

New Contracts Old Chains; A Survival Saga in Lacpatiya's Boadour

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how the notion of survival is represented in the 1977 novel by Firmin Lacpatiya, *Boadour a la Gange*, set among the nineteenth-century indentured servants in the French-controlled island of Réunion. Based on postcolonial theory, trauma studies and work on cultural persistence, the paper suggests that the novel presents survival in three overlapping dimensions, which explains how indentured workers can survive amid the violence of the institutional system. Indentured labour is a recreation of the exploitative and oppressive systems of slavery, despite the fact that it is legally different than chattel slavery. The discussion shows that the protagonist of Lacpatiya, Boadour, and the larger community of the plantation avoid open rebellion in favour of more mundane activities of culture preservation, the passing of intergenerational memory, and the reestablishment of identity in colonial eradication. Placing the novel in the broader contexts of survivance, the analysis reveals how the literary imagination of Lacpatiya would conceptualise this historical experience of indentureship as the perpetual meditation on dignity, belonging, and politics of remembrance. As such, the study can be added to the French postcolonial literature and cross-disciplinary discussions in the field of forced migration, racial trauma, and cultural resistance in the context of the Indian Ocean.

1 Introduction

The general replacement of chattel slavery in the 19th century made the world labor-intensive, especially in the colonial plantation economies, which then was satisfied by the methodical enlistment of indentured workers, mostly of Indian and Chinese origins. According to Burki (2021), such a transition was a complicated socio-economic reorganization, where the abolitionist movement, even though seemingly giving freedom to enslaved peoples, actually preconditioned a new kind of forced labor, which reproduced most of the exploitative features of slavery under a new legal statute. This form of new slavery entailed contractual agreements that tended to hide the coercive nature of the reality of recruitment, transportation, and working environments, in essence enslaving people to plantations, with little legal redress. Zbyszewska and MAXIMO (2025) also argue that such contractual slaves, often defined by deceptive terms and penalties on the breach of contract, were in fact creating indentured slaves as an economic resource in a highly asymmetric power relationship, which is a way of maintaining a system of unfreedom in the disguise of voluntary migration.

The novel *Boadour a la Gange* by Firmin Lacpatiya gives this structural transition to human voice. This economic rationality of the system is brutally voiced by the colonial administrator speech about the arrival of the laborers in Reunion: that The island needs hands; since the abolition of slavery in 1848, the freed African blacks have abandoned the land. Therefore, for our economy, we need a skilled and profitable

workforce."(Lacpatiya,1977,p. 33)¹. The economic rationality of the system is thus brutally voiced, and the laborer is stripped of his personhood altogether by the pronouncement in the that the colony could not even exist without its workers and that emancipation had thrown away its natural workers who were The once-slaves are precipitately sacked by the same colonial media as having become lazy cogs who felt obliged to drive away all conception of order and economy,a rhetoric act that made the importation of Indian labor an economic and civilizing requirement. This is exactly what Zbyszewska and MAXIMO (2025) characterize as continuation of the lack of freedom under the pretext of voluntary migration where the language of contract concealed the inherently forceful essence of the recruitment and labour process, making indentured body an economic object instead of a rights agent. Such systemic extensions of slavery to indenture, as Burki (2021) also observes, were not accidental, but structural in nature, given that the colonial economy was tied to the need to have racially organized regimes of unfree labor, irrespective of what legal structures were employed to legitimize it.

2 The Concept of Survival in Indentured Narratives

The idea of survival in this texts goes beyond the physical survival and implies the continuation of the cultural identity, the continuation of the social unity, and the survival struggle with the dehumanization. Ariefiansyah and Herman (2023) argue against theories of victimhood by pointing at the agency of indentured people in creating new communities and cultures, usually via the subtle forms of subversion and preservation of traditional ways of doing things. Such literary focus on survivance as a concept that implies active presence and continuance as opposed to endurance is consistent with the larger theoretical perspective provided by Black (2021) who uses the concept of survivance introduced by Gerald Vizenor to emphasize the cultural vitality of oppressed groups that persisted in the face of overwhelming demands to assimilate or to be eroded. Khemraj and Pasha (2023) further postulate that such a high work burden and wage subjugation in the 19th century plantation agriculture necessitated the retention of cultural identity and social bond even more when indentured laborers aimed to moderately counter the negative path dependence of the economic exploitation they experienced. Such economic oppression that is frequently interlaced with racial discrimination and social marginalization required the development of new techniques of cultural resistiveness and community cohesiveness as the pillars of survival, as Ariefiansyah and Herman (2023) illustrate with indentured stories used in the Indian Ocean world.

