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# Contextualizing Complex Social Contact: Mauritius, a Microcosm of Global Diaspora

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*This article supplements current dialogue on the archaeology of slavery, offering an Indian Ocean counterpoint to a topic that has largely focused on the Atlantic world. It also delves into the essentially uncharted domain of the archaeology of indentured labour. New plural societies, characterized by cultural hybridity, were created around the world as a consequence of labour diasporas in the late historic period. What do these societies look like during the process of nation building and after independence? Can we study this development through archaeology? Focusing on Mauritius, this paper discusses the complexities of the island, and how it can be representative of similar newly formed plural societies in the Indian Ocean. During French and British imperial rule, the island served as an important trading post for a range of European imperial powers. These varied groups initiated the movement and settlement of African, Indian and Chinese transplanted communities. By exploring the dynamic nature of inter-group interaction on Mauritius, this paper emphasizes the nuanced nature of how different peoples arrived and made the island their home. Mauritius played a vital role in the transportation of forced and free labour, both within and beyond this oceanic world, and offers an important viewpoint from which to survey the ways in which historical archaeology can improve our understanding of the broader archaeo-historical processes of which these diasporas were an integral feature. The paper focuses on the outcomes of settlement, as viewed through the complex practices that underpin local food culture, the use and development of language and the way materials are employed for the expression of identity. The article also traces the roots of contemporary cultural retention for indentured labourers to administrative decisions made by the British, and ultimately explores how heritage and language can provide a powerful lens on mechanisms of cultural expression. In addition to illustrating the nuanced and multifaceted nature of group interaction on Mauritius itself, this article raises an issue of broader relevance—the need for historical archaeologists to give greater consideration to the Indian Ocean, rather than focusing on the Atlantic world. This would allow us to achieve a more informed understanding of European slave trading and associated systems of labour migration within a more global framework.*

## Introduction

The Indian Ocean has served as an important seascape within the context of human migration since antiquity

(Pearson 2003). It has formed the nexus between a complex array of geopolitical, religious and cultural systems, and remains the most widely traversed basin. In brief, the Indian Ocean has provided an enduring,

if at times unfortunate, backdrop to humanity's most important mobility milestones.

The pre-1500 long-distance transportation of people, goods, plants and animals, and technology has been the subject of intense research (Alexander 2001; Fuller *et al.* 2011; Horton 2004). However, given its regional importance for late historic labour diaspora, it is surprising that the Indian Ocean has received relatively little attention when compared to the Atlantic. 'Modern world' archaeology (Orser & Fagan 1995, 11–14; see also Orser 1996; 2008; 2014) has yet to gain the same foothold or generate the momentum needed to promote new inquiry as noted for proto-historic research in this region. Despite the longer antiquity and greater complexity of *forced* labour diasporas in this basin (Campbell & Alpers 2004), archaeological research on slavery continues to emphasize the Atlantic world. Further, the ostensibly *free* indentured system that replaced slavery was initiated in the Indian Ocean. However, with notable exceptions (Armstrong & Hauser 2004; Chowdhury 2003a), little archaeological examination of indenture is being undertaken, whether in an Indian Ocean or an Atlantic context.

Space precludes a more complete assessment of why modern world archaeology has failed to gain the same foothold in the Indian Ocean as it has in the Atlantic world (see Allen 2010; Alpers 2003; Campbell & Alpers 2004; Vink 2003). However, given the potential to contribute to 'world historical archaeology', and narratives such as the development of capitalism, and impacts of increased consumerism (Gilchrist 2005), there is clear need for a research agenda that provides a well-structured approach to studying this multifaceted region. Research endeavour should aim to address questions that both reflect on the idiosyncrasies of the territory and provide the scope to compare migrations that took place in the Indian Ocean with those that occurred in the Atlantic and Pacific. Driven by these regional and comparative challenges, I initiated an exploratory archaeological study on Mauritius in 2008 (Seetah 2010a) that has since grown into the Mauritian Archaeology and Cultural Heritage (MACH) project (Seetah 2015a). Historical research had firmly established the island as a remarkable test case for teasing out the nuances of forced and free labour (Allen 1999; 2014; Teelock 1998; 2009; Tinker 1974). It rapidly became apparent that similar potential existed for the archaeology of this important entrepôt. Using the island's two UNESCO World Heritage Sites, along with modern iterations of food culture and language use, I survey the significance and relevance of archaeology to the local population. From this vantage point, I then explore the interactions between

European, African and Asian peoples who made the island their home following their own 'complex migrations'.

### Migration in archaeology

The study of migration has a well-established precedence in archaeology (Childe 1950). However, tensions exist between the methods applied to investigate the movement of peoples, and theory that drives the research (Hodos 2009; van Dommelen 2014). Further, migration refers to a different set of research questions whether one is studying prehistoric or historical archaeology.

In 1990, Anthony drew our attention to the fact that archaeologists had largely ignored the topic for the preceding two decades, although he also pointed to an evident revival at that time (Anthony 1990). More recently, van Dommelen (2014) has signalled a similar period of decline. The fact that he was writing for a volume of *World Archaeology* dedicated to mobility and migration should indicate another resurgence in research interest on this topic. However, for the present article, the intriguing feature of the interim period, i.e. 1980–2000, is that it coincided with burgeoning interest and expansion in the field of historical archaeology. For a sub-discipline studying the outcomes of global demographic flux, one might have expected that migration theory would have been centre stage. This has not been the case. Certain features, such as architecture, have been the focus of deeper cross-regional studies of migration in historic periods (Burmeister 2000), as have the material signatures of certain communities within specific contexts (Orser 1992; Samford 1996). However, we need to recognize the significance of migration as a mechanism for connection, between host and source groups, between networks (Hauser 2011; van Dommelen 2014) and within newly established communities. Hybridization and global-local frameworks (Hodos 2009) could also serve as important theoretical framing for the study of historic colonization events. This is particularly relevant in discussing the types of data, questions and scales of assessment that historical archaeologists engage with (Gilchrist 2005), for example: how the same group of people can simultaneously be considered as global and local, through processes of creolization (Lilley 2004, 287); the role of food (Franklin 2001), magic (Manning 2014) and healing (Wilkie 1996); and the specific place of material culture in narratives on slavery and abolition (Lenik & Petley 2014; Orser 1992; Samford 1996; Singleton 1995).

The influence of migration on demographic re-configuration is as significant a factor as birth or death (Anthony 1990). However, how do we conceptualize migration for an era where demographic replacement may have had no relationship to technological prowess? When ideas and ideology travelled at an unprecedented rate, when materials underwent global transportation and homogenization, and when millions of people migrated with few, if any, material possessions? Addressing this conceptual lacuna will be a complex undertaking, and well beyond the scope of the present article. However, more effective integration of migration theory into future research is on the horizon.

