahim and his younger brother, Ilyas Ibrahim, who was the consummate double-gamster (the apotheosis of a double-dealer, which is necessary for long survival in Maldivian political life), talked freely with each other, and the elder brother, Abbas, believed himself safe in voicing his criticisms to his brother, the right-hand man of the former President (and later the right hand man of President Gayoom). The younger brother, Ilyas, might tell his older brother some things, but the reason for his success at remaining in favour so long with Nasir was his then unquestioned loyalty. Only after he promoted his sister's husband, Maumoon Gayoom, for the Presidency so soon after Nasir announced his retirement did there appear to be some question about his loyalty to Nasir. Gossip at the time had it that ever since the July election in 1978, until Nasir stepped down that November, Nasir began steadily cutting off his formerly trusted servant, Ilyas.

The elder son, Abbas, through his brother's influence, was given a plot of land by the government on which he built a house. But he did not want to move out of his original house, Enderimaage, two blocks from his new one, "Silver Cloud". His wife, Zahe, finally persuaded him, but she became unhappy being cut off from her husband's family's house, where she had become close to his sisters and mother, and where their children all played together. Her own family was large and lived across town in another ward, Galolu. Her sisters, mother and father visited her every day, and when Abbas left the country on business, she either went home to stay with them or her father sometimes came to stay in her house or she would go to Enderimaage to stay. She also visited her

family nearly every day, and there was a constant exchange of children for playing and food, and women went back and forth to help each other with the cooking, along with all the servants.

After Abbas and his immediate family moved out of Enderimaage, in the original house from 1977 until Maumoon became President, the household consisted of the two sisters, Nasreena and Farisha, their husbands, their children, their mother, and their servants. Soon also Abbas' elder daughter by another marriage moved in to Enderimaage because it was thought there was conflict between her and her stepmother, Zahe. The assumption was that she could get more advantages at his family's house. Abbas' first wife, the mother of that daughter, Sobaa, was high-class *beefulun*, whose family had been bitterly opposed to their daughter's marrying Abbas.

The elder sister, Nasreena, and her husband, Maumoon, were building their own house on land he had been given in another ward, Machangoli, near his father's house and next to a plot on which his sister lived. The married couple, Nasreena and Maumoon, did not want to move into that house because Nasreena and her siblings and mother were all so close and the children (hers and her sister's and her brother's) were all being raised like siblings. Maumoon was a poor *beefulun*, who along with his father had long been considered among the intellectuals of the society and whose family claimed descent from the Prophet. It was said that he had made a good marriage by marrying into such a rich, powerful, albeit new, low-class family. Although Maumoon visited his old father every day (his mother had died earlier) and his brother and sister, his real centre since marriage to Nasreena was his wife's family and their house, Enderimaage.

The same was also true for Ibrahim Samari Maniku, the husband of Farisha (Fari), the youngest child of the Enderimaage sibling-group, children of Ibrahim Abbas and Hava Manike. He visited his poor family every day, but his real attachment was with his wife's house, much richer and more powerful than his family had ever been. He was especially close to his wife's sister's husband, Maumoon, and although they were naturally considered *delianoo*, they also became considered *gaayy* (related friends). Ibrahim was much younger than Maumoon, but as Ibrahim has matured the two have become closer. They are the outsiders who were taken inside the house. They even developed a kind of alliance against their wives' brothers, who often tried to dominate them both.

Another sibling-group, this one of *beefulun* parents (all having the same father and each a different mother), was made up of three siblings (half). They were raised most of the time in their father's house, Mandueduruge, which was given to the only daughter when their father died. While in the first group, Enderimaage, the age differences were minimal, ranging in 1978 from thirty-six to twenty-six, this group, Mandueduruge, was widely spaced in age, in 1978 ranging from fifty-two to thirty-two, but they remained very close.

The eldest child was a son, Ibrahim Rasheed, who had been a powerful cabinet minister for many years. He was first married to a woman who was known for being flighty and having many love affairs. He finally divorced her after they had two daughters. After his first marriage to a *beefulun* woman, Ibrahim Rasheed then married the only daughter of a very wealthy *beekaleh*. They lived on the large plot of land in the huge house that her father, a rich trader, had built. Ibrahim Rasheed, like Ilyas in the first group, had over the years been granted from the government a number of other plots of land in Male' and rented them

at high rates to foreigners. He and his second wife, Shareefa, had one son, Mohamed.

The next member of this Mandueduruge sibling-group was a son, Ismail Rasheed, who was the postmaster general under Nasir, but went into other government positions under the new President Gayoom. He was one of the few remaining Maldivians married to two wives at once, and usually they all lived in the same house. However, the second wife moved out and went to her parents' house, taking their children with her. She stayed much of the time with them in what Ismail called his country house, a farm on the other side of the island, in the new section. The older first wife was said to have nowhere else to go so she always stayed. Her father was also a very rich and powerful *beekaleh* (the second wife was *beefulun*), but he had so many children that there were always quarrels among them over the plot of land he left, and it had been divided endlessly for the different children and their spouses and children. Each of her siblings (all younger) were always vying for favours with whatever government was in power.

The youngest child of this sibling group, Rasheeda Mohamed Didi, who grew up in Mandueduruge, was a daughter who never married. She was one of the best educated women in Maldives and rather uninterested in marrying any Maldivian, always dreaming of finding some challenging, intellectual foreigner. Her elder brothers gave her their father's house, and she lived there alone with two servants. She rented one half of the house to foreigners.

This sister, Rasheeda, was very close to both her brothers and to their wives. In fact, her elder brother, Ibrahim, was designated her legal guardian until she should marry. She visited their houses every day and also visited her brother Ismail's second wife when the latter moved out

across town away from the house where the first wife lived. She was very fond of her brother's children and did a lot for them in terms of entertainment. She trusted her brothers the most, and secondarily their wives, though she recognised each one's weakness as far as gossip goes and refrained from telling them anything about which they might gossip.

The basic group, then, seems to be the sibling group that has been attached most of the time to one house. Beyond that, certain affines may be taken in and trusted situationally, temporarily, according to how each one is perceived. Friends, when found, are very important, but for many Male' people, friends vary from month to month. Those with longtime friends made during schooldays (often abroad when they all slept in the same rooms and were together for years), have a great advantage politically.

#### 5.4 FAMILY (*AILA*) RELATIONSHIPS:

*Aila* (the Arabic word for "family", used for that concept by Maldivians) in Maldives equals "houses", e.g. Akakage (*aila*) people versus Atariige (*aila*) people. The feud between Akakage and Atariige ended when Ahmed Hilmy of Akakage married Mariam Ameen of Atariige, at the prompting of her brother, President Mohamed Ameen Didi, and they all came together. Members of the Maldivian elite said that such marriages used to be done all the time, "marriage to unite", to bring together feuding houses to build strength. Maldivians said that marriages could be used to create an alliance, or connection (*gulhumeh*), between houses and the families (*aila*) of those houses.

The "house" (*ge* or *aila*) includes all the blood-relatives and in-laws (consanguines and affines) living there. Everyone knows who the

affines are, recognising, as members of the elite often said, that “in-laws are not permanent fixtures, they come and go”.

An example of a house (*ge*) that was considered an *aila* was Egamge, the house of the late Ibrahim Ali Didi, the former Prime Minister and son of leaders. At the time of this study, however, it was generally said to have ended in prestige, except as an old, distinguished, respectable house, because the “big man” had only daughters. These four females all married well, but none was strong enough politically in the late 1970s to rebuild the power of that house. The eldest, Fatimath, was married to Ahmed Zaki, who was first banished and later became the U.N. Ambassador. Jameela was married to the former Speaker of the Majlis. Aishath was married to the Minister of Fisheries, while Khadija had married a young islander, whose father was an island chief (*khatib*), a respected island-*beekaleh*. The young islander had managed to get to Male’ and then be sent on abroad to obtain a university degree and a good government position, but he remained known as an islander even though he was married to Khadija of Egamge. The Egamge *aila* came down from their father, Ibrahim Ali Didi, who was titled Ibrahim Famulederikilegefaan, as were his father and grandfather. The latter was reported to have tried to sell Maldives in the nineteenth century to a Bombay merchant.

Some *aila* were no longer established in physical houses, and people simply claimed descent from someone’s *aila*. An example was the Sayeed Kilegefaan Aila from a rich Arab who came to Maldives at the beginning of the twentieth century. Many people claimed descent from him.

Bodufengwaluge Aila was distinguished by its founder, Bodufengwaluge Sidi, and his many descendants--for instance his sons, Mustafa Hussein

and Ahmed Mujthaba, Moomina's mother, and Aminath Hussein. The two sons in the 1970s and early 1980s had begun restoring it to power.

Ultimately, as some old elite speculated, there would be *aila* for the powerful new houses like Enderimaage, Kolige, and Hikifinifenmaage, all of which were founded by *miihun*, who became wealthy through trade and then became trusted servants of the first Presidents and, thereby, *beekalun*. Enderimaage produced the daughter whose husband became the third President. Hikifinifenmaage produced a daughter who married the second President and a son who was once thought a likely candidate for President and who plotted to overthrow a President. Kolige produced the man who became the richest Maldivian.

Velaanaage Aila was the house of the former President Nasir. Historically, it was closely connected to its next door house, Atariige, the house of the first President.

An attached chart (see Appendix 4) shows the configuration of the most powerful, influential houses of the Male' elite--showing sibling groups and some marriages at the time of this study.

### 5.5 HOUSES AND RELIGION:

In Male', at the time of this study, the elite's houses were the center for much of the religious activities--praying, education, rituals, and celebrations. Religion in Maldives is not ostentatiously practiced. People seldom discuss it, especially with foreigners. Little is made of it, except that people go quietly about the daily observance of their

faith. For example, when going to pray, they do not announce it.<sup>5</sup> During the time of this study, people were seldom seen praying publicly, falling on their knees just anywhere, as is often the custom in other Muslim countries.

Until the latter part of the twentieth century, religion was the only form of education. It was not until 1978 that the first non-religious island school was opened. Often it was the mothers who taught religion to their children. Maldivians point out that women were given higher status in the Koran as well as property rights. Education for the elite children began after age two, when they started reading the alifbaa, then the Koran. They were taught mostly at home, by mother, grandmother, grandfather, or teacher.

Maldivians say they try to model their lives on the Prophet and his teachings. The Prophet said always to help family first--that one must know one's own people (family), where one comes from, and help them before anyone else. Members of the old elite talked about how the Prophet lived and died a poor man, demonstrating that it is good to give away one's wealth.

In Male', generally, women did not pray in mosques. In some elite houses, there are special prayer-rooms attached to the *gifili* (outside bath area--courtyard) which women use for praying, or they simply use the *gifili* for private praying. Men pray also in these prayer-rooms but usually in the mosques. In many other islands there are often special,

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5 Sometimes when I would go to visit someone, I might be told they are praying, but often not. I knew one of my good friends, Abbas Ibrahim, for one year before he mentioned that he had been praying in his bedroom once when I arrived. Actually, his wife Zahe had only let it slip when I entered the house and asked for him. When I asked him about it later, he said that if he's near a mosque at the right time, then he enters without production and prays. Otherwise, he waits until he can go quietly into his room at home.

small mosques for women because usually on the islands there were no facilities for women to pray in the houses. In 1977, President Nasir, influenced by his wife and her female friends, passed a law allowing women to pray in all the men's mosques at any time.

Most houses of the elite retain a "prayer man" *solawatkiamihe* ("man who recites solawat") who is paid to come pray at least once, and often twice, daily for their house. One basis for this practice is that it was said in the old days there used to be high waves that washed onto the capital island, Male', and once a traveller came along who said that reading *thunjina solawat* would save them from such evils, as with Abul Baraakaath when he converted them. While praying, the house *solawatkiamihe* burns incense (jos) sticks, which people believe is symbolism handed down from Hinduism. He never speaks to people in the house. He simply enters a main room, sits in a big chair, lights the sticks, and then proceeds to recite *solawat* from the Koran, blessing the house and then leaving after perhaps fifteen minutes. While he is praying, others may be in the room carrying on a conversation or doing some other household activity, perhaps even listening to the radio or watching television while he performs his evening duties.

Among the list of prayers expected from the *solawatkiamihe* is to keep the members of the house safe from *sihuru* (black magic). There is still a strong belief in magic, primarily in the islands, but also on Male' and among the elite. *Sihuru* is black magic for producing bad effects. It is performed secretly by burying bones or lime and reciting prayers for evil. The *sihuru* mixture might be put in food. Moomina Haleem Ismail, for example, said that once she suspected some *sihuru* had been done on her when she suddenly fell in love for one year with Rosahani Haleem, an old man, with whom she was talking one night. Later she remembered having eaten some marshmallows in which the *sihuru*

might have been. Members of the elite often said they had to be careful of what they ate for fear of *sihuru* having been put in their food. They also said they had to be careful never to leave their nail-clippings anywhere (in other words, always to bury the clippings or toss them in the sea) or else they might be collected by someone wishing to make a concoction to work black-magic against them.

*Fanditha* is magic used for good purposes. A father writes prayers on paper, originally palm leaves, to be wrapped on the child's arm or waist *baadi*, like *Thali* in Ceylon. Many members of the elite wear these for protection, as do almost all children on the islands. *Thavid* is the prayer.

*Mawlood*, reciting the life of the Prophet and praising him and praying to God to bless him, are held on many occasions throughout the year. The practice is thought to have come from India or Sri Lanka, as it is not considered strict Sunni Islamic practice. Some Maldivians, especially those who studied in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, opposed it because they say the Prophet did not do it, but it remains a very popular practice. Some occasions for *Mawlood* are the Prophet's birthday, the child's naming ceremony (*nankiun*), the beginning of the Haj, the anniversary of a special person's death, the beginning and ending of Ramazan, and children's birthdays, which, other than the occasion of the first birthday, are relatively quiet celebrations. The Islamic month of fasting and feasting, Ramadan, which is called *Ramazan* in Maldives, is the liveliest of these celebration.

*Nankiun*, or naming the child, is held the seventh day after birth. It is a great social occasion with much cooking at home, kinsmen and friends and affines working together all day and night to feed between 150 and 400 people. *Nankiun* requires that one has to slaughter an

animal with a one-inch horn (goat or cow). In addition, one must feed at least forty people, not directly related, such as poor people; thus two goats are required.

A child's first birthday also was traditionally honored, probably because most of the deaths in Maldives in the past occurred in the first year. Learning from Sri Lankans who had taught in Maldives, however, the Male' elite also began having regular birthday parties for their children.

Circumcision (*khithan*) is compulsory according to religious practice. Traditionally, it was held for boys approaching the age of ten, but by the mid-1970s the age was younger. Often it was an important social event and lots of boys were circumcised at the same time. Maldivians consider it important for the people involved--both for the women looking after the boys and for the boys, who all must stay up all night to be sure the boy does not touch his sutures. In earlier times there was a kind of clitoridectomy performed on women.

All of these rituals and celebrations take place in the house.

#### **5.6 A CELEBRATION OF THE PROPHET'S BIRTHDAY:**

Other than the noonday prayers for men in the mosques, the Prophet's birthday is also celebrated primarily in the house. Here follows a detailed description of the 1977 celebration of the Prophet Mohamed's birthday in Male'. The Prophet's birthday was observed<sup>6</sup> from sunset on Wednesday, the second of March, until sunset on Thursday, the third. In Male', beginning just after sunset on the birthday, there were

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<sup>6</sup> There was not all the great celebration and festival-like atmosphere which sometimes accompanies this occasion in some other Muslim societies. Compared, for example, with Lamu Island (see Prins 1965), on the East African coast, for instance, this Maldivian occasion was relatively quiet.

Mawloods, chanting recitations of the Koran, conducted at many houses for the men. In almost every house, especially the *miihun* houses, like the new shanties on the reclaimed area, men sat in groups around tables in the outer rooms, verandas, chanting the Mawlood. In the houses of the elite, the chanting of the Mawloods were performed more quietly.

Throughout the night, and the days before, women sewed feverishly to get new clothes made for their children and servants. New clothes were made for the occasion for the servants of all the elite houses, but the women of the elite seldom made any new clothes for themselves for this occasion. In contrast, in *miihun* houses (for example at Oceanic Villa), the mother, Shareefa, and her friend and daughters stayed up late into the night sewing for all the household in order that everyone would have new clothes to wear at the feast after the noonday prayers.

On such feast days, all the men perform public prayers at 12:35 p.m. in a nearby mosque (about thirty-six mosques on Male' at the time of this study), as if it were Friday prayers. Afterwards, the main meal of the holiday is eaten, quietly, in houses.

That feast day, I set forth on my walk across Male' in the mid-morning, about 10:30 a.m. The streets were quiet, and there was hardly any traffic (neither pedestrian nor bicycles or other vehicles). All government offices and most all shops were closed that morning. Almost everyone was then in their houses. I went first to visit at Enderimaage (house), where the women (Nasreena, Farisha, Zahe and some friends) were cooking with the servants in the kitchen (across the inner courtyard), and the men (Maumoon, Abbas, Samari and some friends) were talking about current events in Male' (i.e., politics) in an

inner room opening onto the inner courtyard. The latter were waiting to go to the midday prayers at a mosque.

From there, I continued walking across the island and next went to Mandueduruge (house), where I was to meet Rasheeda Mohamed Didi for us to go together to lunch at her brother Ibrahim Rasheed's wife Shareefa's house, Karankage. Rasheeda's servants were happily wearing their new holiday clothes. Some of her servants had also gone to Karankage to help prepare the feast to which I had been invited to come with Rasheeda. A loudspeaker at a nearby mosque sounded at 12:35 p.m. with the call to the prayers, and the few male servants in Rasheeda's house, Mandueduruge, quietly left without a word. Rasheeda and I then left to walk the short distance (a few minutes) to Karankage.

We entered Karankage through a large wooden gate opening into a large outer courtyard (just inside the wall surrounding the large house-compound) shaded with many trees, and we went first to an outer sitting room. There a servant told us that Shareefa, who had been crippled many years earlier from polio, was waiting for us in another sitting room, which was across another, interior courtyard. After noonday prayers, when Shareefa's husband (and Rasheeda's elder brother), Ibrahim Rasheed, returned to Karankage, we all sat talking first in the sitting-room. Then Shareefa suggested that we go to eat.

We then moved back across the inner courtyard to the dining-room, where food was already set out under covered dishes on the table. A

couple of young servants hovered around the room.<sup>7</sup> Only the four of us--Shareefa, Ibrahim, Rasheeda, and I--were eating there that day. (Shareefa and Ibrahim's only child, Mohamed Rasheed, was studying in London, and Ibrahim's daughter, Aisha Rasheed, by his first wife was eating at her husband's house (Kolige), then the richest house in Maldives). On that occasion at Karankage, as elsewhere in Male', the food consisted of the usual fish curries (*mas riha*), some vegetable curries, rice (*bayy*), condiments (lime, onion, chutneys, fish, coconut--sweet and sour), but the main dish was chicken, barbecued with a sauce.

After the midday dinner, we first washed our hands in a sink in the dining room. Then we all crossed the courtyard and returned to their sitting room and chewed the customary betel nuts and cloves. Ibrahim and Rasheeda's brother Ismail's first wife, Fatimath, came to visit us at Karankage. Playing around the house also was the young son of Shareefa's step-brother, Kafdal, and one of Ismail's children (by his other wife, Aminath), and a child of Shareefa's first cousin, Hamida. After about an hour, Fatimath, Rasheeda and I thanked Shareefa and Ibrahim and then walked from there another short distance to Fatimath and Ismail's nearby house. We spent the rest of the afternoon talking there with him, both his wives (Fatimath, as well as Aminath, both of whom were usually good friends), and all their children. In the heat of the afternoon, we mostly just lay around on beds in the darkened, cooler rooms inside the house. Later, after about 4:30 p.m., when it began to get cooler, we sat outside the courtyard-garden. Around five,

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<sup>7</sup> As a sign that not everyone spent the festival day celebrating, outside the dining room, while we were eating, a man walked by in the courtyard. Rasheeda pointed out that he was Hamida's husband (Hamida's and Shareefa's fathers were brothers), but no one spoke to him. That man, Ahmed Adam, known as one of the hardest working men in Male', was working at some project, electrical or engineering, at his wife's cousin Shareefa's house, Karankage. He did not speak to anyone of us, nor did anyone greet him at all.

Rasheeda and I went back to her house, where she received some other visitors before I departed after six p.m.

It was then after sunset as I began walking back across the island to my apartment. At that time, the streets of Male' were beginning to be busy and noisy. Along the way, I stopped by Manduge (house) to visit Habeeba and her husband, Zubair, their children, and her mother. Her sister-in-law, Aminath Hussein, was there also visiting. Some of the children, then in their teens, were talking with their visitors and playing ping-pong on the verandah, and one was reading. In a room just inside the verandah, a *solawatkiamihe* (the house-prayer-man), on retainer for Manduge, was chanting the evening prayers for the house. At first we sat on the high verandah overlooking the inner courtyard (Manduge was the remaining fourth of what was once a palace), but later Habeeba and Aminath suggested we sit on *jolii* (the rope and wooden chairs) down in the cooler garden away from the bright electric lights. There we could sit in the dark, talking quietly, watching the comings and goings of other visitors, unaware of our presence under the trees. Late that night, close to midnight, I left Manduge, where people were still talking. As I walked home to my flat, the streets were still busy and full of people walking and talking, going in and out of houses along the way.

This was the Maldivian elite's celebration of the Prophet's birthday--mostly revolving around their houses.

### **5.7 THE ROLE OF THE HOUSE IN THE KINSHIP/POLITICAL SYSTEM:**

The basic principles of the kinship system are the units, which are defined as houses, focused on one's own siblings (in particular, but not

exclusively, the sibling-group resident in one's own house), and linked to other houses, either by kinship, which is weak and rather unimportant, or by a model of bilateral exchange. These are the basic building blocks of the political system of the Male' elite. They form the underpinnings of a political system in which the prevailing ideology is that one can rely on members of one's own house (because they are viewed as a unit) and then one can attempt to cement further alliances through marriage.

The most important building blocks of the political system are these alliances. Based on the assumption that ideally one can rely on members of one's own house, one tries to cement alliances through marriage, which is, therefore, political manipulation. If that is true, as seems evident, then marriage as part of the political system begins to make sense, first of all in the forms of marriage--whom one can marry. Then, also, sexual liaisons in the Male' elite begin to take on a very different character, one of great importance in the society. Clearly, marriage and sex are intricately bound up with the system of political alliances with affines. In other words, marriage and sex are not distinct from political alliances with affines in the Male' elite political system. The houses, then, built upon kinship and alliance, are the basic building block of the Male' elite society.

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**PART 3**

***USE OF THE  
MALDIVIAN  
ELITE SYSTEM***

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# Chapter 6

## THE POLITICAL GAME: THE IMPORTANCE OF GOVERNMENT POSITION, NANTHA AND PROTOCOL

### 6.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF GOVERNMENT POSITION

In Maldivian society, government service (*sarukaruge vazifa*), the modern bureaucracy that is simply an outgrowth of the traditional sultanic civil service, is critical to success in the politico-centred society. All perquisites, honours, rewards, and prestige derive from elevation on that scale. The power elite is made up of the President, his cabinet, his personal advisers, senior civil servants (directors of departments which are under the Office of the President, deputy ministers under cabinet ministers) and rising young undersecretaries and their spouses (only as appendages), except for the spouses of cabinet ministers. At the apex is the President, the *rais*. For nearly a thousand years the Maldivian Islands were ruled as a singular political entity by autocratic sultans and, before that, by kings. The modern day President rules in many ways much as his Sultan-predecessors did. All major, and most minor, decisions for the nation are made by him. At the time of this study, the ruler did not tolerate any dissension.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Rasheeda M. Didi (1991) for her discussion of the more recent Maldivian political system and her suggestion that it is “a democracy of a kind”.

