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Environmental Justice in the Case of the Chagos Marine Protected Area: Implications for International Social Work

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Abstract: Between the late 1960s and the early 1970s, the British government forcibly removed about 15,000 Chagossians from the Chagos Archipelago. Current legislation based on the declaration of the Chagos-Marine Protected Area (MPA) plays a crucial role in preventing the Chagossians from returning to their homeland. In this particular case study, the article aims to analyze discourses related to the establishment of the Chagos-MPA using an environmental justice framework, to consider the implications for international social work practice. Materials from court rulings, official government reports, and academic/journalist publications on the MPA, as well as from seven semi-structured interviews with key informants from three Chagossian communities based in Mauritius, Seychelles, and the United Kingdom were analyzed using ATLAS-ti 8.4 software. The main findings of the deductive critical discourse analysis are discussed concerning substantive, distributive, and procedural environmental justice for the Chagossian community (This term is used for referring different Chagossian communities from Mauritius, Seychelles, and the United Kingdom as a single homogenous group). This article calls for international social work interventions through transnational alliances between international organizations in challenging the socio-political forces that are having deleterious impacts upon the marginalized and disenfranchised populations and their biophysical environment.

Keywords: Chagossians; environmental justice; international social work; marine protected area

1. Introduction

The global socio-ecological crisis such as the depletion of natural resources, greenhouse gas emission, and climate emergency requires the commitment, contribution, and collaboration of all professionals from every corner of the planet. Consequently, environmental sustainability has become a popular concept, as well as a rapidly growing area of social work education, research, and practice. In this endeavor, the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), and the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) have jointly proclaimed "working towards environmental sustainability" as one of the four goals of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development 2010–2020 [1].

In its simplest anthropocentric form, sustainability refers to the ability to meet current and future human needs without degrading the planet and its life support systems [2]. The concept of sustainability requires: (a) balancing competing needs and interests and adapting to social and environmental changes, and (b) maintenance or increase of 'welfare for all' over time and generations [3]. It involves sustaining the conditions of justice [4]. Indeed, sustainability has no real value as a concept for collective commitments and actions without fairness. Sustainability, therefore, involves considerations for peace, harmony, respect, and above all, justice for all in the global society. It requires collective efforts from all towards maintaining and enhancing social stability, equity, and "well-being for all" in the world [5]. Hence, sustainability is closely linked to justice [6].

In particular, social workers play crucial roles in sustainability through promoting and working towards environmental justice. They are among those professionals who have the appropriate knowledge and skills as well as the mandate for promoting sustainability from a social justice perspective. Social justice plays a central role in the definition, mission, and vision of social work. Within the profession of social work, environmental justice is regarded as part of social justice, and environmental problems as social problems [7–9].

Often, injustices have roots in global systems and structures that have cross-border effects, which require International Social Work (ISW) interventions [9]. Healy (2008) defines ISW as international professional social work practice and the capacity for international action by social work professionals [10]. ISW interventions focus on social issues and problems that are intertwined within cross-border social structures and processes. Through ISW interventions, social workers respond to the harsh realities of globalization that affect the lives of those who are poor, marginalized, and disenfranchised on the planet. In particular, ISW has a vital role to play in shaping an effective global practical response to global environmental justice issues [11]. As Erickson (2018) puts it: "Social work believes in global equality, that is, in the right of all people of the world to share equally in Earth's bounty" [12] (p. 15).

One of the key fields within which social workers can make vital contributions to environmental justice is Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). MPAs are protective management of the ocean for long-term conservation of the natural environment [13]. The conservation focus is often on vulnerable species and ecosystems. The design and implementation of effective MPAs are influenced by social acceptance and the impact of MPAs on communities and therefore require the inclusion or consideration of local people's needs, livelihoods, and perspectives [14,15]. In this effort, social workers make key contributions to ensure environmental justice for local people/communities functioning within the MPAs.

Within this context, this article aims to analyze discourses related to the establishment of the Chagos-MPA using an environmental justice framework, to consider the implications for ISW practice in this particular case study. The establishment of the Chagos-MPA is an evocative and significant case study with the potential to add useful dimensions to the discourses on environmental justice from an ISW perspective; particularly about the issues of environmental injustice and transnationally displaced populations. Moreover, this case study provides an interesting example of complexities related to the transnational ecological and socio-political dimensions of sustainability and environmental justice issues within the postcolonial context. Furthermore, the article is significant in making reflections on ISW concerns related to the global/transnational environmental injustices. In particular, this article analyzes the discourses focusing on power and control imbalances in the texts and talks related to the case of the Chagos-MPA to answer the following research questions: (a) How can environmental justice be deconstructed and understood from a local/indigenous/transnationally displaced community perspective within the context of colonial/postcolonial environmental policy-making? (b) What are the roles and functions of international social workers within the field of environmental justice concerning a disenfranchised/marginalized/transnationally displaced community?

