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Safeguarding *sega*: transmission, inscription, and appropriation of Chagossian intangible cultural heritage

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ABSTRACT

This article explores two related efforts to transmit and inscribe the knowledge and practices of the Chagossian community in the context of forced displacement to Mauritius and Seychelles, and geographical dispersal between Mauritius, Seychelles, and the UK. The first is the Mauritian government's nomination of Chagossian *sega* (an Indian Ocean genre of music and dance) to the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. The second is an AHRC project entailing a series of heritage transmission workshops with the Chagossian communities in Mauritius and the UK and an open access website hosting instructive cultural heritage materials generated at the workshops. Safeguarding *sega* offers the possibility of political, social, and financial benefits such as increased legitimacy, strengthened collective identification, and funding for cultural activities. It also risks loss of control over community knowledge and products. We show that efforts to transmit and inscribe do not necessarily 'freeze cultural change' into a 'static element', not least because there are limits to the extent to which people use a list, an inventory, or a recording as a guide to 'living' cultural practice.

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Displacement and heritage

Throughout the decades since the forced displacement of the Chagos islanders from the Chagos Archipelago, the transmission of cultural knowledge and artisanal skills has been a challenge for the community due to geographical dispersal between Mauritius, Seychelles, and the UK, and a chronic lack of cultural, social, and economic capital. This article explores two concurrent efforts (concentrated in 2017–18) to transmit and formally inscribe Chagossian *sega* music in the context of these challenges. The first is the extended process leading to the Mauritian government's eventual nomination (in 2018) of Chagossian *sega* to the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. The second is our AHRC project (2017–18), which entailed a series of heritage transmission workshops with the Chagossian communities in Mauritius and the UK, an international touring exhibition of Chagossian cultural heritage, and an open access website hosting instructive materials generated at the workshops.

The Chagos islands in the Indian Ocean were uninhabited prior to European colonial expansion in the region from the late eighteenth century onwards, whereupon the Chagos Archipelago was administered as a dependency of colonial Mauritius (Toussaint 1974). French and later British colonists populated the islands with enslaved labourers and contract workers, mostly from East Africa and Madagascar via Mauritius, many of whom worked on coconut plantations (Dussercle 1934, 1935). The population rose steadily throughout the nineteenth century and hovered around

one thousand people over the first half of the twentieth century (Gifford and Dunne 2014). The 1960 United Nations Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries requires a decolonising state to maintain the territorial integrity of a colony at independence, but in 1965, during negotiations leading to the independence of Mauritius in 1968, the UK government excised the Chagos Archipelago from colonial Mauritius. In 1966 the UK government made the Chagos Archipelago available for US defence purposes, and since 1971 the largest island, Diego Garcia, has been the site of a major US overseas military base (Vine 2009).

The UK government depopulated the Chagos islands, first by preventing the return of islanders who had gone on trips to Mauritius and Seychelles, and later by restricting supplies, winding down work on the coconut plantations, and finally coercing the remaining islanders onto crowded ships. By 1973, between 1,328 and 1,522 Chagos islanders had been relocated to Mauritius and 232 to Seychelles (Gifford and Dunne 2014, 46). There were no resettlement programmes, and Chagos islanders lacked contacts, education, training, and experience relevant to job markets in which Afro-Creoles were historically socio-economically marginal. Chagossian families consequently suffered disproportionately from the concomitants of unemployment, underemployment, and poor housing in disadvantaged neighbourhoods (see Jeffery 2011). The practice of Chagossian cultural expressions were hampered – especially in the first few decades following their forced displacement – not only by lack of resources and geographic dispersal but also by widespread denigration of Chagos islanders (*zilwa*). Chagos-born islanders and most of their second-generation descendants were awarded UK citizenship under the British Overseas Territories Act in 2002, since when a significant and growing minority of the extended Chagossian community has relocated from Mauritius or Seychelles to the UK, where most live in Crawley (West Sussex), Manchester, or Greater London. Successive Mauritian governments have contested the UK's sovereignty claim; in September 2018 the International Court of Justice held public hearings on the request for advisory opinion in respect of the Legal Consequences of the Separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius in 1965.

Prior to our AHRC project, we had conducted extensive research with the community; Jeffery has worked with Chagossians in Mauritius, Seychelles and the UK since 2001, and Rotter joined her to work with Chagossians in the UK since 2011. In the context of these projects, representatives of the main Chagossian groups in Mauritius and the UK asked us to help the community to share (*partaz*) and protect (*protez*) Chagossian culture. We thus developed, in collaboration with Chagossian partners, an action-centred project to respond to these aims. With funding from the AHRC, the project facilitated and recorded intergenerational cultural heritage transmission workshops on *sega* music and dance, cuisine, coconut preparation, coconut handicrafts, and medicinal plants, and made instructive films from these workshops available on a newly created Chagossian heritage website (<https://chagos.online>). This article focuses principally on Chagossian *sega*, although we draw on other Chagossian musical traditions where relevant. Our AHRC project coincided with the period in Mauritius during which the National Heritage Fund (NHF), which operates under the aegis of the Ministry of Arts and Culture, prepared and submitted its nomination file for the inscription of Chagossian *sega* on the UNESCO List of Intangible Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. Along with the Mauritian linguist Vinesh Hookoomsing, who was a partner on our project, we acted as academic consultants for the NHF, contributing to drafts of their UNESCO nomination file. Akin to applied ethnomusicologists involved in safeguarding processes elsewhere (see Grant 2012), we were activists in the sense that we strove to be responsive to the community's heritage priorities and requests, applying our resources and skills to aid their efforts, and we saw this as an ethical imperative.

