

Conference Report...

16th International Creole Studies Colloquium Mahé, Seychelles, 28 October – 2 November 2018

Creole Worlds, Creole Languages, Development: Educational, Cultural and Economic Challenges

The 16th International Creole Studies Colloquium was held at the Anse Royale campus of the University of Seychelles (UniSey), Mahé, between 28th October and 2nd November, 2018. The colloquium was jointly organized by UniSey and the *Comité International des Etudes Créoles* (CIEC). The first CIEC colloquium was held in Nice, France, almost 50 years ago. Since then, it has travelled the Creole world, establishing the Creole academia in the four corners of the world: Seychelles (1979), St Lucia (1981), Louisiana (1983), La Réunion (1986), Guyana (1989), Mauritius (1992), Guadeloupe (1996), Aix-en-Provence (1999), la Réunion (2002), Cap-Verde (2005), Haïti (2008), Mauritius (2012), Aix-en-Provence (2014) Guadeloupe (2016), Seychelles (2018).

This year's colloquium was also a collaboration with the Creole Festival Committee to mark the 33rd Creole Festival of Seychelles. The Seychelles Creole Festival has regularly included colloquiums and seminars as part of its annual programme. This was the first time, however, that the festival had seen a colloquium of this magnitude, with such a wide range of participation. There were over 90 international delegates, coming from: Martinique, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Guyana, the Commonwealth of Dominica, Mauritius, Reunion, the Creole Diaspora in Canada, Australia, France and the UK; Universities in France, Germany, Austria; and, of course, academics from Seychelles. For the first time in the history of the CIEC colloquium, Seychelles was represented by a 14 strong delegation, where before, too often, there had been only one representative. It is hoped that this colloquium has opened new doors for Seychellois academics involved in Creole studies.

The 16th International Creole Studies Colloquium was focused on the following main theme: *Creole Worlds, Creole Languages, Development: Educational, Cultural and Economic Challenges*.

This theme invited philosophers, historians, anthropologists, economists, sociologists, linguists, and other researchers in human and social sciences, to present their work on contemporary Creole societies in their historical, linguistic, social, political, economic and cultural evolution. The theme was divided into four main sub-themes.

A. Creole languages and education

Faced with the challenges of education for all in basic and middle schools, sovereign countries that use a French Creole language have introduced some measure of Creole language teaching in their schools. Some states, such as Seychelles and Haiti, have acquired a vast experience in this domain that should be examined. Mauritius has recently also embarked on this venture, which calls for evaluation. The Creole-speaking Outremer Departments, whose Creoles are recognized regional languages of France, and which benefit from the texts regulating the teaching of regional languages in France, have also many educational practices to share.

B. Creole worlds and their cultural and economic challenges of development

Anthropology and the history of Creole worlds are called upon to account for how the Creole-speaking social formations, resulting from European colonial expansion, are facing the challenges of development and globalization. The role of Creole languages in the development of economies (tourism, reception of migrants, etc.) has to be assessed. Literary production in the Creole-speaking islands of the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean has developed greatly in recent years, in French and English as well as in Creole languages. The study of this renewal of literature and cultural practices also formed part of this theme. The migratory movements of creole speakers (see also theme C), the paths of the institutionalization of the Creole languages in their respective areas of influence, and Creole militant practices were also discussed.

C. Creole languages in a multilingual environment: description and analysis of the dynamics of Creole languages

Recent globalization has caused many displacements of Creole-speaking populations towards more developed economic zones. New Creole-speaking communities have thus been created outside their territories of birth, such as Haitian communities in North America, populations from the Creole speaking départements in metropolitan France, Mauritians in Australia, and Seychellois in the United Kingdom. Creole-speaking newcomers are found in prosperous Creole-speaking areas, for instance, Haitians in Guyana and elsewhere in the Caribbean. Immigration to Creole-speaking areas also leads to the emergence of neo-learners of Creole languages. Globalization has led to an unprecedented diffusion of Creole languages, including *via* language and culture industries. These new sociolinguistic situations of diffusion have, to date, hardly been described. Similarly, little is known about the impact of these migratory movements on the dynamics of Creole languages. To these themes may be added the study of the genesis and evolution of Creole languages.

D. Creole grammar: typology, variation and teaching

The description of Creole language systems (phonology, grammar) remains necessary. The analysis of the variation of Creole languages and of their linguistic systems is still unsatisfactory. This theme brought together contributions that attempted to analyze and explain phonological, morphological and grammatical systems in a typological perspective. This theme also included work on a grammar for teaching. Indeed, in Haiti, the Seychelles and Mauritius, as in the French DROMs, questions arise concerning 'grammar models' and the use of linguistic analyses for teacher training and for teaching of Creole languages as first languages.

The colloquium opening ceremony was held on 28 October to commemorate International Creole Day, a day which is recognized by most creole societies which formed part of the Creole movement of the 1970s, when Seychelles played a leading role in the recognition of Creole as a language and culture in its own right. Renowned Seychellois artist, Patrick Victor kicked off the ceremony with a resounding and moving rendition of his song, '*Pep Kreol*' (Creole People). Our Creole audience from all over the world was very moved by this performance; they were further regaled with various performances by the Seychelles National Cultural Troupe, *Bling Bling Poetry*, and a special welcome by the Anse Royale Elderly Association. What made the ceremony special however, was a presentation of Guy Tirolien's '*Credo*' by a mixed group of colloquium participants from the Caribbean. This made of the ceremony a truly Creole World affair and set the tone for further interactions and a feeling of togetherness throughout the colloquium. This was compounded by a conference dinner, hosted by the Vice-Chancellor of UniSey, in which DJ Solo had Mauritians, Reunionese, Seychellois and Caribbean Creoles showing off their various types of Creole music.

The colloquium itself comprised of around eighty presentations, four keynote addresses and three workshops. Well-known Seychellois Creolist Mrs. Marie-Thérèse Choppy, started off the presentations with a keynote address on the changing linguistic landscape of Seychelles, which is having an impact on Seychelles Creole. Other keynote presenters included Professor Daniel Veronique, who presented a comparative study of French Creoles of the Indian Ocean, Professor Felix Prudent, who spoke about the development of Creole literature in the Antilles, and Dr. Guillaume Samson, who spoke about the Reunionese sega.

Outcomes

The hosting of this colloquium has put UniSey and the Creole Language and Culture Research Institute on the map of Creole Academia. It has established important links for

UniSey, but also links between various intellectual concerns in the Creole world and other fields of study. Most importantly, from the feedback given by almost 100% of the participants, this colloquium has helped to establish a truly Creole spirit of togetherness and commonality of purpose, which has rarely been achieved in other such colloquiums. Perhaps the following extract from a Facebook comment by one of the participants sums it up:

Mo finn retourn Moris apre enn semenn dan Sesel dan kad Colloque International des Etudes Créoles. Lintansite bann moman ki mo finn viv telman for ki mo santi ki mo bizin pran letan pou akeyir, grandi avek ek transform sa lenerzi ki finn travers mwa.

I have returned to Mauritius after one week in Seychelles where I attended the International Colloquium of Creole Studies. The intensity of the moments I have experienced are so strong, that I feel I have to take time to assess, grow and metamorphose with the energy that has traversed my soul.

The CIEC colloquium can only progress from strength to strength following this 16th edition. It is not yet known who will organize the 17th edition, but it will certainly be a stronger Creole community that meets in 2020.

In the meantime, UniSey, more precisely CLCRI, is preparing to compile the colloquium presentations into a Colloquium Act, which it hopes to publish in 2019.

Penda Choppy

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