2. The Case Study: Chagos-MPA

The Chagos Archipelago consists of seven atolls and more than 50 small islands. It is regarded as one of the richest marine ecosystems of the world with outstanding ecological values [16]. In particular, the Chagos Conservation Trust (2009) describes the archipelago as, "the most pristine tropical marine environment surviving on the planet" [17] (p. 7). Figure 1 shows the location of the Chagos Archipelago.

Figure 1. Location of the Chagos Archipelago. Source: United Nations [18] (p. 1).

Mauritius and its attached territorial islands—such as Rodrigues, Agalega, and those islands found in the Chagos—did not have human settlement before the arrival of the European colonial powers. The Islands of Mauritius were colonized by the Dutch (1664–1710), the French (1715–1810), and the British (1810–1968), through which all other small attached territorial islands were managed. From 1776, the French colonizers placed hundreds of enslaved laborers from various parts of Africa in Diego Garcia—the largest island in the Chagos Archipelago [17].

From the eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century, British colonial power ruled the Indian Ocean, including Mauritius and its attached territorial islands [19]. The nineteenth-century abolishment movement—one of the strongest global human rights campaigns in the history of humanity—forced the British government to abolish slavery in its colonies. After the abolition of slavery, many ex-slaves continued to live and work in the Chagos for the plantation owners and colonial administrators [20,21]. Those workers who settled in the Chagos are the Chagossians. By the mid-twentieth century, the Chagossian population started growing to form a peaceful community settling in harmony with nature, together with their domestic animals such as dogs, cats, and donkeys on several islands in the Chagos.

In the mid-twentieth century, following another international human rights movement, Britain was obliged to move towards the decolonization of its occupied territories. However, Britain was keen to keep its power and control over the Indian Ocean. Therefore, Britain detached the Chagos off the territory of Mauritius to create British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) before granting the country its independence in 1968. From the late 1960s and early 1970s, the British government then forcibly removed about 15,000 Chagossians from their homeland to facilitate the establishment of an American military base on the main Chagos island of Diego Garcia. Today, Diego Garcia is considered as America's highly secretive military base [22]; and, the BIOT is administered through the Foreign Commonwealth Officer based in London. Meanwhile, Mauritius is still fighting for its sovereignty over the Chagos, and for the Chagossians, the right to return to their homeland through different stances.

After being forcefully removed from their homeland, the Chagossians were placed in Mauritius and Seychelles. In those islands, the Chagossians were marginalized and socially excluded. They were labeled as 'Illois' (people from outer islands). Today, they are dispersed in Mauritius, Seychelles, the United Kingdom, and beyond. In Mauritius, Seychelles, and the United Kingdom, the Chagossians have been struggling to have a decent life, albeit having respective national citizenship. They have

mobilized national and international support to protest their protracted dislocation. The Chagos Refugees Group (CRG) is the central organization for the Chagossians regrouping about 4500 members, mainly from Mauritius, Seychelles, and the United Kingdom. The CRG—as a core transnational community—has been at the forefront in bringing several court cases (in Mauritius, the United Kingdom, and the United Nations) to demand the rights of the Chagossians.

In early 2009, the Chagos Environment Network—mainly environmental scientists who are not Chagossians—recommended the British government to establish an MPA in the Chagos Archipelago. In 2009, the British government decided to have consultations with different stakeholders to plan for the Chagos-MPA. The Mauritian government decided to boycott the consultation because the decision for setting up the Chagos-MPA was already made by the British government without the participation of the former. In 2010, the United Kingdom established the world's largest No-Take Zone MPA covering 544,000 square km (twice the size of the United Kingdom), around the Chagos [23]. MPA restricts human activities to protect the marine environment. A No-Take Zone MPA has a stronger protection ban such as on commercial fishing. The environmental conservation—alongside military security and the high cost of resettlement—has become a key rationale for denying the Chagossians the right to return and live on the Chagos islands.