At the time of the fieldwork underlying this study, from 1976 to 1978, President Ibrahim Nasir ruled the country. All the President's affines<sup>2</sup> (the siblings of his wife) in Male', were given government posts, as were all his grown children. Because their power derived from their proximity to the center, they, along with a few close advisers, made up the inner core of the elite at that time. Cabinet members and other government officials made up what might be described as the "inside" political elite (*sarukaru*) at that time. The "outside" elite included any former member of a recent inside elite (*kurige sarukaruge*) who might not be holding a government office (*sarukaruge vazifa*) or who might be in banishment or exile. The following is a description of the "inside" political elite, each with varying degrees of "insidedness" or "outsidedness", but all "inside" relative to those truly *beeru* (outside) at the time:

## 6.2 PRESIDENT NASIR'S RULE

Ibrahim Nasir was the power behind the development that occurred in Maldives during his rule from 1957 to 1978, most of which took place after the introduction of tourism in late 1974. Nasir himself came to power, first as Prime Minister in 1957 and later as President in 1968, by exposing the former Prime Minister's dealings with the British over Gan. Accusing the Prime Minister of secretly handing over Gan to a foreign power, Nasir, then a senior minister, and his followers forced the Prime Minister to resign in 1957. Earlier, Nasir was reported to have helped his uncle oust the country's first President, Ameen Didi, and reinstall the old Sultan in 1953. Later Nasir sent that same uncle into exile in Sri Lanka. The first few years of Nasir's rule as Prime

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 5 for a list and Appendix 6 for a diagram showing all the key Presidential relationships for all three Presidents.

Minister under the last Sultan, by then only a figurehead, were spent feuding with the British over Gan and trying to suppress the Suvadiva secessionist movement in the south. Eventually, the British took the leader of the Suvadiva Republic, Afeef Didi, into exile in the Seychelles, even though he had received an official pardon from Nasir. The British then released Maldives from its protectorate status and, under Nasir, the Maldivian Islands became independent in 1965. In 1968, Nasir became President of the new Republic of Maldives.

The original financing for the young republic and then the modernisation of Maldives in the second decade of Nasir's rule came from Nasir's old schoolmate, Ali Maniku. The latter was a *beekalun*, the son of a self-made businessman, K.U.M., born a *miihe* from an island outside Male'. Nasir, a *beefuleh*, who originally had no capital base of his own, realized that going into partnership with the country's only truly rich man (with foreign currency) could seal his hold on power. Ali Maniku, who singlehandedly founded and turned the Maldives Shipping Company into a viable international business, was the Maldives' entrepreneurial wizard, holding the portfolio of Shipping Minister but residing in Singapore. It was from Singapore that he controlled his shipping empire and financed the foundation of the Maldivian tourist industry.

Neither Nasir nor Maniku had much formal education, but both were consummate managers, planners, and administrators. Together they planned and directed the modernization of Maldives. It was a symbiotic relationship--Nasir originally dependent on Ali Maniku for capital and Ali Maniku dependent on the President to operate his shipping line as a Maldivian company in Singapore. They developed the tourist industry and handed over the management of it to Nasir's brother-in-law,

Ahmed Naseem, and Maniku's younger brothers, Mohamed and Ahmed Maniku. (An example of Maldivian gossip, political speculation: there was always talk, especially in the last year of Nasir's rule, that a rift was developing between Nasir and Maniku. It was widely believed that with increasing amounts of foreign aid coming into the country, Nasir might have felt he did not have to remain so dependent on Maniku). As it turned out, with Nasir's sudden announcement of his retirement, it was apparent that Ali Maniku had also begun realigning himself to work with a new President and a new government. He obviously intended to remain the financial power behind the throne regardless of who became the President.

Although Maldivians feared Nasir, most respected him and even admired him, maintaining that no one else could have done as much for the country at that time as he. Until he banished his Prime Minister, Ahmed Zaki, in 1975, Nasir had shared much of the power with him, especially in the area of external affairs. It was believed that Nasir had long felt he needed Zaki in his government to keep the support of the old *beefulun* with whom Zaki was more aligned. There were various explanations postulated for Zaki's banishment without trial. The generally accepted view was that the President needed to demonstrate that he was all-powerful and that he no longer needed to share power with anyone else.<sup>3</sup> Nasir's only public statement<sup>4</sup> concerning his summary banishment of Zaki was simply that Zaki had

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<sup>3</sup> The case of Nasir's banishment of Ahmed Zaki is discussed in more detail below in Chapter 7 on Social Control: Rewards and Punishments for the Elite.

<sup>4</sup> The statement was made to me when Nasir granted an interview to me as a journalist in October 9, 1977, when I filed a complete transcript to Reuters. Also, see Colton (1977r).

created a political climate in which it had become nearly impossible to maintain order in Maldives.<sup>5</sup>

### 6.3 NASIR'S GOVERNMENT:

Under the President is his cabinet. The cabinet is hand-picked by the President and expected to be completely loyal, but it is there where the President's greatest threats lie. Until 1975, when Nasir banished Zaki, there had been a Prime Minister; and until 1977, there had been five vice-presidents. In 1977, all five vice-presidents became only cabinet ministers. Although they lost their higher titles, they exercised more control over their ministries than before. Below the cabinet ministers were directors of departments, which were directly under the Office of the President.

In the Cabinet of President Nasir, there were three most honored ministers, all *beefulun*: Ahmed Hilmy Didi, Fisheries; Abdul Sattar, Education; and Abdul Hannan, Public Safety. Along with the President, they held the ancient title of *Kilegefaan*, which, in the Sultanate, was the highest honor a Sultan could bestow on anyone. Of these three, only Hilmy was thought to have any designs on the Presidency, but by the end of Nasir's reign, most members of the elite thought he was too old to be a viable candidate. Abdul Sattar, though younger than the President, was a trusted servant who had held many senior posts. He was thought not to be strong enough to become President. Abdul

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<sup>5</sup> My first interview with President Ibrahim Nasir, on October 26, 1977, conducted in his private waterfront office in Male', was the first interview ever given by the Maldivian leader. Reuters News Service ran excerpts of it that day in an international story (see Colton 1977d), and more excerpts (see Colton 1977k) and a special article about it appeared in *Asiaweek*, November 25, 1977 (see Colton 1977r). My only other interview with Nasir (see Colton 1980b) occurred nearly two years after he had left office and was conducted on April 30, 1980, at a flat in Singapore (not where they were then living but said to be rented for one of his sons).

Hannan was the most feared man in the country and one of the President's few close friends, but it was thought that he would not want the Presidency--that instead he would support his sister, Moomina (Haleem) Ahmed Ismail, the powerful Minister of Health.

Outside Nasir's cabinet, there was a small group of personal, extremely influential advisers to the President. Their power and influence with President Nasir stemmed from their absolute loyalty to him. It was said that these advisers never discussed with anyone else what the President discussed with them. Among these were Mohamed Zahir, the President's private secretary; Zaheer-Naseer, the President's interpreter; Zaheer-Naseer's brother, Umar Zahir, who was reputed throughout Maldives to be the leading informer and who held an official post as a deputy minister of education; and Ilyas Ibrahim, the President's secretary, chief commercial officer and probably President Nasir's most trusted servant. (Ilyas was married to one of Ali Maniku's sisters, and his own sister was married to Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, then the Minister of Transport and by mid-1978, viewed as a strong candidate to become the next President of Maldives).

Besides this group of non-official advisers, the other person having the greatest influence on President Nasir was his wife Naseema (daughter of the wealthy trader Mohamed Kaleyfan, another member of the new middle class). In her late thirties, Mrs. Nasir studied abroad for years in Ceylon, India and for a short time in Australia. She was considered very intelligent, and before marrying Nasir (becoming his third wife--he divorced each of the previous two), she had served as matron of the hospital in Male'. Her family (including siblings and parents) was extremely close, and each sibling held some important political and/or commercial position. Her younger brother, Ahmed Naseem, a powerful

Deputy Minister of Fisheries and also leading figure in the tourism industry, was said by many to aspire eventually to the Presidency.

Connected to Mrs. Nasir's sphere of influence was a group of women who, through her, exerted considerable influence on President Nasir. Altogether they were called "Nasir's kitchen cabinet". Basically, it was a trio of women (also, maliciously called "the triumvirate" in Male' at that time) who had remained very close friends since their schooldays, first in Ceylon, later at Vellore in India and in Australia. Besides Naseema (Mohamed) Nasir, the other two women were Moomina (Haleem) Ahmed Ismail, an elected member of the People's Majlis and also Minister of Health, and Aishath Didi Abdul Sattar, the Director of the Department of Information and Broadcasting and the wife of Education Minister, Abdul Sattar. It was her father, the former Prime Minister, Ibrahim Ali Didi, whom Nasir had deposed in 1957. All three women were trained as nurses, and each had served as Matron of the Hospital. A younger woman who, in the last year of Nasir's rule was coming increasingly into this influential circle was Moomina's younger sister, Maumoon (Haleem) Naseem, who was married to Mrs. Nasir's powerful brother, Ahmed Naseem. Maimoon was the official editor of the English-language newspaper, *Moonlight Weekly*, which Mrs. Nasir was known unofficially to direct.

At the cabinet level, in addition to Shipping Minister Ali Maniku, with his own power base, and the three previously named *kilegefaan*, there were three sub-groups evident in the cabinet organization in the last years of Nasir's rule. These were often categorized by Maldivians in the following way: 1) older loyalists; 2) younger loyalists; 3) intellectual outsiders. In the first group were the older, less formally educated, most loyal ministers, including Home Affairs Minister Ibrahim

Rasheed, Provincial Affairs Minister Hassan Zareer, Fisheries Minister Ahmed Hilmy Didi, Agriculture Minister Ibrahim Shihab, Attorney General Adnan Hussain, Justice Minister Moosa Fathi, and Speaker of the Majlis Ahmed Shathir. Among these, only Ibrahim Rasheed and Ahmed Hilmy Didi ever were thought to have aspired seriously to the Presidency. But in both cases it was thought they were beyond any chance of achieving it and were considered simply senior statesmen by 1978.

In the second group of younger loyalists was a more likely candidate for the Presidency, Moomina Ahmed Ismail, whose popularity was such that she was always considered a contender in spite of the recent law put forth through the Majlis that a woman could not serve as President. She was very ambitious and gained popularity among the people, first as Matron of the Hospital and later as Health Minister. In this group of younger, loyal cabinet members there were, along with Moomina, her brother Abdul Hannan, the Minister of Public Safety, and Abdul Sattar, the Minister of Education. All three were close to President Nasir.

The third group, considered intellectual outsiders, included a pair of Ministers, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom of Transport and Fathulla Jameel of External Affairs. Attached to this group was Zahir Hussain, the Deputy Minister of Education responsible for the United Nations programmes. These three men were very close friends (*gaayy*) who had spent years together studying in Egypt. All three were fluent in both Arabic and English and were considered the young intellectuals of Maldivian society at the time of this fieldwork. They were viewed as outsiders because they were outside the President's immediate circle,

and they were more intellectually- and religiously-oriented than the other commercially-minded leaders.

President Nasir, who probably feared these men (especially Gayoom), had put their education to good use by making them the chief emissaries to the United Nations first, and later to the Arabic-speaking world to which the Islamic Maldives was turning more and more for monetary assistance. Traditionally in Maldives, sending a potential rival off as an emissary was a way of keeping that opponent away from the political center of Male', a kind of banishment.

Also, somewhat attached to this group was the bright, young Musthafa Hussain, who became the new Ambassador to the United Nations at the end of Nasir's rule. His introduction to the United Nations and to Maldivian foreign policy came first through Gayoom and later through Jameel when he served as deputy-ambassador for each of them at the U.N. headquarters in New York.

The leading member of this third group of ministers was Maumoon Abdul Gayoom who, in the last year of Nasir's rule, was viewed by many as the strongest contender to be President Nasir's successor. Gayoom held a Master's degree from Al-Azhar University in Cairo, had taught Islamic studies in Nigeria, had carefully thought out the organization and structure of his native language Dhivehi during one of his periods of banishment, and was considered perhaps the best educated person in Maldives. He was one of the leading preachers at Friday Mosque and was very popular. Although he was banished on one occasion and imprisoned on another for allegedly criticizing the government, each time he returned he was awarded higher government posts than he held before. He had no capital base and was not

involved at all in the tourism industry or in trade, but both his brothers-in-law (*lianoo*) were, especially Ilyas, who was Nasir's closest adviser.

Another tier in the political hierarchy of Maldivian society during Nasir's rule, below those already discussed, included deputy ministers, departmental directors, and undersecretaries-- some of the more powerful and influential ones already aspired to cabinet posts. Leading aspirants included Ahmed Naseem, Mrs. Nasir's younger brother, then in the Ministry of Fisheries as well as helping run the tourist industry; the loyal, diligent Director of TV-Maldives, Naseema Moosa; the Director of Radio-Maldives, "Radio" Ali Maniku; his brother, Adam Maniku, an Undersecretary in Fisheries; Moomina's husband, Kandi Ahmed Ismail, another Deputy Minister of Fisheries and manager of Vilingili Resort where most non-tourist visitors to Maldives stayed; the Deputy Ministers of Education, Zahir Hussain and Umar Zahir; Moomina and Hannan's Egyptian-trained brother Hussain Haleem, Undersecretary in External Affairs; Sakra Naeem, the editor of *Moonlight*, the daily *Dhivehi*-language newspaper; the Undersecretary of Finance, Ahmed Saleem, friendly to all official foreign visitors and noted for his reporting skills; and Undersecretary of Agriculture, Kolige Mohamed Maniku, younger brother of Ali Maniku and manager of Kurumba resort.

As proof of the importance of holding a government position, it should be noted that all the chief entrepreneurs of the tourist industry, who worked all afternoon and night managing their resorts and made more money (in foreign currency) than most other Maldivians, still felt obliged to hold government jobs, at which they worked every morning. While the original chief architects of Maldivian tourism, Ahmed

Naseem and Mohamed Maniku, were in the centre of Maldivian politics, another early working partner in the development of tourism, Afif, a resort manager who did not hold a government post, was considered outside Maldivian politics. He could gossip, but that was all. He was not considered a member of the elite as long as he had not held a position in any government.

During the transition in November 1978, when Maldivian pundits were discussing whether the new President should retain members of the former President's cabinet, one person after another remarked that a former powerholder (cabinet member) would be powerless without an office--there was no such thing as an opposition leader without an office in Maldives. Thus, in the case of those who had worked against the new President's election, his advisers recommended that he give them nothing and they would pose no threat to him. Eventually, two years later, some did pose a threat by hiring foreign mercenaries (but without any widespread popular support), and as a result, all of those allegedly involved plus all their families and any close connections were banished, set completely outside Maldivian political life.<sup>6</sup>

#### 6.4 NANTHA, "THE LIST", AND PROTOCOL:

In an effort to identify some criterion for delimiting the Maldivian elite group, it became clear that the necessary information existed in the political organisation. Maldivians by the mid-1970s called it "the list" or simply "protocol", and the Maldivian term was *nantha*, meaning "names" or "list", from the longer expression *hafla ah kiya nantha*, meaning "names to be called to a function" or "guest list." *Hafla* is an

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<sup>6</sup> See in-depth discussion of this 1980 witch-hunt in Chapter 8 below.

Arabic word brought into *Dhivehi* to mean “function”. The *nantha*, then, was the protocol list of people who could be included in the important Maldivian political rituals, ceremonies, and functions. It was devastating for someone who believed themselves to be part of the elite not to be invited to such events.

Members of the Male’ elite believed that the protocol system as it existed at the time of this study was instituted during Ameen Didi’s rule and was better organised later by President Nasir. At that time, there were said to be two copies of the list kept--one by the Ministry of Home Affairs and the other by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The list began with the head of state, followed by ministers, then ministers of state without portfolio, then deputy ministers, directors of departments, undersecretaries, secretaries, atoll chiefs (Male’ men), and finally, judges. This protocol list was used by members of the elite to determine whom to invite to any formal occasion, a *hafla*, or often simply called by the English words “function” or “reception”. At the same time, it was the official list of the membership of the “inside” elite at any time, and the composition of the list could change daily depending on whether someone was in or out of power, in or out of government service.

Before discovering the existence of such a list,<sup>7</sup> personal observation provided some delimiting factors, mostly associated with deferential behaviour towards those who appeared to be members of the elite, and what I was told by my language teachers and other Maldivian

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<sup>7</sup> I only learned about the *nantha* when I was finally invited to attend some of these “functions” (*hafla*) as a result of my having registered as a journalist with the government and written journalistic articles about Maldives. That gave me an “official” status that allowed me to be included in some of the elite’s functions.

informants and friends about who was in or out of the elite. All that was either inferential or secondary knowledge.

It became clear quickly in my early observations of Maldivian society that somewhat fluid lines delimited the elite, and it was easy to become confused about their application. Repeatedly, I observed differences among people of Male' said to be among the elite--some who appeared to be striving to be in the elite, some claiming to be in the elite, and some obviously in it. A granddaughter of a sultan, considered among the last of real royalty, constantly complained that she and her family were no longer "in society". Some, when talking about her and her mother, a princess, gave them respect, commenting on her high education and cultural knowledge, while others, who appeared slightly more in the thick of Male' political activity, would say she did not count anymore. She complained that her cousin, a cabinet minister, ignored her because her own husband was not a cabinet minister. Later, in the next government, when she was given a position of honor, librarian of the government library, she began being invited again to important functions.

In seeking some delimiting criterion that might signify which persons made up the core elite at any one time and by which it would be possible to re-check all the above interrelationships, I came upon the symbolic event of the sociopolitical function--the important parties or social affairs which were rituals in Male's elite society. Whenever such Maldivian rituals were held in Male', they reaffirmed the small core of the inside elite at that point in time. It was, of course, the clearest observable factor--which people were invited and attended receptions and which did not.

Functions were treated as formal occasions when members of the elite met together for special events, such as receptions for visiting dignitaries, weddings, inaugurations, installations, ceremonial openings of any major operation (e.g., the telecommunications infrastructure, the television, the jet landing, the airport runway), all of which were controlled by the Maldivian elite and, as such, the formal function also served to symbolize that control. These were the only events in Maldivian society in which members of the elite met together,<sup>8</sup> observed who else was included, preened in front of one another, while the “ordinary people” (*miihun*) hovered outside the walls of the buildings where the functions were held and watched the important people come and go.

Once it became clear that Maldivian society contained its own method for delimiting its elite publicly--that it existed indigenously and did not have to be designed arbitrarily for purposes of this analysis, then collection and review of data were possible. Because Maldivian elite society was fluid (in the sense that one might move in and out of groups depending upon the power configurations of the moment), the composition of the guests might vary from one function to the next. But there was no great variation until there was an actual change at the apex, as in the 1978 Presidential transition.

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<sup>8</sup> The elite of the Maldives spent most of their days and nights in their houses, either talking at home or visiting each other. People laughed and had relatively quiet fun, but there was little loud or boisterous partying in the capital. Alcoholic beverages were forbidden by law, and there were also laws against making much noise. Only on tourist islands would the few members of the elite allowed there as owners and managers sometimes relax and participate in the dancing and frivolity, as they had traditionally done when going to uninhabited islands for private parties. On Male', Ramazan, the month of fasting all day and feasting all night, was the only time of the year that the streets were really noisy when there was merrymaking throughout the nights on the capital island.

Maldivians explained that there were several factors that had to be weighed when one was organizing a “function” and deciding whom on “the list” to invite. If it were to be a “formal function”, “reception”, or *hafla*, one would consider what kind of function it was, how big, and what people from the list might be involved in that particular field or related to the guest of honor. If it were to be “a party”, like a “wedding reception”, then one would invite relations (kinsmen and affines) and close friends, as well as high government officials. Members of the elite were careful to obtain the protocol list from the government to make their own *nantha* for such occasions, to be certain they would not exclude anyone important.

Invitations were sent out usually the day of the function, since no one expects any competition for events. For any visiting dignitary who wished to give a reception in Maldives, the Ministry of Home Affairs and also the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided a standard list (kept up to date) of those persons to be invited. Depending on the size of the function, the list began at the top of the government and could be cut off according to size requirements: President and wife (former President Nasir and his wife never attended, while his successor, President Gayoom and his wife, sometimes did), ministers and spouses, directors of departments and spouses, deputy ministers and spouses, undersecretaries and sometimes their spouses if it was a large function. Maldivians generally would not dare invite someone not on the standard government list, and they would say that was why even their best friend might have been excluded.

In the case of weddings, death anniversaries, children’s birthdays, or children’s naming parties, there were traditionally three tiers for any single party: the first for cabinet ministers and spouses only; the

second for deputy ministers and undersecretaries and spouses and a few official foreigners; and the third for family, neighbours, and friends. At such divided parties, there was no overlap. Guests arrived on time, exactly when invited, ate quickly, washed their hands, chewed some betel nut and departed almost immediately so that the next tier could arrive separately. This process was then repeated by the next group. The final section might last a little longer since it could be more casual and friendly with family, neighbours and friends.

It was as recent as the late 1970s when some of the elite of Maldives begin giving parties (e.g., wedding receptions) to which everyone would be invited together. On these occasions, the ministers were usually given a separate room for dining because it was felt that ministers would feel comfortable only among themselves. But when such functions were held, to which everyone was invited at one time, only the elite were invited, and perhaps a few personal friends of the host and hostess, but definitely all the elite members of government.

A reception to honour a foreign delegation would include members of the elite who might have been to that country or who might be fluent in its language. For example, a function for a visiting French delegation would include primarily French-speaking members of the elite, i.e., those who had studied in France like Kuda Sikka and Maizan Adam Maniku. A party for visiting Arabs would include all those who had studied in Egypt, where they had learned to speak Arabic. If it was to be a function honoring a visiting financial delegation, such as one from The World Bank, and if only a limited number of Maldivians could be invited, then again the government would provide the list of those Maldivians from concerned areas and

ministries. The political considerations involved in organising *nantha* and *hafla* were all of what Maldivians called “protocol”.

Retired dignitaries, those members of the Maldivian elite considered to have served the government well for many years, were included in the invitation lists for many occasions during the rule of President Ameen Didi and also when Ahmed Zaki was Prime Minister, as well as under President Gayoom. Ministers of State without Portfolio were also invited for functions, but only when Nasir ruled (i.e., when Zaki was no longer Prime Minister, this group was left out--probably because they were considered the oldtime *beefulun*). Oldtime *beefulun*, who had once been considered members of the ruling elite, were highly critical of Nasir for excluding them from the important rituals of the society. They believed their exclusion was the influence of President Nasir’s third wife, Naseema, daughter of a *beekaleh*. Beginning in the late 1970s under President Gayoom, “prominent businessmen and leading social activists” from Male’ and a few other atolls and islands began to be included on the *nantha* for the functions. Protocol considerations of whether to invite them or not often depended on the type of function and the financial resources available.

During the time of this study, there were examples of the acceptance of a few new groups into the fringes of the elite. Among these were Maldivian teachers (at the government schools in Male’) and journalists. However, when a person from these groups was invited, it was made clear it was because of their occupation (e.g., the journalist, Ahmed Zahir, was invited “only because he’s a journalist”). The same was, of course, true for government officials, but then it was never said that an undersecretary or a deputy minister or minister was invited “only because” of his or her post. Yet what senior officers in former

President Nasir's cabinet feared most, if they should lose their government position, was the loss of this prestige (i.e., being included on party lists, *nantha*, the protocol of invitation). Members of the old *beefulun* class, especially members of the royalty, who had not obtained government posts in Nasir's later government were never included in party lists. One complained that she would never again be included unless her husband obtained a more senior post or if she joined government service again.

#### 6.5 DESCRIPTIONS OF FUNCTIONS:

The following is a description of the two "functions" that were held on the night of the new President Gayoom's inauguration in Male' on November 11, 1978. (There were no other events on other islands to honour the occasion).

November 11 is Republic Day in Maldives. That was the day in 1968 when Ibrahim Nasir became President of the new republic. Nasir had actually ruled the country since 1957, when he had served as Prime Minister under the last titular head of state, the Sultan Mohamed Farhid Didi.

On Friday, November 10, 1978, the elite of Male' began a most unusual period of celebrations, sequentially celebrating several events: the inauguration of a new President (their first new ruler in twenty-one years); a peaceful transition between two governments; the tenth anniversary of the founding of their republic; and the Muslim Eid (festival) for the beginning of Haj and the three subsequent days of holiday (Friday is usually the only holiday of the week, and Maldives celebrates relatively few holidays).

That night at 8:30, the Maldivian elite and foreign dignitaries attended a reception at Majeediyaa Boys' School, where there was a courtyard large enough for such a reception. Formal, engraved invitations were sent out, but no names of hosts were provided. The host was, obviously, the Government of Maldives, the *sarukaru*.

About five hundred people attended this reception, including ministers and spouses, deputy ministers, undersecretaries and spouses, directors and spouses, official foreign visitors, official foreign residents (e.g., directors of Japanese companies, United Nations officers, and embassy officials from the three resident embassies of Libya, India and Pakistan), and teachers at the government schools and their spouses. Drinks (never alcohol, which is illegal) and "short eats" were served. A few speeches were made by ministers praising the old and new Presidents.

