

Translated from French to English:

<https://www.lemauricien.com/article/lengagisme-conjugue-les-humanites-au-festival-international-de-la-coolitude/>

Engagism unite humanities to the International Festival of Coolitude

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Scientific and Artistic Director of FIC, June 2018

The FIC has just ended in Guadeloupe. FIC brought together artists, activists, academics, researchers from around fifteen countries to take part in the very first global festival linked to Indentureship. FIC also put on the drawing board two ideas dear to the humanism of the diversity of Indentureship: dialogue with slavery and articulation with diversity through a coral, an archipelagic vision of the humanities. Its rich program is available on the Internet, as well as information about stakeholders (1). It is appropriate to consider its philosophy and the highlights of this first edition, which took place between Lamentin, Saint François and Capesterre.

Building bridges between roads and memories

The FIC has showcased the diversity of Indentureship for more than a quarter of a century. It links seemingly distant stories and memories, but which need to be articulated in order to bring the pages of history together, including Indentureship. and slavery.

In 1992, its founder book, **Cale D'étoiles-Coolitude**, whose approach to fill the silence of the archives of the **coolie trade**, appeared to be a desire to link this memory of work/labour (with its lot of deception) to slavery, whose abolishment initiated the Great Experience of Indentureship. Its openness to otherness, then articulated with a transnational vision of history, was of interest to UNESCO. Indeed, in 1994, there was talk of a road of the coolie since the commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery at the headquarters of Unesco, in Paris. The then General Director, Federico Mayor, expressed his interest in this approach, as did Doudou Diène, the designer of the Slave Route, who was the guest of honour for the first edition of the FIC in Guadeloupe.

From the outset, the FIC reflected the recommendations of the Unesco Specifications Paper for the International Road of Engagism, or IILR (October 2014), focusing on the better understanding of the "**dynamics**

of the movement of millions of people and cultures of that time", aimed at highlighting **"the global transformations and cultural interactions resulting from this history".** The aim is to **"contribute to a culture of peace by promoting cultural pluralism, dialogue between cultures, sustainable development and peace."** The poetics of coolitude had already opened the way for Indentureship in this sense, notably through the policy of the memory sites in Mauritius, around Aapravasi Ghat and Le Morne.

Therefore, during our IILR registration process in 2013, supported by Aapravasi Ghat, it was important not to separate slavery and Indentureship.

This inclusive vision is contained in the explanatory notes to the UNESCO document, namely that: **"The International Route of the Indentureship will complement the Slave Route. These movements are based on exchanges between cultures that have led to the formation of the present human societies".**

We recalled this generic relationship between slavery and Indentureship during the policies of UNESCO sites in numerous articles and during the discussions with Moussa Ali Iyé, Head of the History and Memory Section for Dialogue and Head of the "Slave Route" at UNESCO.

This was the case in Guadeloupe in January 2017, when I was officially representing UNESCO, commemorating the centenary of the abolition of Indian Indentureship.

I recalled this in Mauritius in August 2017, during the centenary of the abolition of Indian Indentureship organised by GOPIO-Maurice.

To revive the IILR, it was necessary to reactivate its historical, chronological and systemic proximity with the Slave Route. There was, therefore, no space before our moves to give substance to these principles and to make statements palpable, while being part of a "long-term history", to quote Doudou Diène during his intervention at the FIC.

Words of Archipelagos at the bow of the FIC

It is, therefore, no surprise that a **"methodology in action"** was the upstream of the FIC, through a great expert in this field, Dr. Ottmar Ette, author of some forty books ranging from theories on globalisation to studies on Humboldt, Marti and Barthes... Ette is a member of the Academy of Europe. **"There is no monolingual continent. Each island is the microcosm of a macrocosm".** It was Ottmar Ette who organised meetings at the University of Potsdam in 2011 where there was talk of archipelagic imaginary. Coolitude, as a guest of honour, brought its particular gaze in the symposium. It was a decade after these successful meetings that the FIC set out on Guadeloupe.