In December 2010, Mauritius brought the case to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), claiming that the United Kingdom was wrong in proclaiming the Chagos-MPA. On 18 March 2015, the UNCLOS tribunal ruled that the United Kingdom's declaration of the MPA breached the British government's procedural obligation to consult and give due regard to the legally binding rights of Mauritius (rights of access to environmental resources in the Chagos waters) under the 1965 Lancaster House Undertakings (negotiations for the independence of Mauritius) [23,24]. Despite this ruling, the lease agreement of Diego Garcia as a military base to the United States was extended from 2016 until 2036 by Britain [25].

The establishment of the Chagos-MPA has also been labeled as "greenwashing" and "conservation colonialism" [26]. The Chagos-MPA has far-reaching transnational effects and implications for the Chagossians [27,28], and therefore, an interesting and eye-opening case on environmental justice within the field of ISW.

3. Theoretical Framework: Environmental Justice

Environmental justice is understood as fairness in the relationship between people and their natural environment. It is a multi-dimensional concept that encompasses aspects of distribution, procedure, and recognition in terms of demand for, and/or achievement of, a healthy environment for all, with equal protection from environmental harms; equal access for all to environmental goods, services, and information; and equal participation in environmental decision-making [29–31]. In this respect, Bell (2014) presents and uses a holistic conceptual framework on environmental justice as having three overlapping dimensions: substantive environmental justice, distributional environmental justice, and procedural environmental justice [29].

Under the substantive environmental justice, everyone should have the right to live and enjoy a clean and healthy quality of the environment. Such a fundamental right makes provision in legislation for guaranteeing an enforceable right to enjoy a state of the ecosystem that is not harmful to the well-being of all [32]. Distributive environmental justice relates to fairness in the distribution of environmental risks and benefits. Distributive environmental justice focuses on the societal structures and agencies that cause inequalities in the distribution of environmental risks and benefits. The third dimension is referred to as procedural environmental justice. This particular dimension concerns fairness in the procedures relating to the environment. Often, fairness is judged with respect to the degree of democracy, transparency, honesty, and participation in environmental decisions; as well as, the degree of freedom to oppose and demonstrate against certain environmental decisions. Environmental justice incorporates much more than just the fair distribution of environmental risks and benefits. It is not just about distribution, but also about what it takes to be able to function

within that distribution [31,32]. The conceptualization and theorization of environmental justice have moved from being simply a general reflection of social injustice to being a statement about the crucial nature of the relationship between environment and the provision of justice itself [31]. In this sense, social workers need to have a thorough understanding of the role of power and privilege in cases of environmental injustice [33]. In particular, the provision of justice requires a fair redistribution of power, and disempowerment of those having unfair privileges. Often, power is centralized and concentrated in the hands of socio-economic-political elites who influence and take control of environmental resources and services resulting in risk, vulnerabilities, and further marginalization of the unprivileged. Thus, mere participation in the process of decision-making is not sufficient to guarantee equal distribution of environmental risks and benefits. It is therefore important to look at the outcomes of participation and distribution. Hence, in addition to distributional and procedural justice, there is the need to look at the substantive environmental justice dimension, i.e., the achievement of a healthy environment for all [29].

This article analyzes the case study on the Chagos-MPA in relation to the Chagossian community, as a marginalized group, using a theoretical framework on environmental justice as outlined by Bell (2014) [29] and Schlosberg (2013) [31]. Such expanded conceptualization and theorization of environmental justice provides critical in-depth knowledge and analytical discussion on the case study.

4. Materials and Methods

This article is based on the analysis of two sets of materials. The first set is a collection of textual data related to the setting up of the Chagos-MPA, consisting of three court rulings—obtained from the British and Irish Legal Information Institute, eight consultation proceedings, two consultation reports, and five transcriptions of public debates—all obtained from the UK Data Service [34,35]. The second set is seven semi-structured interview data in audio format. The interviewees were key informants/representatives of the Chagossian communities from Mauritius, Seychelles, and the United Kingdom. The interviews were undertaken during the period from January 2018 to December 2019. Six of the interviews were carried out through telephone (three United Kingdom, two Mauritius, and one Seychelles), and one through a face-to-face method (Mauritius). The questionnaire included questions such as: How do the respondents describe the Chagos? How do they feel about and react to the proclamation of the Chagos-MPA? What are their views and perceptions on the processes, procedures, and structures related to the creation of the Chagos-MPA?