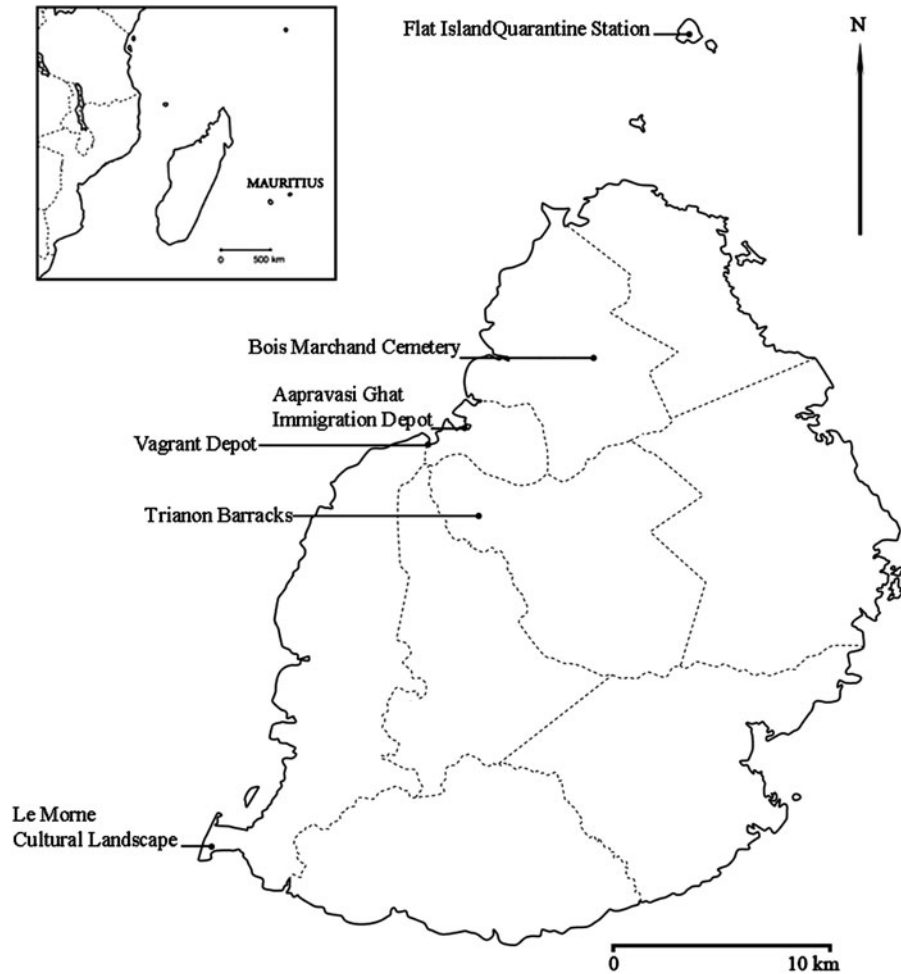
While this article focuses on late historic archaeology, borrowing a few cues from prehistory is instructive. In broad terms, prehistoric research has often been preoccupied with establishing that migration took place, and has been viewed from the perspective of 'replacement' (Anthony 1990; Cabana 2011, 18–19; Jones 1997). Demographic changes are seen to coincide with ethnic and cultural shifts (Rouse 1972, 283). Material transformations are synonymous with the influx of incoming groups that possessed more extensive mechanisms for exploiting the environment, who subsequently established new forms of social, economic and architectural landscapes (Papastergiadis 2000, 25). For the historical archaeologist, the above could serve as points of departure for studying movement and diaspora from the more recent past. Firstly, establishing that migration actually occurred is not the issue (van Dommelen 2014). Overwhelmingly, historical archives provide the necessary contextualization that circumvents this issue for historical archaeologists and opens the door to interrogating deeper-seated concerns. There is also a well-established body of literature discussing the topic from a range of theoretical perspectives, i.e.: migration as part of the processes of industrialization, agricultural transformation (Kearney 1986; Lewis 1982) and linguistic development (Renfrew 1987). Perhaps of greatest functional use is a particular view of migration that, long since recognized (Anthony 1990), is serving to reframe the significance of the subject as a whole: its centrality to human behaviour. This has led to the recognition that migration is structurally essential to human history (Lucassen & Lucassen 1999, 9) and to the development of tangible as well as intangible culture (Rodríguez 2007, ix). Historical and cultural developments are particularly relevant to this paper. History offers the ability to understand better a range of specific facets of migration not readily accessible to the strengths of archaeology, for example, the types of professions associated with certain labour emigra-

tion (Latham 1986, 13). At a practical level, this serves to forge links between communities at the source of labour export and those at the destination. Conceptually, this type of data adds nuances to the complexity and overall picture of *movement* and how this influences the creation of culture.

### Critical nodes within larger networks of migration

The shared context of movement underpinned slavery, indenture and penal transportation (Allen 1999; 2014; Anderson 2000; Carter 1995). However, there were vast differences between these three systems, as was the case for those who migrated to provide services as artisans. While continental landmasses have received considerable attention as major sources and consumers of migrant workers, small islands around the world played a critical role in shaping how these diasporas functioned. Furthermore, in many cases they served as significant labour markets themselves (Barker 1993), particularly as the production of commodities such as sugar increased. For the Indian Ocean, the Mascarene Islands have been of historical importance (Allen 2014, 100), as has Zanzibar, the Comoros, and perhaps most significant, Madagascar (Aderibigbe 1989; Alpers 2007; Boivin *et al.* 2013). Each played a different role in late historic migrations. The Mascarene Islands not only received, and retained, hundreds of thousands of slaves and contract workers, but to a lesser extent served as hubs through which labour was redistributed around the Indian Ocean and further afield (Allen 2014, 82). Madagascar, on the other hand, was an important source of individuals to satisfy the demand for slaves, although it, too, served to channel enslaved peoples from Africa throughout the wider Indian Ocean and beyond (Hooper & Eltis 2013; Lee *et al.* 2009).