The author is able to capture this uncertainty and tension of hope in *Boadour a la Gange* even during departure. The emigrants are described as simultaneously clinging to futures they cannot yet see and severing themselves from all they have known, with the hope within them demanding that they place themselves on the margins of their society and go into exile, such being the price required²."(Lacpatiya,1977,p.28). The same passage is however followed by a deep sense of disorientation as never before each one felt isolated in a new world where the standards of life never stopped moving and adjusting and thus making cultural preservation and communal solidarity not a mere case of sentimentality but a Survival is dynamic and continuous as Black (2021) positions it within the framework of survivance proposed by Vizenor, and it opposes passive forms of colonization exploitation and, therefore, fits well into the performative and relational aspects of survival Ariefiansyah and Herman (2023) discuss in the context of Indian Ocean indentured narratives. The final lines of the novel confirm

¹« L'Ile a besoin de bras ; depuis l'abolition de l'esclavage en 1848, les noirs africains affranchis ont abandonné les terres. Aussi, pour notre économie, nous avons besoin d'une main-d'œuvre habile et rentable. » (p. 33)

² « Cet espoir qui était en eux exigeait qu'ils se mettent en marge de leur société, qu'ils s'exilent ; tel était le prix demandé. »

this reading, as life is described as continuing with its incessant events, tossing the indentured and the freed from drama to mockery for a few grains of sugar and for the same interests, before closing with the defiant refrain: one day perhaps will come... one day certainly³..., which represents what Black (2021) terms the refusal of erasure that is the core of survivance as a theoretical and political concept.

2.1 Physical Survival: Labour, Disease, and Environment

The physical conditions of the plantation labor and strange climatic conditions and infections posed great threats on the life and body of the indentured laborers, and they needed extraordinary competencies to withstand such challenges of labor. These labourers, according to Burki (2021), were frequently subjected to inhumane working hours, poor dieting and poor living conditions which resulted in excessive deaths and long term health problems worsening their capacity to execute their contractual responsibilities and deteriorate their own health. These vulnerabilities were further increased by the widespread inability to access medical assistance, making disease and injury especially deadly even in these exploitative and remote locations, which is accurately reported in the literature about Indian Ocean indenture by Burki (2021) and Khemraj and Pasha (2023). In addition, according to Zbyszewska and MAXIMO (2025), the method of disciplinary measures that the overseers and the plantation owners used tended to involve the use of physical violence and the highest measure of corporal punishment, which further undermined the physical health and the psychological well-being of the indentured population. These systematic abuses highlight how life was fundamentally insecure to these people as day-in day-out existence was an endless ordeal of not only environmental and biological dangers but also state-sponsored brutality as well as what Zbyszewska and MAXIMO (2025) refer to as the legalized violence as part of the indenture system itself. In *Boadour a la Gange* these bodily hazards are worked out in ruthless reality. During the crossing from Calcutta, a young woman of thirteen falls desperately ill, and the absence of any medical provision is noted with grim matter-of-factness, with a character observing that there is surely no doctor on the ship and that no one seems to care about the sick⁴(Lacpatiya,1977,p31). The narrator reflects on the girl's predicament with sorrow that functions simultaneously as social critique, describing her as a young girl barely thirteen years old, forced into exile just to be able to eat, who would surely leave them through lack of care, dying in the middle of the ocean far from her country and her loved ones, and be thrown overboard. Here the narrator perceives the physical condition of a young girl who is barely thirteen, as a physical block to her being in exile, as being the cause of her condition and her downfall, as being dumped into the sea, already, and to perish in the middle of the ocean instead of, as Khemraj and Pasha (2023) put it, carelessly, as the cost of labor being disavowed by refusing her to eat and to be taken care of. After arriving in the plantation, the survival is not any better physically. The text describes the daily grind of labor in terms that underscore its relentless bodily toll, depicting indentured workers and freed slaves laboring side by side, watering the furrows of young sugar cane shoots with their sweat under a tropical sun, with suffocating windless nights offering no relief. The working conditions of the machine can be described as the daily taxing of human skin by the machine, describing indentured workers and freed slaves working side by side, watering the furrows of the young sugar cane shoots with their sweat, under a tropical sun, with no reprieve even afforded by the suffocating windless nights, with the machinery of the sugar mill, the author notes that

³ La vie continuerait avec ses événements incessants, ballotant les engagés et affranchis de drame en dérision pour quelques grains de sucre et pour les mêmes intérêts. Un jour peut-être viendra... Un jour certainement

⁴ *Sur ce bateau, il n'y a sûrement pas de médecin. En tout cas, personne ne semble se préoccuper des malades ici.* » ["On this ship, there is surely no doctor. In any case, no one seems to care about the sick here."]

even killing a worker was not a condition that arose by accident, but was inherent to the economic logic of the plantation system.