The seven semi-structured interviews were mainly used to validate the findings from the analysis of the textual materials. Seven interviews were considered to be sufficient in getting saturation in the deductive analysis of the discourses related to environmental justice identified from the textual materials. Saturation is considered as a gold standard in determining the number of interviews to be carried in qualitative research [36]. The seven interviews were therefore combined with the textual materials for data triangulation. The use of multiple data sources in the analysis is a data triangulation method commonly used in qualitative research as a strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources [37,38]. This study, therefore, utilized two sets of materials in developing a comprehensive understanding of environmental justice with respect to the Chagossian community.

This study did not require ethics approval from a board (following the Swedish law on ethics approval—SFS 2018: 1999) as it did not involve any records of names or other details of interviewees, or any details that can connect a specific person to a crime or illegal activity [39]. The researcher carefully followed the general social research ethical guidelines as outlined by Hardwick and Worsley (2011) in undertaking this study [40]. The research participants were volunteers and they were informed about the purpose of the research. Textual materials used in this study are only those materials that are freely available from open public domains (i.e., UK Data Service).

The gathered materials were all analyzed with the help of ATLAS-ti V.8.4 (computer software for qualitative data analysis). A qualitative research method emerged from the interpretative

tradition and ATLAS-ti software supports a systematic way of interpreting gathered evidence [41]. Basically, interpretivism requires social scientists to deconstruct the subjective meanings of social actions/phenomena being studied [42]. In this study, a deductive critical discourse analysis using ATLAS-ti software as outlined by Rambaree (2014) was used [43].

A discourse is a system of possibilities for the construction of knowledge based on interpretations and understandings of research participants, as well as those of the researcher/s. Discourse, therefore, represents ideas and patterned ways of thinking, reasoning, and communicating. It is also a system of possibilities for the construction of knowledge based on its interpretations and understandings of research participants as well as researcher/s [44]. Discourse analysis is primarily known as an interpretative methodology, based on the deconstruction of discourses, with an explanatory intent [45]. The discourses from the gathered materials can be analyzed and explained using three different types of reasoning—inductive, deductive, or abductive.

Through deductivism, a theoretical framework is developed and used by researchers to gather evidence from the field. A deduction is therefore a logical form of reasoning which is based on making deduction regarding a selected theory from gathered evidence. In the deductive critical discourse analysis process with ATLAS-ti software, three main steps were followed. In the first step, a theoretical framework based on the literature review focused on environmental justice for guiding the deductive CDA was developed. The theoretical framework on environmental justice informs the deductive reasoning used in the critical analysis of the discourses in gathered data. That is, through the theoretical/conceptual framework that guided the selection of discourses for analysis. In the second step, quotations related to the environmental justice framework were selected and coded with codes such as 'conservation', 'selection of quotations and coding of gathered data with reference to the developed theoretical/conceptual framework', 'benefits', 'participation', 'decision-making', etc. In the third step, the codes were regrouped under the central theme of discourses (as shown in Table 1), and then analytical memos were created and linked with the central thematic discourses. In the critical discourse analysis memos, power and control imbalances were analyzed through the deconstruction of texts and talks [45]. In this study, the focus of this analysis was on power and control imbalances in the texts and talks in relation to the establishment of the MPA using the conceptual and theoretical framework on environmental justice [29,31].

Table 1. Summary of main themes related to the discourses analyzed.

Dimensions of Environmental Justice	Substantive	Distributive	Procedural
Power and control imbalances discourses	• Environmental conservation through No-Take Zone MPA • Hazards related to military activities	• Access to ecosystem resources • Economic gains and benefits	• Information sharing vs. participation • Decision-making

5. Findings and Discussion

Table 1 provides a summary of the main themes related to the discourses analyzed in this study. Although the findings are discussed under the three dimensions of environmental justice (substantive, distributional, and procedural), it is important to note that these dimensions overlap largely.

5.1. Substantive Environmental Justice

During the consultative meeting held in London in 2012, one of the representatives of the Chagossian community stated the following:

> "We Chagossians are not against conservation. We've conserved Chagos when we were there ... When the Americans took over the place was pristine." (Quotation from textual materials).

