Objects past, objects present: Materials, resistance and memory from the Le Morne Old Cemetery, Mauritius

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Abstract
This article centres on two distinct material assemblages, both representing resistance but in markedly different ways and at different times. It introduces a regional comparative of religious syncretism, longanis, to an archaeological audience. Longanis, a belief system that developed within slave communities, offers insightful similarities to Atlantic counterparts, as well as unique features in its own right. The article applies an archaeological viewpoint to burial and belief practice to better assess the role that materials have played in serving as proxies for African toolkits and memory.

Keywords
Mauritius, longanis, slavery, object biographies, syncretism, African-Global

Introduction
The study outlined here serves as an insight into socially marginalized groups. It uses materials in a manner that is not necessarily typical of archaeological investigations, i.e. deliberately underemphasizing chronology. Finds were derived from the Le Morne Old Cemetery, Mauritius, currently the only slave / post-emancipation burial ground uncovered from the Indian Ocean (Seetah 2015). Two distinct material collections form the basis for this article. The first is a
body of surface artifacts that evidence the outward manifestation of contemporary longanis, a Mauritian syncretic belief system borne out of a range of African traditions. Longanis incorporates the artifacts of animistic practice, European Christian iconography and, more recently, elements from South Asian ritual. It shares many similarities with other syncretic belief systems in Haiti (Ramsey, 2011) and Cuba (Ochoa, 2010), the southern parts of the US and Latin America, and potentially connects to African groups within an archaeological context (Samford, 1996). However, with the exception of Pulvéni de Séligny’s descriptive accounts (1996), and more recent research on the role of longanis at shrines (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and de Salle-Esoo, 2014), within traditional medicinal practices (de Salle-Esoo, 2011) and Christian faith (Palmyre, 2007), the subject remains poorly studied. The term longanis is itself ambiguous. Likely derived from l’onguenniste, a producer of ointments (Palmyre, 2007: 92), the practice can be referred to as sorselri (sorcery), with longanis denoting the practitioner. It is commonly referred to as ‘witchcraft’, when translated into English. However, during normal conversation in Kreol, the local patois, longanis is favoured as a catchall term to describe the acts, objects and practitioner. As a native speaker I use the more ubiquitous term longanis. This avoids pejorative associations linked to witchcraft and sorcery (Sweet, 2003: 161), and utilizes the term in its more widely referenced and descriptive local form.

The second set of artifacts investigated in this article is the grave goods recovered from within the burials, consisting of a range of items from coins to bottles and clay pipes. Beyond the distinct mortuary context, I articulate aspects of inheritance and similarities between the objects recovered from within the graves and those left on them. Ultimately, the aim of the article is to explore the relationships between these sets of artifacts. On the one hand, they are disconnected in terms of chronology and changing socio-religious practice, but on the other, connected conceptually and through ancestral ties.

Global biographies of ephemeral objects and practices

The materiality of slavery is a topic that has seen a great deal of development over the past few decades. Research has shown that slaves found a number of ways to procure material possessions (White, 2011). The body of literature on slave artifacts (Orser, 1992) and consumptive waste (Crader, 1990) highlights the nuances and complexity of slave life-ways. Despite this, there can be no doubt that these represent small concessions traded against much greater losses (Potter, 1991), with the notion of ‘social death’ poignantly expressing a slave’s inevitable disconnect from ancestral traditions (Patterson, 1982). Where this concept has been challenged is with regard to mortuary practice, emphasising a stronger connection to collective memory (Jamieson, 1995). Allied to this is the development of numerous syncretic belief systems (Thornton, 1988) that have their origins in a marriage between African and European faiths. Thus, burial practice in the past and syncretic belief today both represent manifestations of resistance.
Whether discussing the material (Hansen and McGowen 1998; Jamieson, 1995; Pearson et al., 2011) or spiritual aspects (Bilby and Handler, 2004; Engler, 2012; Fandrich, 2007), one cannot ignore the extensive work undertaken in the Atlantic. The globalized nature of the colonial period, the movement of goods (Hume, 1969), how these end up in graves (Jamieson, 1995) and connect to African-American cultural influence (Klingelhofer, 1987; Orser, 1992), all have utility for the development of material studies in the Indian Ocean. Equally significant is the influence of African spiritualism on the development of syncretic belief systems. This includes connections that have been drawn between West African peoples and a host of religious practices now active in the Americas (Fandrich, 2007), the role that spiritual belief played in political reform (Canizares, 1994; Fandrich, 2007), and how these practices have come to be viewed negatively in the modern world (Bilby and Handler, 2004). However, while cognizant of the manifest potential that the Atlantic offers, I deliberately steer clear of drawing direct analogies between the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic. At this stage of research, given the paucity of material evidence and complete absence of basic artifact catalogues, later-historic archaeology in the Indian Ocean is too poorly equipped to make meaningful comparisons.