Mauritius was a critical node in these larger networks of human migration, both from historic and archaeological perspectives. It is a land of diaspora (Baptiste 2013, 7). From an ecological perspective, the island's setting provides rich opportunity for environmental contextualization of human activity and impact in the region following colonization (de Boer *et al.* 2013). Its archaeology has particular value in studies of migration for labour provision. At one point in its history, the island had one of the largest slave populations of any British colony (Barker 1993; Drescher 2002, 154), with individuals typically derived from a range of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds (Alpers 2003). Intensification in sugar production led to an insatiable demand for labour and meant that slaves were brought in illegally, well after the slave trade had been abolished (Allen 2008; 2014, 141–4). Further,



**Figure 1.** The island in relation to neighbouring landmasses, with key sites discussed in the text noted.

and a key focus of the MACH project (Calaon *et al.* 2012; Seetah 2010b; 2011; 2015a), the island serves as a pioneering example for an archaeological investigation of the indentured diaspora in this region. Sites such as Flat Island, Aapravasi Ghat, Trianon Barracks and Bois Marchand Cemetery respectively mark the quarantining, disembarkation, habitation and final resting-place of incoming migrant workers. These sites offer a unique opportunity for an assessment of labourer life-ways through bioarchaeological and material signatures. Thus, Mauritius offers archaeologists a unique opportunity to delve into mobility, but also into issues such as creolization (Boswell 2008), in the Indian Ocean. It provides a regional counter-point to Caribbean and Atlantic diasporas, both within the context of developing the theory and practice of 'an archaeology of slavery' (Jamieson 1995; Orser 1998; Petley 2014) and, indeed, through sites such as the Seville plantation in Jamaica, that of the indentured diaspora (Armstrong & Hauser 2004).

#### *Colonization and decolonization*

On 17 September 1598, the colony of Mauritius was effectively born. Under the vice-Admiral Wybrandt van Warwijck, the island was claimed as a Dutch territory, and named after Maurits van Nassau, the Dutch *Stadhouder* at that time. Prior to this, Arab and Portuguese sailors had been familiar with the Mascarene Islands, naming them on their maps and using them as refreshing posts. The island has no indigenous population. In fact, prior to settlement the island had no mammals apart from bats. Its flora constituted a rich mosaic of microhabitats ranging from heath and forest in the uplands to *Pandanus* reed swamp in coastal lowlands (van der Plas *et al.* 2012). The Dutch established the island's first settled population at Grand Port Bay in 1638. Excavations undertaken between 1997 and 2000 at the site of Fort Frederik Hendrik, an outpost of the Dutch East India Company, have revealed a complex site, with subsequent periods of French occupation including a chapel (Floore 2010). This initial

community was comprised mainly of slaves from Madagascar and Batavia (present-day Java). Under the control of Dutch masters, the slave workforce focused on hardwood exploitation, especially ebony (Cheke 1987, 20). The infancy period was short-lived. Two failed attempts at permanent settlement resulted in the Dutch vacating the island in 1710. It underwent a sustained period of growth under the French, who claimed the island in 1715 and colonized the newly named *Île de France* in 1721. However, the importance of its strategic position was not lost on the British. Control of the island would solidify their presence in the region and ensure territorial claims on spice, labour and trade routes. As a consequence, the British landed 10,000 troops on 3 December 1810, to France's 2000 soldiers, and easily captured the island. An event that could have been marked by bloodshed was in fact characterized by calm. The island's name was reinstated to its original form, but in all else, economy, culture and legislation, the British made unstinting concessions to the French plantocracy. Unsurprisingly, the resident French cooperated with alacrity. To this day, despite a longer effective period of British rule, the French are the European group who have had the greatest cultural impact on the island.

It was under the British, as a result of the changing political climate in Europe, that the island's utility as a labour hub was brought to the fore, with consequences that had lasting and widespread implications. The abolition of slavery coincided with an intensification in sugar production. Providing labour became a major concern for the French plantocracy in Mauritius, and more widely for imperial powers elsewhere (Drescher 2002, 154). In response, the British undertook the 'Great Experiment', an initiative to replace slaves with indentured labourers. This catalysed one of the largest diasporas of South Asians around the Indian Ocean (Carter 1993). The model was deemed suitably efficient to be more widely adopted, resulting in the displacement of over two million people, with engaged labourers transported to East and South Africa, Southeast Asia, the Caribbean and islands in the Pacific.

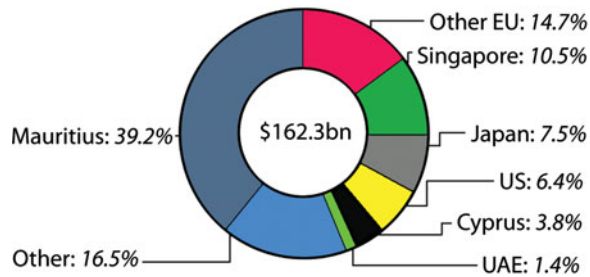
As the above illustrates, the historical narrative focuses on European influence, even if a highly diverse community of actors have been instrumental in creating contemporary Mauritius. The local forms of music and dance, termed *Séga* (Police 2001), along with the local healing/belief system *longanis* (Colwell-Chanthaphonh & de Salle-Essoo 2014; Seetah 2015b) and language, Kreol (or *Morisien*), are all derived from Mauritians of African ancestry and developed during the period of slavery (Vaughan 2005, 174 for 'traditional religion', 202–6 for language). The current and

long-enduring political climate owes its naissance to indentured labourers buying small plots of land for cultivation, which in turn allowed them to generate sufficient income to educate their children better. This led to the first working-class political party in 1936. Since independence in 1968, the economic success of the island has rested on the diversity of its contemporary community, who have maintained or developed networks with former imperial powers and retained links with ancestral populations (Saylor 2012).

More recently, the island's contribution to global cultural heritage has been recognized through the inscription of two UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The first was designated in 2006 (UNESCO 2006), the Aapravasi Ghat<sup>1</sup> in Port Louis, marking the arrival point of the first indentured labourers. The second, the Le Morne Cultural Landscape, was inscribed in 2008 (UNESCO 2008) and commemorates resistance to slavery. Comparing and contrasting these sites offers a view of their contemporary local significance. Ultimately, this provides a lens on the transition from slavery to indenture and the legacies this has left for the contemporary population.

### The role of archaeology in defining an ever-present past

The idiosyncrasies of the island are legion. Mauritius has a landmass of only 2040 sq. km, a population of just 1.2 million and is classified as Third World. However, despite these seeming limitations, it consistently records one of the highest GDPs *per capita* in Africa. The island has experienced significant growth in the past two decades (Lincoln 2006) and in 2014 ranked eighth in the world on the Index of Economic Freedom, higher than the USA and most of Europe. On a continent noted for political instability, it has had one of the longest-running democracies and is the only African nation to achieve 'full democracy' status on the rigorous The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy index (2012). Since independence, it has maintained ideals of religious freedom (Dinan 1986, 33) and promoted a multilingual society (Miles 2000; Rajah-Carrim 2007). However, this modern outlook is contradicted in other ways. The legal system retains a draconian attitude towards homosexuality (Lionnet 2003) and narcotics and Mauritians tend to divide along ethnic lines (Eriksen 1994). Why this last point should be the case is complex (Caroll & Caroll 2000; Nave 2000), but may have its roots in the fact that the island's past has traditionally been based on written documentation, rather than the totality of the human experience. Historical narratives have tended to



**Figure 2.** (Colour online) 'The tail that wags the elephant ...'. Adapted from *The Economist* (12 May 2012), illustrating the share of revenue to India that is channelled through the island, a result of strong ties with ancestral populations.

emphasize differences and evoke previous social stratification, rather than similarities.