Similarly, all the interviewees supported the point that they are not against the conservation of the natural environment in the Chagos Archipelago. In particular, all of them described the Chagos

Archipelago as one of the most beautiful biophysical environments on earth, and therefore, they agreed that the area requires conservation policies and actions. Further questioning during the interviews revealed that the Chagossian community, in general, are against (a) the kind of MPA (No-Take Zone); (b) the manner the MPA is being imposed on them; and (c) the 'real' motive behind the setting up of the Chagos-MPA. For instance, some of the interviewees reported that most of the Chagossians felt, from day one, that the declaration of an MPA was purely put forward to prevent them from going back to their homeland. Indeed, a cable from WikiLeaks reports the following sentences (among others) in an official communication between the British Authorities:

> "The official insisted that the BIOT's former inhabitants would find it difficult, if not impossible, to pursue their claim for resettlement on the islands if the entire Chagos Archipelago were a marine reserve." (as quoted in [46], p. 1).

During the interviews, all the respondents (Respondents 1, 2, 3, 5, and 7) were of the view that the No-Take Zone MPA is too extreme. In particular, the No-Take Zone MPA is an area where no extractive activity such as fishing is allowed. For the Chagossians, fishing was the main source of livelihood when they were living on the Chagos. According to Respondent 2, by proclaiming the area around the Chagos as a No-Take Zone MPA, the British government has a 'hidden agenda'; that is, to make sure it could support the claim that the Chagossians will not have sustainable living conditions on the Chagos Islands, if ever they are allowed to return. One of the respondents stated:

> Respondent 1: " . . . they (British government, environmental experts/representatives) could have proclaimed a different form of MPA and we all know why they chose the No-Take Zone type . . . when we were there, we were protecting our nature and now you have just see what the American military are doing there."

There are some reports stating that the military activities on Diego Garcia—which is formally excluded from the Chagos-MPA for a political reason—are destroying the environment in the Chagos. For instance, Dunne, Polunin, Sand, and Johnson (2014) report that a US$200 million upgrade program of the Diego Garcia military base involved dredging 30.8 km^2 of the island's lagoon and the removal of 6.4 km of seaward coral pavement for "coral landfill" for the airport [47]. The existing highway had already resulted in damages to the island's coral resources and marine ecosystem that is irreparable [47]. Moreover, McQue (2018) states that according to official documents, Diego Garcia is at risk of a disaster, as there are many ships with highly explosive and hazardous materials that are not well secured [48]. It could therefore be said that there is a degree of substantive environmental injustices in the case of the Chagos-MPA.

Substantive environmental justice needs to be discussed in terms of individuals'/groups' right to live in and enjoy a clean and healthy environment [6,29,49]. As can be found from the discourses related to substantive justice, the Chagossian community was and is still supporting the conservation of the Chagos Archipelago. They want the archipelago to be pristine as it was when they were living on the islands. They want the Chagos Archipelago to be clean and nonhazardous so that they can have access to a clean and healthy environment. It is debatable whether the establishment of the Chagos-MPA with a military base can guarantee substantive environmental justice to the Chagossian community.

5.2. Distributive Environmental Justice

According to some of the respondents (Respondents 1, 2, and 7), for several decades, Britain has been deriving economic gains and benefits from leasing Diego Garcia to the USA, and from granting fishing licenses to international fishing companies. Meanwhile, the Chagossians have been struggling in extreme forms of poverty, social exclusion, and marginality in Mauritius, Seychelles, and the United Kingdom. In 2016, the British government had proposed to support the Chagossian Community with 40 million pounds sterling as compensation for the welfare of the exiled islanders [46]. However, Respondent 1 mentioned that the majority of the Chagossians have refused the derogatory compensation,

as "their dignity is not for sale." When probed about some communities who have shown interest in benefiting from the compensation, two of the respondents (Respondents 1 and 2) described this as a "British colonial strategy—to divide and rule."

The responses collected during the interviews also uncover a form of 'ecological grief'; that is, grief resulting from the detachment and loss of a meaningful biophysical environment—among the discourses of the Chagossians. Attachment to the biophysical environment brings identity, meaning, and well-being to individuals and groups. All the respondents mentioned in some ways about pain, anger, and frustration for being forcibly removed from their homeland. All of them affectionately and passionately discussed their longing for returning to their homeland. For instance, Respondent 1 stated that many Chagossians would like to be buried in their homeland next to the graves of their ancestors. According to Respondent 3, there is a lot of resentment among the Chagossian community for not being able to be in the Chagos and become involved in the conservation of their environment.