For the Indian Ocean, the influence of eastern religions and cosmologies, and associated objects, will be critical features in future research on syncretism. The impact of East African and Madagascan peoples in the creation of material cultures tied to burial will also serve as a point of contrast for the role of West Africans in the Atlantic. Of greater utility for research on African materiality and belief, Samford calls for a ‘regional and diachronic assessment of African-American sites’ (1996, emphasis added). I suggest that we need to go beyond this. In the Indian Ocean there have been multiple waves of African influence in this region. Recent migrations have elements in common with the Atlantic iteration, for example an essential disconnect from Africa. However, they are still uniquely Indian Ocean experiences. Wider ranging ‘regional and diachronic assessments’ of material culture are desperately needed to valorise African culture on a world stage, reinforcing African, African-American and, indeed, recognising African-Global cultural history and heritage.

Theoretical framing for this article is leveraged from research focused on object biographies, which has seen major development in recent decades, especially as a consequence of interest by social anthropologists (Appadurai, 1986). Beyond the idea that a biographical approach connects people and things (Joy, 2009) is the notion of webs of interaction around things (Meskell, 2013: 338). Space precludes the type of thorough discussion of object biographies that this topic deserves (Joy, 2009; Meskell, 2004). Of particular relevance to the present article is the framework provided by Gosden and Marshall (1999), which underlines the way artifacts accumulate social and economic capital as a consequence of time, movement and location. Performance also provides an important theoretical construct. While the present research is not at a stage where we can interrogate performance as it relates to politics (Inomata and Coben, 2006) or power (Shanks, 2004) it is possible to
provide some food for thought within the context of ritual (Fogelin, 2007). The notion of a sensorial archaeology (Gosden, 2001: 165; Hamilakis, 2013: 10) also affords important framing. For the present case, the objects create meaning through their service as proxies, their rarity and their ability to form a link between distinct social and ethnic groups. A variation on Gosden and Marshall’s notion of visibility, serving as a mechanism to promote power, is observed at Le Morne. Anonymity, rather than conspicuousness, of both enacted performances and actors, appears to have been a key feature in the artifacts’ ability to garner significance.

A final note on theoretical contextualization: my use of the term syncretism relates to the confluence of the ‘things’ of belief, rather than the systems. Syncretism has faced criticism, not least in that it can pedestal world over traditional belief systems (Shaw and Shaw, 1994). The emphasis in the present article is placed on the way materials illustrate the formation of an admixed local society. It appears that Mozambican and Malagasy peoples initially formed the burial community under investigation. By adopting artifacts from the other islanders, longanis drew in these groups alongside their paraphernalia, i.e. crosses from European traditions and oil lamps from South Asian, elements that serve in the religious and ritual practice of these other migrant communities.

A short history of slavery in Mauritius

More detailed accounts of the historical background to Mauritius can be found in Allen (1999, 2008), Teelock (1998, 2009) and Vaughan (2005). In brief, the Dutch first settled the island in 1638, abandoning it 20 years later, after which the French claimed it in 1710. From 1810, the island underwent its greatest ecological, economic, social and demographic transformations under the British. For example, in the early 1860s the island produced ~10 per cent of the world’s sugar (Allen, 1999: 23), the burden of which re-shaped every aspect of the island.

