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Emerging Oceanic Refugees in the Name of Ecological Conservation:
A Case Study of Chagossians

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Abstract

This paper is focused on the Indian Ocean in order to study an island community called Chagossians, former inhabitants of the Chagos Archipelago. All of them were forcibly (and illegally) displaced and relocated either in the Seychelles or Mauritius between 1967 and 1973 by the UK and US to make way for the construction of a US military base on Diego Garcia, a main island of the Chagos Archipelago. The UK and the US made a secret deal to eject the 2000 native inhabitants of Diego Garcia and the other islands in the Archipelago. The UK cut off the Archipelago from Mauritius as a lesser dependency and renamed it as British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) in 1965; in return Mauritius got its independence in 1968.

Various research studies have been conducted on the case: the precarious living conditions of the displaced Chagossians, their uprooted cultural identities, human rights, to name a few. This paper explores a literary work, *Le Silence des Chagos* (2005) by Shenaz Patel, translated from French into English by Jeffrey Zuckerman in 2019 as *Silence of the Chagos*, which enables us to understand the Chagossian plight from an anthropocentric perspective. My critical project is informed by the interpretive possibilities offered by the concept of island-ness and the discipline of blue humanities. Island-ness operates within geopolitics and emotional geographies. Blue humanities recognises the significance of oceans not only as resources but also as sites of conflict, particularly where military induced development activities generate deep-seated divisions.

Key words: Blue Humanities, island-ness, the Indian Ocean, the Chagos islands, Diego Garcia, Chagossian Refugees

1. Blue Humanities in the Indian Ocean

In March, 2020, the theme of an international symposium organized by the Nagoya University American Literature/Culture Society and the British and American Cultural Studies Program, Faculty of World Englishes of Chukyo University was announced as “Blue Humanities: Anglo-American Literature/

Culture and the Aquatic Environment." Upon receiving a call for paper for the symposium, almost instantly I thought of presenting a paper on the Chagos Archipelago which was declared a Marine Protected Area (MPA) in 2010 by the UK.

Blue Humanities has been receiving highly rated attention in many disciplines, namely, History, Literary Studies, and Environmental Studies. Environment studies are divided into two categories: Green and Blue. The ocean defined as Blue has been perceived as mysterious by the humans yet it is the origin of all sentient beings; so huge as to be resistant to anthropogenic harm, yet in so much danger. Large areas of the global oceans have been imperiled by privatization and pollution, driving ocean-going forms of life, including humans, to relocation and/or extinction.

I refer to Blue Humanities in this paper to underscore the fact that the oceanic environmental policy of the UK could have an adverse impact on the circumstances of Chagossians. The policy would not do anthropogenic but anthropocentric harm to the Chagossians. The UK government used conservation as its latest tactic to prevent Chagossians from going back to their islands, including Diego Garcia. The Chagossians were forcibly removed from their islands by the British, not due to conservation projects, but to allow the setting up of a US military base. The British and Americans manoeuvre the marine environment for political interventions to keep Chagossians away from their home.

The term "conservation refugee" has been used since the 2010s. Mark Dowie, an American journalist, exposed the kind of "fortress conservation" in his book, *Conservation Refugees: The Hundred-Year Conflict between Conservation and Native Peoples* (2009). He recommends the absence of humans in order for nature to flourish. Across the world, millions of people, mainly indigenous, have been illegally evicted from their ancestral homelands in the name of conservation. The Chagossians were not evicted in the name of conservation; yet the UK and the US have used conservation as a political strategy.

In an article published by the British newspaper *The Independent* on 9 Feb. 2009 and entitled "Giant Marine Park Plan for Chagos－Islanders may return to be environmental wardens", Sadie Gray reported that the British government was planning to establish the Marine Protected Area (MPA), a marine park in the waters surrounding the Chagos Islands. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mauritius reiterated the sovereignty of Mauritius over the Chagos Islands and stated that the establishment of any marine park, whatever it may be, would require respect for international law by all parties concerned and the consent of

Mauritius. In response, the British Foreign Office reasserted that the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) was under the sovereignty of the UK. In November 2009, the British Foreign Secretary informed the Prime Minister of Mauritius that the UK would be willing to engage in bilateral discussions with Mauritius on the establishment of a marine protected area. The UK had no intention of making any final decision without any consultations with Mauritius. However, the different opinions held by the UK and Mauritius on the establishment of the MPA remained unresolved.