The Chagossians' right to return to their homeland has been denied by the British government on the grounds of feasibility reports stating that it would be too risky and costly—in terms of lack of freshwater, low-lying islands, and damage to the marine ecosystem—for their resettlement. However, a respondent posed the following questions during the interview:

> Respondent 1: "How come the Americans are spending billions of dollars on a place that is risky? . . . How come there are thousands of military staff from US and non-military staff (mostly from Philippines) who are having some form of settlement, but why and how come the Chagossians cannot . . . "

In a similar line, the *Financial Times* reports that the US is planning to invest more than 3 billion US dollars on Diego Garcia until the end of 2036 [46], while the *New Internationalist* reveals that Diego Garcia's non-military staff are almost exclusively based on cheap labor from the Philippines [48]. During a Knowledge Exchange Workshop (analyzed textual materials) held in July 2011 in Mauritius, local conservationists and ecological scientists stated:

> "Chagossians must be at the heart of planning a sustainable future for the Chagos Archipelago because a sense of ownership contributes to sustainable development and environmental conservation . . . Environmental conservation should be approached in conjunction with Chagossian rights, and sustainable development in conjunction with the preservation of cultural heritage."

Distributional issues are fundamental to environmental justice. In the case of the establishment of the Chagos-MPA, it could be argued that the risks and benefits of the environmental resources are not fairly distributed between the Chagossian community and those who have taken power and control of the Chagos Archipelago. In the establishment of the Chagos-MPA, there is a clear lack of recognition of the Chagossian community as an 'indigenous population' having equal rights to environmental resources of the Chagos Archipelago. Such lack of recognition is an injustice because it constrains people and harms them, which is the foundation for distributive injustice [49,50].

According to international human rights standards, all states must respect and protect indigenous rights and remedy historic injustices [51]. However, according to the leader of the political Labor party, Britain has failed to deliver the justice owed to the Chagossians, wholly innocent of anything, abominably treated, and brutally removed from their home, and this should be seen as "nothing less than a fundamental denial of a basic human right" (Corbyn as quoted in [52], p. 1).

5.3. Procedural Environmental Justice

The collected textual materials indicate that several members from the Chagossian communities, from Mauritius, Seychelles, and the United Kingdom, have participated in various consultation meetings. All interviewees share the view that, among all those Chagossians who were present in the consultation meetings, the majority were not agreeable to the propositions for an MPA in the Chagos.

However, Jeffery (2013) reports that their oppositions were insignificant in comparison to support for the proposed MPA from over a quarter of a million signatories of online petitions organized by a coalition of conservation/environmental organizations led by the Chagos Conservation Trust [21].

According to all informants from the interview, those meetings were much like "information sharing" rather than "true consultation." For instance, Respondent 3 stated:

> " . . . the consultation meetings were just to inform us about the importance and benefits of having a MPA . . . we did not feel that we had enough power to influence the decisions that were already taken at higher levels."

However, one of the consultation reports (from the textual materials, see [53]) states that the consultation "was carried out in accordance with the criteria of the Government's Code of Practice on Consultation" (p. 4). In spite of this, Respondent 2 reiterated that:

> "All was done in a rushed, with very minimal consultation . . . It created a lot of mistrust between the Chagossian Community and the Foreign Commonwealth Office."

The Chagossians, as the main stakeholder, representing the indigenous population of the Chagos, were not treated with equal respect and value in the environmental decision-making process. Indeed, gathered materials indicate that the majority of the environmental scientists ('as environment experts') had more power in setting up of the MPA than the indigenous people of the Chagos. However, a group of environmental scientists from Mauritius during a Knowledge Exchange Workshop (from the textual materials) held in 2011 in Mauritius, reported the following:

> "The conservationists and ecological scientists present expressed their satisfaction in discovering that Chagossians hold detailed ecological knowledge about the environment of Chagos and are dedicated to the protection of the Chagos environment. They argued that the international scientific community should acknowledge the value of this ecological knowledge for planning a sustainable future for Chagos."

According to all the informants from the interviews, the Chagossians want to play an integral part in the conservation of the Chagos. In a public debate (from analyzed textual material—'Chagos Regained'), a representative of the Chagossian community stated:

> "We want our homeland to always be the wonderful place that it is and we want to play our part in its conservation by living there and guarding it."

In particular, one of the respondents of the interviews described the Chagos as his place, where he was born and where he had his home, culture, and livelihood. He further stated that the vast majority of the Chagossians still have a strong attachment to the Chagos as their homeland.