Since the very first settlement, Mauritius became home to a diverse slave community, drawing individuals from a wide geographic pool around the Indian Ocean basin (Campbell, 2004: vii). The Dutch initially brought small groups from Madagascar and Batavia, in present day Java. Under the French, the slave population underwent exponential growth. Slaves numbered 648 individuals in 1735, by 1806 this figure had reached 62,879 and comprised 75–85 per cent of the population at that time (Allen, 2001: 157). Abolition did not end this trade, which continued well into the 1820s, and resulted in tens of thousands of slaves transported and disembarked in clandestine fashion.

East Africa, and in particular Mozambique, as well as Madagascar, were the main sources for forced labour. These two groups accounted for 40 and 45 per cent of the slave population respectively. Smaller cohorts derived from other regions: 13 per cent from India and approximately 2 per cent from West Africa (Allen, 1999: 14). Recent genetic studies of the modern population have highlighted the underlying diversity and greater complexity of Mauritius’ demographic compared to
Madagascar, Comoros and Reunion Island (Fregel et al., 2014). These findings offer strong corroboration for historical data and the particular role that the island played in the slave trade (Alpers, 2001). Indeed, at one point Mauritius had the unfortunate status of having one of the largest slave populations of any British colony (Barker, 1993).

These early African and Malagasy communities have contributed considerably to the islands contemporary culture: through dance and music, Segga; language, Kreol; and spirituality, Longanis. Understanding how these groups interacted with each other is something we will only ever have a small glimpse of, given the rarity of records relating to slave life (Valentine, 2001), and the current paucity of slave sites. In redressing this imbalance, the site of Le Morne offers an important avenue through which we can gain insight into a range of features relating to a population of slaves / freed slaves. This includes aspects of diet and disease (Appleby et al., 2014), demography (Seetah 2015) and with the present article, material culture and burial practice.

**Marronage, inscription and the objects of resistance**

Resistance was a feature of slavery in Mauritius from the Dutch period (Peerthum, 2001: 107), with the historical texts attesting to the role that maroons (runaway slaves) played in resisting the unfair treatment of their masters (Allen, 1983; Alpers, 2003; Teelock, 1998). Marronage, the act of absconding, became a major issue for both French and British administrations (Peerthum, 2006: 159) and increased during the early half of the 1820s. Approximately 11 per cent of the slave population absconded at some point during that period (Allen, 1999: 40–41). Many of these individuals were recovered in municipal areas, suggesting a proliferation of urban marronage (Peerthum, 2006: 167). However, as slaves were largely to be found on rural plantations, the interior and other regions of the island also formed major dispersal routes for runaway slaves. Principal amongst these was the rugged south western corner of the island, and specifically Le Morne (Figure 1: inset a). In recent times, this inselberg has come to be known as the Maroon Republic.

Strong oral traditions emphasise the strategic role of the Brabant, the plateaux that tops the inselberg, and which forms the very tip of the Le Morne peninsula (Figure 1: inset b). One of these oral histories recounts an event that has come to have both national significance, memorialised in sega music, and international recognition, through Amitav Ghosh’s popular trilogy on the opium trade (2011). The story centres on runaway slaves who, on seeing British soldiers making their way to their plateaux, flung themselves to their death. They died needlessly. The soldiers were in fact coming to tell them they were now emancipated.

This poignant narrative formed the basis for UNESCO inscription in 2008 (Bakker and Odendall, 2008). The Le Morne Cultural Landscape was recognised as a critical moment in our global collective past, commemorating resistance to one of the most enduring and abhorrent features of antiquity. The process of
inscription catalysed the development of archaeological research in the area from 2004, initially undertaken by the University of Mauritius and the Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund (LMHTF) (Chowdhury, 2006), and later by the Mauritian Archaeology and Cultural Heritage (MACH) project. In all cases, excavations were undertaken in collaboration with local heritage institutions, and were heavily dependent on community involvement. In 2009, the then director of the LMHTF requested archaeological support to investigate the site. This was prompted by inscription of Le Morne, and a desire to understand the nuances of slavery in the region, given the evident paucity of research on slave life-ways. Surveys undertaken in 2009 by the MACH project and the LMHTF uncovered an extensive site, suggesting a well defined abandoned burial ground. Subsequent excavations in 2010, 2012 and 2013, under the directive of the LMHTF and Truth and Justice Commission, have uncovered a remarkably well preserved assemblage of human remains. At present, 28 individuals have been uncovered, of which a significant proportion have been sub-adult (Appleby et al., 2014). We conservatively estimate that some 70 individuals were buried. Although radiocarbon dating has proved problematic (Seetah 2015), the site could be reliably dated from finds recovered from securely stratified layers. These have allowed us to calibrate the 14C dates, and we can now place the cemetery’s period of use to around the point of emancipation. This presently holds true for the central portion of the cemetery.

