



**International Symposium  
In Reunion Island 11-16 April 2023**

*"Museums facing Slavery: Challenge of  
Reconciling Narratives on a Common Heritage"*



### Concept note

Toussaint Louverture, a major historical figure, contributed to the abolition of slavery and influenced emancipation movements throughout the world, including the Indian Ocean. He now belongs to the pantheon of great men to be honoured. In La Reunion, this symbolic recognition was expressed by the installation of a bust of General Toussaint Louverture in the Garden of Memory of Saint-André on 7 June 2019. This French territory is home to the Juliette Dodu prison, an emblematic place of the carceral system of slavery and indentured labor.

As part of the 220th Commemoration of the death of Toussaint Louverture and the 175th Anniversary of the abolition of slavery in France, the association **Kartyé Lib Mémoire & Patrimoine Océan indien**, in partnership with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the think tank AFROSPERPECTIVES, the UNESCO Routes of Enslaved People (to be confirmed), the Museum of Black Civilizations (to be confirmed) and the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (to be confirmed), will organise an international symposium from 11 to 16 April 2023 on "*Museums facing Slavery: The Challenge of Reconciling Narratives on a Common Heritage*".

Following the four annual international colloquia on the various prison systems that we have organised, we have chosen, for our 5th edition (2023), to focus on the question of the interpretation and representation of slavery in the societies affected by this history in order to contribute to the global debate on this subject.

Indeed, over the past three decades, museums and historical places of memory in Africa, Europe, the Americas, the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean have developed diverse approaches to representing the slave trade, slavery, indentured labor, marronage, resistance and emancipation in their respective collections, exhibitions and educational materials.

The interpretations and representations of the tangible and intangible heritage linked to this human tragedy offered by the different institutions (historical sites, itineraries of memory, marronage routes, places of incarceration and exploitation) have shaped the way visitors look at it. In return, they have also given rise to strong expectations among the populations concerned for more complete and holistic narratives, taking into account the plurality of visions on these legacies.

Beyond the rhetoric of good intentions, the development of appropriate endogenous perspectives that take into account the paradigm shifts on the issue has proved much more difficult to achieve, as the UNESCO Guide on New Approaches to the Interpretation and Representation of Slavery in Museums (currently being published) has shown. Miserabilistic, paternalistic,

minimalist or antagonistic approaches still dominate museum interpretations and representations of slavery.

The initiative of this symposium is therefore justified by the need to :

- Take into account the evolution of the defence of human rights in history;
- Remedy the profound gaps that remain in the transmission of the past, in historical research, in teaching at all levels of human and social sciences, and museology;
- Promote the new roles and functions of museums as places of historical knowledge, heritage and memorial awareness, and as spaces for dialogue and reconciliation of national and local narratives;
- Contribute to the healing of the traumas of slavery caused by the trafficking and exploitation of human beings in history;
- Contribute to the objectives and programme of action of the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024).

The conference will bring together museum and heritage professionals, managers of sites and places of memory, researchers, experts in digital and multimedia technologies, educators, creators from different regions of the world (Indian Ocean, Africa, Europe, Americas, Asia, Caribbean) to discuss the increasingly complex issues they face in their practices. Namely :

- How can museums, sites and other educational spaces pedagogically depict the horrors of slavery as well as the feelings, thoughts, resistance, creativity and resilience of enslaved people? How can these structures illustrate the trauma and psychological consequences that affect social, cultural, political and economic relations in our societies today ?
- How can we tell the story of this common heritage while at the same time resonating with the expectations of local, national and international audiences? How can we address the dialectic between memory and history and reconcile the different interpretations ?
- How has the study and understanding of slavery evolved in recent decades? How do they affect the way this subject is treated and represented in museums and sites today ? How do these representations vary from region to region ?
- What possibilities do information and communication technologies (ICTs) and multimedia offer museums and sites to represent slavery in new and meaningful ways to illustrate this largely intangible heritage and to enrich the experience of visitors, especially young people ?
- How could existing or new slavery museums benefit from the more general reflection on the rethinking of museums ?

The main objectives of the symposium are the following :

- To improve understanding of the impact that Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution had in the different regions of the world, particularly in the Indian Ocean ;
- To assess the expectations of different audiences regarding the interpretation and representation of the legacies of slavery and their impact on psychology, health, education, socio-political and economic status ;
- To exchange experiences and best practices in the interpretation and representation of slavery in different regions of the world ;
- To explore the new possibilities offered by digital multimedia technologies for interpreting and representing the memory and history of the slave trade, slavery, indentured labour and their legacies ;



- To explore the opportunities and modalities of collaboration and partnership with the museums participating in the symposium for the restoration and rehabilitation of the Juliette Dodu prison.

### **Organisation of days**

The symposium is part of the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024) proclaimed by the United Nations. It will take place as follows:

- Day 1:** *Inauguration of an exhibition, opening speech and artistic animations*
- Day 2:** *Influence of Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution on emancipation and abolition movements around the world, in particular in the Indian Ocean*
- Days 3, 4 and 5 :** *What new approaches to representing slavery in museums and public spaces ?*

#### **Discussions around three axes :**

- 1) General Toussaint Louverture's companions in the struggle
- 2) The impact of the revolution on emancipation movements
- 3) Resistance to slavery in the countries of the Indian Ocean zone in relation to the Haitian revolution

#### **Discussions around three axes :**

- 1) Silences, knowledge, and gaps on slavery
- 2) Representations and interpretations of slavery: critical analyses of existing experiences and practices
- 3) Museums as places of reconciliation: new approaches and museum practices

These roundtables will be open to associations and individuals who have expressed their interest, subject to the number of places available. A summary of the proceedings will be made available to the general public at the end of the event.

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