Then at 11:30, a smaller group left the reception to attend the by-invitation-only inauguration of President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. About 150 people attended this function. The only spouses accompanying full-fledged elite members to this event were those of ministers and Gayoom's wife, Nasreena. No other spouses attended.

Included with the invitations were assigned seat numbers. On the dais with the new President were the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General from the old cabinet, both of whom were retained in their same posts in the new government. Justice Minister Fathy was the only "islander" in the cabinet. The Attorney General was a *beefulun*. Both had studied in Egypt, at Al-Azhar University, as had the new President.

Seated in the front were all the other members of the former cabinet. Each had submitted an official resignation that night. After Gayoom was sworn in at the stroke of one minute past midnight on the morning of November 11th, each member of the old cabinet stepped forward to shake his hand and thus give his loyalty to the new ruler. Behind them sat the forty-eight members of the Majlis (parliament), and each of them also stepped forward to shake his hand as a sign of congratulations, acceptance, and loyalty. Behind the members of the Majlis sat spouses of cabinet ministers, Gayoom's wife, Nasreena, and deputy ministers, undersecretaries, and directors of departments. Mixed in with the undersecretaries were the few foreigners invited--the charges d'affaires of the resident embassies, the charges and ambassadors of the visiting foreign delegations, the resident heads of U.N. agencies (i.e., the directors of WHO, UNESCO, UNDP, but no lower ranking U.N. officials), and myself (invited only because I carried the title of "foreign journalist", not as friend of the new President and certainly not as a former resident anthropologist). Also, Maldivian journalists (all four) attended. No teachers were invited.

Similarly strict protocol was followed on all other special occasions and at both "official" and "private" functions celebrated during the time of my residential fieldwork (which had taken place during the two years before Gayoom's inauguration), including the following events: inauguration of Maldives satellite and telecommunication system, May 1977; the third anniversary of the death of Enderimaage father, May 1977; Independence Day celebrations (seating at "grounds") July 1977; Libyan receptions, September 1977 and September 1978; ceremonial first landing of a jet at Male's Hulule Airport, October 1977; Hussein Haleem's wedding reception, November 1977; inauguration of airport modernisation project, March 1978; Pakistani reception, March 1978;

British frigate's reception aboard ship, March 1978; Independence Day reception, March 1978; opening of the national television facility in Male', March 1978; American Ambassador's receptions, April and November 1978; and small dinners for visiting international development workers.

There were other functions, such as sports events, that both the public and the elite attended. At such occasions, however, strict protocol was observed regarding seating and demeanor. It was at such events that the public could view the elite in special seats. During such events, the members of the government elite in attendance were very formal and did not acknowledge members of the public (even those with whom they were very friendly in the privacy of their houses, or others who stood on the fringes watching as they arrived). An example was Aminiyaa Girls' School Inter-House Sports Meet on June 3, 1977, at the Henveeru (the Male' ward that was traditionally the home of most of the *beefulun*) National Sports Grounds. The custom for such occasions was for the government to select as "chief guest" a minister whose post was related to the occasion (so named by protocol). The Honorable Ibrahim Rasheed, Minister of Home Affairs under whose ministry the Sports Division fell, was the honoree on this occasion.

On the west side of the field next to the clubhouse were seats for judges (with their backs to the sun, as the meet was held from 2:30-6:00 p.m.). Judges included a number of "famous, old girls": Naseema Moosa, manager of Crescent Tourist Agency; former principal, Aminath Hussein; and literary and cultural leader, Habeeba Hussein. There were also some male judges, including: the Australian volunteer teacher, Alan Davis; Sri Lankan teacher, Jayantha; "Radio" Ali Maniku (so nicknamed because he was head of Radio Maldives); "Protocol"

Ahmed Saleem (also so named because he was Director of Protocol in the Department of External Affairs); Mohamed Waheed, undersecretary of education responsible for the girls' school; and several other young male undersecretaries in various posts.

South, across the road from the clubhouse, but still on the west side of the field, were official seats, given by invitation only. The first and most official section was comprised of ministers, other senior government officers, and their spouses, and school officials. The following members of the Maldivian elite were also seated there: Speaker of Parliament Shathir and his wife Jameela (daughter of the late Ibrahim Ali Didi, former prime minister); Jameela's sister, Aishath, one of the First Lady's best friends and Director of Information along with her husband Abdul Sattar, Minister of Education; Ahmed Hilmy Didi, Minister of Fisheries; Minister of Provincial Affairs Hassan Zareer and his wife, Fatimath; and the Minister of Transport, Maumoon Gayoom, and his wife, Nasreena with their young son, Faris. Behind this group was another row where other, less important officials sat, including Fatimath Hilmy, the headmistress of Montessori Nursery School, and Steve Stevens, an Australian who was serving in Maldives as the Colombo Plan Education Adviser.

In the next section farther south, sat what was commonly called in English, "the in-laws", or the *lianoo* of President Nasir: the President's wife's family, excluding the First Lady, who seldom ever appeared in public. That day "the in-laws" present included: *fahari*, Saleema and her children; the mother (in-law); sister Waseema, another *fahari*, who had just returned from studying on a scholarship in India (looking very striking with a fashionable midi-length dress, the first worn by a Maldivian); and another *fahari*, sister, Assima, who held

a post in the Foreign Ministry. Altogether they appeared to be a handsome, sophisticated-looking group, somewhat different from the other officials. (The First Lady's brother Naseem and his wife, Maumoona, were in Singapore for a rest after a one-month tourist-industry tour of Europe). The President's father-in-law, Mohamed Kaleyfaan, was sitting on the back row, alone, in the judges area, just observing.

### 6.6 FUNCTIONS AS RITUALS:

Thus, any "function" or *hafla* in Male' is an important ritual in Maldivian elite society. In this politico-centred society, where participants in the society's highest game-- politics--strive throughout their lives to be members of the elite, these formal functions operate as mechanisms for naming (whence the word *nantha*, or names, for "list"), clearly publicising, and displaying the members of that elite. Analysing the official guest lists--following the protocol of invitation--is as accurate a means as possible of delimiting the country's "inside" elite at any given time. And occasionally, as at the large reception on the occasion of the Presidential Inauguration, almost the entire elite of adults, old and new, inside and outside, was present. Members of the elite themselves use these functions (actually view them) as testing points to reaffirm their own status within the power elite at any given time.

# *Chapter* 7

## SOCIAL CONTROL, REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS FOR THE ELITE

### **7.1 THREAT OF VIOLENCE IN A “NON-VIOLENT” SOCIETY**

Maldives is a nation where physical violence is almost non-existent. One of the means by which power is maintained is through the underlying, generally unspoken, threat of possibly violent acts. From birth, children are taught never to hit anyone else, but they are also taught about the violence that could erupt against them if they do anything politically wrong. (Among the elite, there is said to be no hitting of children, that that would be a failing on the part of the adults to show any temper). From early childhood, children of the Maldivian elite hear the whispered stories of the beating- and stoning-to-death of their first President.

The Male' elite are constantly aware of the power the “government” has over their lives, in terms of the critical rewards or punishments that can be meted out as a result of conforming, or not, to rules of the political system. During the period of the study, all arms were held, but never reported to have been used, by the National Security (police and military force) under direct control of the President (formerly Sultan) through his Minister of Public Safety. An intricate system of informers, gossip, and accusation serves as the means of sociopolitical control. The very real threat of banishment from family and home to distant, inhabited islands is the powerholder's strongest weapon. Along with that, but held out with the other hand, is the

potential of favours, the rewards of land and political advancement for the loyal citizens--the unquestioning sycophants/servants.

## 7.2 VYING FOR FAVOUR AND REWARDS

In the Maldivian political system, everyone is constantly vying for favours, including the islanders who attach themselves to houses in Male' in order to obtain a few advantages. People in the elite, or young educated persons trying to enter the elite, are said to come into favour by what is called *vaielhuvun*, "blowing wind, filling with wind (as a sail), flattering". The flatterer, blowing the wind, keeps the ship going. But, like the wind blowing the sails, such flatterers can be deceptive, coming and going or changing course without notice.

Some of the young men who, in the Nasir government, were considered the most *vai miihun* (flatterers, sycophants) carried that reputation into the new government. But it was often said that not only could such flatterers change like the wind, but at the slightest suspicion of their disloyalty, they could also lose favour--or have no more wind--called *vaihusvun*.

The elite, in favour, are rewarded with land for building houses and political appointments. Land is the greatest reward one can receive in Maldives, and it is the one gift the elite who receive it from the government most fear losing. It is so scarce. Traditionally, all land was owned (controlled) by the government (the Sultan, later the President). By the time of this study, a few people (close associates of the President) were able to buy land, but that was an uncommon occurrence. The government was said to give gifts of land to people who deserve it. It is a gift bestowed on favourites, those who appear to be the most loyal members of the elite. In the 1970s and early

1980s, as in the past, people applied to the government (Land Registrations Division of the Ministry of Home Affairs) for land, stating their need and why they wanted the land. People who held land said that (aside from banishment, from which they could return), their greatest fear was that they might lose favour and then the government might confiscate their land. Ibrahim Manik, the *gayy* and *delianoo* of President Gayoom, said just before his *delianoo* took office that the only favour he would ask would be for a piece of land.

### 7.3 CRIMES IN MALDIVES

The worst crime in Maldives is sedition, and almost anything can be construed to be seditious behaviour if the government so decides. Members of the elite live in fear that something they might do or say might at any time be construed to be seditious. Members of the elite often talk about Article 38 of the Maldivian Constitution, which says the greatest crime in the country is speaking or doing anything to cause anyone else to be angry against the government. Members of the elite believe that only this crime matters; they say that non-elite persons can even get away with committing murder while members of the elite can be banished for life for saying a single critical word about the government.

In Maldives, there are laws against a wide range of activities. Among those activities considered crimes and punishable are talking about politics; questioning actions of the government; intoxication; shouting, disturbing the peace; murder; homosexuality; masturbation; insulting another person; foreign impingement on Maldivian business. Maldivians learn very early what these are, and foreigners living in Maldives as well as Maldivians who have lived a long time abroad all learn very quickly what is prohibited, or suffer the consequences.

It is also a crime for any unauthorised person to discuss religion. It used to be that only a few *danabeekalun* (wise men in Islamic laws) could discuss religion, but in 1976 the law was changed to allow any *danabeekalun* to discuss religion. Thus it is still against the law for any non-*danabeekalun* to discuss religion. Conversely, it is said that if anyone else should attempt to discuss religion, no one would pay attention because they do not have the knowledge and authority of a *danabeekalun*.

All the laws for all crimes and their respective punishments in Maldives are published regularly in a large book called the *qaanoon* (from Arabic). According to this book of laws, some other crimes include the following: adultery (proof requiring two witnesses, which are often found quite easily, as people will say they were passing by someone's house or window and witnessed adultery); premarital pregnancy (requires four witnesses to prove the identity of the father, therefore, somewhat more difficult to find the male party to the crime); it is considered a crime to criticise the government in any way, and criticism can be inferred even in allusion or innuendo; or stealing (requires two witnesses).

The following is a sample of offenses and their punishments: for murder, the punishment is banishment for life, and most of the few murderers in Maldives were said to have been banished to one island in Baa Atoll, which was considered a particularly unpleasant island full of vicious mosquitos; for stealing, there is banishment; for being a public nuisance (to trouble one's neighbours or in a public place, i.e., making noise or shouting at someone), one must pay two hundred rupiahs, or not more than thirty days house arrest, or not more than ten days imprisonment; to break the peace (*maslahat geli*) by shouting at or hitting another person, the penalty is not more than six months

in jail, or one year's exile, *aruvaalun* (banishment), or not more than five hundred rupiahs, or not more than three months house arrest; for perjury, lying by a witness, not more than one year in jail, or not more than one thousand rupiahs, or not more than two years exile. Likewise, school children can be put under house arrest for a suspected romance, and a boy and a girl in a locked room together is reason for strong suspicion.

In all cases of offenses, the precise punishment is determined by the judge. Being perceived as attempting any act against the government (i.e., appearing to attempt to overthrow it, hold conspiratorial meetings, or break government property), can bring a range of penalties including banishment, or paying for property, or prison. Sometimes when the government selects a new target or scapegoat, but without tangible evidence of a particular crime, small groups of powerholders will call that person in for questioning. It becomes a kind of "kangaroo court" in which the person accused of bizarre or unknown crimes is caught in a bind, and it becomes very difficult to defend oneself against the "mock tribunal".

#### 7.4 PUNISHMENTS:

Starting at home among the elite, children are first punished by being made to sit quietly in a corner, cut off from the rest of the activities of the house. Elite parents are not known to hit their children for any reason. Then the worst punishment for a child is to be temporarily banished outside the house (*beeru geng*), which they are told is what happens to slum-children, non-elite *miihun* in Male'. Then the elite children are told that the very worst thing that could happen to them would be to be banished far from their house (*ge*) without any communication from home.

In Maldives, there are several kinds of punishment given for different crimes. A person can be fined, imprisoned, placed under house arrest, or banished. Also, on the books and exercised from time to time is the traditional Islamic punishment of whipping. Any person found guilty or in some cases merely assumed to be guilty can undergo any of these punishments. The first President was blamed for trying to institute the Islamic punishments of cutting off the hand (he was said to have had that done to two thieves and also to have had one man executed). Maldivians say they have no capital punishment except when they have been pushed politically. Then, of course, as members of the elite often hint in hushed tones, mobs may accomplish the same task.

*Jalalun* is imprisonment in jail. Usually offenders are put in jail as a first step to frighten them since it is considered a horrible place because it is small and confining. A prisoner cannot go anywhere in jail as one can on an island in banishment. There is a small jail on Male', near police headquarters, with small cells around an open courtyard. Some cells have stocks, which police explain are used for violent prisoners. At one time, there was also a jail on Vilingili Island, which later became a tourist resort. During the time of this study, some of the most powerful people remembered having spent months in prison there during Nasir's rule. Later, in Gayoom's time, those same members of the elite who had suffered different punishments during Nasir's time were responsible for imprisoning and banishing the affines of their former jailer and accuser.

There was also a kind of jail on the island, Dhunidhoo, across the harbour from Male' Island. It was used by policemen, and also served as a little farm where goats and chickens were raised. Otherwise it was not inhabited. In the early 1960s the British representative (the only time there ever was one in Male') was given residence there, but then

to punish him and make his life unbearable because of his government's alleged actions against the Maldivian government, the people of Male' crossed over to the island and cut down all the trees so there would be no shade for the Englishman under the unbearable sun.

When former President Nasir first removed his Prime Minister Zaki from Male', he sent him to Dhunidhoo, where he kept him under constant surveillance for nearly two years before banishing him to the distant island of Fuamulak. Male' people said that a particularly unpleasant aspect of being imprisoned (banished to a prison, actually in the case of this particular island, where there were no other people living) on Dhunidhoo was that the prisoner can see Male' very clearly, as it is only about one quarter of a mile away. With the witch-hunt of 1980-1981, the worst "culprits", the plotters of the aborted coup, Naseem and his brother Saleem, were imprisoned on Dhunidhoo (Naseem with a life-sentence and Saleem for ten years). Before they were actually sentenced, they spent a year in a prison cell reserved for special political cases inside the police-army headquarters in Male'.

There is an expression in the Maldivian language that says: "*Miihe duninghing nantakiae jaluga*" ("he's singing like a bird in jail"). Prison is considered so unpleasant that many prisoners begin talking at length, admitting to anything and telling tales on friends and family during their imprisonment. For example, in the 1980 coup-cases, the conspirators were immediately locked in prison. Very soon they began signing statements which named a variety of other Maldivians they claimed were involved. When Naseem blamed his own father and sister, people immediately said "he's singing like a bird in jail".

*Gegabandukurung* is house arrest. Many people are put under house arrest for various offenses and for varying lengths of sentences, some for years. In cases of political offenders who are put under house arrest, usually while evidence is being gathered before a trial (which may or may not take place years later), their houses are often put out of bounds to others; only the family and house servants are allowed there. At the time of this study, their telephone lines were also cut. A notice is hung on their house gate stating that the house is off-limits, and usually a guard is placed outside, sometimes for twenty-four hours a day.

*Jurimaanakurung* is a form of the punishment in which someone is fined--forced to give a money payment for his offense. It actually means "to do an amount of money", as a kind of penance. In many offenses, a person is made to pay a fine plus being banished, whipped, or some other punishment.

*Tauziru* is the Islamic practice of whipping an offender. The instrument for lashing was called a *durra*, which was made of four layers of hide wrapped around an iron rod. During the time of this study, this form of punishment was used in Male' as the main punishment for adulterers and other criminals. It was said that in the old days, it was much more commonly practiced. On the islands, there was always a whip, the *durra*, kept in full view in the island-chief's office and also at the jail in the atoll-chief's office, all of which offices were appointed by the Male'-based government. On the islands, criminals were reportedly whipped for many types of small offenses.

### 7.5 BANISHMENT (*ARUVAALUN*):

In Maldives, banishment (*aruvaalun*) from one's own island to another distant island is the chief form of punishment. Banishment has been part of Maldivian society since earliest times and can be imposed on any offender for any kind of crime. However, it is for political crimes (for which a wide variety of acts can qualify) and for those relatively few persons who might be found guilty of political wrongdoings, that the notion of banishment in Maldivian society holds most meaning. Such persons and their families are members of the Maldivian elite, resident on the capital Male'. *Aruvaalun*, or banishment, is the punishment that Male' people, the elite, discuss and fear the most. Although island people can be and are banished occasionally, it is the elite who express daily fears and have real reason to be afraid that they might be banished for any, even the slightest political infraction. Of course, others, such as the southern leaders of the Suvadivan Revolt in the 1960s, also feared banishment because their political actions were so strongly opposed to the Male' government.

A person can be banished for any kind of crime, depending on how serious it is considered by the judges: adulterers, burglars, murderers (the few, including women found aborting their babies), persons physically fighting, persons creating public disturbances with arguments and shouting, persons found drinking alcoholic beverages, and persons found committing political crimes. It is in the latter category that all kinds of works and actions can be construed to fall (but only those involved in the Maldivian elite need worry about this).

To avoid any suspicion, persons in the elite whisper when they are discussing anything even remotely political. They seldom greet anyone demonstrably in the streets, only sometimes raising their eyebrows in

acknowledgment. They avoid contact with other members of the elite who might be in a dangerous position or who might be thought to be under suspicion, at a certain time. Families who have a member away in banishment find that few people dare visit them in their Male' houses--only the most loyal siblings and affines.

Many of my Maldivian informants said that their greatest objection to banishment (*aruvaalun*) was that it took them far from home and from their family. Some said that it cast a certain stigma upon the one banished and it made it difficult upon return to find a place in Male' society again. This conception, however, is often far from what actually happens to those who have been banished for political reasons. (Often they return to a better position because they have been viewed as successful in surviving the ordeal of banishment). What some also admit is that banishment takes one away from Male', where to a member of the political elite, exists all the culture and political activity of interest in Maldives-- their world. Most people equate their fear of banishment with their distaste for and condescension towards any place outside Male'. The constant threat that one, a member of this elite, might be banished, sent outside this vital centre of one's society, serves continually as an effective measure for social control.

Banishment, as an institution in Maldives, is extremely significant and illustrative of the political nature of the society. It dominates much of the elite ideology and certainly underlies Male' elite life as the threatening counteracting force in daily politics. Yet, while they live in daily fear of banishment, Maldivians defend this punishment as most humane.

When banished, one must hope the sentence, if it is long, will be commuted or shortened early in the period of banishment. For

instance, when Maumoon Gayoom, now the President, was banished in 1974 for four years for allegedly plotting against the government, the sentence was suddenly shortened and he was brought back after only four months.

Some people who have been banished say that it is harder on their families than on the one actually banished. The families, the members of the banishee's Male' house, no longer enjoy the same income. People who were once considered friends no longer come to visit them in Male', and they are ostracised in public because of others' fear that in talking with them they might be accused of plotting against the government. (Those who have suffered this humiliation say they then learn exactly who their few true friends are).

#### **7.6 THE CASE OF HASSAN HALEEM AND BANISHMENT:**

The following is a case history of one person whom I met during his banishment (Hassan Haleem on Kuludufushi in January 1978) and observed him serving his sentence. Besides giving a picture of banishment, it presents an accurate representation of the Maldivian political system.

Hassan Haleem, the assistant protocol officer in the Department of External Affairs, became notorious (or renowned in the view of some, depending on how one interprets political banishment), in September of 1977. As a young man (then in his twenties) from Male', making his way into the elite, he held an important junior-level position in the Maldivian bureaucracy, and was on his way up the ladder, working in a government department overseen directly by the President.

President Nasir had been in Singapore, and as he was returning through Sri Lanka, it was necessary for him to have one of his protocol officers meet him in Colombo to escort him back to Maldives. The protocol officer, Hassan Haleem, flew to Colombo a couple of days prior to the arrival of the “boss”, as both Presidents, Nasir and Gayoom, were often referred to by members of the elite during the time of this study. Hassan had a diplomatic passport and assumed he could slip past Sri Lankan customs, but instead the officials there checked his bags thoroughly as they do most Maldivians, who are well-known smugglers in South Asia. They turned up 385 expensive digital wristwatches in his suitcase and turned him over to the authorities. The Sri Lankans confiscated the watches and charged him a fine but did not imprison him because he was supposed to have diplomatic immunity.

A couple of days later he went back to the Bandaranaike Airport outside Colombo to meet his President for the return flight to Maldives. Much to Hassan Haleem’s surprise, the Sri Lankan minister who was also there in the VIP Lounge to greet Nasir immediately asked the Maldivian President whether he had heard about Hassan Haleem (the news had been all over the Sri Lankan newspapers for the past few days). When Nasir said he had not, the Sri Lankan Minister related the details in front of Hassan Haleem. The President glared at Haleem with the flashing eyes that his ministers and children report recognising as Nasir’s sign of anger, but he did not say a word to him and, instead, continued talking with the Sri Lankan minister about other matters, then departing without a word to Haleem. As the President boarded the plane for Maldives, the minister sent word back to Haleem that Nasir had asked that he be kept in Colombo until further word to the Sri Lankan Government from Nasir.

The very night of his return to Maldives, the President called a special meeting of the Citizens' Majlis and presented a new bill, directly relating to Haleem's offense, and it was passed instantly into law. The new law stated that any Maldivian found breaking the laws of another country, while visiting or residing in or passing through that country, would be liable for criminal prosecution upon return to Maldives. The offender's passport would be confiscated for five years, the person fined up to 10,000 rupiahs and, depending on the crime, would also be liable to banishment. Following the passage of the bill, Hassan Haleem was summoned back to Male' and was arrested immediately upon stepping from the plane onto Maldivian soil. He was fined, his passport confiscated, and he was banished to a distant island for six months and fifteen days.

It was clear that Hassan Haleem's real crime was embarrassing the President. Many Maldivians, including aides to President Nasir, were known to have been long involved in smuggling all kinds of goods into Sri Lanka. But Hassan Haleem had done the unforgivable and tried smuggling when he was on a Presidential mission and had been caught, creating public humiliation for the Maldivian ruler.

A sidelight to this incident is the way it revealed the kind of conspiratorial thinking that enters into the discussions of every happening in Maldives. Haleem and his friends assumed, as did disconnected speculators, that a friend of Haleem's must have been working against him, and that someone who knew he would be carrying the watches, had tipped off the Sri Lankan customs officials. Otherwise, everyone was certain the officials would have let him pass easily through with his diplomatic passport. Further, it was automatically assumed that the informant had to be someone close to Haleem who was against him. And to all Maldivians discussing the

incident, the obvious reason for such behaviour could only have been that such a close person must have been jealous of Haleem for his proximity to the President.

Hassan Haleem pleaded guilty to breaking the laws of another country and thereby breaking the newly-made law of his own country. The judge sentenced him to banishment, and the next morning he was to set sail for the northern island of Kuludufushi, one hundred thirty miles away (five days sailing time). He was given a few hours to go home and collect a few belongings, including money. And it was his good luck, as it is with most political prisoners who are banished, that a friend of his knew the richest man on the island to which Haleem was being banished. That rich islander was in Male' at the time and happened to be returning on the same fishing boat on which Hassan was to be sent.