Figure 1. Main: Le Morne Old Cemetery. (a) Mauritius, capital and main site starred. (b) Le Morne Brabant.
uncovered during the 2010 season. Subsequent excavations surrounding the core zone are potentially indicative of earlier occupation, capturing the period of slavery itself. In addition to the unique and revealing human remains, two distinct sets of artifacts were recovered from the site and are discussed below.

**Objects present**

The island has an uneasy relationship with those cultural features that have their birth during the period of slavery. Thus, *Kreol* has only recently begun the process of formalisation. *Sega* music, recognised as a unique intangible heritage by UNESCO on 27 November 2014 under the moniker *Sega Tipik Morisien*, is not quite the music of the masses. However, it is certainly very popular across demographic groups and a noted mechanism of resistance in its own right (Police, 2001: 81–110). The most problematic legacy of slavery is *longanis*, remaining an illegal practice despite universal religious freedom being enshrined in the law. The practice is steeped in tradition, and a largely clandestine activity. Its surreptitious nature is no doubt due to its illegality, as well as the nature of the activities performed. In order to shed light on the uses and perceptions of those objects that were recovered as surface finds, short interviews were conducted with members of the local Le Morne Village community. Participants from Le Morne included members of staff at the LMHTF, local elders who could comment on evident changes in *longanis* practice, and consultation with a practitioner. Interviews were also undertaken with inhabitants from Port Louis, specifically workers from the Bois Marchand Cemetery, offering a comparative dimension to practices noted at Le Morne. Bois Marchand is another site currently under study by the MACH project, and also demonstrates evidence of *longanis*. Conversations were easy to enter into, for example when individuals made a site visit, despite the attendant illegality. Participants shared their own opinions of an activity they regularly see evidence for, if not actually witness first hand. To this, I add my own experiences and observations of encountering *longanis*, and that of members of the MACH project.

In general, *longanis* is practiced at night, though midday and early morning can be critical times for certain activities. The clandestine activities have always favoured cemeteries, and signs of *longanis* can be seen in virtually all cemeteries one visits. Crossroads also have particular significance (de Salle-Essoo, 2011: 117), as do other locations associated with death (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and de Salle-Essoo, 2014). The Le Morne Old Cemetery appears to have been a particular focal point for the wider region, no doubt due to its relative seclusion, but also its association with an ancestral population.

The practitioners can be either male or female and see their role as one of healing. This point was emphasised by a practitioner I had a short interview with in 2013, who was adamantly that this was a curative activity. Nonetheless, the manner of healing can at times stand in contrast to this underlying principle. *Longanis* focuses on channeling negative energies, or ill-will. The perception that someone has been affected by ‘the evil eye’ is evidenced by his or her illness.
This requires negative energy to be transferred, which can be undertaken by sacrificing a life, or through the shedding of blood. Symbolism is key here. The proxy for a life can be, for example, splitting a coconut, or cutting a piece of fruit, which is then sprinkled with red dye to signify the shedding of blood. A sinister facet to *longanis* cannot be avoided, particularly when one witnesses the direct evidence from the artifacts, and takes into account their meaning and significance. Even within the context of healing, practitioners may channel the negative energy *into* someone else, bringing illness to that individual as a way of removing sickness from the person they are curing.

In 2010, during general site clearance, the sheer quantity of relics of *longanis* was staggering. Unfortunately, at that time neither LMHTF nor the MACH project had the resources to systematically record the finds beyond a cursory level. Many hundreds of coconuts were strewn around the site, with evidence of animal sacrifice and offerings. The more commonly found items included coins, coconuts, tinned victuals, lemons, earthenware oil lamps and red or white candles (Figure 6). These could be categorised in two ways. Items that signified, when broken, split or spilled, ‘the life given’, or more general offerings, i.e. coins. Evidence of animal sacrifice was pervasive, often involving young animals, puppies, piglets and pullets, though adult birds were also noted. Whether the presence of juveniles represents animals that were easy to acquire, or that had special significance during the actual rituals, is not clear. The animal offerings notwithstanding, these finds, while instilling a sense of disquiet, were not in and of themselves particularly threatening.