In December 2010, diplomatic documents dated back to 15 May, 2009, between the UK and the US, were leaked through WikiLeaks, suggesting that the intention of establishing of the MPA was to prevent the return of the former islanders, Chagossians to their homeland. In March 2010, the UK implemented the establishment of the MPA and introduced the measure of total ban on fishing in the MPA. In December 2010, Mauritius filed a complaint to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) Mandatory Dispute Settlement System to challenge the consistency of the British MPA with the UNCLOS and related international law.

Meanwhile, the Chagossians conducted strike activities and reiterated their right to return home. Their voices, struggles and protests were brought before the International Court of Justice in 2019. The UN says that the way the UK expelled Chagossians was against international law and the UK must bring an end to its administration of the Chagos Archipelago as rapidly as possible. Mauritius won this historical battle by reasserting its sovereignty over the Chagos. Only one US judge voted against the other 13 judges supporting Justice's advisory opinion. The advisory opinion itself is nonbinding. However, Owen Bowcott, in an article "UN court rejects UK's claim of sovereignty over Chagos Islands", published by the British newspaper, *The Guardian* on 25th of February 2019, argues that "the unambiguous clarity of the judges' pronouncement is a humiliating blow to Britain's prestige on the world stage."

The Chagos islands have been geopolitically important for the UK and the US. The strategic significance of the Diego Garcia military base for the US was demonstrated in 1991 during the first Gulf War; during the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the US and its allies; in the wake of 9/11 when the US bombers launched attacks on Afghanistan.

2. Island-ness in the Indian Ocean

Localized island studies seem marginal in geography and peripheral to

continents; however, the concept of island-ness has stratified meanings in the globalized world. Island-ness represents islands as isolated yet connected, localized yet globalized entities surrounded by water. Island-ness in the context of Blue Humanities can be extended to the study of how islands, which were or still are colonized such as the Chagos islands met socio-economic challenges of colonization in the past and how they deal with the present militarization. The area in the Indian Ocean, a web of socio-economic and geo-political networks connecting a vast area from south-eastern Africa to China, incorporating the Middle East, the vast area of Asia and Australia, is densely populated holding half of the world's population. Thus, the US has concentrated its attention on the Indian Ocean for the purpose of watching over the Middle East and the Eurasian Continent since the Second World War and during the Cold War. The Americans have found a specific way to make use of Diego Garcia as a secret military base.

In her essay "Island-ness in the India Ocean", Gupta (2010)[1] defines and explores the concept of islandness. She "take[s] Fernand Braudel's[2] history of the Mediterranean as a starting point for thinking about the nature of island-ness" (275):

> The events of history often lead to the island. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that they make use of them. (275)[3]

Gupta introduces Braudel's way of making history in order to shift the perception of islands from places where people happen to end up in shipwrecks to venues of "connectivities between land and water, mainlands and islands, ships and ports, islands and beaches" (275). Island-ness also carries the connotation of vulnerability. Mascarene Islands, Reunion, Mauritius and Rodrigue, and the Chagos islands in the Indian Ocean, were the sites of resilience, colonialism, economic and military development.

The vulnerability of islands is exemplified in the current COVID-19 situation with more cases worldwide and a new variety reported in the recent months of November and December 2020. The first four countries, that completely closed

[1] Pamila Gupta is a researcher based at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa.

[2] Fernand Braudel (1902-1985) is a French historian and has been considered one of the greatest of the modern historians who have emphasized the role of large-scale socioeconomic and geopolitical factors in the making and writing of history.