2.2 Cultural Survival: Language, Religion, and Traditions

Even though the colonial authorities purposefully worked with the attempt to abolish the established social systems and to prohibit the indigenous cultural activities, the indentured laborers participated in the process of protecting and re-defining their linguistic, religious, and traditional heritages, often altering them in the process of adjusting to the new socio-geographical settings. This cultural obstinacy, as the author claims, can be seen in the continuity of the use of the ancestral language and religious ceremonies, which are re-roomed and restructured to avoid the explicit oppression yet keeping the ties of communion and identity even during forced displacement (Willmott et al., 2016). Guan et al. (2023) and Ronda and Moen (2017) also mention the secretive continuity of oral traditions, religious rituals, and vernacular languages as the important channels of opposing complete assimilation and keeping in mind the collective memory. As Giuliano and Nunn (2020) note, cultural persistence can be many-sided, so communities do not simply preserve unchanged traditions but restructure them in accordance with new environmental and social forces. The mechanisms of syncretism according to which the cultural elements of the core culture can be preserved even in circumstances of active assimilation are explained by Martinez et al. (2019), and the inability to adapt culture to external forces is the most significant paradox, which is quite clearly manifested in the novel in question where it is depicted through the lens of cross-cultural analysis (Giuliano and Nunn, 2020).

The plantation community in Boadour a la Gange continues with its religious life, which is creatively determined. The detailed account of the Pongol ceremony demonstrates exactly the very dynamic cultural syncretism that Giuliano and Nunn (2020) define as the active reconfiguration of tradition under the influence of new social and environmental conditions. This is what Willmott et al. (2016) refer to as the cultural tenacity such that the colonized peoples managed to retain the content of ancestral practices despite the need to change their forms in the new context, and life on a plantation was above all a work, and the little leisure stolen under the pretext of rest served to transmit a few ancestral customs reminding every member of the family of their ancestry⁵ (Lacpatiya, 1977, p31). The bal tamoul that follows the Pongol ceremony makes the cultural-political dimension of these performances visible: through staged performances of the life of Krish The most vivid expression of cultural survival is made by Boadour herself when she refuses to have her son baptized, stating that they have already been robbed of all that they had to offer; their language that is no longer understood by their children, their customs that no longer have been honored and that despite all this she will teach her son that which had been taught to individuals since time immemorial⁶. As it is argued by Martinez et al. (2019), such syncretic claims make it possible to retain the main cultural identity even in the situations of blatant colonial ass In the meantime, the ambiguous status of Sariana, who comes to mass only after being coerced but says that she will go to church and retain her practices and belief in her deities¹⁵ demonstrates the enduring bargaining between tradition and adaptation that Willmott et al. (2016) define as the hallmark of cultural survivability in a colonial context, and that Guan et al. (2023) contextualize as the strategic compartmentalization of cultural

⁵ La vie sur une propriété était surtout faite de travail, et le peu de loisirs volés sur le repos servait à propager quelques coutumes ancestrales qui rappelaient à chacun ses racines. »

⁶ Ils nous ont tout enlevé : notre langue que nos enfants ne connaissent plus ! Nos coutumes qui ne sont plus respectées ! Et maintenant ils voudraient nous enlever notre Dieu ! Eh ! bien malgré eux, j'apprendrai à mon fils ce que nous nous sommes communiqués de génération en génération !

identity that allowed colonized populations to balance between overt conformity and covert cultural preservation.

2.3 Psychological Survival: Identity, Memory, and Trauma

The destabilizing nature of indenture severely challenged the psychological wellbeing of indentured laborers, and the need to find sophisticated coping strategies to overcome the overwhelming sense of trauma, manage the shifting identities, and formulate counter-discourse to the prevailing colonial narrative. According to Coraiola et al. (2023) and Ford et al. (2020), the ongoing rebuilding of selfhood under the conditions of radical transformations of the environment and society is one of the main features of colonized subjects, who often used the existing cultural structures to perceive and address emerging misfortunes. Adams et al. (2021) believe that these psychological mechanisms played an important role in keeping people and groups sane amidst the systematic dehumanization and removal of past social statuses. Cenat (2022) conceptualizes the phenomenon in terms of complex racial trauma, according to which both personal and intergenerational experiences of prejudice severely affect psychological health, whereas Holmes et al. (2024) highlight that the cumulative effect of racial stress and trauma required the development of particular psychological strategies, such as self-care, social support, and identity-affirming practices, to reduce negative effects of adverse mental health and become empowered. Gonzalez et al. (2021), also contend that the intergenerational transfer of common values and cultural connection were the vital aspects in the alleviation of the psychological effects of colonization and the development of a sense of belonging and group connection. Li et al. (2022) continue this discussion by theorizing that historical collective trauma may not only make some threats and challenges, but also may yield adaptive and maladaptive effects within the communities impacted, and that it may be transgenerational, with the post-traumatic symptoms being directly related to the collective victimization of their ancestors. Nagata et al. (2024) also show that the mental health, social relationships, and self-concept are not immune to these long-term effects and present the pervasive and long-lasting impact of these historical injustices that are intergenerational. According to Harasym et al. (2022) idioms of distress that are commonly conveyed through cultural discourses and activities shed light on the psychological loading and coping strategies that have been cultivated within historically marginalized populations that they define as having an open epistemological approach to understanding mental health in a varied context.

