

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Edinburgh		
Unit of Assessment: 22 – Anthropology and Development Studies		
Title of case study: Safeguarding, transmitting and promoting cultural heritage in protracted displacement: Empowering Chagossians to prevent cultural loss		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2001 - 2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Laura Jeffery Rebecca Rotter	Professor Research Fellow	Since 2005 2011 - 2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2017 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Chagos Islanders have suffered multiple historical injustices, ongoing marginalisation, and challenges to transmitting their cultural heritage since their forced displacement from the Chagos Archipelago in the Indian Ocean. Research by Jeffery and Rotter has significantly contributed to the safeguarding, transmitting, and promoting of cultural identity and practices at risk of loss by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) facilitating intergenerational heritage transmission amongst the extended Chagossian community in Mauritius and the UK; (2) raising the community's profile in wider society in Mauritius and the UK through physical and online exhibitions and a music album; (3) contributing significantly to the inscription of Chagossian <i>sega</i> music to the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, thus enhancing international exposure of the community's plight. 		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Between 1965 and 1973, the entire population of around 1,500 Chagos islanders from the Chagos Archipelago were expelled to Mauritius and Seychelles by the UK Government to make way for a US military base on the largest island, Diego Garcia, and have been prevented from returning. In 2002, Chagos Islanders and most of their second-generation descendants were awarded UK citizenship, since when several thousand members of the extended Chagossian community have migrated to the UK, most to Crawley in West Sussex. In such contexts of protracted displacement and dispersal, how do marginalised and fractured communities sustain and transmit memories of the homeland, cultural practices, collective identification, and visions of the future? To what extent do academic distinctions between (political) forced displacement and (socio-economic) voluntary migration capture the experiences of people who undergo multiple uprootings and regroupings?</p> <p>The research of two University of Edinburgh Social Anthropologists – Jeffery and Rotter – addresses these key questions in the anthropology of displacement and migration through their longstanding ethnographic engagement with the aftermath of the Chagossian displacement. Funded by ESRC, AHRC and Leverhulme, they worked between 2001 and 2019 with the Chagossian communities in Mauritius, Seychelles, and the UK, and in collaboration with project partners including the Chagos Refugees Group branches based in Mauritius and in Crawley.</p> <p>The islands of the Chagos Archipelago had been inhabited since the late 18th century by enslaved, and later indentured, labourers who developed their own ways of life and cultural practices over several generations prior to their displacement. Jeffery's research demonstrated</p>		

that distinctively Chagossian cultural practices relating to their coconut-based cuisine and handicrafts, medicinal plant use, and traditions of musical performance have become central to their ongoing political and legal struggles for compensation and the right of return (3.1). It also documented the contradictions inherent in the compulsion to demonstrate cultural continuity and cultural loss simultaneously (3.2). On the one hand, to show that they remain a distinctive group, Chagossians must emphasise the endurance and distinctiveness of their culture vis-à-vis their Mauritian counterparts. On the other hand, to show that they are victims, they must demonstrate the losses they have suffered in the struggle to sustain their traditions in contexts of ethnic discrimination and socio-economic marginalisation.

In this context, the researchers' publications illustrate changing representations of the homeland ('from plantation to paradise') in Chagossian song lyrics (3.1); emphasis on the uniqueness (in Mauritius) of the extensive use of coconut in Chagossian cuisine (3.3); struggles to transmit knowledge about the medicinal use of Indian Ocean plants (3.4); and the failings of the UK government to adequately consult Chagossians in planning for the future of the Chagos Archipelago (3.5). Generally, Jeffery's and Rotter's research highlights the challenges of transmitting cultural knowledge and practices across generations when a community faces dislocation from the homeland, geographical dispersal, and chronic social, political, and economic marginalisation (3.6). Jeffery and Rotter were, thus, ideally positioned to instigate and engage in recent efforts to overcome some of these challenges by supporting the safeguarding, transmission, and promotion of Chagossian cultural heritage.

3. References to the research

3.1 Jeffery, L. 2007. How a plantation became paradise: changing representations of the homeland among displaced Chagos islanders. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* **13**, 4, [10.1111/j.1467-9655.2007.00466.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2007.00466.x).

3.2 Jeffery, L. 2011. *Chagos islanders in Mauritius and the UK: Forced displacement and onward migration*. Manchester University Press. (Can be supplied by HEI on request)

3.3 Jeffery, L. 2010. Creole festivals and Afro-Creole cosmopolitanisms in Mauritius. *Social Anthropology* **18**, 4, [10.1111/j.1469-8676.2010.00126.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8676.2010.00126.x).