[3] "Island-ness in the Indian Ocean," *Eyes Across the Water: Navigating the Indian Ocean*. U of South Africa Press, 2010.

their borders, were such island countries as Tuvalu, Samoa, Kiribati in the Pacific Ocean and the Comoros and Mauritius in the Indian Ocean. Mauritius imposed a sanitary curfew on the 20th of March as from 6:00 (AM). The curfew was extended until the 1st of June 2020.

In the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, a Japanese iron ore bulker (length of 300 m and tonnage of 200,000) was shipwrecked on the south east coast of Mauritius on the 25th of July, 2020. The Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change of Mauritius announced in a communiqué dated 6th of August, 2020 at 11:00 that there was a breach in the vessel MV WAKASHIO. There was a leakage of oil in the lagoons of Blue Bay, Pointe d'Esny and Mahebourg. This area is a highly sensitive environmental zone that includes the Ramsar[4] site of Pointe d'Esny and the Blue Bay Marine Park.

Gupta describes islands "as places of containment or quarantine (leper colonies), as potential places for exile and imprisonment, [...] as military bases and/or sites of nuclear testing" (Gupta, 275). The Chagos islands have become 'leper colonies' as BIOT, and Mauritius, an island nation state, is a temporary home for Chagossian refugees.

3. Overview of the History of Chagos & Chagossians

The Chagos islands were first inhabited in the late eighteenth century, when French plantation owners from Mauritius (then known as Ile de France, a colony of France) constructed coconut plantations there and imported slaves from Africa to work on them. After 1810, "Mauritius and its dependent islands and archipelagos－particularly Rodrigues and Diego Garcia－were "important imperial communications stepping-stones" (Jackson, 2001, 11). Life in the outer islands followed the same basic pattern and evolution as in Mauritius: abolition of slavery and its replacement by indentured labour. The Chagos, particularly, was "a colony of a colony, dependency of a dependency" (Vine, 2009, 26).

In the middle of the Cold War, the late 1950s, the US decided to establish a military base in the Indian Ocean in order to defend the Arabian Gulf against possible threats from the Soviet Union and China. Diego Garcia was chosen as the ideal site for the following reasons: 1. its geopolitical location at the heart of the Indian Ocean 2. its size and unique shape 3. the absence of endangered species 4. the nature of its population ("not a permanent or semi-permanent population"

[4] The Convention on Wetlands is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. Available at https://www.ramsar.org/ [accessed 2 of Jan. 2021]

or "a floating population")[5] 5. the fact that it was still a colony of Great Britain, the America's solidest ally. The Chagos Archipelago was then a dependency of the British colony of Mauritius. Mauritius at that time was seeking independence.

Britain separated the Chagos Archipelago from the dominion of Mauritius first, and created a new colony, the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) in 1965. Then Britain leased Diego Garcia to the US. All of the Chagossians were forcibly displaced and relocated either in the Seychelles or Mauritius between 1967 and 1973. Britain asserted its sovereignty over the Chagos Islands. The Chagossians were uprooted so that Diego Garcia could be established as a key military base in the Indian Ocean.

A distinct indigenous outer island culture developed progressively on the Chagos, referred to as the culture of Ilois [*zilwa*] a.k.a. Chagossians. Chagossians had been living there for approximately five generations till they were forcibly removed. Their ancestors are buried in the cemeteries on the islands. It was in this context of exile and, as will be shown, poverty in distant Mauritius that the people of the Chagos islands developed a new awareness of their identities and socio-political conditions as Chagossians.

Back in 2005, I conducted interviews with 20 Chagossians from 3 generations to research their memories, feelings and thoughts about their homelands. The first generation of Chagos refugees - most of them have passed away since then - vividly remembered how they were removed and relocated in Mauritius. Some left the Chagos islands for Mauritius in order to visit a hospital, for example, but they could not return home. They were told that their islands had been sold, so there was no way to go back. Others were forcibly pushed on board without enough time to pack their belongings. Their pet dogs were killed in front of their eyes. They took the killing as a threatening warning against them "with its unsubtle implication that humans might be next" (Pilger, 2007, p.45). Finally, the rest of the islanders had to get on board and leave the islands.