The present economic, political and socio-cultural climate are all firmly knotted to the island's past. The physical landscape is a mosaic of churches, temples and mosques. The island's inherited economic ties to both Britain, through the Commonwealth, and France (Saylor 2012) remain strong, as do regional links with Africa. More recently, relations with the USA and other European partners have been developed; however, perhaps the most intriguing are those with India (Fig. 2) and China (Baptiste 2013, 24), which are as a direct consequence of ancestral networks (linguistic rather than genealogical) between Mauritius and these countries.

Archaeology has significant potential to provide a more nuanced understanding of the island's past, as well as to contextualize the complex relationships that occurred between the diverse group of people who arrived and settled on the island. Recent genetic studies of the modern population have contributed to a better understanding of the inherent demographic diversity of the current population, with the results pointing to a more complex gene pool than neighbours such as Reunion Island, the Comoros or Madagascar (Fregel *et al.* 2014). This evidence provides strong corroboration for historical records that point to the island serving as a significant sugar producer in its own right (Carter 1993) and thus needing labour (Allen 2008). Beyond recording the complexity of its demographic, the island's archaeology is a powerful vehicle through which to study how different groups interacted, and to gain an insight into imperial decision-making.

#### Food culture

In terms of cultural identity, the island is a true melting pot. This is most clearly visible within the context of food. Its cuisine derives from European, African

and Asian influences, yet all dishes are typically classified as 'Mauritian'. There is no filter based on where the food originated, only on how locals reinvent the dish to suite their palate, which includes taking food taboos into account. Though relatively limited, the archaeological evidence provides a particularly insightful view on the adoption of different food traditions. Excavations at Aapravasi Ghat have uncovered a small cohort of animal bone that illustrates, as one might expect, an emphasis on domestic species. While this assemblage includes the typical specimens of cattle, sheep/goat and pig, mainstays that constitute faunal assemblages around the globe, the intriguing discovery of water buffalo (Joglekar *et al.* 2013) adds specific nuances as to the species that may have been required for traction, but that ultimately made their way into the food chain. The Asiatic water buffalo, *Bubalus bubalis*, is better suited to muddy and heavy soils, although domestic cattle, *Bos sp.*, are more effective in drier conditions and for road transport (Harris 1974, 16). It would appear that certain conditions of the island called for the importation of buffalo. The buffalo and cattle bones showed evidence of butchering, indicating that once their period of use as beasts of burden was over they were consumed.

One might be tempted to delve more deeply into this issue and speculate as to who would be consuming cattle on a site that served as an immigration depot for (transient) predominantly South Asian and Hindu labourers. Although the presence of Indian red earthenware (Calaon 2011) supports the notion of South Asian culinary practice, the historical records suggest a predominantly vegetarian diet was provided for the labourers (Teelock 2012, 125). Therefore, it is likely that other groups on the site were consuming these animals, although this is a complex issue and one needs to take into account the fact that caste likely played a role, and that the prohibitions against consuming the cow may not have applied. Unfortunately, the stratigraphic security of the deposits associated with these faunal remains has been questioned (Summers 2011; Teelock 2012, 124–7); thus, further inference is futile. However, for the purposes of the present article, the value of these materials lies in the fact that they derive from late historic levels, whether disturbed or otherwise, and that they reveal general details relating to the nature of subsistence on the island at that time. More specific evidence on this subject has been recovered from Trianon Barracks. During excavations in 2010, the foundations for what may be a stable for large animals was unearthed. It is likely that similar structures were a feature of most sugar estates, providing shelter for traction animals. These fauna, then,

formed part of the diet once they were past their useful life. In addition, the only archaeobotanical find recovered from the island to date, a chickpea (*Cicer arietinum*), was recovered from an area that appears to have used as an outdoor kitchen, to the rear of the barracks. Given the ubiquity of the chickpea in South Asian cuisine, serving as an important source of non-meat protein, it is perhaps unsurprising that this find should be found in association with a labourer site (Seetah 2015a).

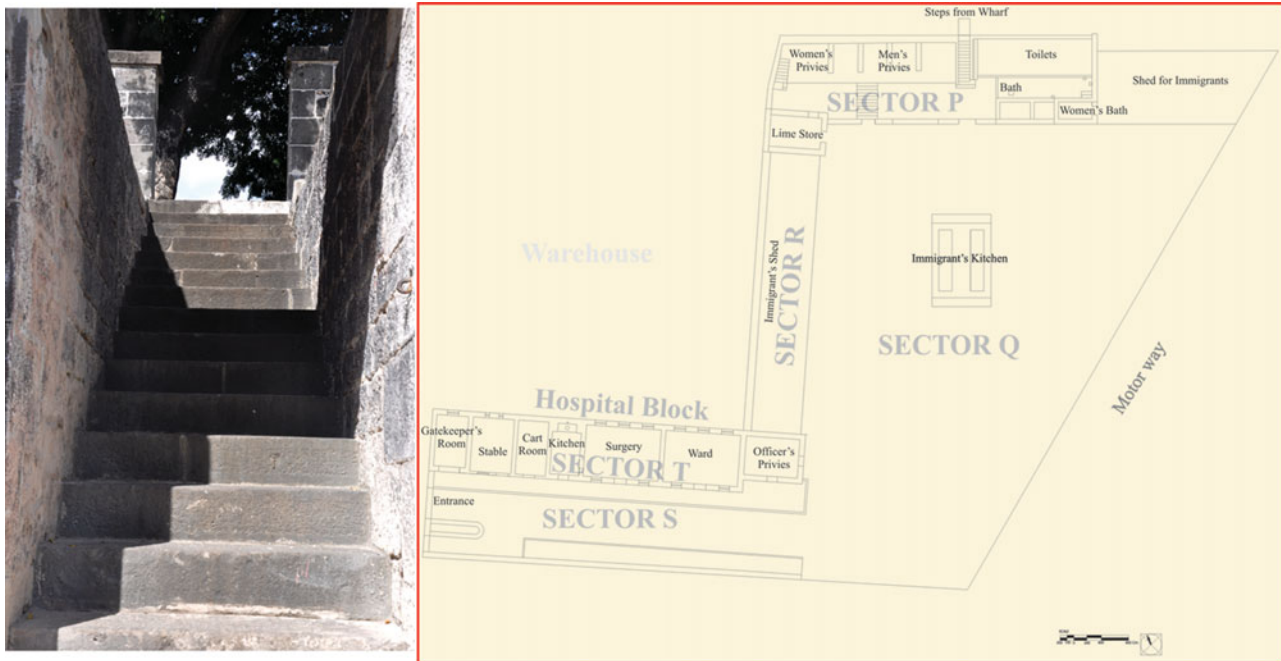
The lasting and complex nature of group interaction is evident in the modern day. The island's signature dish is *kari pul* [chicken curry], derived from South Asian cuisine and now universally adopted. Traditionally, the spices required for the dish were crushed on a *ros ek baba* [rock and baby], a basalt block with a cylindrical grinding stone specially fashioned for the purpose. These preparatory apparatus were also widely used by the islanders, not just those of South Asian descent, until superseded by modern appliances. The above examples speak to development of food cultures, and specifically, how these were diversified as a consequence of the indentured diaspora. The island's cuisine has a vibrant legacy of French influence, with many dishes having undergone a transformation from their original form, but still based on two essential herbs: thyme and parsley. These culinary reinventions have a counterpoint. Although anecdotal, it is worth mentioning that for many Mauritians of Indian descent, there is a self-imposed prohibition on eating pork. Through interactions with the Christian faith—ironically not Islam—whether in school or by attending Mass, the Old Testament taboo against consuming swine has been adopted by many Hindu Mauritians, and in this way has become part of the island's wider food culture.