This article seeks to engage constructively and critically with the concept of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) through the lenses of our AHRC project and the UNESCO nomination process, which took place concurrently in 2017–18. Following critical heritage studies, we see heritage both as a state-sanctioned version of history used to regulate present social tensions, and also as a resource for subaltern self-definition and validation. We show that 'safeguarding *sega*' is

a mixed blessing: it offers the possibility of political, social, and financial gains such as increased legitimacy, strengthened communal identity, and funding to allow communities to continue to practice valued cultural activities, but also risks a loss of control over community knowledge and a compounded sense of disempowerment.

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and critical heritage studies

During the second half of the twentieth century, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) developed conservation principles aimed at protecting cultural property including individual historical monuments, buildings, and sites (Ahmad 2006, 292). Heritage principles were later broadened first to encompass groups of buildings, historical areas, towns, and environments (Ahmad 2006), and second to encompass cultural practices on the assumption that urbanisation, modernisation, and globalisation posed grave threats to intangible cultural heritage and cultural diversity by limiting the collective memory and cultural inventory of the world's peoples (Nas 2002; De Jong and Rowlands 2007, 16). Today the international definition of heritage encompasses: tangible heritage, such as monuments, groups of buildings, and sites; natural environments; and intangible cultural heritage, such as practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, and associated instruments, objects, artefacts, and cultural spaces (Ahmad 2006, 298–299; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2015, 163).

Historically, the primary task of heritage studies was documentation and preservation, but heritage scholars and applied ethnomusicologists have increasingly engaged with critiques of the folklore (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2015, 164) or 'salvage' model (Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Clifford 2008; Skounti 2008; Grant 2012, 2015, 635), shifting their focus 'from the protection of the object to safeguarding the process enabling its production' (Bortolotto 2007, 26; see also Kurin 2004, 73). Heritage scholars have encouraged a shift away from the popular conception of heritage as a physical artefact or record towards heritage as a process related to human action and agency, and as an instrument of cultural power in any given time period (Harvey 2001, 327; Smith 2006). Smith's critical discourse analysis approach suggests that places, sites, and objects do not themselves constitute heritage; rather, heritage management and the preservation process identify things and places that are given meaning and value as heritage, reflecting contemporary values, debates, and aspirations (Smith 2006, 3). Heritage is thus produced rather than innate, and its production involves economic, political, social, and cultural stakes for individuals and groups (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996; Skounti 2008, 75).

On the one hand, heritage is the version of history promoted by state-sanctioned cultural institutions and elites to regulate contemporary cultural and social tensions (Smith 2006, 11). Smith argues that heritage professionals and institutions such as UNESCO and ICOMOS promote an 'authorised heritage discourse' which 'advocates a "conserve as found" conservation ethic that assumes that value is innate within heritage sites', and thus 'privileges material heritage over the intangible, and emphasises monumentality and the grand, the old and the aesthetically pleasing' (Smith 2012, 2). On the other hand, heritage is a resource used by subaltern groups to define themselves, challenge received values, and rework the meanings of the past according to the cultural, social, and political needs of the present (Smith 2006, 4, 49; see also De Jong and Rowlands 2007, 26; Crooke 2010, 25–27). This process of memorialisation involves the curation (i.e. selective preservation and abandonment) and objectification (i.e. transformation into manageable format) of memories and memorial artefacts (De Jong and Rowlands 2007, 16). To use Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (2015) formulation, heritage is a mode of cultural production that gives the endangered or outdated a second life as an exhibition of itself.

Critical heritage studies has focused on the potentially emancipatory power of heritage, celebrating the democratisation of heritage by 'rejecting elite cultural narratives and embracing the heritage insights of people, communities and cultures that have traditionally been marginalised in formulating heritage policy' (Smith 2012, 534). Heritage preservation may be seen as a means by which to express group membership and to reject or subvert received notions of identity (Smith 2006, 49), and as a resource,

property, or commodity through which cultural minorities may gain prosperity and political power in decision making (Brown 2005, 53). This is apparent in the case of inscription on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Lists, which entails formal, international recognition of the value of particular cultural forms.