Thus, when they reached Kuludufushi five days later, Hassan Haleem was given a new, little house on the large compound owned by this rich man. There Haleem had a good stereo cassette player that he had brought with him, and the rich man's servants brought Haleem food. (The government actually encourages this because then the islander who gives hospitality to the prisoner in effect becomes his jailer, who curries favour with the government by reporting back about the criminal and also curries favour with the prisoner by housing him).

According to the rules of banishment, unless the person is considered especially dangerous and requires stricter confinement to one island, a banished person may go anywhere within the atoll, so long as he reports to the atoll chief where he plans to live. He may also engage in any business except teaching. Many banished people become quite wealthy during their period of banishment, and some enter into

profitable businesses that they maintain through that particular island even after returning to Male'. Hassan Haleem, for instance, had no expenses because his island-patron took care of him. Additionally, he travelled around the atoll with the rich man doing business. Several days a week he went to a special island where the rich man had lots of chili plants and helped collect chilis to send back for sale in Male'.

When I first saw Hassan Haleem, he was playing volleyball on the beach of Kuludufushi where the fishing boats pulled ashore. It had been more than four months since he had been sentenced to banishment on this distant island. He seemed very popular as other players called his name, cheering him. At sunset he walked back to his little house with some of his new friends, the islanders, who all appeared to admire and flatter this man from Male'.

While I was staying on the same island as the guest of the atoll chief, I became friendly with Haleem and used to talk with him and took him paperbacks that I had finished. He told me about banishment and his story, but then, as with most Maldivians, he said it would not be a good idea for me ever to mention his name in connection with his story. He said people would want to know how I knew and then they would trace the source back to him.

Because Hassan Haleem's life in banishment seemed so pleasant and free, I asked him why people would not want to be banished, or why they would mind being given this sentence, especially for such a short period of time as in his case. His list of answers consisted of basically the same set of reasons others who had been banished had told me previously. This, however, is the detailed and well-thought-out response Haleem gave me as we stood on the island of his banishment:

- 1) In banishment there is the constant feeling that one is not free to leave a place (albeit confinement to a whole atoll), because one is not allowed to return to Male'.
- 2) When banished, one is separated from one's family and misses them, constantly worrying about how they are coping. Also, men worry about their wives having love affairs back in Male'. Banished men can, of course, find island women for companionship, some even marrying them.
- 3) One misses Male' and all that is going on there. Life in the islands is too quiet, they say, for Male' people.
- 4) There is also the perception of a certain stigma attached to being banished for political reasons. Actually, however, it is double-sided as banishment can become a badge of honor, especially after one returns, making it a kind of rite de passage, depending on the person and crime (or alleged crime).
- 5) In banishment, far away from Male', there is always the fear that it will be difficult to gain re-entry into elite Maldivian society, i.e., government service.

Hassan said he feared he could probably not get back into government service, which is so important if one expects to remain in the elite. (As discussed in the previous chapter, even businessmen in the political elite always try to retain their government positions and work at both jobs). Hassan feared that he would have difficulty starting any business again for a while. He also was deeply troubled about embarrassing the President, and he was distressed that the President had not met him again since their last brief encounter in the Colombo Airport.

Aside from the regulations that the banished person stay in the atoll where he's assigned and not engage in teaching, the only other major rule is that the prisoner (banishee) must send all his post back through

the Prisons Department to be read and censored before being forwarded to family and friends. The same applies to correspondence sent to the banished person.

Eight months later, when I made a return trip to Maldives, I met Hassan walking, free again, on the streets of Male'. He was in good spirits, and while without any real work yet, he was hopeful he might be given a government job in the new administration that would be coming into office in a few months.

#### 7.7 OTHER CASES OF BANISHMENT:

Another case of banishment involved three affines, *lianoo* and *delianoo*-Abbas Ibrahim, Maumoon Gayoom, and Ibrahim Samari of Enderimaage--who were banished from their house simultaneously. One of them later became President of Maldives.

Living in the same house, Enderimaage, were the eldest brother, Abbas Ibrahim, his wife, Zahe, his two sisters, Nasreena and Farisha, and their husbands, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom and Ibrahim Samari Maniku, respectively, as well as the siblings' recently widowed mother, Hava Manike. Only one month before the men (the *lianoo* and the two *delianoo*) were banished, the siblings' father had died on his way home from Haj with this first wife. The fourth sibling, a brother Ilyas Ibrahim, who happened to be the chief assistant (the personal secretary), to the President, lived with his wife, Nasira, in her family's house, Kolige. Her family was considered the richest in Maldives, and her brother the country's only "millionaire".

At that time, it was 1974, the dining room of their house, Enderimaage, was in the front part of the compound, near the front

wall on the street. The three male affines (Abbas, Maumoon, and Samari) used to talk there among themselves and sometimes criticised the government for all kinds of things, including the current inflationary prices in the market. According to them, a certain neighbour, who was known in Male' as a "spy", must have heard them from the street and reported them. (After their banishment, they changed rooms for dining, moving to a room in the back of the house compound, on the far side of the back courtyard, out of earshot of any spying neighbours).

Each of the Enderimaage men was arrested without warning, almost simultaneously at his respective government office, by policemen, taken to a judge, and sentenced immediately to banishment without trial. They were accused of plotting to overthrow the government. While the three men said they believed a spying neighbour had reported them, others later said they thought that the youngest of them, Ibrahim Samari Maniku, the least experienced in the politics of Male', had given them away by repeating some of their conversations in his office. Others believed that the other brother, the powerful Secretary to the President, Ilyas, whether he had reported them or not, had allowed their arrest and banishment in order to teach them a lesson. He would have feared that their political discussions would eventually get him into trouble with his "boss".

Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, the one viewed by Nasir's government as the most influential of the three, and, therefore, the most "dangerous", had only recently returned home to Maldives after years abroad studying in Egypt and teaching Islamic Studies in Nigeria. He was already very popular among the common people (*miihun*) of Male' for his sermons at Friday Mosque prayers. The assumption was that Nasir's government wanted to teach him a lesson about the limits of Maldivian

politics. Thus, he was banished to the most remote island from Male'-- in the far northwest of Maldives to a single island called Makunudu, an island not even in an atoll but out in the western ocean all alone and separated from other islands by a deep, wide channel. Traditionally, that island had been one of the two islands to which the most dangerous and usually royal political criminals were banished. Gayoom was sentenced to four years, but after he reached the island, the sentence was shortened to four months. During that period, he lived in the best house<sup>1</sup> on Makunadu and made many friends there, gaining great respect among the islanders as a very learned and gentle man.

President Gayoom attributed much of his election success to the understanding of Maldives he gained while in banishment and to the friends he made on the island. While banished, he spent a great deal of time contemplating and studying his own native language, *Dhivehi*; studying the history of Maldives; thinking about Maldivian politics; and planning how he might write a book about it all someday. Also, during this period, he began planning how someday he could become President of Maldives. In retrospect, he thought it was important for him to go through a period of banishment to prove his Maldivian-ness, like earning a badge of honour in his own country since he had spent so many years abroad studying and teaching. It was his rite de passage into the politics of the Maldivian elite.

Gayoom's *lianoo*, Abbas, and his *delianoo*, Ibrahim Samari, the two male affines who were banished at the same time, received long sentences that were also shortened. Each of them, also, made strong

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<sup>1</sup> Years later when Gayoom was elected President, the islanders of Makunudu turned the house of his banishment into a national shrine.

friends on their respective islands. After they were released and returned to Male', they maintained ties with their respective islands of banishment by receiving the islanders laden with gifts into their Male' house, Enderimaage. The women of Enderimaage frequently took their children on holiday to visit one of those islands, and the old mother went along also to that same island for medical treatment because her son, Abbas, had found some good practitioners of herbal therapy during his banishment there.

While the Enderimaage men were banished, the two sisters, their children and their mother remained alone with a few servants in the house. Abbas' wife, Zahe, moved with her children back across town to live with her parents while her husband was gone. The brother, Ilyas, who was not banished, came daily to visit his family's house, to help them and finance the household, but no one seemed to expect him in his role as personal secretary to the President, to do anything to help his brother or his two affines. Only one of the sisters' longtime friends, Hajja, came to visit. Maumoon's wife, Nasreena, now the First Lady of the Maldives, said that the period with their men in banishment taught her never to trust anyone outside her family again because all the many people she had thought were their friends proved not to be. Everyone was too afraid to visit their house at all during that time.

When Maumoon returned, he was given a higher post than he had occupied in government before. Not long afterwards, though, he was supposed to be banished again--this time for allegedly criticising the President's policy on tourism and alcoholic beverages--but, instead, he was imprisoned for a short time in the jail on Male'. He saw that as another ordeal to endure in Maldivian political life, part of his ongoing *rite de passage*.

If a member of the elite who has been banished for political reasons is taken ill, the person may usually return to Male' for treatment. For example, when the former Minister of Agriculture, Farouk Ismail, who had been banished in 1974 on suspicion of plotting against President Nasir's government, became ill in 1977, he was allowed to return to the capital for medical treatment. He was allowed to stay in his house in Male', but under tight house arrest. Guards were installed outside, the telephone lines cut, and no visitors other than his wife, children, parents, and house servants, were allowed to enter the house. Later, when he returned to his place of banishment on a distant island, only his daughter, Faida Farouk, was allowed to visit him. Finally, in July of 1978, he was released as part of a general amnesty for all political prisoners granted by President Nasir upon his announcement of his forthcoming retirement. In August of 1978, when I returned to Male' on a short visit, I met him for the first time. Then Farouk Ismail was very bitter. One of his worst offenses in the past was that he had always been friendly to foreigners, for which he got into political trouble as far back as 1967, a time when few other Maldivians would dare speak to a foreigner.

Still another interesting case of banishment involved the former Prime Minister, Ahmed Zaki, who was banished in 1975. He was said by the President to be too troublesome. Nasir said that he was unable to rule as long as Zaki was around making trouble. The following events occurred on the day he was banished:

According to President Nasir's son, Mohamed, the decision to banish Zaki was made at the lunch table--Mohamed said many important affairs of Maldivian state were decided at that daily meal in the Presidential Palace. That day the shipping magnate, Ali Maniku, was in Male' and having lunch with the President. Also at the table, as

usual, were the President's wife Naseema, their two young children, Ismail and Aisha, and Nasir's two older sons by an earlier wife, Mohamed and Ali. Ali Maniku and Naseema sat on either side of the President who, as always, was at the head of the table in the palace, Nasir's huge private residence called Velaanaage.

Ali Maniku and the First Lady began reporting bad things about Zaki and his chief of protocol, Jaleel (also his cousin, both *beefulun*, the class which both Ali Maniku and Naseema were said to be bitter against). For several years leading up to that day, both Maniku and Naseema had complained constantly to President Nasir about Zaki and Jaleel, who were also Nasir's cousins. The day Zaki was banished, Ali Maniku came specially to lunch to tell Nasir that he should take back all the old powers of the Presidency, some of which he had given up to Prime Minister Zaki, originally because of Nasir's health problems. Ali Maniku and Naseema reportedly were the only ones talking, complaining, saying that Zaki was no administrator, and that he and Jaleel were giving all the favours only to their old *beefulun* families and friends. Nasir listened in silence.

Finally, without a word of advance notice, President Nasir got up from the table and went to the telephone in the same dining room. In front of everyone eating, he made five telephone calls, one right after the other:

- 1) to Sakra Naeem, the President's "reporter" and editor of the Dhivehi-language daily newspaper, ordering him to come to the Palace, Velaanaage. When Naeem arrived, Nasir told him to go at once to Radio Maldives and announce every ten minutes that the President was calling a state of emergency.

- 2) to Zaki, who lived across the street from the President's house, ordering him to stay in his house, Orchidmage.
- 3) to the Telephone Exchange, to cut all lines to Zaki's house and the Office of the Prime Minister.
- 4) to his most loyal aide, Abdul Hannan, Minister of Public Safety, head of the police and army, to take Zaki to Dhunidhoo, a prison island just off Male'.
- 5) to his Minister of Education, then Adnan Hussein, to close all the schools.

After giving all his orders by phone and in person to Naeem, President Nasir left the dining room without another word, went to his room and took his regular afternoon nap. As Nasir's son, Mohamed, observed, the President had there and then shown his wife and his friend (the country's chief financial supporter and Minister of Shipping) that he was the President and could take charge and act against the old elite. It was also said that the whole process showed that Nasir had complete faith in his Minister of Public Safety, Abdul Hannan (who was five years later banished by the next government for having "obeyed all the orders of Nasir" during his government).

Zaki was never tried for any crimes. He was kept on the nearby island of Dhunidhoo for almost two years before being sent to another remote island, Fuamulak. Comparable to Makunudu in the north, where Gayoom had been banished, Fuamulak in the south was also not in an atoll but off, alone, far from any other land with no beach for boats.

Zaki had been very popular, especially with the old *beefulun* families whom he favored as his own class, unlike his cousin Nasir, the President whose marriage to the daughter of a *beekalun* had connected

him more to the rising *beekalun*. Zaki had made several trips abroad on diplomatic missions, which Nasir never did as the head of state, leaving it all to his Prime Minister. It was reported that Zaki had on those occasions become friends with both Mrs. Gandhi and Mrs. Bandaranaike, the prime ministers of India and Sri Lanka, who treated him as a head of state, which he was not; thus Zaki was suspected in Maldives of plotting with those foreign powers against Nasir's government.

Zaki was also released in September of 1978 by Nasir in his general amnesty before retiring from the Presidency. When Zaki returned wearing a sarong (*mundu*) like an islander, everyone remarked on this-- a Male' man, indeed the former Prime Minister (the office was abolished after Nasir banished Zaki in 1975), looking and dressing like an islander. A large welcoming reception was held for him immediately upon his return, and he was already expected to be given a high post in the new government. He publicly insisted that he held no grudge against President Nasir. Indeed, Zaki was made Ambassador to the United Nations, a post which he held into the new government for nearly three years that time<sup>2</sup>, again being out of Male' all the time. Thus, the position of ambassador, while an honour in one way, is viewed as another kind of banishment, at least as another way of keeping a potential rival out of the country.

Until the 1980-1981 "witch-hunt cycle" (described in the following Chapter 8) in which two women were banished, people had said that in modern history only one woman had been banished for political reasons, though a number of elite women have been put under house

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<sup>2</sup> Ahmed Zaki is again in 1994-95 back in New York as the Maldives' Ambassador to the United Nations.

arrest. That woman was the outspoken daughter of the first President, Ameen Didi, who was killed by a mob in 1953. She was banished by Nasir in 1967 during what came to be called "Ameena's coup", which she and her husband Mahir were alleged to have plotted. This followed her having worked closely with Nasir as his private secretary. Later she rose to power again in the new government of President Gayoom and became a member of parliament.

Her former husband, Mahir (her second husband of three), was banished so frequently by his kinsman, President Nasir, that he was almost completely out of the politico-centered society, and no longer had a role anymore except as an example of someone who has spent most of his adult life in banishment. By the late 1970s, Mahir's sons felt so politically tainted by him that they completely allied themselves with his other former wife, their mother's father's house. It was safer there for them politically.

## 7.8 ULTIMATE BANISHMENT--EXILE

There is no word, other than the same *aruvaalun* for banishment, used to describe the state of exile from Maldives. But, historically, many former Maldivian rulers and other aspiring politicians have spent their last years in exile, sometimes described as a kind of voluntary banishment.

Traditionally, if rulers were ousted while they were abroad or if particular persons considered great political threats to the Maldivian government went out of the country, they were simply sent word while they were overseas that it would be best for them never to return. Those persons then suffered the worst kind of banishment, exile from their beloved Maldives. Usually exile was permanent, or they lived with

little hope that it would ever be safe for them to return and become part of Maldivian society again.

For example, President Nasir's uncle, who ruled the country after leading the coup that deposed and killed the first President, was ultimately himself put into exile by his nephew. The uncle, Mohamed Ibrahim Didi, was visiting in Ceylon at the time and simply received a message not to come home. He abided by the "order", knowing the history of previous rulers. And there he remained, reportedly (as the story went in Maldives) somewhat crazy and bitter. Ultimately, that nephew, former President Nasir, himself went into exile ever since he retired in 1978 and moved his residence to Singapore.

In the case of the Addu rebel, Afeef Didi, who did the worst thing imaginable in Maldives (by leading a revolution against the Male' government and establishing a separate state in the southern atolls), the punishment was banishment to another country far across the Indian Ocean. He was helped by the British into exile in the Seychelles in 1963 and continued living there for the rest of his life, never feeling safe enough to return to live at home, though he was supposed to have been pardoned officially.

After the witch-hunt cycle began in May of 1980, quite a few leading elite Maldivians went into exile, some only temporarily and others more permanently.<sup>3</sup> In each case, as with the previous cases of leading Maldivian political figures living in exile abroad, the official word in Male' is usually that the person's exile is self-imposed and voluntary and that they would be welcome to return at any time. Yet those persons in exile have a great political sense about elite life in Male'

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<sup>3</sup> See the Preface and Chapter 8 on "Patterns and Cycles of Political Conflict".

and believe they would not be safe. Their own sense is usually corroborated by repeated messages over the years from family and friends at home urging them to stay safely abroad away from Maldives until the political climate might change.

### **7.9 POLITICAL BENEFITS OF BANISHMENT**

Banishment often appears useful for the elite who undergo it. How they survive it politically depends on a combination of factors, including their behaviour afterwards and the political climate to which they return. For many, banishment becomes an essential step towards entering the highest level of political life. Indeed, one leading Maldivian, Ahmed Naseem, when asked what he planned to do since he had been out of government for some time, responded that he first had to do his “national service, meaning banishment”. Naseem made this statement in Male’ only a few days before the 1980 coup-plot was revealed and before the 1980 witch-hunt began. Only days later he was accused of plotting the coup and became known as “the most dangerous” man in Maldives. He was arrested, signed a statement of admission and then sentenced to life-imprisonment, not banishment, even worse. Immediately, Maldivians speculated that he would someday be viewed as a hero.

Conversely, President Nasir spent only a couple of years outside Maldives, studying in Ceylon. Most of his life he spent in the government, carrying one portfolio after another. He was never banished. But his successor, President Gayoom, spent thirteen years studying in Egypt and then another couple of years teaching Islamic studies in Nigeria. It is possible that his experience of banishment was a necessary step toward demonstrating his desire to re-enter Maldivian

society, the political elite. It was, at any rate, an initiation rite for him, and he himself actually acknowledged it as such afterwards.

Banishment brings important island connections to those members of the Male' elite who have been banished. It creates food-supplies, labour-pools, and important political alliances-- some passed down for generations. Similarly, the connections created give the Male' elite places to visit on holidays or islands to go for special therapy. (On a trip I took to visit the northern islands with some members of the Male' elite, the only islands where we spent the night, always with the chiefs, were ones where the fathers and grandfathers of the visitors from Male' had been banished). By the same token, the houses of Male' elite become centres for those islanders when they come to Male'. These houses provide places to live in the capital, through which to obtain an education and food in Male', in exchange for work as servants.

In conclusion, banishment is the quintessential punishment for the Male' elite. Maldivian society, controlled as it is by a politico-centered elite, resident in the single urban and central capital island, implies that the worst state of affairs is to be outside Male'. Thus, banishment, by which a person is driven out or removed by authority from a home or country or place of usual residence, is the worst imaginable catastrophe. Banishment is the corollary of this supremely centripetal state. It is the centrifugal element that can suddenly fling a player far from the centre where his only real game is played. Banishment is the counteracting force to the political nature of Maldivian elite society, as well as to its obsession with centeredness. The nature of such a politico-centred society, consequently, implies that banishment will be the paramount and most effective punishment.

# Chapter 8

## PATTERNS AND CYCLES OF POLITICAL CONFLICT

### **8.1 VIOLENCE AND THE IDEOLOGY OF NON-VIOLENCE**

Maldivians pride themselves on being “non-violent”. They describe themselves as “gentle people” (*madu maitheri*) or “peaceful” (*amaankan*). They say they do not like violence (*thalha folha*), and they believe themselves to be non-violent. In physical terms that is generally true. The kind of psychological violence<sup>1</sup> done against each other in the elite is, however, of a high level. And the psychological violence levelled is doubly effective because, usually, one cannot fight back physically, but must use only the same weapons--gossip, slander, and ostracism. Physical violence is rare, except historically in the intense power struggles within the tiny elite and when mobs (*havaru*) sporadically gather (*havaruevvung*) and erupt periodically into violence. Physical violence in Maldives occurs only when political pressure becomes so intense that people are released for mob action against the enemies: foreign enemies, as in the case of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century; the Southern Maldivians who had become foreign by establishing an independent state; the foreign yachtsmen attacked by Maldivian “pirates” in the late 1980s); and the Maldivian scapegoats (members of the elite) attacked by mobs (e.g., against President Ameen Didi in late 1953) and the internecine struggles between individuals

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<sup>1</sup> Maloney (1980:374-75) also remarks upon the high level of “psychological pain” imposed upon Maldivians by their society.

within the elite<sup>2</sup> and “witch-hunt” cycles against groups throughout recent Maldivian history (see below).

The fatal mob attack in 1953 on the first President, Ameen Didi, all alone in the crowd, was a prime example of this physical violence sporadically unleashed by Maldivian mobs (*havaruevvung*). He was beaten, stoned, and, still suffering, left on the beach. Every Maldivian, whether alive or not at the time of the mobbing of Ameen Didi, will always carry a memory of the story of what happened to that first President, and the fear of mobs (*havaruevvung*) is very effective as a measure of social control.

During the 1980 trials, when the alleged coup-plotter, Naseem, was paraded through the streets, the mobs were allowed to taunt him and shout and flail their fists. A foreigner, one of the mercenaries allegedly hired first by the alleged coup-plotters and later by Maldivian Government to testify against Naseem, recounted what a frightening experience it was when he was in the police headquarters identifying Naseem. From the streets could be heard the most hostile noises and shouting from the people, which went on day and night for a month outside both the prison and Naseem’s family’s house, where some stones were thrown over the wall into the windows. Still another foreigner, who observed the crowds gathered by the government to shout their allegiance to the current government and to denounce former President Nasir and his affines, said that it was extremely frightening because it verged towards erupting into violent mob behaviour.

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<sup>2</sup> See the *Tarikh* (in Bell 1921; 1940) and Maloney (1980:175-210).

Maldivians do not like to discuss this aspect of their society. Their ideology is that they are truly gentle and peaceful. They do not like to admit how brutally their first President was killed. Only the Adduans and Suvadivans will eventually tell about how the Male' leaders opened fire on the islanders in the south and burnt their islands. In hushed tones, some people will talk about the torture of Adduans following their secession and of former opponents of the Nasir regime and, later, the torture of the alleged coup-plotters against the Gayoom government. Maldivians steadfastly deny that their people molested foreign yachts even though the sailors reported and showed the ropeburns on their arms and necks. Yet despite this secrecy and embarrassment about violence in their society, all Maldivians, especially the elite (as the prime targets for any violence), greatly fear the violence that they know can erupt from unleashed mobs while at the same time, vigorously proclaiming their national ideology of non-violence.

## 8.2 JEALOUSY, ENVY AND REVENGE:

Jealousy, envy (*hasadhaveri*) of other members of the elite, and obsession with revenge (*badaluhifung*) dominate political action in Maldives. The elite group in power controls the country's little wealth, and the former elite group becomes envious and seeks to seize that power (and thus wealth) from the incumbent powerholders. The first method they use is talking against the government, and ultimately they can plot coups (*bahavai*), but this leads to counter-action by the government against the suspected opponents of their rule. The counter-action takes the form of punishment, usually severe in psychological terms because by house-arrest, imprisonment, banishment, even sometimes confiscation of property, the powerholders almost completely obliterate a major part of the elite for a period of time.

Then, much later when that group returns and finally seizes power, the memory of what they went through under the former government and the persistent envy of those who “had” while they “had not” guides much of their action while in power. In other words, members of the Maldivian elite spend much of their time retaliating against what they believe were the injustices of the previous powerholders.

Several Maldivians went so far as to describe their society as based upon what they called “the politics of envy”. The most prominent objects of envy are, first of all, property, and then women. Many of my informants said that people were envious of all kinds of possessions, of which there are not many in Maldives. For instance, many of those in power during the time of this study acknowledged that those members of the elite out of power were envious of the power-holders’ education and foreign travel which, like property and women, were possessed by the powerholders because they ruled, and by ruling they could determine the allocation of the few valuable commodities in their country. Likewise, many of those out of power acknowledged that indeed they were envious of the benefits of those in power.