Some of the artifacts recovered were more overtly sinister. Principal amongst these were three suspended figures, constructed of bundled cloth and shrouded in black fabric. They were fashioned to be crudely anthropomorphic, and were approximately 30 cm in length (Figure 2a). Such effigies ostensibly signify real people, with harmful intent directed towards the individuals they represent. They can contain small pieces

![Figure 2. (a) Black shrouded human form. (b) Dolls.](image-url)
of cloth, on which the name of the person to be harmed is noted. Invariably, they symbolize injurious acts that will befall the individual, or to certain parts of the body. In this regard, personal items from the individual may be procured and used against them. Items of male underwear were recovered from the site, signifying the intent that harm would befall the specific component of the body that the garment was in contact with. In this particular case, the intended harm was perhaps indirect, i.e. infertility. Numerous dolls, two with decapitated heads (Figure 2b), were recovered from the site. These were particularly interesting as they could align with the type of negative connotation as discussed above, or potentially with rites that revolved around blessings conferred on a new-born child.

Other items were seemingly innocuous, yet, their underlying significance held considerable intent for malice. Two termite riddled trees showed examples of this. Bottle caps were hammered into the trees, under each bottle cap a small cloth listed a name, or set of names, along with various rites and short scripted texts detailing harmful acts to befall the named individual(s). The ill-will that was vested in each token would endure and revisit those listed. They could only be released from the harmful acts and bad luck when the bottle cap was prised off. Given the secluded nature of the site, these motifs of harm could endure for many years. Whatever the outcome of such acts, the intent is unequivocally malicious and premeditated to dog the person for some considerable time.

Finally, moving beyond the ritual objects themselves, two fundamental features serve as identifiers of symbolic significance. The location of the site clearly holds particular relevance, serving as an important focal point for the activities that created this particular assemblage (discussed in more detail below). One specific object also functioned as a focal point: a cross. Over a period of years, numerous iterations have been placed in a central position within the cemetery (Figure 3), despite the fact that no Christian connection can be associated with the site itself. The cross serves as an emblem, a symbol of power for one religion, adopted and used as a focal point for longans. This is repeated in other cemeteries, and indeed, more generally were crosses are used for ritual purposes (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and de Salle-Essoo, 2014).

Figure 3. Two iterations of crosses, left from 2006 (Allan Charlot), right 2012 (Alessandra Cianciosi).
**Objects past**

In general, the finds recovered from the graves demonstrate less variety than noted from similar contexts in the Atlantic, for example, in St Helena (Pearson et al., 2011: 99–141). The initial excavations in 2010 recovered a number of mother-of-pearl buttons, along with a bottle, a set of coins (Figure 4), and a shovel and hoe. This last set of objects was apparently left on completion of interment. Subsequent seasons evidenced another more refined bottle, seven clay tobacco pipes, both new and used, and flint-strikes. These latter artifacts formed part of a smoker’s paraphernalia and were recovered in a grave with five pipes. A series of bone buttons were also recovered. Finally, a small teacup from grave 28 (Figure 4), the only such find to date, appears to have been left on top of the grave fill at the time of interment, although it may potentially have been a later deposit.

![Figure 4. 2010 grave goods – bottle (grave 33) and coins (grave 7) (Yves Pitchen); 2012 grave goods – (a): bottle (grave 23) (b): buttons (grave 23) and (c) teacup (grave 29) (Alessandra Cianciosi).](image)
With no precedent, i.e. burials, from which to discuss these finds as archaeological objects within this geographic context (although, see Colwell-Chanthaphonh et al., 2014, for a detailed account of surface finds from a nearby settlement site) I firstly touch on how they arrived to the island. I then discuss how they came to belong to the interred, or the family and community of the interred, and how they may have been used.