Many of Chagossians have never celebrated the Independence of Mauritius because the tragedy of the Chagos islands is deeply linked to its independence. Chagossians are the victims of the Independence of Mauritius. Mauritians used to discriminate against Chagossians, calling them "ZILWA." When they were brought to Mauritius, they were put into animal pens. They were and still are the poorest in the country without decent jobs. The Chagos archipelago was, still is and will be a homeland of the Chagossians. Those who lived there have their

[5] See Vine, *Island of Shame* (Chapter 4 ""Exclusive Control"; Chapter 5 "Maintaining the Fiction" pp.72-92)

local identities and island identities deeply connected to the Chagos islands.

Formerly Chagossians on the Chagos islands were plantation laborers and not fully educated . They did not need money to buy things. They were more like a whole big family helping and supporting each other. Therefore, they had a tough time to adjust to the more modern Mauritian society after independence in 1968. They lived in despair with high mortality and suicide rates. Chagossian women undertook hunger strike action and activist groups led by Olivier Bancoult managed to wage a series of campaigns and legal battles through the British courts. The legal battles revealed the political nature of the plight of the Chagossians.

The UK government, without consulting Mauritian government, more than three decades later after they had forcibly removed Chagossians, declared an MPA around the Chagos Archipelago, the world's largest marine protection area in BIOT.

4. A Reading of *Silence of the Chagos* (Patel, 2019)

There are a few English novels related to or focused on Chagossian refugees: *A Lesser Dependency* (Peter Benson, 1989) by a British author, and *Mutiny* (Lindsey Collen, 2001) by a South African born Mauritian writer, to name a few. In this section I will analyse Shenaz Patel's *Le Silence des Chagos* which was translated from French into English in 2019 by J. Suckerman (*Silence of the Chagos*). Patel is a Mauritian journalist and writer. She is the author of several novels, plays, short stories, and children's books. She was an International Writers Program (IWP) Resident at the University of Iowa and Honorary Fellow at City of Asylum, Pittsburgh in the US in 2016. She was a fellow at the W. E. B Du Bois Research Institute at Harvard University in 2018. The translated book was published by *Restless Books*, an independent, nonprofit publisher devoted to championing essential voices from around the world. The Chagossian's tragic plight inspired her to write the novel.

The novel is constructed as a story with a dual location, Mauritius and Diego Garcia, and dual time zone, here now and back then, and three-generation characters. The story shifts frequently between Mauritius and Diego Garcia; in 1968, 1963, 1967, 1973 and 1993. The structure of the story functions effectively to show the intricate lives of the Chagossians buffeted by the political tactics of the UK and the US.

Patel starts her story with a geographical description: "A string of islands strewn across the sea" (1). Then she continues the prologue by describing

historical and geological features, the plate tectonics background of "Gondwana" and "Lemuria". She contrasts a boy in battle-weary Afghanistan with a hungry Chagossian boy in Mauritius (2-3). This way of starting the story is very thoughtful: the comparison with Afghanistan is meant to draw our attention to the strategic significance of the US military base in Diego Garcia. The Diego Garcia US military base has played a significant role in many conflicts, from the Vietnamese War (1965), the Arab-Israeli War (1973), the Gulf War (1991), the Iraq War (2003) to the American War in Afghanistan (2001). The history of the Chagos, which is not well known in Japan, has a global dimension.