UNESCO lists

UNESCO's definition of intangible cultural heritage is expansive, encompassing 'all forms of traditional or popular or folk culture, i.e. collective works originating in a given community and based on tradition' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2015, 164). National governments, intergovernmental organisations, and NGOs can nominate candidates for inscription on one of two UNESCO lists (Nas 2002, 139; Pietrobruno 2013). The Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity aims to increase 'visibility of the intangible cultural heritage' and to raise 'awareness of its importance while encouraging dialogue that respects cultural diversity' (<https://ich.unesco.org/en/publications-of-the-lists-00492>). Nomination to and inscription on the Representative List implies that these forms of intangible cultural heritage are well known and practiced widely. The List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, by contrast, relates to forms of intangible cultural heritage that are less widely known and practiced by fewer people, and therefore at a greater risk of loss. The Urgent Safeguarding List aims to mobilise 'attention and international cooperation in order to safeguard intangible cultural heritage whose viability is at risk despite the best efforts of the community(ies) or the State(s) Party(ies). It records the safeguarding measures elaborated by the State Party with the widest participation of communities, which may benefit from the financial support of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund' (<https://ich.unesco.org/en/publications-of-the-lists-00492>). The process of developing and submitting nomination files to UNESCO is reportedly time and labour intensive: the state party must prepare a complex dossier including a written section on the history and present status of the element, supporting documentation such as bibliographies, a high-quality short film depicting the element, additional documentary film footage, proof that community practitioners endorse the dossier, a detailed action plan and budget for safeguarding measures, and a list of five other elements to be nominated in the future (Seeger 2008, 115).

Nomination to the UNESCO heritage lists is desirable for governments, as it is 'the most visible, least costly, and most conventional way to "do something" – something symbolic – about neglected communities and traditions' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2015, 168). Inscription offers states and practitioners the possibility of significant attention and legitimacy in the global arena plus financial support (Fog-Olwig 2002, 146). Yet commentators have questioned whether cultural elements that are defined and selected by national governments offer the 'best basis for deliberative and dispassionate consideration' (Nas 2002, 145). From the perspective of indigenous peoples and/or minorities, heritage inscription may enhance self-determination without challenging the nation-state (Robbins and Stamatopoulou 2004; Brown 2005, 45); less optimistically, heritage inscription may be 'a way for states to recognise the rights of minority groups to exist without directly addressing their claims for autonomy and a way to present a member-state's best face to the international community as a place tolerant of its internal diversity' (Beardslee 2016, 97).

According to Seeger, writing a decade ago, the people and institutions who produced UNESCO nomination files often possessed little knowledge of the element and may not have consulted specialists within the nominating country or scholarly literature on the subject area (Seeger 2008, 121). Furthermore, the influence of nationalism and geopolitical agendas meant both that dominant groups tended to nominate their own practices before those of minorities, and that states rarely submitted joint nominations for elements which span national borders (Seeger 2008, 121). We observed at the 13th session of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in late 2018 that member states are now submitting minority elements and joint files alike, and that debate centres on the recognition of

the changeability of elements as living practices and the need for a bottom-up approach to safeguarding (Robbins and Stamatopoulou 2004; Brown 2005, 45; Beardslee 2016, 97).

Inscribing intangible cultural heritage is ‘inherently paradoxical: a celebration of the fluid dynamics of cultural practice that creates new objects, lists, and canonical templates for tradition’ (Geismar 2015, 79). First, inscription involves fashioning static elements from a living practice that is embedded in a dynamic social, cultural, and political context (Pietrobruno 2013, 4). Pietrobruno argues that online representations (videos, texts, photos) can both ‘freeze cultural change’ and ‘uproot living heritage from its contexts by generally featuring versions of heritage that express the political aims and ideologies of presiding national governments’ (Pietrobruno 2013, 4; see also Smith and Akagawa 2009). Second, inscription raises questions such as why should specific cultural phenomena be preserved and revitalised? Might the result be either fossilisation and alienation from the living sociocultural source on the one hand, or the invention of tradition on the other? Aren’t cultural practices always subject to invention, development, decline and deterioration? (Nas 2002, 139–140). Is cultural diversity necessarily ‘good’ in and of itself? Aren’t some practices worth abandoning (Fog-Olwig 2002, 146)? And are intangibility and evanescence being mistaken for disappearance (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2015, 170)?