The first step, identifying origins, is the least complicated. All finds, excluding items such as the buttons, can be securely identified as coming from Europe. Indeed, even the buttons are potentially an imported item. With the exception of the clay pipes, none of the artifacts had a makers mark, rendering the task of assigning a precise provenance and manufacturer difficult. This does not preclude more general statements, however. Each of the two bottles recovered are distinct, the one recovered in 2010 from grave 33 is typical of glass bottle production from the mid-to-late 19th century (Dumbrell, 1983: 115). By contrast, the bottle recovered in 2012 from grave 23 represents a specialised type. Although it lacks particular decorative features, its form suggests a more complicated manufacturing process, resulting in a relatively long and slim bottle. A slight opalescence indicates a degree of glass weathering from soda leaching as a result of surface moisture. The glass is also eroded from time spent in abrasive sand. The bottle may have been used for liquor, fancy wine (Historic Glass Bottle Identification and Information Website: http://www.sha.org/bottle/index.htm), or perhaps contained medicine. This will remain unclear until residue analysis has been completed.

Of the recovered pipes (Figure 5), six retained insignia that were indicative of a specific marker. However, they are still somewhat difficult to assign a

Figure 5. Clay pipes from graves 23, 24 and 42 (Alessandra Cianciosi).
specific provenance. The ‘TD’ motif noted on five pipes from grave 23 ostensibly refers to Thomas Dormer, a British manufacturer who produced pipes until 1780. These initials are reasonably common (Oswald, 1975: 128–207), and could also refer to other makers. More problematic is that the impressed design of the motif recovered from Le Morne evidences clear differences to more definitive ‘TD’ pipes (for example, see Figure 27 in Sudbury and Gerth, 2011). While four follow one standard form of embossing, one follows another. Towards the end of the 18th century, the ‘TD’ inscription, alongside a more general move to standardisation, came to represent a style of pipe produced by a range of manufacturers. The pipes recovered from Le Morne are likely representative of the style, rather than the specific maker. The pipes appear to have been made of ball clay, commonly available in Devonshire and Dorset, Britain (Sudbury and Gerth, 2011). The distinctive crown and ‘B’ motif noted on the heel of two pipes, one from grave 23 and another from 42, are even more enigmatic. These appear to be either from Germany or Holland, with the emblem used by a range of manufacturers dating from 1686 (Cornelis Jooste Smient) to 1850 (Nicolas Van Blokland) (Calado et al., 2003).

Linking object biographies to place, space and performance

Despite the obvious lack of chronological continuity, I have deliberately chosen to conflate both sets of artifacts in the following discussion to emphasis the multiple levels of association. On the one hand, they both represent ritual and the development of syncretism. However, the practice being invoked is markedly different. A more direct material comparison illustrates another critical point, the difference in quality of the objects. This is relevant both in the sense of what they represent to the individual for whom the ritual was undertaken, either the interred or in the modern setting, the ‘client’, and in an ascribed value. For the burial context, the objects recovered from the graves may well have represented the most treasured possessions that the individual / community had. These were ‘included’ in the burial. In contrast, many elements used for longanis were deliberately selected to then be ‘discarded’. Other points of disconnect are evident in how the materials have come to be part of each individual assemblage, and of course, what their function is perceived to represent. However, while taking these into consideration, there is still clear connection between these two assemblages, not least within the context of an ancestral tie back to African practices and the material evidence of an ethic link (Crawford, 1967; Middleton and Winter, 1963; Mulago, 1991; Tishken et al., 2009).

Spatial contextualisation

In ascribing value and detailing a biography for these objects, ‘place’ comes under the spotlight (Gosden and Marshall, 1999). This theoretical framing has greatest utility in discussing Le Morne itself. The first historic note of the cemetery is from a map dated to the 1890s, which indicates a burial ground in the direct vicinity of the
current site. Four crosses marked the location, which in itself is thought provoking given that there are no indications of Christian rites within the burial context. In fact, as evidenced by the grave goods, the opposite is true. The interments mimic African practice (Agorah, 1993; Handler, 1997; Jamieson, 1995). The cemetery itself, at least in the present day, is very much secluded. Approaching the site from a phenomenological perspective, one has the sense of a highly ephemeral place. The cemetery is juxtaposed between land and sea, sitting directly on a large sandbank, with the imposing Brabant on one flank, and the gentler features of the immediate, and more open, surrounding land on the other. The cemetery effectively forms a highly secluded natural amphitheatre. On a practical level, one imagines that the site was chosen as it permitted burial to be performed without fear of disturbance. This would have been significant if the cemetery was in use during the period of slavery. These same features, seclusion and privacy, have made the site a key locus for practitioners of longanis.