Patel uses a plethora of terms to name Chagos, "Chagos", "Diego", "Deported", "Forced exile", "Military base" (2), as a place and a site. The epigraph presents an excerpt from a Chagossian song in Chagossian Creole, named *homeland*:

Letan mo ti viv dan Diego
Mo ti kouma payanke dan lezer
Depi mo ape viv dan Moris
Mo amen lavi kotomidor

When I lived in Diego
I was like a tropicbird in the light
Now I am in Mauritius
I am like a restless bird in the night

---EXCERPT FROM "PAYS NATAL"
[HOMELAND], A SONG COMPOSED
AND SUNG BY THE CHAGOSSIANS
IN EXILE IN MAURITIUS

TRANSLATED BY LAURA JEFFERY & SARADHA SOOBRAYEN

The song symbolizes the voice of Chagossians: they once lived in their homeland, free enough to "fly" around their paradise-like home. Their memories of freedom stand in stark contrast to their current status as displaced refugees in Mauritius.

Charlesia, Raymonde and Désiré , the protagonists of the novel are based on real- life Chagossians. Charlesia, based on a real-life Chagossian named Marie Charlesia Alexis (1934-2012), represented the first group of Chagossians in the

British eviction plan.[6] She was persuaded to accompany her sick husband to Mauritius for hospital treatment. After his recovery, they could never return home.

Charlesia longs for life "back there" on Diego Garcia, where she spent her days harvesting coconuts and her nights dancing to sega music.[7] Music and dance are important markers of Chagossian culture and identity. "Back there" is a key phrase which frequently pops up to illustrate her longing to go "back." As she struggles to come to terms with the injustice of her new reality, Charlesia encounters a young man named Déiré. He is Raymonde' son, born on *Nordvaer*, the last boat carrying deported Chagossians on the one-way journey from Diego Garcia to Mauritius. Désiré has never set foot on Diego Garcia, but as Charlesia describes the vivid story of their people, he learns of the home he never knew and of the life he might have had.

Raymonde represents one of the very last islanders to be forcibly expelled on board the overcrowded boat *Nordvaer* in 1973. Forewarned of the plight of previous deportees, the Chagossians on this exhausting passage protested when they arrived in Port Louis, refusing to get off until they were guaranteed basic housing and financial assistance. Désiré is, therefore, neither a Chagossian nor a Mauritian. His birth certificate registered him as a citizen of the Seychelles for convenience.

Raymonde has kept the information about her family and the other Chagossians from her son, trying to protect both of them from the trauma of remembering their forced relocation. For the first time after twenty years, she disclosed information about his birth on the boat. Charlesia is like a grandmother to Désiré and teaches him about his imaginative homeland, their culture, history, and their identity as Chagossians.

In the first section of the novel, "Mauritius, 1968" (7-29), when Mauritius celebrates its independence from the UK, "Charlesia had heard the Independence Day cannon, so what?" For her, it was "noise"; "there was never any hope of quiet" (8). For her, a "red-blue-yellow-green flag" (9) is meaningless, not a

[6] Marie Charlesia Alexis was born on Diego Garcia in 1934 and died in England in 2012. She was granted British citizenship in 2002 and became a singer and activist. She went on hunger strike along with a small group of Chagossian women, in which there were Lisette Talate and Rita Bancoult, with whom I conducted an interview in 2005. They protested against their treatment in Mauritius and demanded the right to return to their homeland.

[7] Sega is both song and dance. The ravane (a thin, wide drum covered with a goat's skin), the *maravane* (a pebble filled box that makes a rattling sound when shaken) and the triangle are played. The sega is extremely versatile. In colonial times, the sega was banned by the slave masters, being considered crude and taboo. Today it is no longer a creole song and dance, but the national song and dance (see Roseline NgCheong-Lum, Culture Shock! 1998, pp.54-56).

National flag. In her study of Patel's novel, "Belonging Nowhere: Shenaz Patel's *Le Silence des Chagos*," Waters (2018, p. 122) holds that "Mauritian independence is viewed from the marginal perspective of Chaggosian characters". Looking at Mauritius Independence Day celebrations through the eyes of Chagossians is an accurate reflection of their feelings of not belonging to Mauritius. The Independence Day cannon, therefore, sounded as a noisy "drum being banged over and over and over" (11). "Nothing was right here" (13).