Unfortunately, at present we have no comparable locations that can reveal details of slave diet and subsistence. Results from the 2010 season of excavations at the Le Morne Old Cemetery suggest an 'adequate diet', i.e. no indications of malnutrition or anaemia, based on osteological analysis (Appleby *et al.* 2014). However, the more revealing direct evidence from material assemblages remains largely absent (although see Colwell-Chanthaphonh & de Salle-Essoo 2014). This is particularly problematic, as a deeper understanding of food within the context of regional trade could be critical for developing a better appreciation of the nuances of slavery (and indeed indenture) and how these varied pan-regionally. Food networks have received relatively little attention, compared to the slave trade and the transport of goods such as sugar, spices and ivory. However, the movement of these commodities cannot be dissociated from that of lux-

ury goods and enslaved people. Alpers (2009, 23–7) emphasized this point within the context of provisioning, for example, when moving from the local, i.e. between small islands, to the regional. The point is further reinforced when we consider the relationship between provisioning, and the physical transport of forced labour. The density of slaves aboard ships within the Indian Ocean was lower than in the Atlantic, simply because the cargo was more diverse, slaves and 'luxury' goods being transported alongside large quantities of provisions (Allen 2014, 79). Cattle were particularly important, as exemplified from one particular case in 1782, where 343 cattle were transported aboard *L'Eléphant* from Madagascar, along with 200 slaves (Allen 2014, 97). This example illustrates the complexity of the cattle trade and, indeed, the value of traction animals. The find of water buffalo and cattle bones from Aapravasi Ghat, and the potential of recovering similar artefacts from sites associated with slavery, is even more thought provoking when we consider that, through techniques such as strontium isotope analysis, we may be able to reveal the precise origin of these animals. Expanding our focus to the wider paradigm of 'food culture' and the exploitation of plant resources, important work has illustrated the fundamental role of enslaved individuals in shaping botanical landscapes during episodes of *marronage*, and the development of nomenclature that associated specific plants with maroons (Kull *et al.* 2015). Ultimately, this topic illustrates the integral nature of provisioning to the socio-economic life of this oceanic basin, as well as the potential contributions that archaeological datasets can make to 'grand historical narratives' (Gilchrist 2005), when approached from a multidisciplinary perspective.

#### *Inscription as a lens on cultural meaning*

As the seat of the Great Experiment, the site of Aapravasi Ghat has much potential to illuminate a critical phase in global attitudes to human labour.<sup>2</sup> The site itself marks the physical 'Steps' upon which the labourers entered Mauritius and commenced their contract as engaged workers (Fig. 3). Its origins lie in a desire for greater administrative and practical control of the indentured system. Initially, a range of buildings served as temporary locations for the management of the migrant labourers. By the end of 1849, a permanent immigration depot was established and served the dual role of registering and channelling incoming workers to the sugar estates and recording those who were in the process of leaving the island, having completed their contracts. The depot also served as the location for registering the complaints of



**Figure 3.** (Colour online) (a) The Aapravasi Ghat Steps. (b) Map of the Aapravasi Ghat site, the location that represents the transition to indenture. (Used with permission of the AGTF.)

labourers made against estate owners. Once established, the site functioned for close to a century, incorporating washing sheds, privies, a hospital block, kitchen and administrative quarters, as well as stables (Fig. 3). The standing structures reveal details of a set of buildings constructed mainly from basalt blocks. The site was evidently filled and re-filled on numerous occasions throughout its period of use (Summers 2011), as evidenced by excavations on a number of key areas. One of the more recent excavations uncovered a patent slip (Calaon 2011), illustrating the diverse nature of activities that took place on the site. At present, the site covers an area of some 1640 sq. m, one-third of its original size. The constructions of a bus depot and the island's main highway have severely truncated much of this important heritage site.

Since its inception the administrative and technical units of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund (AGTF) have incorporated archaeological study into their research mandate. This is revealing in itself. For a nation that has no specific legislation protecting archaeological sites or archaeological heritage, and limited access to excavation expertise, the inclusion of archaeological study into the research mandate was both perceptive and forward thinking. The decision by multiple directorates has proved highly beneficial, both as a means of contextualizing the historical narrative, and for public engagement. The Trust's new interpretation centre showcases the French dock and an

excavated British port-slip that formed part of the disembarkation process for the newly arrived labourers. The present site around the 'Steps' themselves was evidently used during the French period as a public dock. During the British period, the area was converted into a patent slip for the repair of governmental vessels, including those that transported labourers (Calaon & Forest 2015). Contention exists over the possibility that the docks served as a landing place for goods, slaves, and subsequently for labourers. For some, the possibility that slaves were disembarked at the same site as labourers signifies continuity and a shared experience of bondage. Others prefer to see slaves and labourers as distinct groups.

In this case, the historical evidence suggests that the British had a desire to accommodate the demands of the French plantocracy, partly to appease them, but perhaps more deliberately to minimize the potential for rebellion (Addison & Hazareesingh 1984, 43). The concessions provided to the French had far-reaching implications, not least of which was that the island remained culturally attached to France rather than Britain. While the background to this decision and its outcomes are too complex to elaborate on here (refer to Allen 1999, 9–13) economically speaking it made perfect sense that the site formerly used to disembark goods and slaves, rather than becoming obsolete with abolition, should subsequently be used for indentured workers.