Exploring the spatial context further, but focusing more specifically on space, the graves themselves have come to signify a precise focal point. Their positioning has underpinned the subsequent use of the cemetery. It had long been assumed that any bone had been robbed by longanis practitioners. Despite this, the grave outlines retained sufficient importance to serve as a prominent locus for the healing / harming rituals, and the positioning of the finds associated with these practices.

**Viewing the sensory response**

While we may speculate vis-à-vis the actual details of how the burials were undertaken, the level of community involvement, and the individual roles people played (producing coffins, undertaking ceremonies, the inclusion of music, and of course, the interments and depositing of grave goods), specific objects themselves provide insight into the significance of performance. For example, the pipes and the bottles, the latter of which we assume contained alcohol, are both reflective of social practice emphasising the sensory context. While I do not wish to inappropriately conflate performance and sensory constructs, in this context it is the specific inclusion of objects that intimate sensory release that initiates a performance as part of burial practice.

Performance takes on greater meaning when discussing longanis, serving as the most realistic and significant aspect of the practice. Viewing this performance through the lens of the artifacts, we can piece together a range of acts, often but not necessarily involving the ritual slaughter of live animals, or proxies such as coconuts. Light clearly plays a significant role, given the presence of oil lamps and candles. Thus, blood and illumination are critical, especially when one considers that the candles are often red. Similar to the burial context, an individual serves as the focal point for the performance, whether to be healed, or as the instigator of a harmful act to be brought upon another. One feature of performance, and indeed materiality, that contrasts between the ancient and the modern is durability. For the ancient context, we have no evidence of perishables, i.e. bone, to indicate an offering of meat. However, this does not preclude the deposition of food or other
non-durable items. While some features of *longanis* are meant to endure, such as the bottle caps, these are in the relative minority. In general, the items used would leave little lasting signature, being of a more ephemeral nature. Although not universally the case, it appears that once the performative aspect has been undertaken, the objects themselves do not retain their initial value. They are not reused, but rather, new items are employed.

**Conclusions**

One might question why the above appraisal is even necessary, given that we can have direct evidence of the practice of *longanis*. In this way we undertake an assessment of a correlated activity from an archaeological view, devoid of the filter of speech, or the personal inference of the researcher, and focused specifically on the objects. The relationship evidenced by both sets of objects, within one broadly defined spatial context, binds two communities that now have limited tangible connection, other than that which can be drawn from a material perspective, through the lens of archaeology (Figure 6).

The association functions on a number of levels. Even if the direct descendants of those who historically inhabited Le Morne now reside elsewhere, there is nonetheless an ethnic link between the modern and the ancient. There is also a link at the conceptual level. In both instances these objects represent syncretism, expressed in different ways, but using material things in lieu of, and in order to recreate, traditional toolkits. Unfortunately, the lack of detailed work in this region is a major handicap to developing these ideas. Until we better understand how belief systems function in the source communities and indeed in Mauritius, we will only ever be able to make very broad brush-stroke comparisons. Despite these limitations the finds are representative of a significant development, local culture. It is this that connects the grave goods with the surface finds. It is this that consolidates the biographies of these sets of objects. For the archaeological context, use of the ancient objects has been undertaken to create and mimic lost burial rites. But whose rites are we speaking of? DNA clearly indicates the burial of Mozambican and Malagasy individuals, who would have different attitudes and practices relative to treatment of the dead (Glazier, 1984). Thus, in this case it seems evident that a significant enough period of time had elapsed to allow a coalescing of distinct burial traditions. A strong enough sense of community had developed that allowed for sharing of this burial space. This same admixed group, i.e. Mauritians broadly defined, use modern objects to express their syncretic belief system. Today, a broad cross-section of the population is involved in *longanis*. This syncretism is evident in the meshing of Christian, i.e. crosses (Figure 3) and animistic (effigies and sacrifice) practices. Another material view illustrates that, for the archaeological context, we see predominantly European artifacts, as one would expect given their provenance. For the *longanis* finds, a contemporary globalized situation is reflected that includes earthenware oil lamps, a direct influence from South Asia and part of the indentured labourers’ ‘toolkit’.
Both sets of objects, combined, represent the material development of a cultural marker, spirituality. This helps us to better understand how *longanis* developed in the absence of cohesive group affinity, as the popular conception of slavery posits. In turn, this offers a lens into the archaeological context. The fact that objects from certain ethnic and religious groups, for example Chinese or Islam, have not been adopted is revealing. This provides an insight into group dynamics based on when specific peoples arrived to the island, and the roles they undertook. These latter two

