

The original inhabitants of the Chagos islands in the South Western Indian Ocean are exiles from the African continent and Madagascar. They arrived in the archipelago during the eighteenth century as slaves to perform forced labour on private copra plantations. After the abolition of slavery (1835), these former slaves continued working for their former masters.

During the 1965 negotiations for Mauritian independence, the British demanded surrender of the Chagos islands territory which was part of the Mauritian colony in exchange for a three million pound indemnity. This transaction allowed the British to make Diego Garcia (the largest of the Chagos islands) available to the Americans as a military base, and triggered the forced clearance of the entire population, plantation owners and workers alike, to the Seychelles (also a British colony at the time) and Mauritius.

The research focuses on how Chagossian children attending primary school integrate their current living conditions in Port Louis (Mauritius) with their perceptions of their ancestral homeland. Since their forced expulsion from the Chagos archipelago, Chagossians have been engaged in a campaign advocating their right of return, largely driven by high profile litigation before the British Courts. However, due to the length of their exile, the displaced generation may never see the day of the longed-for homecoming as on October 22, 2008, a House of Lords judgment struck down the principle of right of return.

The memory of the past and the dream to return has now been transmitted through two generations to the grandchildren of those forced to relocate. This research discusses perceptions and representations of these children by using reflexive drawing techniques and other methodologies. The study examines these findings within the practical framework of day-to-day survival and hopes for the future entertained by the children.

Book publication:

*Eviction from the Chagos Islands: Displacement and Struggle for Identity Against Two World Powers* (2011), Sandra J.T.M. Evers & Marry Kooy (eds.). Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers.  
<http://www.brill.nl/eviction-chagos-islands>