However, the issue goes beyond the reuse of physical space. It exposes the physical distance between Europe and the colonies and between Europeans and non-Europeans. In reality, despite abolition of the slave trade in 1807, the illegal transportation of enslaved individuals continued almost to the 1830s (Drescher 2002, 154). Although emancipation was enacted in Mauritius in 1835, one year after it came into effect in the British Empire, the system of 'apprenticeship' meant that liberated slaves still owed a period of servitude to the plantation; although admittedly on different terms to the period under slavery. Sites such as the Aapravasi Ghat illustrate materially that the physical distance created by differences in skin colour, social status and ethnic origin formed barriers that could not be crossed. The archaeo-history illustrates this in a number of ways. The systems of importing labour onto the island revolved around a set of specific actions, a way of treating the incoming workers, that included washing and health checks. According to oral history,<sup>3</sup> slaves were apparently bathed at the *Bassin des Esclaves*, in Pamplemousses. Although the specific functions of this 'bathing structure' have been questioned,<sup>4</sup> ground penetrating radar revealed a network of pipes that could have channelled water to the feature (Mušič *et al.* 2013). Given concerns over the possible uses of this site, a lack of archival support, and the distance from coastal sites where slaves would have been landed, we must be cautious in associating this specific site to slavery. However, it offers a possible location for an activity that almost certainly occurred as part of the process of importing slaves to the island and preparing them for work. During indenture, similar functions took place at the Aapravasi Ghat. In order to deal with labourers who became ill whilst in transit, the British established quarantine bases, such as Flat Island, to minimize risk to the resident population. In short, of main concern were the ability of the incoming individuals to undertake physical labour and the avoidance of spreading disease. These archaeological details reinforce the notion that similarities did exist in the treatment of slaves and labourers.

Another issue that serves as a nexus for assessing actions and reactions by the administration is the manner in which absconding workers were dealt with. This was respectively termed *marronage* during slavery, and vagrancy (for those who had completed their five-year period of service) or desertion/absenteeism (for those still under contract) during the indentured period. For both the slave and indentured contexts, desertion was considered a pressing issue that called for radical action (Allen 1999, 35–79). It should come as no surprise that many of the mechanisms

used during the period of indenture to deal with vagrants and deserters mimicked those that were previously implemented to deal with maroons (Allen 1999, 56). This was poignantly emphasized at Trianon, a labourer barracks of 'free' individuals, where an apparent shackle was recovered during the 2010 excavation season (Seetah *et al.* in press).

Emancipation resulted in certain *concessions*, but the main driver for migration, and the treatment of those who migrated, remained an insatiable demand for labour. The indentured experience was more regulated (Carter 1993), with evidently greater need or desire by the British to oversee and record the process. The small concessions permitted at the time, to maintain one's own name and religion and to be photographed and recorded as an individual (Fig. 4), had far-reaching implications that could not have been foreseen by the administrative powers of the day. Those allowances effectively marked the division between slave and free labour and have permitted cultural ties to be maintained by indentured labourers that were not possible for the descendants of slaves. Similar conclusions have been drawn from historical sources dealing with economics (Stanziani 2012, 55), illustrating the fundamental difference between the ethos of slavery, to *control* labour, and that of indenture, to *provide* labour. The sites further illustrate this point. Aapravasi Ghat had a well-orchestrated hospital block and kitchens. In order to deal with runaway labourers (Allen 2004; Deerpalsingh 2004), the Vagrants Depot in Grand River North West was established (Peerthum 2004). To these architectural features we can add the physical paper trail that existed for each labourer. In brief, indenture was a far more structured system in Mauritius than slavery had been. The slave was effectively a ward of the plantation; the labourer was a dependent of the state (Allen 1999, 56).

#### *The value of intangible heritage*

Unsurprisingly, being the descendant of a slave or that of a labourer is an important axis around which many socio-cultural issues revolve for the contemporary population. The site of Aapravasi Ghat, in its guise as an immigration depot, is a marker of both a global transition in labour provision and an ideological shift. It represents a milestone and a critical turning point for the island, which, with allowances, one could suggest culminated in independence.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, the Le Morne Cultural Landscape represents a site of far greater emotive significance, particularly for Mauritian of African ancestry, and was inscribed primarily on the basis of intangible evidence (UNESCO 2008). Le Morne Brabant is a plateau that forms the

SHIP'S No. 1284.

73939  
FEMALE IMMIGRANT OF 1848.

Pls. 5. -h

Name ..... Vonamalay  
 Father's Name ... Colaudyvaloo.  
 No ..... 383,506.  
 Present Age ..... Thirty three yrs.  
 Where from ..... Madras.  
 Date of Arrival ..... 7<sup>th</sup> April 1848.  
 If married, to whom..... Single  
 Stature..... 1 met. 47 cent.

15.6.81

Immigration Office, 18<sup>th</sup> June 1881.

L. J. Martineau  
CHIEF CLERK.

**Figure 4.** (Colour online) An immigration ticket, recording various demographic data for the arriving labourer. (Used with permission of the AGTF.)

summit of a small mountain peninsula (Fig. 5a). Local oral histories describe the surrounding region and *Inselberg* as a last resort for runaway slaves. The plateau is only accessible via a precarious path from the mainland, which necessitates scaling the 'V' gap (Fig. 5b). The open sea flanks the opposing side. The nature of this site as *refuge* is exemplified by one particular oral narrative: the story recounts how a group of slaves threw themselves from the pinnacle when they saw British soldiers making the perilous journey up the single path to the mountaintop. They met their deaths needlessly. Understandably, they were unaware that abolition had been enacted, and that the soldiers were in fact attempting to tell them that they were now free. This story and its site hold a crucial place in local memory. It has been immortalized in *séga*, and its significance was further reinforced when dedicated as a World Heritage Site. At that time, the Le Morne Her-

itage Trust Fund (LMHTF) was charged with adding tangible evidence to the oral tradition through a broad research plan. As with the AGTF, the Le Morne directorate also acknowledged the value of archaeology, and in December 2009 the Trust answered the mandate to 'add the tangible' with the discovery of the Le Morne Old Cemetery (Fig. 5c), lying within the buffer zone of the World Heritage Site (UNESCO 2008).