Applied ethnomusicology and the safeguarding of music

Similar dilemmas are evident in debates within applied ethnomusicology. Drawing on debates on heritage preservation schemes from linguistics, Grant identifies four areas of ambivalence that also apply to music. First, some linguists argue that efforts to address language endangerment are disruptive of natural processes such as change and obsolescence, and they suggest that language systems should be left to self-regulate. Others respond that, like environmental ecologies, cultural ecologies have disappeared in the past few decades as a result of unprecedented social and economic change and that this justifies efforts to maintain diversity (Grant 2012, 35–36). Second, some linguists argue that a purist ideology in preservation efforts rejects hybridity and evolution and ‘can give rise to the opinion that safeguarding – that is, “guarding safe” a tradition – straight-jackets it into a petrified form, forbidding it to be subjected to any process of innovation and change that would normally feature in living, vital cultural heritage’ (Grant 2012, 37–39). However, Grant points out that there is a growing sense in ethnomusicology and UNESCO alike that musical genres can develop and morph in response to new contexts and influences, and even that such change supports their vitality, such as through tourism or festivals. Third, some linguists argue that the researcher should not intervene in preservation efforts as doing so may constitute paternalistic, unwanted interference, in variance with their role as observer and theorist (Grant 2012, 40–42). Grant points out that communities often lack the resources and infrastructure required to maintain and protect their heritage against commercial exploitation, and thus may consider that institutionalised researchers have a duty to respond to their concerns. Fourth, Grant shows that linguists have highlighted the widespread ineffectiveness and unintended outcomes of language safeguarding and revival programmes such as hijacking as a national symbol or restrictions on what is eligible for revival (Grant 2012, 42–46). However, Grant points out that there may also be positive unintended outcomes: ‘the efficacy of revitalisation projects might not be judged solely on the criterion of increasing the number of speakers of the language, but also on cultural, academic, social and political outcomes ... safeguarding approaches need not only (or even primarily) seek to protect and promote musical traditions per se, but may also embrace broader objectives that may potentially benefit the culture under study and the individuals who make it up’ (Grant 2012, 45).

Other ethnomusicologists have criticised both the process and the envisioned outcomes of inscription. Beardslee (2016) critiques UNESCO’s own portrayal of the ICH safeguarding process as a source of empowerment for communities and a tool to resist homogenisation. UNESCO attempts to address problems with the ‘authorised heritage discourse’ (Smith 2012) by requiring community consent in the nomination process, but Beardslee argues that in practice the process is

dominated by a ‘heritage middle-management’ speaking on behalf of marginalised practitioners who lack the requisite skills and access (Beardslee 2016, 89). UNESCO processes focus on the heritage practice rather than the practitioners themselves, who are treated as ‘anonymous bearers’ and ‘interchangeable vessels’ in heritage documentation (Beardslee 2016, 94). In the Jemaa el Fnaa square in Marrakech, he argues, the UNESCO process did not acknowledge that open-air performances destined for safeguarding were key to the economic livelihoods of the performers. Indeed, the heritage preservation measure of removing adjacent transport hubs reduced the number of passers-by to the square, diminishing income streams for practitioners who then ceased to perform there. Beardslee’s conclusion is pertinent to UNESCO inscription processes in general: ‘celebrating the cultural activities of the subaltern does not necessarily allow them to speak, and safeguarding measures carried out uncritically may merely give the voiced something else to talk about’ (Beardslee 2016, 97). Safeguarding measures may build capacity for something new rather than safeguarding something that already exists (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2015, 165). In this paper we examine the safeguarding nomination process for Chagossian *sega* music in Mauritius in particular.

Safeguarding chagossian *sega*

The word *sega* likely derives from the Mozambican *tschiéga* and the Madagascan *chéga* (Dussercle 1937, 150). *Seга* is a syncretic Indian Ocean musical genre that emerged on the colonial plantations of the 17th and 18th centuries through encounters between enslaved labourers with diverse ancestral origins, who played music, danced, and sang lamentation and protest songs to resist their everyday hardship and domination (Boswell 2006, 61–62; Lee 1990, 23–33; Vaughan 2005, 213). Historically, on the Mauritius islands including the Chagos Archipelago, *seга* dances took place in public places such as plantations and beaches, and in private spaces such as homes and among friends, on holidays, and at weekends from Saturday evening until Sunday morning, with the tempo of the music increasing over the course of the night alongside the consumption of alcohol (Ballgobin and Antoine 2003, 78; Boswell 2006, 62, 2017, 99). Drummers would beat a 6/8 rhythm on animal skin tambours (or *ravann*) before being joined by other instruments such as rainmakers (*maravann*) or triangles (*triang*), a solo singer accompanied by a call-and-response chorus, and dancers (see Ballgobin and Antoine 2003; Dussercle 1935, 137–176; Lee 1990, 35–40). Lyrics would protest unfavourable social, political, and economic conditions; lament personal suffering; depict joyful occasions; or jest via suggestive sexual *double entendres* (Ballgobin and Antoine 2003, 78; Boswell 2006, 61–65, 2017, 96; Dussercle 1935, 37–38; Hookoomsing 2011, 50; Jeffery 2007, 2011; Lee 1990, 27, 31, 74–76). Due to the association of *seга* with alcohol-fuelled, sexually charged, and violent behaviour on colonial plantations, representatives of the Roman Catholic Church long officially denigrated *seга* as primitive, low class, and morally dubious (Boswell 2006, 62; Dussercle 1934; Lee 1990, 45–49). Creole plantation workers used *seга* to ‘sing back to the white, oppressive ideals of “high” culture, propriety and chasteness’ (Boswell 2017, 99).