Although several 'consultative' meetings for setting up of the Chagos-MPA were held, the decision-making cannot be considered as being deliberative. The decisions about the Chagos-MPA were not made in full agreement and partnership with the Chagossians and the Mauritian government. From a critical perspective, the decision-making process could also be considered as being manipulative. Hence, the analyzed discourses from the gathered materials reveal some procedural environmental injustices in the establishment of the Chagos-MPA.

In the case of the establishment of the Chagos-MPA, it can be said that Chagossian communities (or their representatives) were invited to participate in the decision-making process which was made publicly. These are key indications of procedural environmental justice. However, procedural environmental justice also requires that there should be equal footing and say in the decision-making process [29,50]. In the case of the establishment of the Chagos-MPA, it can be argued that the Chagossian community was not given equal consideration, for instance, as compared to the 'environmental experts' and the representatives of the British government. Procedural environmental justice with a strong

voice from the marginalized/disenfranchised is necessary to bring environmental justice in its true sense, although there is no guarantee that such a population will make wise decisions [50]. Procedural environmental justice requires putting local people's priorities first, making participation democratic, robust and reflexive, as well as taking steps to coproduce knowledge between professional and nonprofessional stakeholders for wise decision-making [29,50].

6. Implications for ISW

All over the world, there are cases where the fundamental rights of local communities to enjoy, share, and fully participate in decision-making towards a healthy environment is being violated [29]. At the international level, social workers are therefore being urged to engage transnationally in the global response to address such environmental injustices within the framework of sustainability [54]. Consequently, in the recent past, sustainability has become one of the central concepts within national and international social work education, research, and practice. There are several environmental social work approaches focusing on ecological and environmental sustainability and justice, such as:

- Environmental Social Work—focusing on environmental work by social workers [55]
- Eco-social Work—focusing on ecological arguments and justifications in making demands for social justice, as well as advocating for the respect of human rights and participatory approaches through social work interventions in the communities [56]
- Green Social Work—dealing with transformative social work practices to create a living, viable earth with equitable shared and distributed ecosystem resources and opportunities [57]
- Ecological Social Work—combining both humanity and nature together with the education and practice of social work, in order to ensure the sustainability of natural resources [58].

All these social work approaches are vivid examples of how social workers are focusing on sustainability issues by making a shift towards a more holistic foundation with environment, social, and economic dimensions in the education and practice of social work [59]. Hence, social workers play a vital role in sustainability by ensuring a better quality of life for all in a just and equitable manner.

Although the underlying frame of social work is the nation-state, post-colonialism, globalization, forced migration, and the associated implications for universal social values such as human rights and social justice often present challenges that require ISW interventions [10]. The everyday life of some people/communities—like the Chagossians—are entangled transnationally. Particularly, this case study provides an interesting example of how environmental justice can be a complex transnational ecological and socio-political issue. Under such conditions, social work interventions with displaced and dispersed communities—like the Chagossian community—need to transcend national borders. International social work associations—such as the International Federation of Social Workers and the International Association of School of Social Work—have identified environmental justice as a core issue within the practice and education of both national and international social work [54]. International social workers have the necessary training, skills, and mandate based on their professional values and ethics to work on local/indigenous people's needs and rights related to environmental justice [9]. International social workers can and do play effective roles in community organizing, and advocacy for eco-social policies and governance of coastal ecosystems that are vital for communities to thrive and become sustainable [60]. In this sense, international social workers make valuable contributions by bringing their skills and competencies as mediators/negotiators into practice for achieving just sustainability with environmental justice, for all are based on the principles of human rights and social justice.

The findings of this case study indicate that the root of environmental injustices caused to the Chagossians is located in transnational systems and structures linking multiple states—Mauritius, Seychelles, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. Therefore, it is essential for international social workers to build transnational alliances with established international organizations—such as Amnesty International and other types of international bodies that lobby for