The remains of a cemetery were known of, and an attempt was made by the local National Heritage Fund to investigate and record the site in 2006. However, the fact that in recent decades the site has been abandoned and used primarily for *longanis* hampered attempts to study it. Thus, its potential scope and significance remained unrealized. In 2009, general archaeological reconnaissance was undertaken by the MACH project, as requested by and in collaboration with the LMHTF. This incorporated the plateau itself,



**Figure 5.** (Colour online) (a) *Le Morne Brabant*, site of the UNESCO ‘*Le Morne Cultural Landscape*’ World Heritage Site; circled area indicates ‘*V*’ gap. (Photograph: Saša Čaval). (b) The ‘*V*’ gap (photographed from a helicopter), a precarious access point that afforded a distinct advantage to the maroons; arrows indicate route that slaves used to cross the terrain. (Photograph: Diego Calaon). (c) *Le Morne* ‘*Old Cemetery*’. (Photograph: Yves Pitchen).

along with Îlot Fourneau, an islet apparently used during the French period for punishing slaves. More extensive geophysical and field survey was undertaken on the cemetery, revealing that a number of distinct structures were present in a much larger area than previously assumed. Subsequent investigations have uncovered over 45 tombs, and while work is still on-going, the site is already of major national significance (Seetah 2015c). Since its discovery, continued research has focused on the osteological (Appleby *et al.* 2014) and material signatures of the interred. To date, some 28 individuals have been recovered, along with a unique cohort of both surface finds and grave goods (Seetah 2015b). Through  $^{14}\text{C}$  and finds analysis from securely stratified layers, a broad chronology for the site suggests it was used during the British period, effectively capturing the last quarter-century of slavery as well as the commencement of emancipation. However, earlier phases of use cannot be ruled out, which align with the period of French hegemony. The site

itself is carefully maintained by the LMHTF staff and now included in their guided excursions of the heritage monument. Local schools and tourists alike tour the site, and in this way a completely new dimension has been added to the *Le Morne* experience, contextualizing *struggle* through *persistence*, i.e. that a community of freed slaves endured in the area. The cemetery allows for a connection to be made with the former slave/emancipated population that speaks of a more normal circumstance, burial of the dead (Fig. 6). The artefacts and coffins, while modest, reveal evidence of craftsmanship and skill, decorative pendant and burial rites.

*Le Morne* has become an important focal point for numerous groups who see it as the main site on the island where a remembrance (Fig. 7), as opposed to a record, of the past exists. This feature of the site allows for individual interpretation, and is not as strictly tied to an historical narrative. In this way, the site illustrates the complexity of social facets of forced



**Figure 6.** (Colour online) (a) Child inhumation, with coffin outline. (b) Coins recovered under the head of an adult inhumation. (Photographs: Yves Pitchen).



**Figure 7.** (Colour online) A plaque presented by the Rastafarian community. In English the inscription reads: ‘So that memory is not erased, a homage to our ancestors who died because of slavery’.

migration, how aspects of cultural identity, such as burial practice, are recreated, and the uniqueness of each iteration. Le Morne typifies the benefits of shift-

ing our expectations of how to recognize a site. By acknowledging the value of intangible heritage, in this case oral history, inscription has been positive. Without being granted UNESCO status, it is unlikely that the cemetery would have received the attention it fully deserves and has enjoyed in recent years.

### The legacy of colonial interactions

Apravasi Ghat and Le Morne reveal the connectivity between archaeological heritage and the modern population. Archaeology on Mauritius has centred on imperial bastions (Floore 2010; Summers & Summers 2008) or the plantation system from architectural and landscape-organization perspectives (Summers & Summers 2009). Alongside the work of the MACH project, the growing recognition of the importance of maroon (Chowdhury 2003b; 2006) and indentured archaeology (Chowdhury 2003a; Teelock 2012) has led to the subject becoming accessible, attractive and relevant to a much broader proportion of the local community (Seetah 2015c). Given the contemporaneity of what is being revealed by archaeology, and the implications this has for understanding the development of

the modern nation, there is considerable scope for corroboration with other lines of evidence. In this way it is possible to fill gaps in our knowledge where archaeology cannot make a strong contribution, and gain a more complete assessment of the mechanisms used for group interaction; one such example is linguistics. At independence, there was strong pressure to retain the colonial languages (French had never been lost), and this became a major focus of education (Miles 2000). The outcome of this policy is that most Mauritians use at least three languages, English, French and Kreol, and often four (the fourth being a traditional tongue reflecting ethnic background, for example Hakka, Urdu or Hindi). Thus, it is not uncommon to hold a conversation in three languages, simultaneously, within a group.

The situation is far from simple, however. Retaining and actively promoting European languages has had beneficial economic ramifications. As virtually all Mauritians are polyglot, particularly the younger generation, learning the basics of new languages is relatively easy. This has been a boon for the expanding tourism industry, which has to cater to an increasingly diverse community of patrons (Soper 2007). It also facilitated the move to Britain and France, before and since independence, for those with the opportunity and means to emigrate. On the negative side, this retention may have played a role in undermining the development of Kreol (Eriksen 1999), although the language is now more formalized (Rajah-Carrim 2007). Socially, the role of language is equally revealing. While French and English are taught and used extensively, the languages themselves have, as in many other colonial enclaves, remained static. The colonial tongues are formal and archaic, and do not reflect the development of the languages in their place of origin. This is of no surprise, given the physical distance between Mauritius and Britain, or France. However, it is surprising, given the regular social interactions between returning expatriates and local families, as well as in business. The language that is in constant flux is Kreol, showing all the nuances and dynamism of language development elsewhere, with new words, expressions and vernaculars. This makes for an interesting situation for expatriates, who are easily marked by their use of Kreol. Fortunately, as the island has a large expatriate community that retains strong local links, this does not attract stigma.

Kreol, its use and development, is interesting in its own right. As indentured labourers arrived collectively, were able to retain their language, and often had an intermediary, a *sirdar*, between cane-cutters and the master, there was little need to communicate in any language other than their own. Thus, particularly in

the early period of indenture, for Mauritians of South Asian descent Kreol was not a language used regularly, despite being the island's *lingua franca*. For those Mauritians of Chinese ancestry, who operated small shops, strong language links to their mother tongues, Mandarin or Hakka, were retained, but at the same time they had to use Kreol for business and in social situations. Indeed, language and the acquisition of 'western tongues' have been recognized as a crucial feature for both Chinese migrants who used the island as a stepping stone as they travelled west, and those who remained on Mauritius (Ly-Tio-Fane Pineo 1985). The usual simplistic conceptualization sees this particular community as insular, but both in Mauritius (Miao Foh 2012) and with other Overseas Chinese communities (Voss 2005), the situation is one of much greater complexity and involves a long history of interaction between communities (Ly-Tio-Fane Pineo & Fat 2008, 71–81). While the use of French, English and Hindi by Mauritians of non-European descent has received attention (e.g. Eisenlohr 2006, 171), equally illuminating yet hardly ever explored (for a notable exception, see Lionnet 1993) is the use of Kreol by those of French ancestry. The islanders' use of French is universal to the extent that, despite the ubiquity of its offspring, Kreol, there is no real impediment in daily life to the dominant use of this colonial tongue, whether in business or social circles. For Mauritians of French ancestry, the mother tongue is French in its local form, then Kreol. In all the aforementioned cases, and despite generations of daily and constant social mixing, it is still possible to detect accented used of Kreol by Mauritians who have never left the island.