As a consequence, when another group comes into power, revenge (*badaluhifung*) is not only sought against the former powerholders because of the punishments they had exacted, but because of their possessions. As one former powerholder, then in exile, said, “They’ve taken away, almost destroyed, our livelihood, but we will come back”. That person’s group once held most of the wealth in the country and believed that it has been taken away and the families all put out of the system by house-arrest, imprisonment, banishment and overseas exile because a grave injustice had been done that must be righted in the course of time. As a result, people in both elite groups (the insiders and the outsiders) are endlessly involved in devising schemes, either to

come back into power or to hold on to the power. It creates a society that, as one Maldivian described it, is based on intrigue and suspicion in which everyone is plotting and scheming most of the time, and those who survive always play a “double game”.

This leads to a society in which everyone is watching over his/her shoulder while at the same time trying to watch the path ahead. There is a constant fear that someone, out of jealousy, might report one for some “crime” and thereby promote themselves. Members of the elite live in constant fear that someone’s envy will lead to their eviction from Male’ society. They live under the constant threat of banishment because their conversations are listened to by anyone around them with access, and their actions are observed and discussed by the other members of the elite. The object of the game becomes how to hide a single aspect of one’s life.

The modern elite watch each other’s actions just as their predecessors are reported to have done in the royal palaces. For example, the few people owning cars in the late 1970s memorised each other’s licenses so they were able to see who was visiting whom and then report it in various conversations as soon as possible to speculate on the implications. Children learn from an early age to report to their parents about whatever they see anywhere, e.g. who speaks to whom on the streets and who they see visiting another house. In fact, Maldivians, the elite, are so fearful that they might stand accused of collaborating with another person that the primary greeting on the streets, if given at all, is a quick raise of the eyebrows. Usually people walking or bicycling down the street are given no greeting by the people watching them in silence from behind their house walls.

In Maldives, there are no political parties, no open opposition, and great fear of political discussions. Most of the time, it is against the law to discuss politics. Yet people are always aware of the opposition, and often the government creates an opposition by its action against the group of families it is against, from ancient envy and desire for revenge. For instance, in the 1980-81 cycle of revenge, from the day the new government came into power, affines and friends of the former President were followed by policemen. Guards were posted outside a few of their houses. Supporters of Naseem, the alleged chief coup-plotter in 1980, say they sympathise with him and understand why he was driven to it, because he was harassed constantly by this blatant police surveillance.

### **8.3 SUSPICION AND ASSUMPTION OF UNDERLYING POLITICAL MOTIVATIONS:**

Politics and allusions to political maneuverings pervade (often only by innuendo and in a kind of code language) the daily conversations of the nation's elite in Male'. Members of the Maldivian elite are highly analytical of all actions, behaviour and words in daily life, always speculating about what really happened, what the real motivation was for any deed. Almost any action by a member of the elite is analysed by the others in terms of political motivations, and almost every action is given a politically negative connotation by the observers. As an example, just before completing my fieldwork and leaving Maldives in 1978, I gave a farewell party and invited a couple of ministers whom I had not really expected to attend. The following day, a friend, Abbas, then out of power and envious of their power, told me he was sure that the two ministers (who had, in fact, surprised everyone by coming to the party) had only come to spy on who else was there.

Several years later, when one of those very ministers was out of power and living in exile at my London flat, Abbas' brother, Ilyas, then Minister of Public Safety, and the Foreign Minister came through London and called me, inviting me to meet them for dinner at their hotel. I spent several hours in conversation with these men, who had also been my friends in Male', and never once did they ask about this minister who they certainly would have known had sought refuge with me. But the next day, when I talked with the former minister in exile and another Maldivian living in England, they both warned me that the two visitors had only been seeking information about the former minister. Although that seemed not to be the case to me, their ideology is such that there always must be some ulterior motive behind any such action.

When a member of the elite moves from the microscope of Male' to the outside world, overseas, for any reason--whether a member of the government (*sarukaruge*) on official business or a member of the former government (*kurige sarukaruge*) in temporary exile--then that person becomes highly suspect. For instance, one of the causes always given for the banishment of Prime Minister Zaki by President Nasir was that everyone suspected Zaki had been plotting with foreign leaders, like Mrs. Gandhi and Mrs. Bandaranaike, during his official trips abroad. Now he is Ambassador to the United Nations in the new government and is suspect again.

Another example of the automatic suspicion among the elite was that just after the former President announced his retirement plans and Maumoon had been elected to succeed him (there were still several months remaining before the changeover), the President's wife and her best friend, a minister, and that minister's husband made trips abroad. First, Moomina, the Health Minister had attended a WHO meeting in

the Soviet Union and then returned through Singapore and Colombo with her husband and her sister's husband (the President's *lianoo*). The group back in Male' preparing to come into power and to oust those of whom they had been so envious, began circulating the rumor, which they believed, that these three had been soliciting aid from Soviet diplomats to overthrow the new government. For the accusers, the proof lay in the fact that the Health Minister had gone first to the Soviet Union and then had met her husband and sister's husband (who later did allegedly become the chief coup-plotter), secretly, outside Maldives, to discuss the plans and meet Soviet agents abroad.

#### 8.4 PERIODIC ERUPTIONS OF OPEN POLITICAL CONFLICT:

Smoldering envy (*hasadhaveri*) and desire for revenge (*badaluhifung*) lie in relative quiet under the surface of Maldivian society while the "opposition" is banished and kept out of the system until a new configuration of that "outside" group takes power, and then the cycle begins anew. At intermittent points in the cycle there are eruptions, in which the mob plays a dominant role, either in bringing about the overthrow of the government or in proclaiming its support of the government in power.

Usually tranquil, reserved and non-demonstrative, the Maldivian Islanders (elite leading the non-elite) explode periodically (in recent history about every seven years, more or slightly less). Observing the recent pattern of these outbursts reveals the following point as the peak in the cycle: people march in the street, dressed in their finest, clean clothes, to demonstrate for or against the government in power, depending on the current tide and always against a suspected enemy of the country. (A Maldivian enemy is a *baghavai therieh*, or traitor,

and often is accused of collaborating with foreigners to bring about a coup).

Such demonstrations, though superficially giving a carnival appearance, verge on mob action that can be pushed to violence by the slightest whisper of provocation. Politics clearly is the one sphere in which violence might erupt in this generally non-violent society.

### 8.5 THE 1980 ALLEGED COUP-PLOT AND SUBSEQUENT WITCH-HUNT:

An eruption into government-led mob activities against alleged traitors was the state in Maldives throughout 1980-81. The result was a “witch-hunt”, so described because it was never known whether there was actually a coup-plot or whether the President’s *lianoo* and other close advisers had actually created the entire story and led the people to go against the former government to seal the new ruler’s hold on power. Anyone who had been closely connected to the former President and his *lianoo* became suspect and were chased down and sought like “witches”.

In late April and May of 1980, the people living in Male’ erupted again after a six-year lull since the last witch-hunt. This time they rose up in response to President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom’s announcement in an “Extraordinary Session” of the Majlis that details of a coup attempt had been uncovered. The President declared that the Maldivian, Ahmed Naseem (a founder of tourism, a former Deputy Minister of Fisheries, and then still the *lianoo* to the former President Nasir), had allegedly confessed (“singing like a bird in jail”) to National Security interrogators that he had devised the plot, which included his hiring foreign mercenaries to execute it.

The week before President Gayoom's announcement, his own *lianoo*, Ilyas Ibrahim, the head of the National Security Service (army and police) had said that the Maldives government had been tipped off in late February that such an internationally planned coup attempt was being made, and he said directly that the only person with enough money to do that was former President Nasir. (He, of course, did not point to his own *lianoo*, Ali Maniku, the country's chief financial supporter, as the one Maldivian who did have such money).

Not until they forcibly obtained a confession from Naseem, however, were they able to pin it on anyone so strongly. Immediately after the President's public revelations, which were televised, for about five weeks there were daily demonstrations in favour of the incumbent Gayoom and against the former President. People burnt pictures of Nasir. They stayed outside the house of Naseem's family, chanting and even hurling stones through windows.

Former President Nasir, who was living in Singapore with his wife, the elder sister of Naseem, firmly denied any involvement in the plot, saying that he had had no knowledge of it until it reached the world press. But the Maldives government maintained that it had proof otherwise and refused to accept his denial. Later Gayoom's government alleged that Naseem had confessed that Nasir had "masterminded" the coup-plot. Yet over a year later, when the trials were finally held, there was no mention of Nasir's involvement. Eventually, Nasir was tried *in absentia* for completely different charges--for misappropriating government funds, which was the original charge levelled against him at the beginning of the long witch-hunt which had started immediately after he left office in November of 1978.

At the peak of the cycle, when the demonstrations were taking place, on May 16 (the first announcement of the uncovered coup-plot was made April 28), President Gayoom himself led a massive, hours-long demonstration against his predecessor, Ibrahim Nasir, and his “crowd” (*Nasiruge miihun tha*), Nasir’s “cronies” (*Nasiruge gaayy miihun*). Gayoom and other leading orators, all by then open opponents of former President Nasir, including some of his former ministers (all masters of the double game), spoke to crowds of between 15,000 and 20,000 (the population of Male’ was then about 35,000) and discussed their views of how Nasir came to power, telling how he had been one of the leaders in the overthrow of the first President, and how he had allegedly mishandled government money.

During all that time, waiting in prison with Naseem were his brother and a number of his friends (the word used for friend, being *miituru*, meaning “to run together” with the connotation that friends are always plotting). At the same time, under house arrest were the other members of the two main houses, Hikifinifenmaage and Nooraanee Villa, targets of the national campaign of vilification. Hikifinifenmaage was the house of the parents of the former First Lady and her siblings, including Naseem, all accused as coup-plotters. Nooraanee Villa was the house of the parents of Moomina, the former First Lady’s best friend and former minister then under suspicion, and her husband, another founder of the tourist industry and former deputy minister of fisheries. Also, attached to Nooraanee Villa were Moomina’s siblings--her sister, Mana, Naseem’s wife, and her brother, the former loyal Minister of Public Safety under Nasir--also accused of participation in the conspiracy to overthrow the government.

The trials took place nearly a year later after constant investigations, newspaper articles, and harassment of the houses under arrest. They

were tried according to Muslim Shariath law, in which only two witnesses are required. In several instances, however, the government said that it would not reveal the names of the witnesses because it would hurt national security. They even brought in two of the former SAS mercenaries (paying them since they said they had not received any money for the coup that never happened) and proclaimed them heroes for not carrying out the coup, and used their mercenary evidence against Naseem.

### 8.6 LEADERS OF THE WITCH-HUNT:

Orchestrating the “witch-hunt” were the two *lianoos* of the incumbent President Gayoom against the *lianoos* of the former President Nasir. Gayoom’s *lianoos*, Abbas, had been bitter for years against former President Nasir, and because he was often openly critical, he had been banished and imprisoned on several occasions. When Nasir was ruling the country as prime minister, Abbas had worked in his office, but later Abbas and his father, who previously had been devoted to the first President, were accused of participating in the 1967 coup plot against Nasir. For years Abbas railed against what he considered the injustice and the harshness of Nasir’s rule. Then Nasir married Naseema, a woman whom Abbas had at one time wanted to marry and whose sister Abbas had ardently tried to marry until his suit was rejected by the woman’s father. That man, then, became the father-in-law of the President, which set Abbas even more against Nasir and his affines. The affines over the years gained more and more power and wealth, as they were the founders of tourism under the mandate of President Nasir. Finally, when Abbas’ sister’s husband was elected to succeed Nasir, through the great help of both his *lianoos*, Maumoon Gayoom’s *lianoos* accompanied him into power. Abbas took immediate action against those he felt had wronged him in the past. He bluntly

said to the aging father-in-law of the ex-President, the father of the daughters Abbas had wanted to marry, "Now that we have the power, we can do anything we want. And I want to have you cut up into little pieces and fed to the crows".

Thus, Abbas and his brother and their friends, all of whom had grievances against the former President and his affines and their close friends, finally got their revenge. They used their power to "tear down" the houses of their enemies. Maldivian pundits always cautioned that the tide would turn again someday. Later, if the pattern of cycles should continue (and there is no reason for it not to), the group under attack can return and do the same to the current powerholders.

The other *lianoo* of President Gayoom was Ilyas Ibrahim. He was younger than Abbas, but because he was a clever sycophant, always playing the double game and not outspoken like his brother, he had managed to hold great power in both governments. For years he served as private secretary and right-hand-man to former President Nasir. Then he manipulated the ascendancy to power of his sister's popular husband, Maumoon. Then when Nasir went out and Gayoom came in, suddenly the pressure was on from his own brother, Abbas, and from many other members of the elite who had been against Nasir to destroy Nasir and all his affines and their friends, who had held such power and wealth.

The trouble for Ilyas was, of course, that, as the personal secretary and chief aide, he had been involved in all that Nasir had done and certainly would have known if Nasir had done anything illegal or unjust. The pressure was strong, so very cleverly, Ilyas managed to lead the witch-hunt against Nasir in such a way that people could not ask,

at least not aloud, about Ilyas' involvement in Nasir's regime. By then, of course, Ilyas was the *lianoo* to President Gayoom.

Ilyas became the head of the army and police in the new government of his *lianoo*, Gayoom. He also maintained his attachment to his own *lianoo*, the rich brother of his wife, Ali Maniku, who had also always been very involved in everything Nasir had done, but always managed to play a double game by being absolutely essential to the survival of the Maldives because of his wealth and control over the Maldives Shipping Company and the tourism industry, and, because he claimed to be only a businessman and not interested or involved in politics. The only persons who could prove differently were Nasir (whose reputation they had ruined, at least temporarily in Maldives) and Ilyas (who would never report on his rich *lianoo*, the shipping magnate, because of his dependence on Ali Maniku's support and because of what he knew that Ali Maniku and his siblings could reveal about him).

It was also believed that Ilyas had long harboured a number of jealousies. Until Nasir married his third wife, the much younger Naseema, Ilyas had been very close to Nasir and was privy to almost everything the President was doing. After Nasir's marriage to Naseema, Ilyas kept a right-hand position but never exerted as much influence as Naseema, once she was living in the Presidential Palace. It was often said that Ilyas was extremely jealous of her. At the same time, he was also thought to be secretly in love with Naseema and thus jealous of Nasir. He was also jealous of all her family, siblings and parents who paid him little attention, and who were the real objects of all her affection and love. He always had been especially jealous of her younger brother Naseem, on whom she doted and whom it was reported that she was grooming for the Presidency.

Conflict broke out between Naseema and Ilyas when the latter promoted his wife's brother (as opposed to Naseema's brother, Naseem, or her friend, Moomina) into the Presidency following Nasir's unexpected retirement in 1978. Ilyas also was said to be jealous of the power and influence of Naseema's best female friends, Moomina and Aishath, and of Moomina's brother's relationship with Nasir. They, too, became his targets in the witch-hunt of 1980.

Yet, throughout this witch-hunt, Ilyas, who had led the attack on Nasir and Naseema's family, continued to play a double game by maintaining contact with her in exile and even helping her when he would not help the others. For instance, he arranged specially to have her passport renewed in Male' while she was in exile, whereas he reportedly refused to do the same for Nasir's son, Ahmed, who was then in exile in Sweden and stateless.

By the same token, it was also believed that Ilyas' sister (Nasreena, the wife of President Gayoom) had always been jealous of the former President's young wife, who was her predecessor as First Lady, basically because for years while her own dear brother, Ilyas, was Secretary to President Nasir and practically living in Nasir's palace, the sister Nasreena heard nothing but praise for everything about Naseema. Ilyas' sister would have been unaware that her brother continued to stay in communication with the former First Lady during the height of the national witch-hunt frenzy of 1980-1981.

### **8.7 THE 1981 CLIMAX OF THE WITCH-HUNT**

By late 1981, the "witch-hunt" in Maldives reached a climax with the banishment, exile, and house arrest of most of the alleged "traitors" (*baghavai therieih*): Naseem, the former *lianoo* of the former President,

was imprisoned for life; his brother, another former *lianoo* of Nasir, was sentenced to eleven years of imprisonment; Saleema, their sister, the only woman manager of a tourist resort, and former *fahari* of the former President, was banished to a distant island for life; Mohamed Kaleyfaan, their father (then in his seventies) and former father-in-law of the former President, was sentenced to ten years of banishment; the rest of the in-laws' (*lianoo*) house, Hikifinifenmaage (with the old mother and Saleema's and Naseem's children, and two other sisters and their husbands) was put off bounds to the rest of Male' people; Mana, the wife of Naseem and the sister of the former First Lady's best friend, was sentenced to banishment for five and one-half years in the northernmost atoll; Kandi, the husband of Mana's sister, Moomina, was banished for eleven years; Moomina, the sister of Mana, wife of Kandi, best friend of the former First Lady, sister of the former Minister of Public Safety, and herself the former Minister of Health and popular member of parliament, was sentenced to banishment, then pardoned, and then went into self-imposed exile on advice that Ilyas would not stop until he had her imprisoned for life; Hannan, her brother and former Minister of Public Safety and loyal friend of Nasir, was sentenced to lifetime banishment; Maizan Ali Maniku, one of Naseem's good friends, the former director of Radio Maldives under Nasir, banished for ten years; Kuda Sikka, a friend of Naseem's and former Director of Telecommunications under Nasir, who visited Nasir in Singapore, banished for ten years; Kuwa Mohamed Maniku, a businessman and friend of Naseem's, whose wife was first married to Nasir's son who had divorced her to marry her sister, banished for ten years; Mohamed Haleem, brother of Hannan, Moomina and Mana, banished for talking with his sister's husband, Kandi, while on a government trip to the island where Kandi was banished; Hussain Haleem, the only sibling of the Nooraanee Villa house not officially banished, but placed in a kind of banishment at the United Nations,

where he was left for three years (and while at home on vacation, he was under constant surveillance by the police even though he was a Maldivian diplomat); Ahmed Nasir and his wife and son, in exile in Sweden, after the Maldivian government refused to give them new passports when they had visited his father in Singapore; Naseema Mohamed, former First Lady and former wife of Nasir and sister of Naseem, in exile in Australia; Ibrahim Nasir and his two children by Naseema, in exile in Singapore and Canada while a trial of him *in absentia* began in Maldives; Mohamed Nasir, a son of Nasir's by his second marriage, died tragically in Europe in early 1982 after wandering around abroad throughout 1980 and 1981 in self-imposed exile, probably fearing to return, though his other brother Ali had managed to talk his way out of a Maldivian jail.

During the intense period (1980-1981) of that particular "witch-hunt" cycle, a number of families were lumped together as the "common enemy" (*baghavai therieh*) of Maldives (Nasir and his children; the former First Lady and her family; the former First Lady's best friend, Moomina, and her family, including the wife of her brother and the former President's only loyal minister; and a few *miituru*, friends of the former *lianoo* to the former President). Several Maldivians used an old Maldivian saying to describe their situation: "*Bulala miida laves waalu vettuunima ekuvaneve*", or "even the cat and the mice will join together when fallen in a well". For example, it was explained that normally two such distinct families, houses, Hikifinifenmaage (then *beekalun*) and Nooraanee Villa (*beefulun*) would never have been considered in the same boat even though there were long friendship bonds and marital alliances between them. There was prejudice on both sides.

Although the "cat and mice" were "in the same well" during the peak of the witch-hunt, the *beefulun* son of the former President, Mohamed,

believed that if his stepmother's brother's coup plan had worked, his stepmother would have managed to get a divorce anyway and would have gone back to Male' as the sister of the new President without Nasir, her former President husband. Mohamed, the son, believed his father would have been less safe with his (former) *lianoo*, Naseem, as leader than with Gayoom, even though a trial was about to commence against him. Just before Naseem was first arrested in April 1980, he said that his sister was not happy in Singapore and was thinking of returning to Male'.

Mohamed, a true child of one of Maldives' most successful politicians, as a constant analyst of Maldivian politics, said that the coup plan have included getting Naseem's sister to persuade her husband Nasir to go to Colombo in December 1979 (a couple of months before the coup was to have taken place) for them all to visit with her family who was there at the time. Thus, if the coup had not succeeded (as happened), it would have looked as if Nasir had been behind the plot, and if it had succeeded, as Mohamed believed, his stepmother would have left her husband and returned where her brother would be ruling.

For one year, the Ilyas-led propaganda against his former boss had it that Nasir had masterminded the plot, and according to one mercenary, Naseem told the mercenaries that the former President was behind it and would arrive once they took the army headquarters. When the trial finally opened a year later, the plan that was then revealed did not mention the former President and instead argued that there would have been a revolutionary committee formed at first, led by Naseem, who never had much popular support, and Moomina, who had enjoyed great popularity, and her mother's younger brother, Mustafa Hussein, who was also very popular. Mustafa managed to clear his name saying they must have just used him in the plan. Moomina remained abroad in

exile and never returned home to clear her name. She said she hoped “time” would do that for her.

Originally, at the beginning of Gayoom’s government, when there was a long investigation into former President Nasir’s financial affairs, the proceedings must have made Gayoom’s *lianoo*, Ilyas Ibrahim, quite nervous since he, as chief private aide to Nasir, would have been privy to all the former ruler’s affairs. Again, when the alleged coup-plot was first revealed, the government’s first claim was that Nasir had masterminded it. Soon, however, the blame shifted to Nasir’s *lianoo*, led by Ahmed Naseem, and Ilyas’ former boss was not the chief focus.

Calling the alleged conspiracy “Naseem’s coup-plot” was clever on the part of Ilyas. It gave him a chance finally to clear his name, for a while anyway, of any connection to Nasir, by letting Ilyas use the opportunity to become a hero. He was able to claim that it was his alertness, the work of his army and police, that saved the country from danger. Then with the resumption of the trial against Nasir, especially *in absentia*, no one dared raise points that might implicate Ilyas, who many said actually ruled the country instead of the elected Maumoon. (In the days of Nasir’s regime, it was sometimes said that Naseem was ruling the country and not the elected man. In each case, neither *lianoo* of either President had as much popular support as the actual ruler. Each *lianoo* had most of their power from their hold on the President).

Later, in the case of former President Nasir, many members of the elite repeated the old Maldivian saying, “*Mahana macha madiya jehun*”, meaning that what has been done to him is “somersaulting on his grave”, which Maldivians say often happens. Regardless of any

sympathy Nasir might have eventually received, however, he remained living abroad in exile, far from the country he had once ruled.

### 8.8 DREAMING ABOUT MALDIVIAN POLITICS:

Members of the Male' elite literally dream about the politics of their little world, and they have great faith in the prophetic value of dreams. For example, the former Minister of Health, Moomina Haleem Ismail, and best friend of the former First Lady, Naseema Mohamed Nasir, told of a dream she had in August of 1980, while they were both in exile during the early months of the "witch-hunt" against them and their families. Moomina dreamt that she saw the former President Nasir's first two wives (Aishath Zubair and Mariyam Saeed) lying in a heap. Beside them on the ground in a plot dug for a garden were three broken eggs--two with healthy chicks but the third with a very weak chick. In the dream, Moomina at first did not think the weak chick would live until, suddenly, she saw it had mature wings and knew that it would live. Moomina said she guessed this chick was her friend, Naseema, Nasir's third wife.

The former First Lady, Naseema, often remembered a vivid and frightening dream she had in December of 1978, just after her husband, former President Nasir, had stepped down and had taken her and her two children away from Maldives to Singapore. She described this as the dream that proved very prophetic for her husband, her friends, and her family: "I dreamt that there was a group of us, including Nasir, Moomina, and I think some of my family (I'm not very clear who) at the entrance of our old hostel in Colombo (at the former Maldivian embassy where in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s specially selected elite girls were kept with the *beefulun* Maldivian representatives and chaperones for studies). Suddenly, huge black rats

started coming out of the doors of the house. They came out of the drains and from the ventilation openings in the walls and they crowded the ground, biting us and menacing us. We tried to beat them down with sticks, but as one fell more would appear”.

### 8.9 NASEEMA, THE DREAMER, CONTINUED RECOUNTING HER NIGHTMARE:

“inally, we started out through the garden, backwards, the rats following us. In the garden there is a small mango tree under which we had to pass to go in or out of the place. There was a grinning white rat sitting on a branch of this tree and as we passed underneath, it urinated on us, splattering everyone with the mess. We tried to catch it, but it ran up the tree, out of reach. And then I woke up. I remember it very vividly and feel that this is still what is going on in Male’ now. The fear and frustration I experienced in my dream was so real, and it’s just what I feel now. I believe the black rats must have been all the people in this government who have been working against us, and the white rat was Maumoon, the ruler of all the other rats”.