Photo:

At the Capesterre Indian Enlisted Memorial Site,

The planting of a tree of coolitude by Doudou Diène and Khal Torabully, symbolising peace and brotherhood

After the opening of the exhibition Coolitude-KANN series by Raouf Oderuth, it was «Words of the Archipelagos»* at the bow of the FIC. There Professor Ette developed the archipelagic vision dear to the German coolitude and theoretician. Then, Ette and Torabully exchanged around the fractal thought of coolitude, especially around the poetry of the coral, post-hybridity... They were complicit in posing the philosophical substrate of the festival.

The following day, in "**Approaches to Diversity**", ideas were contextualised and deepened in interventions by Professor Dilip Menon, Dr Ashutosh Kumar and Dr Maurits Hassankan. Rich words that will be the subject of a book. Then came the round table on the complexity of cultures and memories, chaired by Andil Gosine and bringing together Joëlle Guetalli-Tedeschi, Sandra Rojo Flores and Ananya Kabir. How to think the otherness, the differences, the histories and create spaces of articulations between these imaginations, cultures and worldviews, resting primarily on the histories of Indentureship and Slavery, which have been matrices of many current societies? Rich exchanges between these enthusiasts of diverse visions and practices, building a complex approach so essential today.

In the afternoon, Doudou Diène, the guest of honour of the FIC, made an overview of the construction of racial and societal hierarchies in the wake of slavery. He masterfully emphasised the consequences of this dominant thought at work in slavery and indentureship, permeating today's racism and murderous identities. Diene, active on the roads of the world, recalled that **«the whole history of the world is that of the movement»**. **History "... comes from afar and it makes it possible to shed light on current phenomena, we are all products of a long history on chaotic paths»**. Diene stressed the historical character of the FIC and hoped that its message would be transmitted more broadly, and expressed the hope that it would be renewed again and again.

Joëlle Guetalli-Tedeschi and Sandra Rojo Flores, Andalusians of adoption, spoke of their work in relation to coolitude, namely a bilingual anthology ***«In Cantos of coolies»** and the House of Wisdom, born of the **convivencia (coexistence)** of coolitude.

Mexican anthropologist Sandra Flores recalled a page of Indentureship in Yucatan, highlighting the transnational aspect of this paradigm. Succeeding them, Anne-Lise Liens shared her reflections on her staging of Fanon's play, **Peau Noire (black skin), masque blanc (white mask)**, and recalled that the FIC is a comforting space, knowing that racism is more than alive.

The day ended with a stunning show by Nadira & Indranie Shah Dance troupe from Guyana, combining styles and imaginations in an exceptional way. This was the choreographic language of our exchanges.

A memorable Sunday in Saint François and Capesterre

In the Rotonde, on Sunday morning, Emelda Davis received a standing ovation after a reminder of the struggle of her people engaged by the sugar industry in Australia, which moved Anne-Lise Liens to tears. Continuing on the universal aspect of indentureship, Tristan Franconville developed an important reflection on the «allocated» of the 17th century since Dieppe, revealing European aspects of this practice.

Dr. Ananya Kabir focused on an approach that linked the spaces and objects of the West Indies and elsewhere, questioning the cultural and symbolic production of post-slavery and Indentureship. The work session ended with a round-table discussion on the methodology and perspectives discussed at the FIC. Andil Gosine recalled that it is important to make the creativities of the coolie trade audible and visible.

The festival ended in Capesterre, during a moving tribute to the Indian and non-Indian enlisted, while recalling the slaves. After a multi-denominational prayer, petals offerings in front of the stele of the coolie, Doudou Diène and Khal Torabully put in the ground, a **neem**, symbolising the tree of coolitude, bearer of peace and brotherhood.

Michel Narayaninsamy, co-founder of the FIC, did not hide his happiness. During these 4 days of activities, the FIC will have achieved a world-first in terms of perspectives and articulations between memories, stories and imaginaries, especially those stemming from slavery and Indentureship. We'll come back to that... Dr. Diène, before leaving Guadeloupe, stated that he had just **"attended an historic event"** and wished to see it renewed, because it was **"the first link between Indentureship and Slavery"** that had just begun...

(1) http://www.potomitan.info/ki_nov/coolitude_2018.php

Translation note:

*«En cantos coolies» In Coolie cantos

*«Paroles d'archipels» Words of Archipelagos