Finally, the *preference* for language use is also revealing. The Creole community, born the offspring of French and African liaisons, retain a preference for French, slipping more easily into this tongue, seemingly a relic of the period under French rule and the unfortunate circumstances of enslavement. Almost to the present day, Kreol has been used casually and socially: one will generally speak French in 'polite society' or in a bank, for example, indicating greater formality, while all legal and administrative transactions largely take place in English.

These points illustrate that, when we investigate community development, we need to be aware of social *space*, a parameter that remains fundamentally different to time or distance; a third dimension of culture contact. Ultimately, Mauritius provides a revealing insight into the complexity of language use and the extent to which different tongues can serve a variety of roles within a single society. Language is a crucial tool for investigating migrations, but this goes beyond the acquisitions of new tongues at the point

of colonization. Linguistic development is a dynamic process that features strongly throughout the path to independence, and beyond.

## Conclusions

Different types of inference are revealed from different source material. For historical archaeologists, one of the most rewarding tasks is to find the appropriate way to incorporate these into their own research. Comparing modern conceptualizations of food, with language and religion—a flexible *versus* more rigid memes—provides contemporary analogues that connect to archaeo-historic data. Food is often one of the first cultural markers encountered in a new setting, and can be easier to adopt. In the present case the situation with food, as observed materially through the foodstuffs eaten and the vessels used in cuisine, is exemplary of the general milieu within which the nation has developed. All culinary practices, objects, and indeed peoples, are imported: all have colonized the island (Summers 2011).

Apravasi Ghat, through both the architectural features and recovered finds, provides an important material indication of the regulatory and ideological transformation that took place in the Indian Ocean during the late historic period. At the same time, Le Morne is a reminder of *why* that change was necessary. In combination, the archaeology effectively reveals history. Le Morne offers critical evidence of what became of emancipated slaves, whose place within the archival records becomes less prominent, but no less important. More recent finds from Le Morne, as yet unpublished, from levels that likely capture the period towards the end of slavery, indicate conditions of malnutrition and extensive inflammatory disease. Could these finds be revealing the extent of hardship that the former slave community underwent following their departure from the plantations? This type of data contributes to an expanding literature (see early work by Allen 1999, 79–105) from an historical perspective, which has teased out a more nuanced understanding of the development of collective identity for free populations of colour (Allen 2011a) and, in particular, the role of women (Allen 2005; 2011b). Furthermore, results from Le Morne may play a more specific role in illuminating our understanding of daily life for slaves/freed populations in this region, the relationships between groups, and how this population came to form a community (Bernadin de St Pierre 2002). These cases, deriving from Mauritius, connect well with research exploring the role of freed slaves in other parts of the Indian Ocean World, such as Zanzibar (McDow 2013; McMahan 2013).

Historical data from this period become increasingly important for understanding the depth and nuances of forced, convict (Anderson 2000) and indentured experiences. Indeed, Anderson (2009, 93) has argued that framing indenture as ‘a new system of slavery’ (Tinker 1974) fails to contextualize the role of ‘colonial innovations in incarceration’; further, it leaves little room to develop a narrative on varied forms of post-colonial identity (Casella 2005). By integrating historical evidence with archaeological data from sites such as the labourer barracks at Trianon, it is possible to gain a nuanced understanding of the fundamental differences between slavery and indenture. This has the potential to contextualize modern interactions, revealing aspects of how a society develops. The perceived ideological change that should have marked indenture is rebutted by reality. Both slaves and labourers were treated appallingly, undergoing corporal punishment and subject to strict restrictions on movement. The possible shackle from Trianon suggests that physical restraints may have been a feature, in certain circumstances, of indenture as well as slavery (Seetah *et al.* in press). However, while it has been noted that labourers on occasion went to the extreme of self-mutilation and even suicide as a result of their ill-treatment (Ramsurrun 2012, 47), they were also able to revolt and resist in different ways to slaves. For example, they used illicitly gained tickets (a system of passes to allow travel beyond the confines of the plantation) to avoid vagrancy rules (Gyaram & Teerbhooan 2012, 12). A significant proportion of labourers returned to India (Allen 1999, 62), and more intriguing, on occasion returned to their homelands to recruit new labourers, i.e. family and friends (Carter 1995, 35). These actions were in no small part a result of being able to retain and develop specific aspects of their culture. This cultural development is evident archaeologically, through the material signatures that have influenced local cuisine, and within the tangible landscape, as part of the rich religious topography of the island (Čaval forthcoming). The development of belief practices is potentially evident within a slave context also, although in a more subtle way. While slave communities largely adopted Catholicism, admixed African beliefs were combined with European Christian effigy and elements from South Asian ritual practice to form *longanis* (Seetah 2015b). The modern motifs of this practice are evident throughout the cemeteries and ‘holy sites’ (Colwell-Chanthaphonh & de Salle-Essoo 2014) of the island.

Mauritius uses its diverse heritage to maintain palpable economic and cultural links with Europe, Africa and Asia, whilst developing its own unique brand of *créolité*. Its archaeology has an important

role to play in revealing the past to the contemporary population, and offers a counterpoint for migrations and interactions that have taken place elsewhere. As Lane (2011, 11) suggests: 'Archaeology remains one of the most effective means of researching the unwritten past, and so has the potential to challenge the very same colonial discourse of which it was a part'. The island typifies the admixed modern world where neither our looks nor surroundings necessarily reflect where we are: morphology is not synonymous with culture, nor does architecture reflect geography. Mauritius' archaeology and unique cultural development offers much in terms of understanding the character of the Indian Ocean, as well as a means of comparison for those studying migration and 'complex contact' in other geographic settings.

## Notes

1. The site was formerly named Coolie Ghat [*Ghat*: a South Asian term to describe steps leading to water].
2. Interestingly, Aapravasi Ghat is not acknowledged in Breen's article on UNESCO sites in sub-Saharan Africa (Breen 2007, table 1), despite his including a 2006 inscription (i.e. Stone Circles, Senegambia, Gambia) and other islands (e.g. Madagascar). This seems to reinforce the invisibility and under-utility of small islands in the region for archaeo-historic investigation.
3. Along with archaeological data, the oral history was used to inscribe the site as a national monument on 29 January 2015.
4. The basin/bath is located close to the Botanical Gardens at Pamplemousses; in the absence of historical records or unequivocal archaeological data detailing its function, it should be acknowledged that the site may have served other purposes, and that these may have been tied to the gardens.
5. The British were keen to grant independence, and the island had been self-governed for a number of years prior to 1968 (Simmons 1982).

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