Another dream that became prophetic for one of the alleged coup-plotters was experienced by Maizan Ali Maniku, or “Radio” Ali Maniku, in early 1978, two years before he became implicated with his old friend, Naseem, in the plot. The day after his dream, the Director of Radio Maldives told several people that he had just had a dream that frightened him so that he awoke sweating. Maizandorschuge Ali Maniku said he had dreamt that there was a revolution in his coral-islands republic, and the revolutionaries invaded his office at the broadcasting station and ordered him to announce their goals. He awoke before he had to make a decision on how to act. His eyes open, his body drenched in nervous sweat, he sat up on his bed and tried to

figure out the meaning of his dream. He couldn't decide what he would do in such a situation.

Relating the story to me, a foreigner, "Radio" Ali Maniku explained the difficulties. If he had obeyed their orders and their coup was unsuccessful, he would be in trouble with the present regime under siege in the dream. The incumbent government would have viewed him as a collaborator in the attempted coup. If he refused to carry out the revolutionaries' demands and they ended up succeeding in their coup, he would then be a *persona non grata* with the new powers. He had remembered reading that last year's coup in the neighbouring Indian Ocean islands-nation, the Seychelles, had been broadcast to the people over the radio that the revolutionaries first took over.

Less than a year after Maizan Ali Maniku had this dream, a new government came in and he lost the job for which he had been trained. His job of Director of Radio Maldives was given to the new President's *liano*, Abbas Ibrahim, who years before had been the first Maldivian to receive training in radio broadcasting but whose job had been taken away from him by the former President as partial punishment for his criticisms of Nasir's government. Abbas had been bitter ever since, feeling all his training had been wasted and therefore jealous of his successor Ali Maniku. When Ali Maniku lost his job and felt he had no chance in the new government, he obviously found sympathy with his old friend, Naseem, who many had thought might be President and who felt the new government would destroy the tourist industry he and his family had founded. Both Naseem and Maizan Ali Maniku moved to Colombo where they then, allegedly, planned the coup attempt. The dreamer, Maizan Ali Maniku, was later banished to a distant island, and his alleged co-conspirators were either banished or imprisoned.

## 8.10 EXILE FOR PERSONS DEEMED STRONG POLITICAL THREATS:

There were others affected by the 1980-1981 “witch-hunt” who then began living in exile abroad, just as members of the Maldivian elite have done for centuries when they found themselves in the “opposition” group. In the old days, when a Sultan would test his power by going on Haj to Mecca, he would often receive word not to return. Usually he would have been overthrown by a brother or a cousin. Traditionally, those viewed as the greatest threat to the ruler have received a punishment worse than banishment to an outer island--either imprisonment as Naseem received (which has been rare), or exile overseas, from which the government hoped they would never return. In 1955, former President Nasir’s father’s brother, Ibrahim Mohamed Didi, who had ruled the country immediately after Ameen Didi was overthrown, had gone for medical treatment in Colombo, and his young nephew, Ibrahim Nasir, was left at home to keep the country going. While his uncle was in Ceylon, the nephew sent word to him to stay there and not return to Male’. The uncle obeyed and never returned to Maldives.

Afeef Didi, the Adduan leader of the Suvadiva Revolution, obtained British assistance in 1963 to flee Maldives, and he also never returned, despite the change of government. In still another case, Ibrahim Nasir, who was warned by his former secretary, Ilyas, simply moved away to Singapore and never dared return. Likewise, Moomina, the former health minister, eventually took up residence in Colombo and has not yet returned to Male’.

Sometimes in these sorts of cases, the Male’ government would be just as happy if those involved simply stayed out of the country, away from

Maldivian politics. However, in some cases, such as Nasir, and perhaps even the once popular Moomina, the leaders of the “witch-hunt” at the time would have liked to have them back in the country to be used as public spectacles and then sentenced to life-imprisonment, or so the exiles feared. In a sense, too, the richest Maldivian, the shipowner, Ali Umar Maniku, had gone into exile by taking up residence in Singapore where he could live safely if the government in Male’ ever felt strong enough economically to turn on him and release their country from his hold. That has not happened yet, though privately many members of the elite say that he and his family would some day be the target of long-smoldering envy and anger at their power.

The old elite, the *beefulun*, who have been going through these cycles for generations, say they are more or less accustomed to the attendant stress. It is said that the new members of the elite, the *beekalun*, who were not raised with the experience of having their parents and grandparents in banishment and house arrest and were not taught how to react to it, have much more trouble coping now. For example, in the case of Moomina, a *beefuleh*, and her *beekalun* husband, Kandi, they both say that she is much better equipped emotionally to cope with it than he is.

Yet, while the old elite have been brought up with this tension, they share the same widespread symptoms of worry, fear, and stress as those tormented *beekalun* suffer. At the time of all the house arrests, and later the trials, the parents and women among the targets all complained of hypertension, constantly taking their blood pressure. Both men and women complained of extreme nervousness. Some talked of suicide. Before this climax of the cycle, these people were not suffering from such ailments.

As mentioned earlier, though physical violence is the most rare form of attack on these people, there is great psychological violence. During the peak of the house arrests in 1980, besides keeping mobs “howling” outside their houses, the government installed lights and loudspeakers outside the houses of those accused, and they were kept blaring all night with obscene verbal attacks on the families locked inside the walls around their courtyard and house, terrified that at any moment the mobs might come over the walls.

Abroad, those in political exile at the time of witch-hunts also live in fear. They talk about nothing but their country. They seldom want to become involved in another world because for them the world remains Male’ and the people there. They become desperate for contacts with someone who can give them news of their family and homeland, yet they are afraid to make contact with other Maldivians. They exercise all their Maldivian deviousness and cunning to establish secret links with their families by having letters sent from other places to other people they hope they can rely on. They write in cryptic language. Parents rush off letters to be carried out of the country by some low-person who might not be suspected of carrying letters to post from Ceylon or India. By the late 1970s, they also had the telephone which they could establish devious means of using, like having a friend on the international switchboard.

Long before they are involved directly in a witch-hunt as targets, and usually while they are still in power, the leading members of the elite begin establishing “contingency funds” that they send to other countries, usually by devious means, to have safe outside Maldives if they or any members of their family get into political trouble. In the old days they buried gold and saved it to be smuggled out on ships, or they made necklaces for women to wear with gold coins. Most of the

founders of tourism established bank accounts overseas in preparation for a time when they might be in trouble, as have members of the current government.

While abroad, Maldivian exiles dream and think constantly of home. Being abroad is like a prison sentence for them. They talk a great deal about the world of Maldives, telling much more than they would ever dare to say at home. The Maldivian saying “singing like a bird in jail” applies when they are overseas.

A member of the Maldivian elite like Moomina, who could possibly have become ruler of the country, could not understand anyone giving up their Maldivian homeland voluntarily. During the early years of her exile, Moomina was highly critical of her friend Abida, who married an Englishman and left home, but Abida says that life in Maldives with all the stress and tension in Male’ made her sick, and would be dangerous for her weak heart. Moomina believed the reason Abida left was because she was not *beefulun* and was jealous of the upper class, for even though she was the first woman to earn a university degree, she never received the status she thought she was due. Moomina frequently said, “How can a real Maldivian live away from home (by choice)? You must live at home in Male’”. The former First Lady, Naseema, while in exile, said this of her country: “I cannot imagine spending the rest of my life away from home, those little dots in the ocean. They are home. I must return some day”. She did, and started a new life there.

### 8.11 PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH TO POLITICS:

These Maldivians in banishment and exile abroad have great faith that they will return home to Male’. They never give up hope. They quote

the Koran as saying that justice will be done. Many of my informants often said, "Things will always come around". Members of the Maldivian elite expressed firm belief that one who helps or does good to others will be helped,<sup>3</sup> and, likewise, the opposite, that for those who have done bad, things will come round and hit them another way. Their own history teaches them that history repeats itself and that there are cycles in politics and political conflict. Member of the Maldivian elite are fond of saying, "*Thareekh alunmii eadha wanii*" ("history always repeats itself"). When in banishment or even exile overseas, they believe things will come full-cycle and they will return to their homeland. It is a philosophical acceptance of their predicament, but not a complete submission. They believe that if they bide their time, things will work out. They maintain a kind of optimism that there will be "justice". They believe good will come to good, and bad to bad, and, of course, each believes that his/her side is good, that his/her family has unjustly suffered, and that the tormentors are the bad, to whom bad will come. They always stress that the men who were known to have attacked the first President physically, beating him the worst, all died unpleasant deaths not long afterwards. One of the leaders of the 1980-1981 "witch-hunt" died soon thereafter of cancer, while another suffered a heart attack. The exiles viewed these events as God's way of meting out justice.

Aside from the actual reversal and transferral of power, speculation about what might have happened is also rife. One member of the old elite, Moomina Haleem, said she knew exactly how she would behave when she finally felt safe enough to go home. She said she would not

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<sup>3</sup> For example, those former nurses, Moomina and Naseema, to whom I gave refuge while they were in exile, often remarked that this was evidence of their belief that "things will always come around"--that although they had never helped me in their country, they had helped poor people with medicine, and then later I was helping them, and thus someday someone else would help me.

go home until she had assurance in writing from her parents that it would be safe for all of them. She said that she would never forgive herself if her parents died because of her arrest. At the time she spoke (during the peak of the witch-hunt), her elder brother, younger brother and sister all were banished, and her other brother was in a kind of banishment at the U.N. She said that both her parents developed high blood pressure and lost weight. They had already had tuberculosis years earlier. Her last warning from her mother in 1981 was not to return yet as Moomina believed that "Ilyas will not rest until he can pass a life sentence of prison on me. I think he is paranoid. But God is omnipotent, merciful, and I will live in hope". She recalled how the late first President, Ameen Didi, had been lured back to Male' only to be stoned to death.

When finally at home, she said she would start from scratch again, as one always must do. She remembered how Fareed Didi, once the Deputy Prime Minister and son of the last Sultan, then for sixteen years had no position (under Nasir, except that he still had lots of houses and dhonis), and only later was he working again, but under the Justice Minister, Moosa Fathy, an islander from Naifaru.

Moomina said that whenever she should finally go home again, she would just pretend nothing had happened (all those years she had been under house arrest and then fleeing around the world while most of her family was banished). She said it was the only way to survive once one returned to Male'. She said that this was the way members of the Male' elite had always behaved. As soon as they were sent into exile (or banishment), they immediately began writing letters to the ruler and his *lianoo* and friends, begging for jobs in the government, asking for forgiveness. Then when one was finally brought back, ultimately, one accepted any job possible and, as Moomina put it, "even if it's

peanuts, compared to before, people will do it". People (the elite) know, said Moomina in exile, that "It's the only way a person can survive in Male', be in the government. If you don't go back into government, then they think you're against them. I'll go back when it's safe. And I'll be friendly to all those who have maltreated me. At first they'll pretend they don't have time to talk with me. They'll pretend not to recognise me. They'll be feeling guilty. But I'll just go ahead, do my work, and put my head down--what Zaki and Maumoon did before, the whole history of the Maldivian people (the elite) is this".

Ahmed Zaki, the former Prime Minister banished for life without trial but released in a general amnesty after three and one-half years and later the ambassador to the UN, said after he was released from banishment that he would have accepted a job as assistant to the *kunimiihun* (dirt-sweepers, lowest occupation), because otherwise the government would have thought he was against them. Zaki also once remarked that as UN Ambassador, he was the subordinate to a boss, Fathulla Jameel, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who used to be his subordinate. Zaki recalled the old Maldivian saying that "He who would command must learn to be obedient". Zaki, like others who have returned from exile, made a point of insisting that they hold no malice against the person (in his case, Nasir) responsible for banishing him. Maumoon made that point, too, while he worked his way back up the ladder from banishment and into the Presidency.

Moomina said that she realised she made a bad error in Maldives by not accepting the lowly position of Director of Social Affairs (after she had been Minister of Health in the former President's cabinet) which was offered her when the new President came in. She had paid no attention to the advice of her friend, Ismail Rasheed, that she should go to work and try not to think everyone was against her. She should

have insisted that she have an office and work. If she had been there on the spot, she could have advanced again, even though the new President did not start by giving her a new cabinet position. Moomina said, "I knew all the time I was not doing it right for Male'."

The philosophy of the Maldivian elite is that when one knows someone is jealous (and people are always jealous because there is such limited scope and limited rewards in Maldivian society), then it is wise to make that person a personal friend and not keep him/her on "the other side of the wall" (*beeru*) as an enemy. They also say that "among fools, do not be too wise", especially in a place like Maldives where envy can be aroused over the slightest advantage shown by one person over another. For example, when President Nasir said that he would give me an audience, the night before I was to meet him, I found a scorpion for the first time in my bathroom. Later I mentioned it to several Maldivians, and everyone immediately said someone must have been jealous of my upcoming meeting with Nasir and had placed it there.

In Maldives, people are said to succeed (in politics) with luck, being at the right place at the right time, with hard work, sharp thinking, cunning, and also, it is said, some people succeed by putting others down and currying the favour of someone important. For example, Moomina and her family believed that many people told lies about them to Maumoon Gayoom and thus got closer to him by disparaging her family. President Nasir himself said about ruling in Maldives that he never trusted people--never totally--learning what aspects to trust in each one. He never told people his plans in advance--he just did things--gave unexpected orders. He said he thought that was the only way to rule and get things accomplished in such a small country as Maldives.

The history of Maldives is full of witch-hunts and scapegoat-seeking periods. There are always suspected conspiracies and coup-plots, and counter-theories of conspiracy, in other words those suspected by the government of conspiring in turn suspect the government of concocting the conspiracy allegations. Members of the Maldivian elite are themselves “conspiracy-theorists” *par excellence*. The alleged crimes have always been that strong opponents and their groups (houses, families, friends, affines) were plotting to overthrow the incumbent government. Other members of the elite, from their associated group including the above named categories, are often judged to be guilty only by association. That is why often whole families, houses of people and groups of friends, disappear from Maldivian political life for periods of time.

#### **8.12 CYCLES OF POLITICAL CONFLICT:**

Examination of the recent history (since 1953) of these “enemies, coup plots, coups, suppression”, reveals that there are cycles; that, just as the Maldivian elite themselves believe, things come full circle. Evidence can be found by looking in detail at each period--the first climaxing in 1953 with the overthrow of the first President Ameen Didi; another in 1960 with the Male’ government attacking the Southern atolls; a third in 1967 with the roundup and banishment of many “coup-plotters”; still another in 1974 with the suppression of a large “coup-plot” that reached the point of *havaruevvung* (the traditional crowd-gathering, the mob, shouting to get rid of the ruler; and finally in 1980 the suppression of a “coup-plot” and the 1981

banishments of many “coup-plotters”.<sup>4</sup> Examining the details of these cycles also demonstrates, as members of the Maldivian elite say, the group on top, doing the banishing at any one time, will later become the “criminals” and be banished, perhaps not at the very next cycle, but within a few cycles, it goes through generations of families and friends. Members of the Maldivian elite firmly believe that everything goes full-cycle over in time.

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<sup>4</sup> In 1988 there was another coup attempt against the Maldivian government. Because it occurred after the time of this study, however, I have chosen not to describe it. However, the timing and the way it worked in Maldivian society certainly appeared to fit into my observation about the cyclical nature of these coup-attempts, political conflict and reactions. I would hope it will be possible at a later time to examine that coup attempt and later political conflicts in Maldives for comparison.

# CONCLUSION

## REITERATIVE PATTERNS OF REPETITION AND CHANGE

Study of the political elite of Maldives has revealed reiterative patterns of cycles of political conflict, power resolution, and opposition. These cycles are fueled by envy and the desire for revenge. The resultant actions create what the Maldivians themselves describe as their “topsy turvy world of Maldivian politics”<sup>1</sup> in which patterns and cycles are observed by the politically analytical participants and observers among the elite.

The members of the Maldivian elite themselves recognise and talk about the cyclical nature of their sociopolitical life. For example, although one might be banished and outside the system at one point, the members of the elite, who have been brought up in families long accustomed to the cycles of their political world, sustain themselves with the belief that some day they will return home and they maintain hope that in time they will return to power. Members of the Maldivian elite have traditionally had a strong sense of their own history. In discussing the way they, the elite, live, they sometimes begin a sentence with the expression, “*Dhivehi Rajje thareekh balalaiirhu*” (“looking back into Maldivian history”), and then proceed to bring up some event or pattern from the past and link that to some present situation, event or pattern of behaviour. Or simply the Maldivian elite might emphasise any current point by saying in either *Dhivehi*, “*Thareekh alunmii eadha wanii*”, or in English, the same, “History repeats itself”.

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<sup>1</sup> Several Maldivians on several different occasions used these English words and expression to describe Maldivian political system and the way in which their political elite worked.

It is clear that every Maldivian government spends a great amount of its energy in taking revenge on the previous government. The members of both these governments, the incumbent and the previous one which is thus placed in opposition, make up the political elite of the Maldives Islands. For centuries the elite of Maldives has been locked in continual cycles of this energy-consuming revenge, power, jealousy (*hasadhaveri*), and reaction. One group comes into power (*sarukaru*), always driven by intense desire for revenge and establishment of what they believe will be justice over the injustices of the previous group (*kurige sarukaruge*) that held power. Upon taking power, the members of the new power-holding group are driven by jealousy and envy (*hasadhaveri*) that have built to great intensity against the previous group of power-holders. Then the cycle begins again, and the former government begins immediately to be driven by jealousy and envy and the desire for revenge against the now incumbent government.

In this small island-state, the slightest amount of excess power, acquisition or wealth arouse great envy among the group that is out of power and even those partially in power but not at the crucial centre. Maldivians say that in Maldives, wealth always is dissipated after two generations because the place is too small. They say they do not believe people should hoard--that too much disparity in wealth brings jealousy which leads to political conflict. The cycles of acquisition, jealousy and revenge, and reaction prevent too much accumulation.

In observing these cycles and the way in which, at any given time, a very high percentage of the best educated, the elite, the cream of leadership, may be absent from the political organisation of Maldives, a conclusion drawn is that the process is not productive; in fact, it appears counter-productive to progress. As Maldives is a microcosm nation-state that can be studied at the local community level, it

appears that this small country presents an image of much of the political action in other nations and internationally. In many nations elsewhere, however, where such cycles might occur perhaps over a longer period of time, the system is usually much larger and thus the loss of some of the political elite would not be felt as severely by the system. Yet in Maldives, with its own system that is controlled by the elite, the absence of much of the elite and the preoccupation with revenge and fear by the other group holding power prevent the ruling group from devoting much valuable productive energy to other aspects of Maldivian society.

Unlike the situation in a larger, more populous society, where such a “topsy-turvy world of politics” of revenge and counter-revenge, may not be that damaging to the overall progress of society, Maldives is too small to afford this kind of system, in which, at any particular point, half of the most productive, best educated members of the society are not allowed to participate or contribute. Instead, they have been banished, sent into foreign exile, put under house-arrest or imprisoned, negating the possibility of either those people or their houses making any positive contribution to the society. And when they are finally released and allowed to return to society, generally they spend much of their time, as did the ones in power before them, plotting and scheming to take power again and then to use that power for revenge. The degree of psychological damage done to the families that are the targets of any one government is so great that once those families return to power, they can think of little else than taking revenge.

To succeed in Maldivian politics, therefore, one must have a core of supporters, primarily centered in a house (*ge*) that becomes the basic political unit of the elite. That house, that political core, is made up of siblings (if they are available), close friends (and as is usually the

case, one's spouse's close friends) and, most importantly (perhaps essentially, since they represent outside support), loyal affines (including *lianoo*, *fahari*, *delianoo*, and *gaayy* relationships if available). Also, rulers and rising rulers, traditionally *beefulun* because of the ideology that only *beefulun* could rule, also needed the support of trusted servants and wealthy traders, formerly *miihun* then elevated to the category of *beekalun* but still believed to be in a politically non-threatening, non-*beefulun* position (because of the ideology that only *beefulun* can actually rule). No one can rise without most or all of these supporters--definitely not without loyal affines, who become symbols of one's ability to cement relationships with outside groups. If a sibling or someone in that kinship category or an affine appears to be a rival, then the strong leader's only resort is to banish that person, or even send into exile the most threatening rival.

Once in power, a leader with loyal affines also has the advantage of maintaining excellent spy posts in a variety of ministries and households, by placing his siblings and his affines (the *lianoo* and *fahari*), and his best friends (the *gaayy*), in diverse posts. Part of their obligation to their *lianoo*, now the nation's leader, is to report back what people are saying, and especially to watch for any sign of opposition. The leader's siblings, his wife's siblings, and their close friends are the only people who daily meet privately, usually both at the midday meal and later in the evening at the President's residence for such reporting. Later, as they realise how important they are to keeping the leader in power and that they can expect favours in return, the *lianoo* begin encroaching and demanding more and more, thus inviting the envy and resentment of other members of the elite who are not so close to the President, the apex of their society.

Analysis reveals that a vital relationship of co-dependence arises between the rulers (and other rising political leaders in the elite) and their affines (*lianoo*). Each needs the other to gain power at the beginning of a leader's rule or rise to power. Such alliances are extremely difficult to maintain in Maldivian society, given the basic distrust permeating the elite, the lack of loyalty, the fear of outsiders, and the very high divorce rate. But then the divorce rate, in itself, reflects this strategy to manipulate affines. Once a strong leader senses he has a firm grip on power but fears his affines' demanding favours in return for helping put him in power and keep him there early on, then he himself might select the divorce strategy.

It is then, if the leader is really the cleverest political gamester of Maldives, that he might decide the wisest course is to divorce the woman who has brought along all the siblings and other in-laws who are now making trouble by demanding so much in return. The President of the increasingly-modern Maldives is ever more dependent on popular support, and more egalitarian relations are expected between him and his *lianoo*, *fahari*, and *gaayy*. This reciprocity always may have existed, and probably is the reason for the frequent changes in leadership historically.

Consequently, there is a paradox: affinal support is essential to reach the apex of this politico-centred society, but given the framework of the society, it is almost impossible to maintain affinal loyalty for long periods of time. Once the top has been achieved through dependence on this core of affines, along with perhaps siblings and friends and spouse's friends, the leader may then ultimately be defeated by the actions of his affines. There is a Maldivian saying that embodies the

dilemma of this *lianoo* relationship: “*Liyannunnam ithu’baru nukurasche*”, translated as “Don’t trust brothers-in-law”.<sup>2</sup>

There seem to be two interpretations of the strategy suggested here for achieving the apex of Maldivian political organisation. Either a person builds alliances with affinal relations available through the current spouse, or the leader rises by successively marrying, divorcing and sealing marriages with useful, new allies. Historically, there is evidence of a mixture of both. The strongest player in the end must be able to say “no” to his affines (*lianoo*) in the Male’ elite.

These co-dependent relationships between a political leader and affines, especially the closest, the *lianoo*, support the apparent continuity of a system that is, at the same time, fundamentally changing as a result of the new changes of political power and wealth. In one sense, the President is the autocratic sultan under another name but with dependence upon all the same types of relationships, but also there is evidence that the system has begun changing dramatically.

At the time of this study, Maldivian elite society was undergoing new processes of change. For example, the development of the tourist industry especially and all the new avenues to wealth it provided had already begun altering some aspects of the system of social stratification. The composition of the elite has expanded to make room for more members, in particular the rich *beekalun*, who were able to amass wealth early on when the *beefulun* at first thought such work, including tourism and shipping, was beneath them. Yet, at the same

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<sup>2</sup> Bell (1921) cites several typical entries from the *Tarikh* which clearly demonstrate the historical reasons for the elite’s distrust of one’s in-laws. The following describes what happened to Sultan Muhammad (no.71) in 1692 A.D. (A.H. 1104): “After a reign of eight and a half years, intrigues of his wives’ relatives brought about his death--by poison, it is said. He was succeeded by his first wife’s brother and second wife’s uncle” (Bell 1921:17).

time, the same “modernising” processes fed into and built up the power of the elite and perpetuated other traditional, related systems (i.e., propping up the pattern of houses functioning as the basic political unit and strengthening the roles of *lianoo* and *fahari*). The traditional power-wealth nexus between the ruling *beefulun* and the trading *beekalun* continued to exist in a somewhat different form.