"Back there" (13) in Diego Garcia, the sea had been everywhere. "Behind them, beneath their eyes, the inner sea, the outer sea, its muted, smoothing rhythms harmonizing to protect and cradle the horseshoe that was their land" (11). The sea is like the air they need to live with and on. Their "island is closed" (25). The Chagossians believe that "it was Mauritius, the British, and the Americans who rendered us undead" (142).

Every afternoon Charlesia, wearing a red headscarf, walks to the end of the quay and looks out over the water, fixing her gaze "back there", that is, on Diego Garcia. Without any explanation, no forewarning, and only an hour to pack their belongings, the entire population of Diego Garcia was forced on a boat headed to Mauritius. Government officials told Charlesia that the island was "closed" and there was no going back for any of them.[8] Although the sea between here now in Mauritius and back there in Diego Garcia lays boundlessly, the definite line between here and there has been created by the UK as British Indian Ocean Territory.

Even though Désiré and Charlesia have known each other for a long time, yet they have never talked about Chagos before. In the second and third sections, "Diego Garcia, 1963 and 1967," their lives and silenced deportation are described in contrast to the first section of "noise" (8) of the Independence Day cannon and the other children chanting of "L'ile Maurice, in-dé-pen-dance!" (Mauritius independence!) (8). Finally, Désiré, after having listened to Charlesia's narrative, begins to uphold a Chagossian identity through reflection on the loud "independence celebrations at school. A happy day that as a child he had awaited excitedly" (142). He, as an adult, tries to understand "their independence" (144), not his.

Patel narrates the trauma of displacement through a young man's journey of self-discovery. "Nord" (73) as in "Nordver" is (74) the name by which Désiré is

[8] *The object of the exercise was to get some rocks which will remain outs; there will be no indigenous population except seagulls who have not yet got a Committee (the Status of Women Committee does not cover the rights of Birds).* Portion of a diplomatic cable sent in August 1966 by colonial office in London to the British Delegation at the United Nations. (31)

called by his aunt. He could not answer his cousin's question why the aunt calls him Nord instead of his real name, Désiré. He was born at sea, so he is called by the name of the boat, the Nordvaer, on which he was born. When he was on Mauritian soil on the following day of "the third day of work" (125), he was asked to show his ID card, which he did not have because "[h]e wasn't Mauritian" (126).

> Désiré didn't know where he belonged anymore. Mauritius? He had always lived here but he had no nationality. The Seychelles? He had never seen that land. Britain? They were even less willing to take him on there. The Chagos? He had never been to those islands where he should have come into the world. His place of birth was a boat that had disappeared. (126-127)

Désiré's reflections on his loss of identity and belonging help us understand the impact of geopolitics on human lives.

The non-linear structure of the novel functions spatially and temporally as a signifier for the Chagossians' displaced and uprooted identities. Both place and time constantly shift through the narrative. Readers feel the Chagossians' displacement: from the Chagos via the Seychelles/Mauritius to the UK back to Mauritius. The experiential shift from the past to the present and the rift between their homeland, Diego Garcia and their current transit residence, Mauritius frame the Chagossian identity construction.

The open-endedness of the novel emphasizes the poignant fact that the status of the Chagossian refugees remains unresolved:

> As they sat, facing the sea, in the sunset's peaceful haze, Charlesia and Désiré watched the light fading away in the distance. Far beyond, they knew, lay those sprinkles of islands that a greedy hand had wrested from their memories.
> [...] Their home. Back there, in the Chagos. (149)

Chagossians were uprooted and relocated in a completely different world. Since their forced expulsion, they have imagined their homeland. They have passed onto the second and the third generation more vivid images. They have transmitted all their sufferings and trauma to the younger generations up to now.

In addition to the three Chagossians representing different generations, there are other characters in the story, namely, the plantation administrator on

Diego Garcia and the captain of the Nordvaer. All the characters bear testimony to what happened then. Therefore, Patel's novel can be read as testimonial literature which portrays the "collective memory of displacement" (Bragard, 2008, 144). Françoise Lionnet[9] (2011, 25) in "Cosmopolitan or Creole Lives? Globalized Oceans and Insular Identities" contends that *The Silence of the Chagos* captures

> [...] the harsh realities of forced exile for the Chagossians, providing a concrete cognitive and affective mapping of a small community that fought, for nearly forty years, a losing battle against the super powers.