3.4 Jeffery, L. & R. Rotter. 2016. Sustenance, nourishment, and cultivation: plants as living cultural heritage for dispersed Chagossians in Mauritius, Seychelles, and the UK. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* **22**, 2, [10.1111/1467-9655.12402](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.12402).

3.5 Rotter, R. & Jeffery, L. 2016. 'We no longer have faith and trust in anyone': Misadventures in community consultation on the future of the Chagos Archipelago, *International Development and Planning Review*. **38** 4, [10.3828/idpr.2016.22](https://doi.org/10.3828/idpr.2016.22).

3.6 Jeffery, L. & Rotter, R. 2019. Safeguarding *sega*: transmission, inscription, and appropriation of Chagossian intangible cultural heritage, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*. **25**, 10, [10.1080/13527258.2018.1555671](https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2018.1555671)

4. Details of the impact

Only one-third of the approximately 1,500 exiled Chagos-born islanders, who are the repositories of cultural knowledge, remain alive today. Subsequent generations are estimated to number around 10,000. In light of growing urgency to guard against irrevocable cultural loss, Jeffery and Rotter collaborated with the community, the Mauritian government, heritage professionals, and artists to achieve safeguarding, transmission, and promotion of Chagossian heritage at community, society and policy levels.

Impact on community: Transmitting knowledge and skills across generations

In 2017, Jeffery and Rotter's AHRC project delivered heritage transmission workshops, at which displaced islanders taught younger generations about distinctively Chagossian practices relating to *sega* music, cuisine, coconut preparation, coconut handicrafts, and medicinal plants, which fostered a revival of Chagossian culture (5.1). Five workshops in Mauritius each involved 50-100 Chagossian participants and received considerable media coverage (5.2), which raised the community's profile in wider society. Two workshops in the UK reached a total of over 100 Chagossian participants. Workshop feedback attests to significant impacts: participants developed new skills in dance, musical instruments, coconut preparation, cookery, and herbal medicine, alongside deeper knowledge of Chagossian history, cultural traditions, and collective identification. Overall, over 77% of participants (who completed a feedback form; n=238) indicated an increased knowledge, and over 90% expressed their intention to share this knowledge with others (5.3).

In Mauritius, the workshops inspired young Chagossians to join the Chagos Tambour Group, and for the group to record a new album using traditional instruments and methods (5.1). The album is freely available online, it has been accessed 7,400+ times, and is the 5th most popular album of all time on the Indian Ocean music repository filoumoris.com; music videos of the album's songs received 161,000+ views (5.4). In the UK, the workshops prompted further cultural revivals: community elders secured charitable funding to run follow-up workshops, and musicians and dancers formed a new intergenerational *sega* group, Chagos Tambour Junior UK, which has performed in a variety of local UK events (5.1). The project website, chagos.online, is a Chagossian digital archive featuring films, photographs, recipes, and contextual information to support community efforts to safeguard, transmit and promote their heritage. It is attracting sustained interest, with 5,200+ users in 7,100+ sessions with 26,300+ pageviews (5.5), and has been praised by community leaders in Mauritius and the UK as a "learning resource which we will keep using to teach young Chagossians and non-Chagossians about our culture (5.1).

Impact on society: Promoting Chagossian heritage

The researchers promoted Chagossian heritage to politicians, policy makers, and the public via an international touring exhibition. In Mauritius, this exhibition was displayed in April and November 2018. It attracted extensive and sustained coverage across the Mauritian media, including *L'Express* (the most widely read daily newspaper with a circulation of over 20,000 printed copies and an average daily online readership of 195,000), which ran nine pieces about the project (5.6). The exhibition received support from high-profile guests of honour including the acting President, a former President, and a Government Minister of the Republic of Mauritius (5.7). Air Mauritius sponsored an installation in La Réunion in May 2018. Since January 2020, music from the Chagos Tambour Group album features prominently as Air Mauritius inflight entertainment (5.8).

In the UK, the Crawley Museum exhibition in May 2018 attracted nearly 500 visitors including the support of guests of honour: the Mayor of Crawley and the Crawley MP (5.8; 5.9). Crawley Museum's curator stated that the event "attracted a good response, and many people commented that they relished the opportunity to find out more about the people and culture of the islands." (5.9). The exhibition increased awareness amongst non-Chagossian museum visitors of Chagossian culture and the threats it faces: "I heard so much about Chagos but never knew the whole story. This exhibition helped to fill the gaps" (5.7). Visitors described it as "very important for us to know a bit of their life and its richness" and as a "very enriching visit with new undiscovered values" (5.7).