In conclusion, it can be argued that there was a combination of repetition and change occurring in the elite system of Maldives during the period of this study from the late 1970s to the early 1980s. This thesis demonstrates that, despite the apparent continuity of the Maldivian elite system on some levels, at other levels and at the same time, significant sociopolitical changes had begun taking place in the system as a result of the complex processes of modernisation. There is clear evidence of replicative evolution of the elite sociopolitical system in which reiterative cycles of political conflict and process appear, continue, and repeat themselves in changing forms over time. This is not simply the viewpoint of the anthropological analyst but the way in which members of the Maldivian elite view their own sociopolitical system. The sociopolitical system of the Maldivian elite can be seen to represent evolving, complex cultural replication incorporating, variably and at once, dissonance and patterns of order, repetition and change.

## ***APPENDIX [1]***

### ***BRIEF CHRONOLOGY OF MALDIVIAN HISTORY***

#### **PRE-HISTORY**

- circa 1500 B.C.--date of first settlers suggested by Thor Heyerdahl and archaeological team in early 1980s
- circa 500-600 B.C.--based on earlier archaeological evidence, dates usually set for when first wave of settlers came to Maldives from Southern India and Ceylon, first bringing Hinduism and later Buddhism as still extant dagobas and other Buddhist relics found in outer islands
- circa first century A.D.--allusion believed to be to Maldives included in the *Periplus* account of Indian Ocean lands and trade
- circa 150 A.D.--allusion believed to be to Maldives in works of Ptolemy (the *Geographia* of Claudius Ptolemaeus)
- circa 320-390 A.D.--allusion believed to be to Maldives in works of Ammianus Marcellinus
- circa 535-550 A.D.--a vague reference to Maldives in the works of Cosmas the Monk, surnamed Indicopleustes
- circa sixth century A.D.--Carbon-14 datings of pottery indicate that central Maldives was inhabited since at least this period
- circa ninth century A.D.--a description believed to be of Maldives is contained in a collection of notes by Arab travellers, including in particular Suleiman the Merchant; also Chinese potsherds from this period found in Maldives
- circa tenth century A.D.--detailed account of islands believed to be Maldives given by Abu'l Hasan Ali, called El Mas'udi, after his known visit to Ceylon in 916 A.D.
- circa eleventh century A.D.--clear description of islands most likely to be Maldives given in geographical account of Indian Ocean by Alberuni in 1030 A.D.
- circa early twelfth century A.D.--detailed account of life on islands most likely to be Maldives contained in collection of others' reports compiled by Edrisi between 1099-1186 A.D

## **RECORDED HISTORY**

(Recorded Maldivian History Begins in 1153 A.D. with Conversion to Islam and First Record of Muslim Rulers Chronicled in *Tarikh*)

| <b>Date</b>   | <b>Event</b>   |
|---------------|--|
| 1153 A.D.     | Maldive Islands converted to Islam   |
| 1153-1821     | Period chronicled in <i>Tarikh</i> , the Maldivian chronicle, written in Arabic, recounting the history of the rulers of Maldives  |
| 1195-1196     | Earliest found copper plates ( <i>Loamaafaanu</i> ) on which is inscribed the ancient script ( <i>Eveyla</i> ) of the Maldivian ( <i>Dhivehi</i> ) language  |
| 1343-44, 1346 | Ibn Battuta of Tangier stayed in Male', the capital, and island of Fua Mulaku; later he included description of Maldives in his writings about his lifetime travels                                  |
| 1558-1573     | Portuguese occupied Male' and Maldives   |
| 1573          | Maldivian hero, Mohamed Bodu Thakurufaan, expelled the Portuguese  |
| 1602-1607     | Francois Pyrard de Laval shipwrecked in Maldives and lived there for nearly five years as trusted adviser of the Sultan; and later (in 1611, 1615, and 1619) published detailed accounts of his stay |
| 1645          | Maldives began paying symbolic tribute to the Dutch Governor of Ceylon and later to British governors until Ceylon's independence in 1947  |
| 1752          | Malabari Pirates from India seized and occupied Male' for brief period of four months  |
| 1835          | Survey of Maldivé Islands made by British Navy   |
| 1879          | First visit to Maldives by H.C.P. Bell, archaeologist of Ceylon and Maldives (his later trips were in 1920 and 1922)   |
| 1887          | Maldives made a nominal British protectorate   |
| 1901          | American geographical expedition to Maldives reported by Agassiz   |
| 1932          | Royal absolutist government of Sultan Muhammad Shamsuddin replaced by oligarchical regime and first constitution established   |
| 1953          | Mohamed Ameen Didi introduced a Republic with himself as President, which lasted less than a year; the President stoned to death by a mob; and witchhunt mounted against his supporters              |

- 1953-1968 Sultanate restored
- 1957 British re-established staging post, air base, on Gan Island in Maldives' southernmost Addu Atoll
- 1957 Ibrahim Nasir became Prime Minister and essentially began ruling the country with the last Sultan only a titular head of state
- 1960 Southern atolls seceded from Maldives; Male' government attacked southern atolls
- 1965 (Jul.) Maldives gained its independence from Britain with agreement reached on Gan; and Maldives became a member state of the United Nations; Independence Day set on July 26th
- 1967 Alleged coup attempt foiled and witch-hunt mounted against alleged coup-plotters, including Ameena, daughter of the slain first President Ameen Didi and secretary to President Nasir
- 1968 (Nov.) Ibrahim Nasir re-introduced Republic with himself elected by Majlis as President
- 1972 Tourist industry launched with opening of Maldives' first two tourist resorts
- 1974 New witch-hunt; alleged opposition banished, including Maumoon Gayoom, later to become third President
- 1975 Prime Minister Ahmed Zaki banished
- 1976 British Government unexpectedly withdraws from and abandons its base on Gan Island
- 1977 (May) Satellite station installed in Male', establishing Maldives' first telecommunications link to outside world
- 1977 (Oct.) First jet landed at Male's Hulule Airport
- 1978 (Mar.) Television station opened in Maldives
- 1978 (Jun.) President Nasir unexpectedly announced his retirement to be effective November 11
- 1978 (Jul.) Presidential referendum and Maumoon Gayoom selected first by Majlis and then in national referendum to succeed President Nasir
- 1978 (Nov.) President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom inaugurated
- 1980 (Feb.) Alleged coup attempt by hired mercenaries foiled
- 1980 (Apr.) Alleged coup-plot revealed by government

1980 (May on-) New "witch-hunt" for "coup-plotters", trials begun  
1981 Trials continued for alleged 1980 coup-plot  
1988 Coup attempted with aid of foreign mercenaries and  
new witch-hunt mounted in Maldives

## APPENDIX [2]

### GLOSSARY OF KEY *DHIVEHI* WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <b>amaankan</b>            | peaceful, as in non-violent  |
| <b>America miihe</b>       | American   |
| <b>aruvaalun</b>           | banishment   |
| <b>atolhu</b>              | atoll  |
| <b>atolhu terege kandu</b> | deep, blue sea between islands within an atoll   |
| <b>avah</b>                | a ward, division, of Male' or any island   |
| <b>badi</b>                | prayers written on paper, originally palm leaves, wrapped on child's arm or waist  |
| <b>baaru</b>               | power, Sultans had power to do what they wanted  |
| <b>badaluhifung</b>        | revenge  |
| <b>baghavai</b>            | a coup-plot, or actually coup overthrowing the government  |
| <b>baghavai therieh</b>    | a Maldivian enemy, traitor, a coup-plotter, often accused of collaborating with foreigners to plot the overthrow of the Maldivian government                   |
| <b>banderige</b>           | treasury, after constitution drafted   |
| <b>banderimanikufaan</b>   | treasurer  |
| <b>bayy</b>                | rice   |
| <b>beefulun</b>            | highest ranking people in stratification system, traditional elite, aristocrats (singular, <i>beefuleh</i> )   |
| <b>beekalun</b>            | achieved status within lower class, traditionally a political adviser, or wealthy member of lower class, now the new middle class (singular, <i>beekaleh</i> ) |
| <b>beeratehi</b>           | used to be applied to islanders negatively meaning outsiders, considered obscene   |
| <b>beeru</b>               | outside  |
| <b>beeru kandu</b>         | outside sea, wide open sea outside the Maldives archipelago  |
| <b>beeru miihun</b>        | outsiders, outside people, foreigners  |
| <b>bing</b>                | land   |

|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| <b>bodethi beefulun</b>       | big people, people in power, big high-ranking people, used of people in power and by children of older people in elite houses |
| <b>bodubanderige</b>          | the Treasury, where all documents and money, gold were stored   |
| <b>bodubanderi kilegefanu</b> | title for treasurer, head of the Treasury Office in the time of the Sultanate   |
| <b>bodubanderi manikufan</b>  | another title for treasurer, head of the Treasury Office in the time of the Sultanate   |
| <b>boduhandu</b>              | rice allowance  |
| <b>boduburuga</b>             | “big veil”, covering whole head and body  |
| <b>bodung</b>                 | big ones, also meaning the big people, the nobles, the elite, those in power  |
| <b>boduwazir</b>              | prime minister  |
| <b>buruga</b>                 | traditional veil for women covering head  |
| <b>Ceylon miihe</b>           | a Ceylonese, Sri Lankan, person   |
| <b>danabeekalun</b>           | learned men, the intellectuals, originally meaning those learned in religious matters, achieved status                        |
| <b>daraaja</b>                | or “hierarchy” degrees, levels of society, political system; English word “hierarchy” used                                    |
| <b>dhaturu</b>                | journey or trip   |
| <b>dhaturu veriya</b>         | great traveller, authority on journeys  |
| <b>Dhivehi</b>                | Maldivian language, based on Elu, an offshoot of Sanskrit   |
| <b>Dhivehi Rajje</b>          | Maldives, name of the country in <i>Dhivehi</i>   |
| <b>Dhiveseh</b>               | Maldivian person, citizen, singular   |
| <b>Dhivehing</b>              | Maldivian people, citizens, plural  |
| <b>dhobi</b>                  | Indian word, washer person, low-status  |
| <b>digu hedun</b>             | traditional long dresses for women  |
| <b>doshimayna kilegefan</b>   | one of the traditional five titles that could be bestowed by a ruler, Sultan or Sultana                                       |
| <b>durra</b>                  | used for lashing adulterers and others; an instrument made of 4 layers of hide outside an iron rod                            |
| <b>Eid</b>                    | Islamic festival, twice a year, the day after the month of <i>Ramazan</i> and the day after the Prophet’s birthday            |

|                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <b>ethere</b>                     | inside (as opposed to outside, <i>beeru</i> )   |
| <b>faamulaceridayri kilegefan</b> | one of the traditional five titles that could be bestowed by a ruler                                      |
| <b>faaru</b>                      | wall, as around house-compound  |
| <b>faru</b>                       | reef around island or edge of atoll   |
| <b>fahari</b>                     | sister of one's spouse, sister-in-law   |
| <b>falhu</b>                      | deepest, bluest water within the lagoon off the island and still inside its reef                          |
| <b>banditha</b>                   | magic used for good purposes  |
| <b>fandiyaru manikufaan</b>       | chief justice after constitution drafted  |
| <b>fasshana kilegefan</b>         | one of the traditional five titles that could be bestowed by a ruler                                      |
| <b>feyli</b>                      | traditional cloth, woven of black and white horizontal, wide stripes, worn as skirt by both men and women |
| <b>gaayy</b>                      | close person, meaning very close friend   |
| <b>ganduvaru</b>                  | palace  |
| <b>ganduvaruthere beefulun</b>    | highest-ranking people, the <i>beefulun</i> of the palace, royals   |
| <b>ge</b>                         | house   |
| <b>gebeefulun</b>                 | people of the house, specifically high class <i>beefulun</i> people                                       |
| <b>gegabandukurung</b>            | house-arrest  |
| <b>Gerumanu miithe</b>            | German person   |
| <b>gifili</b>                     | outside bath area, area of courtyard for bathing and toilet   |
| <b>gemiihun</b>                   | people of the house   |
| <b>goti</b>                       | plot of land on which house built   |
| <b>gulhumeh</b>                   | connection, alliance, as between families, houses   |
| <b>hafla</b>                      | "function" as in reception, Arabic word used by Maldivians  |
| <b>hafla ah kiya nantha</b>       | guest list, names to be called to a function  |
| <b>Haj</b>                        | Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca  |
| <b>hangubeekalun</b>              | government servants who escorted the Sultan, like modern national security guards                         |

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <b>hasadhaveri</b>          | jealousy, envy   |
| <b>havaru</b>               | crowd, mob, population   |
| <b>havaruevvung</b>         | traditional crowd, mob, gathering, and shouting to get rid of the ruler  |
| <b>iizzaitheri</b>          | distinguished  |
| <b>iizzaitheri beefulun</b> | dignitaries, distinguished <i>beefulun</i>   |
| <b>India miihe</b>          | an Indian, person from India   |
| <b>Ingresi miihe</b>        | English person   |
| <b>Italy miihe</b>          | an Italian, person from Italy  |
| <b>kilege</b>               | respectable  |
| <b>jalalun</b>              | imprisonment in jail   |
| <b>jurimaanakurung</b>      | form of punishment in which offender is fined, forced to give a money payment for the offense  |
| <b>kaivani</b>              | marriage   |
| <b>kandu</b>                | the sea, the deepest, bluest water   |
| <b>karufehili libas</b>     | traditional overblouse for women with embroidered open neck and gold cuffs   |
| <b>khandan</b>              | an Urdu word used by old Maldivian elite for long family line or, like a dynasty, including ancestors, for the most distinguished families |
| <b>khitan</b>               | circumcision   |
| <b>kilegefaan</b>           | during the sultanate, this was the highest honour a sultan could bestow on anyone  |
| <b>kimakolu</b>             | a covered box in which royalty were carried by servants through the streets  |
| <b>kudibeekalun</b>         | trusted palace servants who assisted the Sultan  |
| <b>kunimiihun</b>           | dirt-sweepers, street-sweepers, one of lowest occupations in stratification system   |
| <b>kurige sarukaruge</b>    | former government, outside elite   |
| <b>lianoo</b>               | spouse's brother, wife's brother, brother-in-law, can be any male in-law   |
| <b>libas</b>                | overshirt, blouse, unbelted over waist   |

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Loamaafaanu</b>                 | ancient copper plates on which oldest form of <i>Dhivehi</i> language is inscribed giving account of life in Maldives from as early as twelfth century A.D. |
| <b>maafarikilegefan</b>            | one of the five traditional titles that could be bestowed by a ruler  |
| <b>maa kandu</b>                   | huge sea, the deeper sea between the atolls outside the atoll reefs   |
| <b>maawaharu</b>                   | ambergris   |
| <b>madu maitheri</b>               | gentle, as in non-violent people  |
| <b>Majlis</b>                      | the parliament  |
| <b>maslahat geli</b>               | disturbing the peace  |
| <b>mas riha</b>                    | fish curry  |
| <b>Mawlood</b>                     | recitation of the life of the Prophet from the Koran, praising him and praying to God to bless him, held on many special occasions                          |
| <b>mehir</b>                       | another word for bride-money  |
| <b>miihun</b>                      | the people, ordinary people, commoners, lowest rank in stratification system ( <i>miihe</i> is the singular)  |
| <b>miihun ulhe rahrah</b>          | inhabited islands, islands with people  |
| <b>miihun nulhe rahrah</b>         | uninhabited islands, islands without people   |
| <b>mudu</b>                        | clearest, most shallow water at the beach of an island  |
| <b>mundu</b>                       | long sarongs worn by men  |
| <b>nankiun</b>                     | child's naming ceremony, held the seventh day after birth   |
| <b>nantha</b>                      | the list, naming, protocol list, guest list, list of names  |
| <b>Nasiruge gaayy miihun</b>       | former President Nasir's cronies, his close people (with negative connotation)  |
| <b>Nasiruge miihun tha</b>         | former President Nasir's crowd, negative connotation  |
| <b>Nasiruge sarukarugebeefulun</b> | the high-ranking people of Nasir's government   |
| <b>ndoli</b>                       | large, wide-seated swing, a basic piece of Maldivian elite furniture, found in most elite houses in the courtyards and in rooms                             |

|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| <b>Portuguesa miihun</b>      | the Portuguese, remembered for their brutality in their sixteenth century invasion and fifteen-year occupation of Maldives                    |
| <b>Qanoon</b>                 | from Arabic, large book of laws for crimes and respective punishments   |
| <b>raani</b>                  | Sultana, female ruler   |
| <b>rah</b>                    | island (plural is <i>rahr</i> )   |
| <b>raiyyathunge majlis</b>    | elected members of parliament   |
| <b>Rais</b>                   | ruler, now the President  |
| <b>rajja</b>                  | the King, the ruler of Maldives in pre-Islamic times (before 1153 A.D.) when Buddhism was the religion of the country                         |
| <b>rajjenbeeru miie</b>       | actual word for foreigner, meaning person outside the country   |
| <b>rajjenbeerun</b>           | from outside the country, also foreigner  |
| <b>rajjetherage</b>           | inside the country  |
| <b>rajjethere</b>             | rural areas, all the atolls and islands other than Male' but within the country of Maldives, including both inhabited and uninhabited islands |
| <b>Ramazan</b>                | Maldivian version of word for the Muslim month of Ramadan   |
| <b>rang</b>                   | gold  |
| <b>rangkiun</b>               | brideprice  |
| <b>Rannabaderi kilegefaan</b> | one of the five traditional titles that could be bestowed by sultan   |
| <b>rasgefan</b>               | Sultan  |
| <b>ruma</b>                   | traditional head ornament for women, a tightly wound piece of cloth made to look like a flower above one ear                                  |
| <b>sarukaru</b>               | the government, the ruling elite  |
| <b>sarukaruge beefulun</b>    | government people, political elite  |
| <b>sarukaruge vazifa</b>      | government service, position, job   |
| <b>sayyah</b>                 | Arabic word used for travellers   |
| <b>Sayyid beefuleh</b>        | high-ranking people claiming descent from the Prophet Mohamed   |
| <b>Sidi</b>                   | Maldivian name used for a person claiming descent from the Prophet  |

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| <b>sifaing</b>           | national security guards, modern-day successors to Sultan's <i>hangubeekalun</i>  |
| <b>sihuru</b>            | black magic, magic used to produce bad effects  |
| <b>siyassat</b>          | Arabic word used for politics   |
| <b>solawatkiamihe</b>    | prayer-person, man who recites solawat on a daily basis for the house   |
| <b>Tarikh (thareekh)</b> | a chronicle of Maldivian rulers and dynasties from 1153 to 1821, written in Arabic; also an Arabic word used for history in general                               |
| <b>tauziru</b>           | Islamic practice of whipping an offender as punishment  |
| <b>Thaana</b>            | traditional Maldivian script, the version devised to be written from right to left after conversion of Maldives to Islam  |
| <b>thalha folha</b>      | violence  |
| <b>thavid</b>            | the prayer written on the <i>baadi</i> to be placed on child's body for protection  |
| <b>thedhuveri</b>        | personal loyalty  |
| <b>thimaage</b>          | kinsperson  |
| <b>thunjina solawat</b>  | solawats, readings, specifically used to ward off evil spirits  |
| <b>vaielhuvun</b>        | flattering, "blowing wind, filling with wind" (as a sail)   |
| <b>vaihusvun</b>         | loss of favour, the flatterer would have no more wind, suspected of disloyalty  |
| <b>vai miihun</b>        | flatterers, sycophants, blows the wind, keeps ship going with wind, but like the wind, can be deceptive, fickle, coming and going, changing course without notice |
| <b>vazirunge majlis</b>  | cabinet ministers, all appointed by President,  |
| <b>verikun</b>           | the power, rulership, political control   |
| <b>veriya</b>            | an authority  |
| <b>vilu</b>              | the slightly deeper, aquamarine water off the beach, inside the <i>falhu</i> water, but beyond shallower <i>mudu</i> water all inside the reef of the island      |

**SOME MALDIVIAN SAYINGS AND EXPRESSIONS REFERRED  
TO IN THESIS:**

**“Ambiwarikura ishtashi kolu”.**

“The wife doing the divorcing by pulling the little hairs (of the husband”).

**“Bulala miida laves waalu vettuunima ekuvaneve”.**

“Even the cat and the mice will join together when fallen in a well”.

**“Dhivehi Rajje thareekh balalaiirhu...”**

“Looking into Maldivian history...”

**“Liannunnam ithu’baru nukurasche”!**

“Don’t trust brothers-in-law”!

**“Mahana macha madiya jehun”.**

“Somersaulting on someone’s grave”, meaning, showing disrespect for a past leader.

**“Miihe duninghing nantakiae jaluga”.**

“The person’s singing like a bird in jail”.

**“Thareekh alunmii eadha wanii”.**

“History always repeats itself”.

## **APPENDIX [3]**

### **LIST OF MALDIVIAN ELITE KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY**

**Mama** (pronounced mahm-ma) is mother

**Baappa** (pronounced bahpa) is father

**Daatha** (pronounced daa-ta) is older sister

**Koko** (pronounced ko-ko) is younger sister

**Beebe** (pronounced same as baby) is older brother

**Koko** is Younger Brother (same as for younger sister) \*(There is no distinction between full siblings and half siblings. There are no special terms for step-sisters or step-brothers, unless sometimes those growing up together in the same house may use sibling-terms).

**Don Baappa** or **Beebe** is mother's husband (rarely *Baappa*)

**Don Mama** or **Daatha** is father's wife

**Bodu Daatha** is same for both mother's sister and father's sister

**Bodu Beebe** or **Beebe** or **Is Beebe** are the same terms for both mother's brother and father's brother

**Debenge Dedari** is first cousin, child of parent's sibling, brother or sister

**Debenge Dedariyavuree Earikolu Duru** are first cousins once removed in generation

**Beebenge Dedari** are second cousins, children of first cousins \*(Cousins in any direction may be addressed as brother, sister, or by name outward, through second cousin).

**Daitha** is a much older female relative (kin or affine)

**Maama** (pronounced Maa-ma) is mother's mother

**Maama** (the same as above) is also father's mother

**Kaafa** is mother's father

**Kaafa** (the same as above) is also father's father

**Munimaama** or sometimes just **Maama** is the same for mother's father's mother or father's father's mother or mother's mother's mother or father's mother's mother

**Munikaafa** or sometimes just **Kaafa** is the same for mother's mother's father or father's mother's father or mother's father's father or father's father's father

**Hurumaama** is mother's mother's mother's mother (and all combinations of great-great-grandmothers. If they were possibly alive, the address would be either *Maama* or *Bodu Maama*, or in reference, the name of the house plus *Maama*).

**Hurukaafa** is mother's father's father's father (and all combinations of great-great-grandfathers, only in reference).

**Dhari** is child

**Dharifulu** is daughter or son

**Koko** is used for child of both sister and brother (as well as above, for younger brother or younger sister)

**FIRIHENG DHARI** is son

**Angheng Dhari** is daughter

**Dhari Ge Dhari** is grandchild

**Thimaage** is used for any kinsman and applies to anyone related consanguineally bilaterally reckoned. (In reference, the term is always followed by term denoting the particular kinsperson's rank--beefuleh, beekaleh or miiheh).