Towards the end of the 20th century, a relatively sanitised version of *seга* increasingly gained official recognition in Mauritius for its potential as a national art form with a role both in the tourist entertainment industry and in processes of Creolisation and interethnic nation-building (Boswell 2006, 61–65; Lee 1990, 30). The Mauritian government has successfully nominated a series of musical genres to UNESCO’s Representative List: traditional Mauritian *seга tipik* was inscribed in 2014 (<https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/traditional-mauritian-sega-01003>), Bhojpuri *geet gawai* folk song was inscribed in 2016 (<https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/bhojpuri-folk-songs-in-mauritius-geet-gawai-01178>), and *seга tambour* from the Outer Island of Rodrigues was inscribed in 2017 (<https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/sega-tambour-of-rodrigues-island-01257>). Other states in the region have also nominated cognate Indian Ocean musical genres to the Representative List: *maloya* from La Réunion was inscribed in 2009 (<https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/maloya-00249>, see Samson 2011), and *moutya* from Seychelles was nominated in 2018 (<https://ich.unesco.org/doc/download.php?versionID=48928>, see Parent 2016). The Mauritian government’s nomination for Chagossian *seга*

to UNESCO's Urgent Safeguarding List, submitted in 2018 (<https://ich.unesco.org/doc/download.php?versionID=48560>), will be examined by the UNESCO Committee in late 2019.

Official recognition of *sega* and cognate musical genres by Indian Ocean island states has occurred in parallel to improved relations between the current Mauritian government and the largest Chagossian organisation, the Chagos Refugees Group (CRG) in Mauritius. This is evident at the international scale in their cooperation in bringing the Mauritian sovereignty case to the International Court of Justice. At the national scale, in Mauritius, the CRG dominates the elected Board of the Chagos Welfare Fund, which the Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth recently transferred from a Ministry into his direct remit in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO); he also dramatically increased the CWF budget. Thus the Mauritian government's decision to nominate Chagossian *sega* to UNESCO reflects two parallel trends: official recognition of *sega* as a national music genre and a close working relationship between the PMO and the CRG, which is likely to be bolstered by the Mauritian government being seen to 'do something' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2015, 168) about this neglected minority community and its traditions (cf. Seeger 2008, 121).

Identifying the significant features of a cultural practice is a prerequisite for nomination to the UNESCO List (<https://ich.unesco.org/en/forms>); demonstrating distinctiveness is also important to the Chagossian community for political and symbolic reasons (see Jeffery 2011). Chagossians routinely distinguish Chagossian *sega* from other Indian Ocean *sega* and cognate musical genres through reference to differences in costume, dance, instrumentation, and tempo (Jeffery 2011, 87–88). During our *sega* workshops, the women providing dance instruction in Mauritius and in Crawley independently highlighted the same key distinctions between Chagossian dance costumes and their Mauritian counterparts (see Jeffery 2011, 87). Firstly, Mauritian *sega* tops are cropped above the midriff and the full-length skirts flare out to reveal the dancers' legs when she twirls, while Chagossian *sega* tops cover the midriff and the flared skirts are shorter and slit up the front to reveal an underskirt, under which the dancer wears a slip, so her legs are concealed, even when she twirls (cf. Jeffery 2011, 64). Secondly, the dancers emphasised that the Chagossian method of tying their headscarves (*konde*) differs from the *rasta* style favoured by Mauritians. Thirdly, at our *sega* workshops in Mauritius and Crawley alike, the dance instructors independently admonished their students for raising their heels off the ground, explaining that this was a Mauritian practice, and that Chagossian *sega* dancers should keep their feet flat on the ground, a practice reportedly derived from having traditionally danced on sand in Chagos.

Chagossians attributed the slower tempo of Chagossian *sega* (compared to Mauritian and other Indian Ocean *sega*) to the practice of dancing on sand combined with a slower pace of life on the Outer Islands (Jeffery 2011, 87). However, comparing different versions of some of the same songs that appear on a series of albums recorded in 1985, 2004, and 2018, reveals increases in tempo of between 5 and 10 beats per minute (still slower tempi than Mauritian *sega*). We also observed Mauritian *sega* outfits worn at Chagossian community events in Crawley and on the UNESCO Chagossian *sega* consultation video filmed in Mauritius, and the persistence of Mauritian *sega* dance styles amongst younger generation women and girls despite their instruction in Chagossian *sega*. Thus Chagossian cultural practitioners may face challenges not only in safeguarding typical elements of Chagossian culture from total loss but also in preventing dilution of Chagossian practices through exposure to cognate practices over nearly half a century since displacement from Chagos. As Boswell has pointed out, 'cultural heritage managers and researchers will find it difficult to identify pristine cultural practices and heritages or even a master narrative of heritage in the Indian Ocean' (Boswell 2008, 22), and 'the emphasis on preservation is at odds with the reality of superdiversity and ongoing creolisation' (Boswell 2008, 36).