**Figure 6.** Material connections in space (Yves Pitchen).
groups arrived mainly as merchants and artisans. They undertook different functions around the sugar plantations compared to slaves or indentured labourers. Thus, this likely influenced the level and types of inter-group interaction.

Beyond direct reflections of which objects have been included and why, are issues relating to more elemental factors. The ‘things’ represent hidden cultures and resistance. Although open to debate, it can be suggested that the ancient, and certainly the modern, groups created these assemblages in a clandestine fashion. Much clearer is that in both cases we are seeing a mechanism of resistance, although the extent of this resistance is hard to qualify. Though discussing a different context, Silliman offers an insightful means of capturing the essence of resistance: “people who never permit these processes to become final and complete and who frequently retain or remake identities and traditions in the face of often brutal condition” (2005: 59). Certainly in the present case, it would seem that ‘remaking traditions’ has formed the basis for both the burial rites and longanis practice.

Drawing on ideas of social death, at least in death some adherence to traditional practice could be maintained, a small concession in the face of an overwhelming loss of freedom. In the present day, longanis represents resistance against legal restrictions and sanctioning. One cannot legally practice this system, and paradoxically, this may well be a reason why it survives; it has never been institutionalised. Once again emphasising material connectivity, by being subaltern, by being seen as insalubrious and connected to activities considered unsavoury, longanis has endured. The fact that longanis was practiced at this particular site has meant that the cemetery and its interments have been protected by virtue of avoidance strategies undertaken by the general populace.

At least on a theoretical level, the social meaning that underpins the materials we see in the modern context have their naissance in those we see in the graves. Critically, the artifacts that exemplify longanis demonstrate the extent of cultural disconnect from ancestral populations. While we are still a long way from understanding how this practice made its ways to Mauritius, it would now be possible to integrate materials from an African ‘healer’ toolkit in the present day. However, that hasn’t occurred, and we can well understand why. The schism has been too great. There is no connection to contemporary practice. Retention and continuity are reflected through collective memory (Matory, 2005: 38) and this does not exist. Although we are seeing evidence of African traditions, the situation is more complicated. We have yet to understand where in Africa these particular attitudes derive from, despite well-established precedent (Middleton and Winter, 1963) and historical assessments of memory and identity (Teelock and Alpers, 2001), the links between materials and social meaning are absent.

Future research will no doubt add to, and complicate, the picture. It is worth noting that only eight DNA samples have been published to date (Seetah 2015). With additional assays, we may yet see that the modern and the ancient reflect each other in more nuanced ways, indicative of deeper cross-cultural diachronic ties.
This would reinforce historical descriptions revealing the way different groups interacted with one another, and ultimately came to form a community (Bernadin de St. Pierre, 2002). The overarching topic of ‘folk religion’ is one that is gaining traction within this archaeological sub-discipline (Manning, 2014). However, the archaeological perspective would be bolstered with better ethnographic research detailing attitudes to death and dying, spiritualism and healing. The fact that African syncretic belief evidently had an important influence outside of the Atlantic context, noted on locations such as Mauritius and Reunion (Barat et al., 1983; Sam-Long, 1979), should alert us to the full potential of what we have been missing from the Indian Ocean, and what might be gained with further research in this region.

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