**Thimaagemiihe** are people related by blood

**Lianoo** is brother-in-law in reference, but brother-in-law addressed usually as *Beebe* or *Koko*; the term *LIANOO* also used in general for any male affine and sometimes for all affines, any people related by marriage

**Fahari** is sister-in-law, female affine, or generally for women related by marriage

**Maydaitha** is spouse's mother (though now people usually say *Mama*)

**Bafakalegee** is spouse's father (though common usage is now *Baappa* or *Beebe*)

**Kujjaa** is baby or child

**Ambi Kambalun** is a "distinguished" person's wife (*beefulun* class)

**Firi Kalun** is a "distinguished" person's husband (*beefulun*)

**Ambi Miiha** is the wife of a *miihe* ("ordinary man")

**Firi Miiha** is the husband of a *miiha* ("ordinary woman")

**Kaivani** is marriage

**Rangkiun** is brideprice (also *mehir* for bride-money)

**Wari** is divorce

"**Aila**" is the Arabic word used for a "distinguished" family

**Khandan** is the Urdu word used for "long family line" or like a dynasty, including ancestors, for the most "distinguished" families

## **APPENDIX [4]**

### **CHART OF SOME PROMINENT HOUSES AND SIBLING GROUPS IN MALE', 1976-1980:**

#### **Enderimaage**

Abbas  
Ilyas  
Nasreena(Gayoom)  
Farisha

#### **Atariige**

(late Ameen Didi)  
Ameena Mohamed Ameen

#### **Velaanaage**

Ibrahim Nasir  
Mrs. Ibrahim Zaki  
  
Ahmed, Ali, Mohamed

#### **Kolige**

(Umar Maniku)  
Ali Maniku(Hafsa)  
Mohamed Maniku  
Ahmed Maniku  
Nasira(Ilyas Ibrahim)  
Nasira

#### **Akakage**

Hafsa (Ali Maniku)  
Ibrahim Hilmy Didi  
Ahmed Hilmy Didi

#### **Mandueduruge**

Ibrahim Rasheed  
Ismail Rasheed  
Rasheeda Mhd. Didi

#### **Maizandoshuge**

Fatimath  
Adam Maniku  
Maizan Ali Maniku  
Aishath  
Khadija

#### **Karankage**

Shareefa(Ibr. Rasheed)

#### **Bageechage**

Ibrahim Shihab  
Adnan Hussein  
Fatimath(Ameen Didi)  
Mariyam Saeed(Nasir)

#### **Bodufengwaluge**

Aminath Hussein  
Ameena Hussein  
Mujthaba Ahmed  
Musthafa Hussein

#### **Carnationmage**

Hussein Moosa  
Siraj  
Aminath Didi  
Fatimath Didi

#### **Sosunge**

Aminath Hussein  
Aishath Zubair(Nasir)  
Abdullah Zubair  
(late Titi Gomaa)

#### **Nooraanee Villa**

Abdul Hannan  
Moomina Haleem(Kandi)  
Hussein Haleem  
Mohamed Haleem  
Maumoona(Naseem)

#### **Faamuderige**

Aminath Didi(Ameen)  
Hussein Zaki  
Ibrahim Zaki(Nasir)  
Don Didi

#### **Aage**

Ahmed Hilmy Didi

**Hikifinifenmaage**  
Naseema Mhd.(Nasir)  
Saleema  
Naseem(Maumoona)  
Assima  
Saleem Ali  
Waseema  
Ume

**Kullawaage**  
(Mohamed Jameel)  
Fatimath Jameel  
Fathulla Jameel  
Abdulla Jameel  
Jedulla Jameel  
Aminath Jameel

**Egamge**  
(late Ibr. Ali Didi)  
Fatimath(Ahmed Zaki)  
Jameela(Shathir)  
Aishath(Abdul Sattar)  
Khadija

**Orchidmage**  
Mohamed Zaki  
Ahmed Zaki(Fatimath)  
Aminath Didi

**Manduge**  
(Gomafulu)  
Habeeba(Zubair)

**Noomarage**  
Zubaida Mhd.Didi  
(late Ameen Didi)  
Ismail Mhd.Didi  
Moosa Mhd.Didi

## APPENDIX [5]

LIST OF PRESIDENTS & THEIR KEY RELATIONSHIPS including Their Houses, Marriages, Children, and Affines including *Lianoo* (brothers-in-law), *Fahari* (sisters-in-law), *Delianoo* (men/women who share in-laws), & *Bafakalegee* (father of spouse)/*Maydaitha* (mother of spouse) where pertinent

### 1) *President Mohamed Ameen Didi:*

(First President, First Republic, 1953; formerly Prime Minister)

- Ameen Didi and his sister inherited two houses: *Atariige*, which he took upon division, and *Aage*, which went to his sister, who married Ahmed Hilmy Didi (thus *lianoo* to Ameen Didi) of *Akakage*, and his sister married Ali Maniku of *Kolige*
- 1<sup>st</sup> marriage to Fatimath Saeed of *Bageechage* with siblings: brothers-Ibrahim Shihab and Adnan Hussein (*lianoo* of Ameen Didi)
  - \* sister-Mariyam Saeed (*fahari* of Ameen Didi) and wife of Ibrahim Nasir, who later became second President, thus Ameen Didi and Ibrahim Nasir were once *delianoo*
  - \* (Ameen Didi and Fatimath Saeed had one daughter, Ameena Mohamed Ameen, who was the only child of the first President; she later became Private Secretary to Nasir and later banished)
- divorced Fatimath Saeed
- 2<sup>nd</sup> marriage to Aminath Didi of *Faamuderige* with siblings:
  - \* brothers-Hussein Zaki and Ibrahim Zaki (*lianoo*), who was married to the sister of Ibrahim Nasir and father of Ahmed Zaki, who later became Prime Minister under Nasir before being banished
  - \* sister-Don Didi (*fahari*), who was married to Sultan Designate Abdul Majeed, who never succeeded to the throne, thus Ameen Didi and Abdul Majeed were once *delianoo*
- divorced Aminath Didi
- 3<sup>rd</sup> marriage to former wife, Fatimath Saeed

*President Mohamed Ameen Didi (Cont.)*

- later married a second wife, while keeping Fatimath as wife 4th marriage to Zubaida Mohamed Didi of *Noomarage* with siblings:  
\* brothers-Ismail Mohamed Didi and Moosa Mohamed Didi (*lianoo* to President Mohamed Ameen Didi, while his other *lianoo*, Ibrahim Shihab and Adnan Hussein, though members of his cabinet, were suspected of involvement in coup-plot that led to Ameen Didi's assassination and overthrow of the first short-lived republican government
  
- Ameen Didi also maintained special liason with Aminath Hussein (who was known as his confidante and called his "lover") for whom he built a large house, *Sosunge*, for her family, siblings by her mother, including the first wife of President Nasir

## 2) *President Ibrahim Nasir:*

(Second President, Second Republic, 1968-1978; formerly Prime Minister)

--- Ibrahim Nasir and his sister of *Velaanaage*; his sister married Ibrahim Zaki of *Faamuderige*, the brother of Ameen Didi's second wife, and they had son, Ahmed Zaki, who later became Prime Minister under President Nasir before being banished

--- 1<sup>st</sup> marriage to Aishath Zubair of *Sosunge* with siblings:  
\* brother-twin, Abdullah Zubair (thus *lianoo*), who was married to Habeeba, daughter of a last princess  
\* sisters-(*fahari* to Nasir) Aminath Hussein and Titi Gomaa, another princess  
\* (Ibrahim Nasir and Aishath Zubair had one son, Ahmed Nasir, who later married, then divorced first wife to marry her sister, and later they went into exile)

--- divorced Aishath Zubair

--- 2<sup>nd</sup> marriage to Mariyam Saeed of *Bageechage* with siblings:  
\* brothers-Ibrahim Shihab and Adnan Hussein (thus *lianoo* to both 1<sup>st</sup> President Ameen Didi and 2nd President Ibrahim Nasir, making them *delianoo*); the brothers then held positions in Nasir's cabinet as they had in Ameen Didi's  
\* sister-Fatimath Saeed (Nasir's *fahari*), wife and widow of Ameen Didi  
\* (Ibrahim Nasir and Mariyam Saeed had two sons, Mohamed Nasir, who went into exile and died overseas, and Ali Nasir, who was first imprisoned in Male' and later released during government-led witch-hunt against his father's family/affines/friends)

--- divorced Mariyam Saeed, but kept her brothers in his cabinet

--- 3<sup>rd</sup> marriage to Naseema Mohamed of *Hikifinifenmaage* with seven siblings, five of whom soon had spouses, and a rich father, Mohamed Kaleyfan (Nasir's new *bafakalegee*) and strong mother:  
\* brothers-Ahmed Naseem and Saleem Ali (both *lianoo* to Nasir), Naseem was married to Maumoon Haleem of *Nooraanee Villa* and sister of Maldives' most powerful woman, Moomina Haleem  
\* sisters-all Nasir's *fahari*- Saleema, married to Razak (thus *delianoo* with Nasir); Assima, married to Shakur; Waseema, married to Ismail; and youngest sister Ume  
\* (Ibrahim Nasir and Naseema Mohamed had two children, a boy and a girl, who remained with him in Singapore when they divorced)

--- divorced Naseema Mohamed after alleged coup-plot turmoil

### 3) *President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom:*

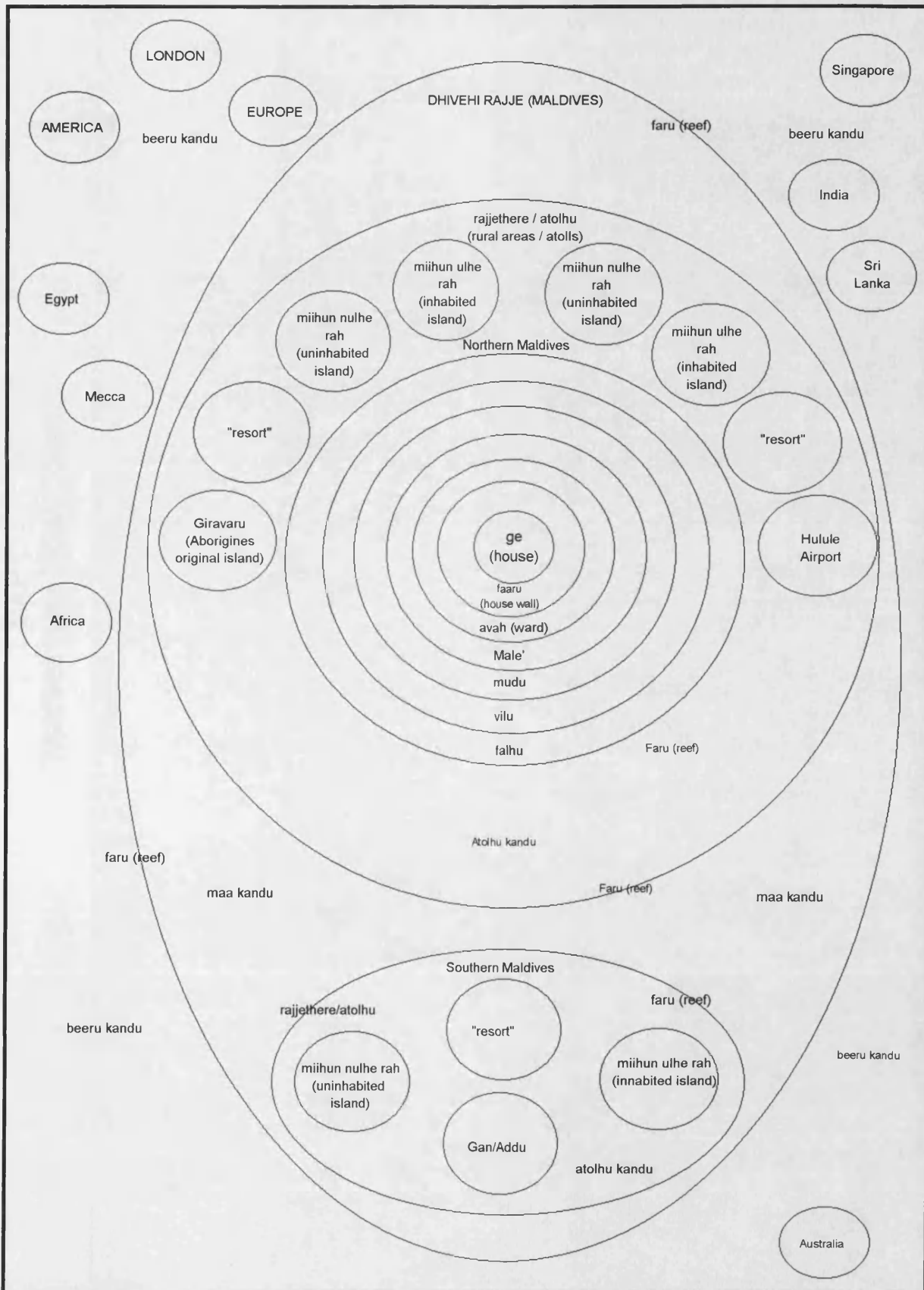
(Third President of Maldives, Second Republic, 1978-1983 present 1995, formerly banished by Nasir, then Minister of Transportation in Nasir's cabinet)

- Son of a *Sayyid Beefulun*, descended from Prophet Mohamed, from intellectual family without wealth, a brother and a sister by father, and only a plot of land for future house-building
- Well educated at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, and former teacher in Nigeria
- 1<sup>st</sup> and only marriage to Nasreena Ibrahim of *Enderimaage* with rich father, Ibrahim Abbas (*Bafakalegee* to Gayoom) and strong mother, Hava Manike (*Maydaitha* to Gayoom) and siblings:
  - \* brothers-Abbas Ibrahim, married once earlier and then married to Zahe, and Ilyas Ibrahim, married to Nasira of *Kolige*, sister of *Kolige* Ali Maniku, the richest Maldivian, later married to a second wife while keeping Nasira (both Abbas and Ilyas were *lianoo* with Gayoom)
  - \* sister- Farisha (Fari), married to Ibrahim Samari Maniku (who was thus *delianoo* with Gayoom because they shared *lianoo*)
  - \* (Maumoon Gayoom and Nasreena Ibrahim had four children-- twin girls, Dunya and Yumna, and two younger boys, Faris and

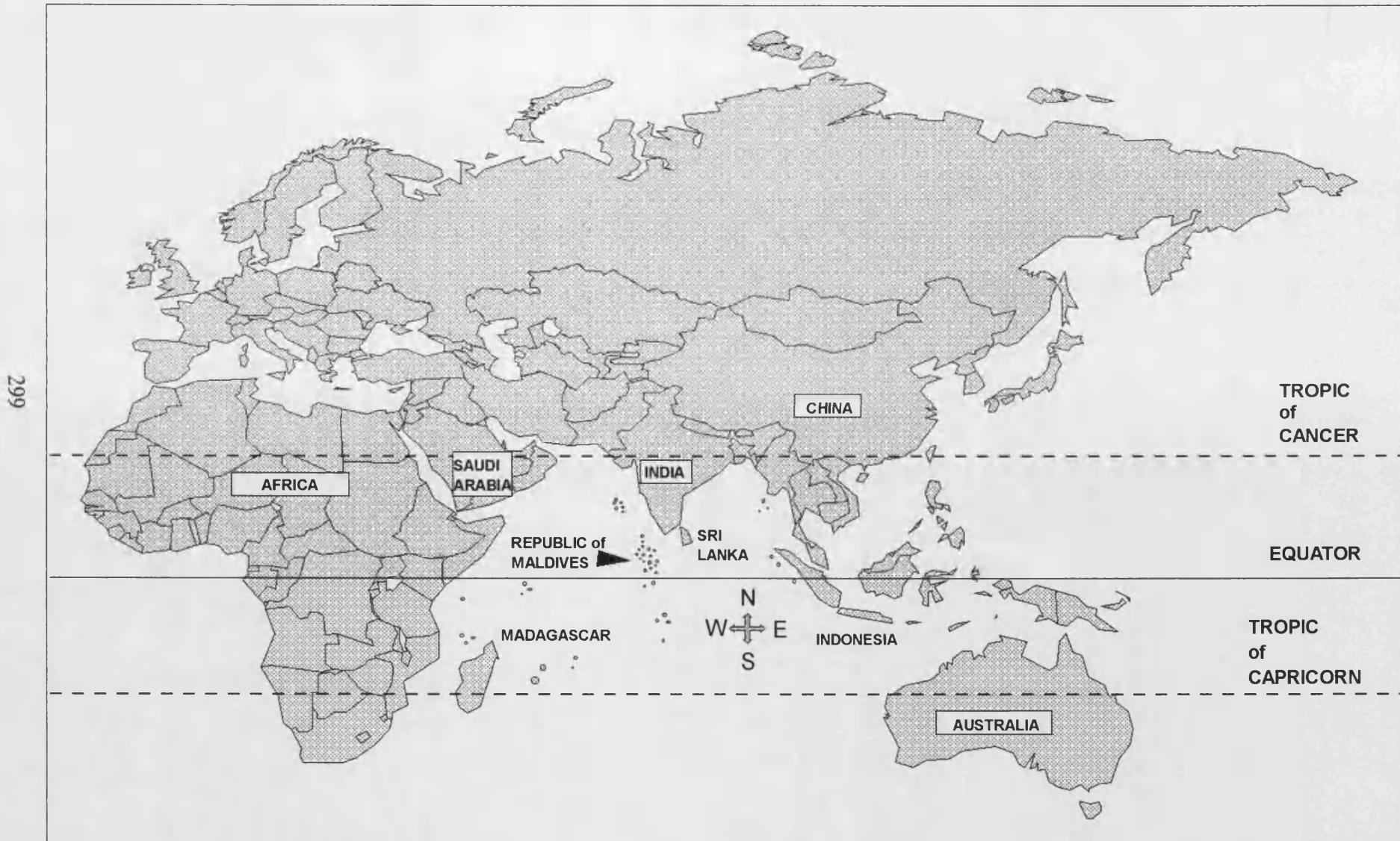


# APPENDIX [7]

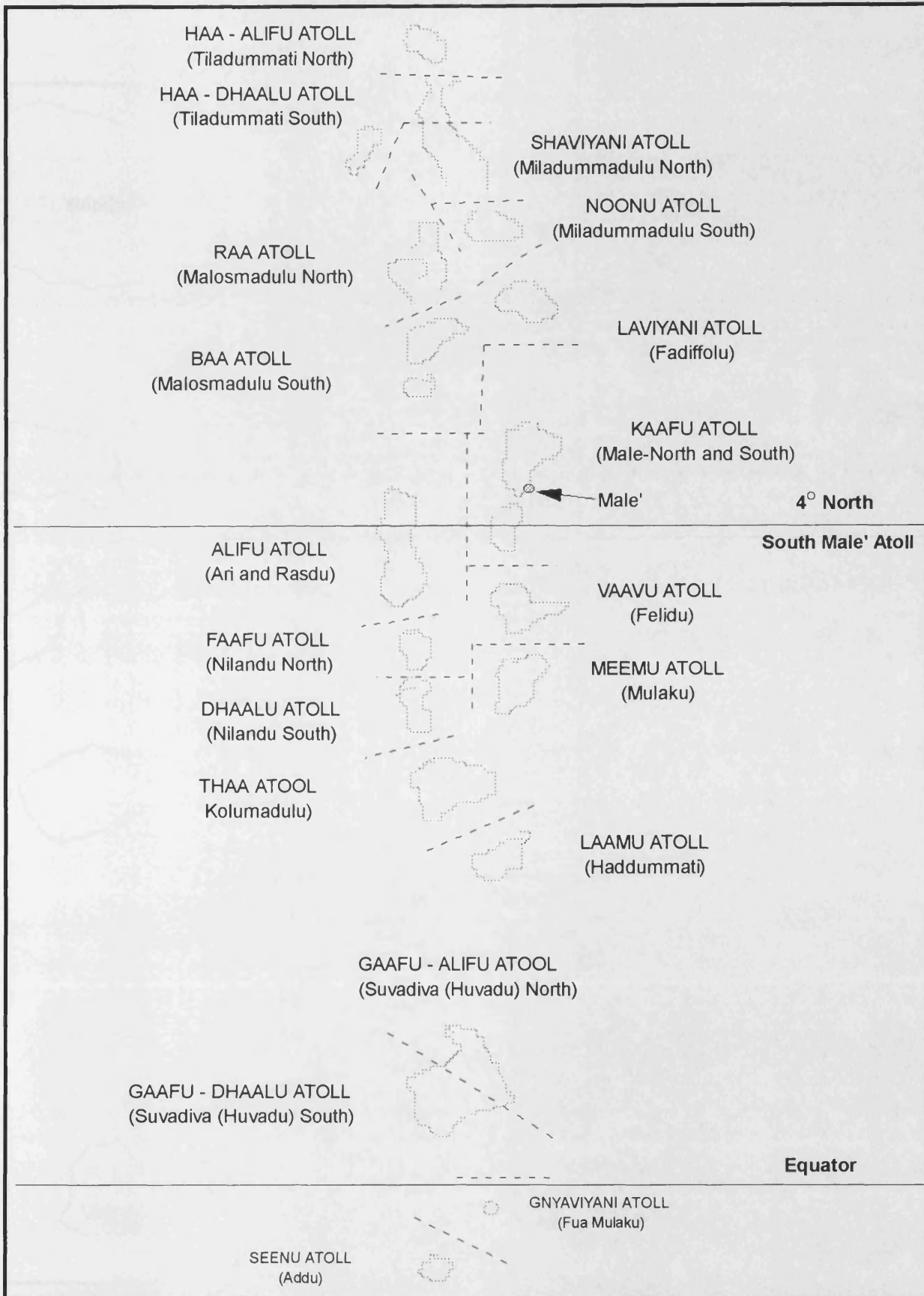
Diagram Illustrating World-View of the Maldivian Elite



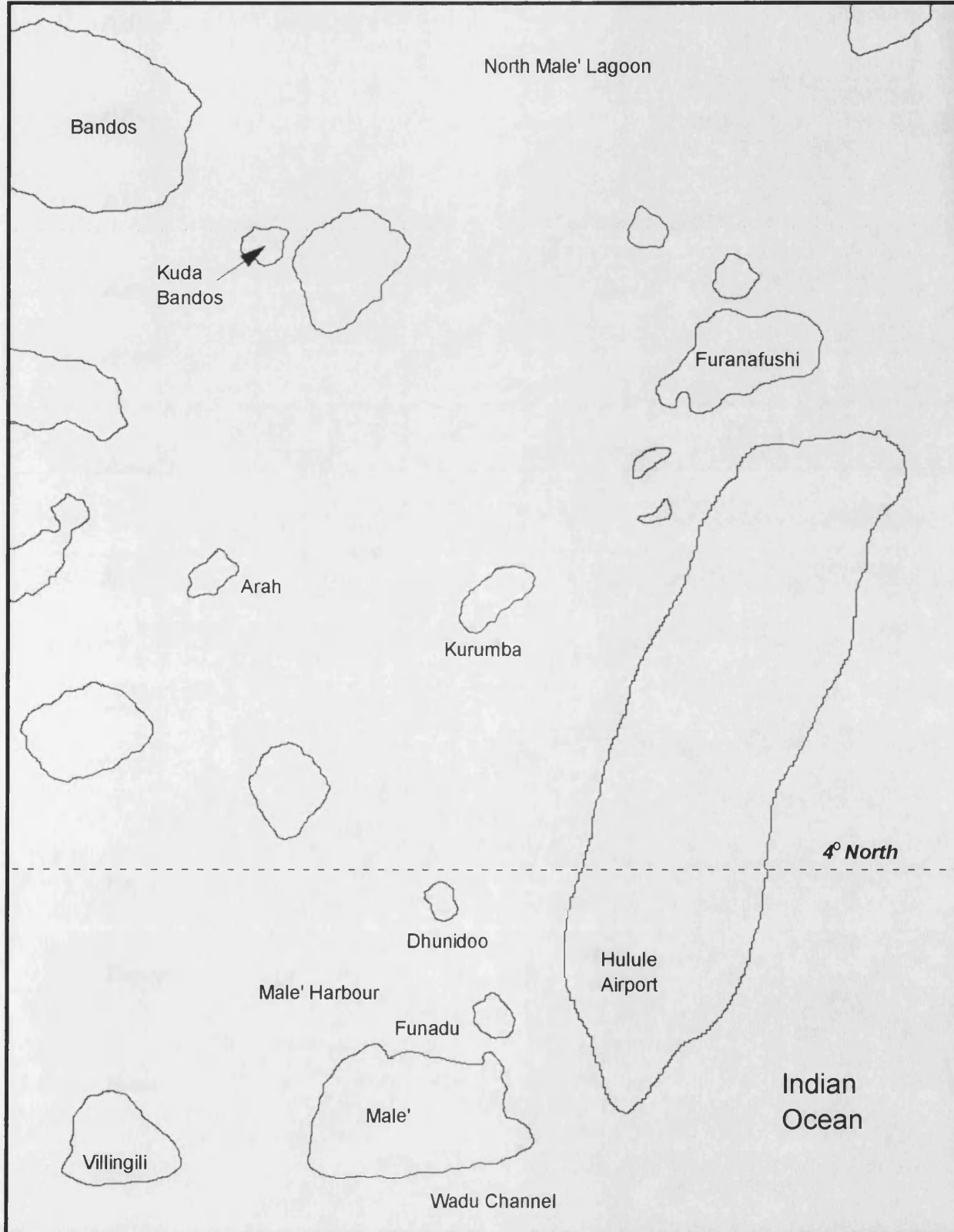
MAP 1  
Maldives in the Indian Ocean



## MAP 2 The Republic of Maldives



MAP 3  
Male' and Neighbouring Islands



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