In some ways, changing practices within Chagossian *sega* mirror similar changes in Mauritian *sega*. During our *sega* workshop in Crawley, we recorded an interview with two Chagossian brothers who described the preparation of tambours (cf. Ballgobin and Antoine 2003, 78) and compared and contrasted the respective qualities of the various animal skins routinely used to make tambours on the Chagos Archipelago, agreeing that ray skin and shark belly are thinner and

have a brighter resonance than thicker donkey skin. In Mauritius, goatskin tends to be favoured over donkey skin for its resonance (Ballgobin and Antoine 2003, 78). Animal skin instruments made in Chagos are no longer in circulation, and Chagossian drummers now use goatskin or synthetic tambours made in Mauritius. During the National Heritage Fund (NHF) community consultation in Mauritius, two non-Chagossian observers complained about the Chagossian drummers' use of synthetic tambours, saying that the Chagossians ought to have procured 'authentic' animal skin tambours since the performance was being filmed for the UNESCO nomination dossier. However, the NHF itself did not express concern, and one of the Chagossian drummers reported that – especially during winter, when this recording was taking place – synthetic tambours are more practical since animal skin tambours need to be tuned by being heated over an open fire. (According to the same drummer, however, synthetic drums are considerably less durable and cost up to three times as much as animal-skin drums.) Reflecting the heritage management shift in focus from objects to processes (Bortolotto 2007, 26), the drummers considered it more important to demonstrate 'authentic' Chagossian drumming techniques and rhythms than to insist upon instruments made with 'authentic' materials.

Rejuvenation and resurgence

In 2002, during a two-year Comic Relief 'capacity building' project, the Chagos Refugees Group (CRG) in Mauritius established two subgroups – a socio-economic Chagossian Women's Group and a musical Chagos Tambour Group – with the objectives 'to protect and promote our traditional cultural heritage' (Jeffery 2011, 83). Both groups played key roles in Chagossian fundraising events and Creole cultural festivals at which the Chagossian Women's Group distributed Chagossian cuisine and the Chagos Tambour Group performed Chagossian *sega* music. The Comic Relief project culminated in the production of a Chagos Tambour Group album in 2004 (see Jeffery 2011, 61–70). However, this nascent cultural revival was hampered by the gradual exodus of Chagossians from Mauritius following the awarding of UK citizenship to Chagos islanders and their second-generation descendants under the British Overseas Territories Act in 2002, and both groups became increasingly inactive over the following decade or so.

Our AHRC project (2017–18) responded to community requests since 2013 for assistance to revive engagement with Chagossian cultural heritage in Mauritius and to spark interest in Chagossian cultural heritage in the UK. In preparation for our Chagossian *sega* workshops, we commissioned dance costumes (skirts, underskirts, and headscarves), and two new goatskin tambours. Following our *sega* workshop in the UK, participants formed a new group called Tambour Chagos Junior UK, which successfully applied for funding from a charity to enable weekly rehearsals over the subsequent months before performing as part of several local events in Crawley including a Chagossian Day at Crawley Library during Black History Month in October 2017. Following our *sega* workshop in Mauritius, the Chagos Tambour Group performed at the Creole Festival in Rodrigues and in the neighbouring French overseas territory Réunion island in October 2017, and we responded to their request for support in recording and releasing a new album in 2018 (freely downloadable from <https://chagos.online>).

Feedback on our events suggested that people had attended because they wanted to teach or learn from others about their family's culture and their own pasts, to meet new people and make new friends, or to learn specific skills. Chagos islanders reported attending in order to 'learn things that I have lost during my childhood', 'rediscover my little island', or 'share our culture, our traditions with others and with our future generations'. Participants from the younger generations appreciated learning about the Chagossian 'way of living', 'way of sharing', and 'team spirit', how to dress for and dance Chagossian *sega* (with several commenting that they had learned about the differences with Mauritian *sega*), how to play Chagossian *tambour*, and about other Chagossian instruments such as the one-stringed wooden instruments *makalapo* and *zez*.

Participants from all generations emphasised that our project should be the start rather than the endpoint. Chagos islanders in particular focused on the need to continue sharing their way of life with younger generations in order to prevent further cultural loss, as reflected by the following suggestions for future activities: ‘the Chagossian youth of nowadays need to be more involved in cultural activities’, ‘[the workshops] should be continued so that we do not lose our culture’, and ‘continue to make the youth and other people learn about this culture’. Several participants from the younger generations requested instrument-making workshops, which we had sought to organise through our Chagossian project partners, who were unable to identify suitable instructors. Indeed, all of our sessions were contingent on a limited number of individuals with expertise being willing and able to lead workshops, and on their ability or otherwise to source specific material; geographical variability had least impact on music, which is relatively mobile, compared to our workshops on cuisine, coconut handicrafts, and medicinal plants (given the challenges in the UK of sourcing ingredients, coconut fronds, and medicinal plants from the Indian Ocean). Participants from all generations asked for more: longer workshops, regular workshops, workshops repeating the same themes, and workshops covering additional themes (such as oral storytelling, sewing, tools, and children’s games).