Impact on policy: Safeguarding Chagossian *sega*

The researchers also contributed significantly to the Mauritian government's nomination of Chagossian *sega*, a syncretic Indian Ocean genre of music, song and dance, for inscription on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, which mobilises international assistance for safeguarding measures. The Mauritian National Heritage

Fund (NHF) confirmed that the researchers “provided evidence and advice which was instrumental to the development of the nomination file” and “significantly strengthened the nomination file by demonstrating that the Chagossian community is organised and seriously committed to sustaining and safeguarding Chagossian Sega, but requires support in doing so” (5.10). Accordingly, the nomination file cites Jeffery’s publications and the AHRC project (5.10). In December 2019, the nomination succeeded and Chagossian *sega* was inscribed on the UNESCO List. This inscription elicits financial and infrastructural support for the community to continue practicing *sega*, alongside enhanced international exposure of its plight, boosting the struggle for compensation and resettlement. For instance, in October 2020 the Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius and his Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage launched a safeguarding, transmission, and protection consultation process (5.11). As stated by the Chagos Refugees Group Mauritius chairperson, Jeffery’s and Rotter’s contributions have been “vital in securing this important international and national support to teach the younger generations and others about the value of our culture, protect our practices from cultural appropriation, and ultimately keep our culture and identity alive” (5.1).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 Testimonials from Chagos Refugees Groups Mauritius and UK

5.2 Media coverage of heritage transmission workshops

- 8 articles (L’Express)

5.3 Heritage transmission workshop participant feedback

- Descriptive statistics & correlations for all workshops feedback
- Participant feedback forms for:
 - Crawley cuisine and coconut preparation workshop, 11 June 2017
 - Crawley *sega* workshop, 19 August 2017
 - Mauritius cuisine workshops, 22 July 2017 and 23 July 2017
 - Mauritius *sega* workshops, 29 July 2017 and 30 July 2017
 - Mauritius medicinal plants and coconut handicrafts workshop, 05 August 2017
 - Crawley Chagos Day celebration, 28 October 2017

5.4 Chagos Tambour Group album web analytics

5.5 Chagos.online web analytics

- Google analytics report for project website Chagos.online (<https://web.archive.org/web/20200923164506/https://chagos.online/>) outlining visitor numbers, profiles and behaviour

5.6 Media coverage of heritage exhibition and album

- 20 articles (L’Express, Le Defi Quotidien, ION News, Weekly, Kitikwi, Koze, MBC, Top FM, Inside News)
- Video: Leritaz Kiltirel Sagos, *MBC*, 21 January 2019, 51 minutes, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LiOOeaolqw8&feature=share>

5.7 Exhibition visitors’ feedback

- Chagos Refugees Group visitors’ book (170 responses)
- Chagos Refugees Group visitors’ feedback notes (31 responses)
- Crawley Museum visitors’ book (35 responses)
- Rose-Hill Plaza visitors’ book (36 responses)
- UNESCO 13COM meeting visitors’ book

5.8 Chagos Tambour Group music becomes part of Air Mauritius inflight entertainment

- Air Mauritius inflight entertainment guides Wave February 2020 for A319 (p6) and A330/A340/A350 (p41)

- Facebook message of Louis Olivier Bancoult, Chairperson of the Chagos Refugees Group Mauritius, about listening to music onboard Air Mauritius flight on January 31, 2020.

5.9 Testimonial from Crawley Museum

5.10 Inscription of *Chagossian sega* in the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding:

- UNESCO Sega tambour Chagos nomination file, 12 April 2018
- Testimonial from National Heritage Fund, Mauritius, documenting the research team's impact on the UNESCO nomination.
- Sega tambour Chagos - UNESCO inscription - UNESCO article
<https://web.archive.org/web/20201002131124/https://ich.unesco.org/en/USL/sega-tambour-chagos-01490>
- Sega tambour Chagos - UNESCO inscription - Republic of Mauritius website
<https://web.archive.org/web/20200229091903/http://www.govmu.org/English/News/Pages/Sega-tambour-of-Chagos-inscribed-on-UNESCO%E2%80%99s-List-of-Intangible-Cultural-Heritage-in-Need-of-Urgent-Safeguarding.aspx/>

5.11 Opening of the First Consultative Workshop on “Safeguarding, transmission and promotion of the Sega Tambour Chagos” by The Hon Pravind Kumar Jugnauth Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius in the presence of The Hon Avinash Teeluck Minister of Arts and Culture, 18 October 2020.