Lionnet also comments on the MPA:

> *Is marine life more grievable than the disappearance of a Creole community?* Rooted there for more than two centuries, the community had caused no harm to the fauna and flora. Why does the fate of the Chagossians, whose forcible displacement directly serves United States political interests, remain largely invisible in North America despite the novel (*Le Silence des Chagos*), [...] (2011, 31)

While Lionnet's focus is on the discursive discourse in the Creole-speaking Mascarene region of the Indian Ocean and its contributions to the new geo-narratives, the focus of my reading has been on a lingering memory of trauma in the ways literature gives voice to the oppressed and marginalized. The history of Chagos and Chagossians is little known in Japan. In the words of Lionnet, in "North America" too. Shenaz Patel's *Silence of the Chagos* can be read as an important and humanizing reflection on individual memories and emotions.

5. Conclusion

I first outlined some of the background of the Chagos relevant to *Silence of the Chagos* before exploring Patel's literary engagement with the Chagossians' history. A happy ending both in the novel and in their real lives will not be imagined. The novel, however, draws attention to the ongoing plight of

[9] Lionnet, F. is a Franco-Mauritian and American scholar at Harvard University. She shared her analysis on the Chagos and Chagossian at the international symposium held at Nagoya University, Japan in 2011. In her talk, she introduced "ocean studies" to argue for the crucial role of maritime histories in the construction of cultural and national identities over time.

Chagossian refugees in Mauritius.

My findings are based on the novel's fictional representations of modern day Chagossian refugees in Mauritius. The novel explores crucial questions pertaining to the Chagos and Chagossians in an imaginative way. In my further research endeavours, I would like to review the voices of the undocumented Chagossians whom I met during my research. During my interviews with the Chagossians, I have been given a glimpse into their hearts and history; the Chagos is more than a place or country. As a homeland, it is their soul. Academics, therefore, may be only trespassers in their lives. We all should listen to their voices directly and indirectly from reading many stories regarding them; their voices started to move the Great Powers. In April 2006 a group of some 100 Chagossians were allowed to visit the Chagos Islands for the first time since their expulsion.[10]

Their voices clamouring for their return home have seldom reached the "mainland" Japan. Some Okinawans, who attended to a conference "Dialogue Under Occupation V 2011 Okinawa" held in Okinawa, Japan, heard about the Chagossians' struggle. It was an international conference jointly organized by Okinawa International University and Okinawa Christian University. It focused on "the ongoing exploration of dialogue and discourse in areas of the world experiencing occupation" (DUO V, 2011). Occupation here is "a complicating factor which creates a power differential between participants: the occupied and the occupiers."[11] The conference invited Olivier Bancoult and David Vine. The latter presented a paper entitled "The Chagos (Diego Garcia) Struggle." Both Mauritius and Japan are island states, each comprising several islands: Rodrigues, Agalega, Chagos (Mauritius) and Hokkaido, Kyushu, Shikoku, Okinawa (Japan). The concept of Island-ness may help us better understand the course of events regarding the Chagossian situation. The Japanese may also draw insights from the plight of the Chagossians to better understand the militarization of Okinawa.[12] We cannot change the past but we can shape the future by moving in new directions.

[10] Reuters reported in an article, Banned from the "Footprint of Freedom" dated on 16 Apr. 2006 byEd Harris. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-mauritius-chagos-idUSL1036983320070415

[11] https://dialogueunderoccupation.wordpress.com/duo5oka/ (2020/11/28)

[12] There are differences between the two cases: Okinawans live on their island; the Chagossians have been uprooted. Their histories are also different. The history of Okinawans is located within narratives of Japanese colonialism and imperialism. The history of the Chagossian is located within the larger narrative of British colonialism and US imperialism.

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