Sustaining a cultural heritage revival, however, requires a considerable time commitment from practitioners. We have previously criticised community consultation processes in which states and their contractors schedule last-minute meetings and expect Chagossians to be able to attend at short notice (cf. Rotter and Jeffery 2016, 396). During the Chagossian *sega* nomination process, we observed members of the Chagos Refugees Group in Mauritius echoing Beardslee’s concern that UNESCO nomination processes are dominated by the itineraries of a ‘heritage middle-management’ (2016, 89). The employees of the NHF – archetypal ‘heritage middle-management’ – explained that they themselves were under severe time pressures since they had had to wait for the Mauritian government to decide whether and when to nominate Chagossian *sega* to the UNESCO Urgent Safeguarding List. Thus the whole process was driven by the government’s agenda and UNESCO timetable rather than those of either the heritage middle-management or the practitioners themselves. For our part, we developed our AHRC project in response to community requests, and, in collaboration with our Chagossian project partners, and we tried to organise project activities long enough in advance so as to give sufficient warning to participants. Nevertheless, Chagossians in Mauritius rightly criticised the arduous commitments dictated by our project’s restricted timescale and budgetary constraints, which necessitated a single relatively short period of fieldwork in Mauritius and resulted in a series of 2-day workshops being squeezed into three consecutive weekends during the school holidays.

Appropriation and commercialisation

In response to concerns raised by indigenous peoples and local communities whose artefacts, traditional knowledge (TK), and Traditional Cultural Expressions (TCEs) have historically been (mis)appropriated, researchers, museums, and other cultural institutions have become increasingly engaged with issues of power, ownership, and representation in the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage (WIPO 2013, 16). The more recent ability to access, replicate, augment, and reproduce digital heritage makes these issues even more pressing (Solanilla 2008; Marschall 2014; Nwabueze 2017). Many communities have instigated measures to protect heritage from the risk of cultural misappropriation and economic exploitation by outsiders, such as by restricting access to (digital and physical) collections to community members only (Solanilla 2008, 113; Brown 2005), establishing legal protections such as trademark registrations, and raising awareness of the definition and consequences of cultural misappropriation amongst designers and producers of creative works (Intellectual Property Issues in Cultural Heritage Project 2015). The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) has sought to develop intellectual property (IP) guidelines and best practices for recording and digitising intangible cultural heritage (WIPO

2006). WIPO (2013, 15) acknowledges the complicated intersection between on the one hand IP and copyright law, which is predicated upon the identification of the author (or joint authors) of a work and the completion of that work at a fixed point in time, and on the other hand TK and TCEs, which are communally created, passed down through generations, and constantly evolving over time. WIPO recommends that stakeholders engaged in cultural heritage work should identify content and its owners, agree on the terms and conditions of its use and reuse, and make this information accessible to relevant parties. It suggests that a partnership model may be the best method of achieving such aims (WIPO 2006, 117).

One of the starting points for our project was that Chagossians hoped that a cultural heritage website would help them to valorise and share their culture with a wider audience (including but not restricted to the geographically dispersed extended Chagossian community itself). At the outset of the project, we met our Chagossian project partners to discuss the legal and ethical dimensions of the project, including ownership, guardianship, access to, and future uses of project outputs. When we discussed options for the website, we encountered a tension between those who saw the internet as a helpful tool for registering intellectual property and protecting copyright, and those who feared that making Chagossian culture freely accessible on the internet could enable non-Chagossians to ‘steal’ and commercialise elements of Chagossian culture for their own financial benefit. (Nobody suggested, however, that these cultural heritage practices constituted secret knowledge that should not be made accessible to non-Chagossians.) This reflects a broader trend observed by Brown (2005): ‘Even when specific indigenous communities do not actively endorse greater secrecy, they are increasingly fearful that documentation of their intangible heritage will not protect it but simply facilitate its exploitation’.

There is a history to this: *sega* is predominantly an oral tradition (in common with many other traditional and indigenous music forms, see e.g. Seeger 1992). *Sega* song lyrics may evolve over time, and it is customary for originators to bequeath their songs to a chosen descendant, who then claims the right to perform and/or record those songs. ‘Ownership’, as Seeger remarks in relation to the Suyá, an indigenous community in Brazil, ‘is more a right that one exercises in giving than in restricting’ (Seeger 1992, 348). However, marginalised communities may be justified in fearing that ‘someone [else] is getting rich on our music’, because ‘some “arrangements” of music have reaped great financial rewards while the tradition-bearers themselves have never seen any money’ (Seeger 1992, 356; see also Feld 2000). Chagossians have reported that one consequence of performing Chagossian *sega* in public has been that non-Chagossian Mauritian musicians have appropriated various elements of Chagossian music. To start with, the Mauritian musicians Marclaine Antoine and Stéphane Honoré (better known as Menwar) reportedly learned Chagossian drumming, and the latter paid a Chagossian for the rights to one of her *sega* songs. More controversially, the Mauritian *sega* singer Nancy Derougere, who had apparently been at the recording studio when the Chagos Tambour Group made their 2004 album, reportedly repurposed two of their songs as singles, after which the Chagos Tambour Group appealed to the Mauritius Society of Authors (MASA) to clarify their authorship and intellectual property and to prevent Derougere’s versions from being played on the radio.