human rights—in order to develop a strong collective force in demanding environmental justice for the Chagossian community. In this endeavor, several ISW organizations such as the IFSW, the IASSW, and the ICSW—provide relevant and appropriate platforms, support, and opportunities to access and mobilize resources towards ISW interventions for promoting environmental justice at the global level. International social workers can therefore start networking with and through such international organizations to work on environmental justice issues for communities like the Chagossians. Since 2010, the three organizations—IASSW, IFSW, and ICSW—have set up a special committee on sustainability, climate, and disaster intervention that is working in close collaboration with the United Nations and related international bodies/organizations on issues such as environmental justice [61]. In the recent past, this particular committee has made a cogent appeal on land rights of the indigenous populations to the international delegations at the COP23 (Conference of the Parties) in Bonn, Germany from 6 to 16 November 2017 [61]. Consequently, several international social workers have successfully engaged in collaborative transnational interventions for promoting environmental justice in countries like Kenya, India, and Jamaica [54]. Perhaps, the committee could now consider bringing specific cases, such as the case of the Chagos-MPA, to such international fora for international advocacy, lobbying, and accelerating transnational actions through international collaboration for promoting environmental justice for the Chagossian community.

Specifically, this case study provides an interesting lesson for ISW, on how the strong international lobbies of the globally organized environmental scientists have overshadowed the violations of human rights and geared the demand for environmental justice at the expense of the Chagossian community. Therefore, working on such environmental justice issues requires international social workers to develop partnerships with international as well as national actors in Mauritius, Seychelles, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America who are in favor of the marginalized and disenfranchised communities. Such partnerships across Mauritius, Seychelles, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America can make a significant difference in challenging the socio-political structures and forces that have a deleterious impact upon the Chagossians and the biophysical environment of the Chagos Archipelago.

This case study illustrates the many possibilities through which international social workers can practically make differences to demand environmental justice for the marginalized and disenfranchised communities through their professional knowledge, skills, methods, values, and ethics. Some examples of ISW interventions for environmental justice could be through participation in:

(a) Social impact assessment—assessing and reporting the impact of legislations, policies, and practices on such vulnerable groups. For instance, international social workers need to research and report the social impact of the Chagos-MPA.
(b) Systemic/cause advocacy—knowledge from individual cases in contributing towards collective advocacy for systemic change to legislation, policy, or practice [62]. In particular, international social workers need to consider, highlight, and advocate on the human rights and social justice dimensions of the process and procedures of the establishment of the Chagos-MPA.
(c) Collective empowerment—support for groups to realize their power and take actions themselves for demanding justice and respect for their rights [63]. Social mobilization is an essential technique of international social work that could be used to create the required synergy and momentum in bringing the Chagossian community together in the demand and mobilization for justice.
(d) Nature mourning and ecological grief relief—group counseling and eco-therapy—in supporting communities to spiritually reconnect with their natural biophysical environment [64]. Discourses on the Chagossian community reveal that many of them suffer from a loss of their natural environment. International social workers can therefore collaborate at a global level to coordinate and provide ecological grief relief and counseling to the Chagossians who are spread across the world.

7. Conclusions

Using an environmental justice framework [29,31], this case study has analyzed and discussed discourses related to the Chagos-MPA. Based on the findings from this case study, the article has considered implications for international work. In particular, it calls for the involvement of international social workers in alliances. Such a partnership is argued as a key condition in challenging the socio-political forces and structures that have a deleterious impact on the marginalized and disenfranchised populations.

However, this article needs to be considered with a limitation. The interviews are mainly focused on collecting views of key informants of the main Chagossian communities from each of the three countries—Mauritius, Seychelles, and the United Kingdom. However, it is important to note that many other Chagossian communities not considered in this study might not share the same views as those provided by the respondents here. Nevertheless, the data triangulation method used here ensures that the commonly shared views of the majority of the Chagossians from the three studied countries are highlighted and discussed in this article.

For decades, Mauritius has been struggling in various courts claiming that the process of its decolonization was unjust. On 25 February 2019, the United Nations' International Court of Justice deliberated by 13 votes to 1 that the United Kingdom infringed on the right of self-determination of the Chagossians and therefore demanded the unconditional withdrawal of the British colonial administration from the Chagos as rapidly as possible [27,65]. Following this, on 22 May 2019, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution by a recorded vote of 116 in favor of 6 against, and with 56 abstentions, demanding that the United Kingdom unconditionally withdraw its colonial administration from the Chagos within six months [66]. Even at the expense of international law and fundamental human rights, Britain is still refusing to give up the Chagos [65]. After years of struggle, one can only hope that one day the Chagossians can reclaim their homeland and achieve justice. In this transition towards the achievement of environmental justice, international social workers can and need to play a pivotal role, given that they have the mandate and competencies for working towards human rights and social justice for all in the world. As it is known to all, sustainability—both as a concept and as a practice—is incomplete without the consideration of the social dimension.

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