Controversy also surrounds the stringed instrument *makalapo*, a metre-long curved stick planted into the ground at one end, and then connected by a string to an interred sound box buried in a hole in the ground, which resonates when the string is plucked. Chagossians report that it can also resonate of its own accord, and that it does so especially on All Soul’s Day (2 November), as a means of communication from dead ancestors who are buried underground. During our workshop in Mauritius, a Chagossian elder, Herville, taught youngsters that the instrument is associated with its own music and song lyrics: *makalapo, makalapo, enba later, ena dimunn* (‘*makalapo, makalapo, people are buried, under the ground*’). However, in Mauritius the *makalapo* was popularised by the Mauritian *sega* singer Sandra Mayotte in a rollicking *sega* that Chagossians complained fails to respect the otherworldly significance of the instrument for Chagossians (see also Jeffery 2011, 88). Similarly, the Mauritian authors of an article on traditional

musical instruments in Mauritius note that historically *makalapo* were often deployed by children to imitate adult ballads, played during *kalipa* dance and wrestling shows, and used as a doorbell to announce the arrival of guests (Ballgobin and Antoine 2003, 71), but they do not mention any association with buried ancestors. In a short film about *makalapo*, however, Marclaine Antoine describes how the buried sound box makes the dead dance underground, and comments that *makalapo* are known sometimes to resonate at night even in the absence of human performers (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YoK4PYMg70M>).

Some Chagossians are thus concerned that outsiders will commercialise Chagossian song lyrics, dance styles, instrumental techniques, and recipes if they are made openly available online. The National Heritage Fund (NHF) response was that inscription of *sega* on the UNESCO Urgent Safeguarding List would have the potential to safeguard copyright, and that resources ensuing from the inscription could be used to establish training courses e.g. in Chagossian drumming. The NHF nomination file (<https://ich.unesco.org/doc/download.php?versionID=48560>) notes that the Mauritian government had already put aside Rs.50m for artistic projects (including but not restricted to Chagossian *sega* musicians), incorporating: National Award for Artists (Rs.2m), Production Grant Scheme (Rs.8m), Support to Emerging Artists for Performance Opportunities (Rs.10m), and Promoting Local Production (Rs.4m). (There are around Rs.45 to £1.) In relation to Chagossian *sega* in particular, the NHF file (ibid) notes that the Mauritian government proposes to provide financial support for participation in international cultural exchanges and at international music events, album production, community inventories, youth training programmes, annual competitions, instrument provision, and an ICH interpretation centre at the NHF.

Meanwhile, our website (<https://chagos.online>) states at the bottom of every page that the content is the intellectual property of the extended Chagossian community, but copyright for the website itself is held by The University of Edinburgh and licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial No-Derivatives 4.0 International License (CC-BY-NC-ND). However, echoing Beardslee's concern that the preoccupation of heritage professionals with collective outputs can result in heritage documentation that does not sufficiently identify individual practitioners (Beardslee 2016, 94), the website reveals our own tendency to flatten the community. We identify the Chagossian instructors by name, but other participants remain unidentified. And perhaps naming instructors only on the film summaries (rather than also within the films themselves) is not good enough. On the other hand, however, for visual images showing numerous practitioners it is a challenge to come up with a better shorthand than 'members of the Chagos Tambour Group'.

Conclusion

This article has been prepared in the midst of our ongoing heritage project activities and the Mauritian government's nomination of Chagossian *sega* for the UNESCO Safeguarding List, and it therefore seems premature to conclude on the side of either celebration or critique of the processes and outcomes associated with intangible cultural heritage regimes. From our perspectives as contributors to the UNESCO nomination file but not experts in the UNESCO nomination process, it would seem that Chagossian *sega* ticks all the boxes and ought to be a strong contender for the Urgent Safeguarding List. Assuming that the nomination is successful, the follow-up questions would concern the extent to which the attendant resources are distributed top-down via 'heritage middle-management' or, alternatively, via negotiation with Chagossian groups, with sensitivity to the fact that Chagossian groups are also heavily invested in other demanding and time-consuming political and legal processes. From our perspectives as ethnographers with long-term engagement with the Chagossian community, it is clear that previous attempts to document and preserve Chagossian *sega* (such as the previous Chagos Tambour Group albums recorded in 1985 and 2004) have not prevented changes in practices and performances of Chagossian *sega*, not least because there are limits to the extent to which people use a list, an inventory, or a recording

as a guide to cultural practice. In other words, inscription of a ‘canonical template’ on a remote UNESCO List may well be ‘inherently paradoxical’, but the process need not necessarily ‘freeze cultural change’ into a ‘static element’ since it might not unduly influence how people actually engage with ‘living practices’.

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Data Availability

<https://chagos.online>

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