The psychological aspect of displacement is presented with a keen intensity in *Boadour a la Gange* in terms of how the novel addresses the issue of the memory and identity transfer. The leaving Calcutta is represented not as the personal movement, but as a general psychic displacement, with other people left standing, and one final scan of the coast of India with alien eyes, whether they are leaving with no hope of return⁷(Lacpatiya,1977,p22). Bakka himself feels the accruing dislocations of his own life to be the loss of psychological agency, the feeling of being driven forward toward an unfamiliar future. This is directly echoed by what Cenat (2022) discusses as the complex racial trauma, where individual and collective experiences of prejudice have contributed to shaping the single most heartrending answer to this trauma expressed in the novel is the insistence by Boadour to pass the word of memory to her son Babouram who has been born into the colony and registered by the state under a corrupted name, torn off by bureaucratic apathy of his own origin. Boadour is forcefully focused on inculcating in him some words of her vocabulary and most of all to speak to him of India, of Calcutta, of Bakka and Sohini, in the understanding that without these words he will not really know who he is himself. This imperative is made explicit by

⁷ D'autres restaient debout, scrutant une dernière fois la côte de l'Inde avec des yeux étranges, se demandant s'ils portaient sans espoir de retour. »

Boadour later in the novel in the final pages when she declares that her son will be aware of their past and that he will share it with contemporary generations, in order that no one forgets that they came to this land to take a few grains of sugar.¹⁹ This is consistent with Gonzalez et al. (2021) observation that the intergenerational transmission of shared values is a critical psychological strategy of communities wishing to preserve identity and group solidarity when they face a situation of systematic dispossession. Such culturally inflecting expressions of suffering, as Harasym et al. (2022) posit, do not merely describe trauma, but are adaptive responses, symptomatic of open epistemological attitude to mental health in a multi-cultural environment - a dynamism fully exemplified when Boadour insists on naming, telling, and remembering trauma as a form of psychological and cultural repair, both occupying of personal grief and alleviating the negative mental health consequences of the ongoing festival of racial trauma.

3 Representations of Survival in Francophone Literature

Themes of hard travel, forced labor and seeking dignity have been repeatedly explored in literature coming out of this area, summing up the long historical context of indentureship and the effects that continue to ripple. These writings, as Li et al. (2022) insist, actively apply the devices of allegorical and metaphoric language to outline the psychic landscapes of forced displacement and cultural alienation and provide piercing insights into the subjective aspects of survival. The oral accounts, folklore, and cultural practices that are so often employed as instruments of conveying the preceding inequities of indenture and transferring the psychological weight and cultural vibrancy of endurance across the generations, are the transgenerational transference of trauma and fortitude (as Cenat, 2022, and Gone, 2025, argue). Additionally, this body of literature provides a unique tool of grasping the psychological aspects of survivance within these communities beyond passive endurance to active resistance and assertion of cultural identity within the framework of colonial hegemony, as Gone (2025) contributes to his system of Indigenous survivance to postcolonial societies in general. Akintayo et al. (2024) also posit that the reclaiming of language - specifically the creation of creolized forms - represents the apotheosis of such rebellion, the symbolization of an intentional abandonment of prescriptive colonial linguistic norms and the proclamation of a unique cultural hybridity that questions the hegemonic order established by colonialists.

This literary mode is eminently depicted in *Boadour a la Gange* through the character of the street singer Bakka that the protagonist Boadour meets at the Calcutta marketplace the evening before his departure. This oral history is dramatized as a kind of pivotal apparatus what Gone (2025) refers to as an oral narrative, as the woman tells of how her son had been recruited under duress and intoxication to the boat to work in the tea fields of Ceylon under the heel of the English. This is precisely what Li et al. (2022) define as allegorical and metaphorical devices used in the books of Francophone Indian Ocean literature to map the psychic spaces of forced displacement and re-ecologize the personal misery into a collective cultural repository. This song is so rattled by Bakka, but tries to remove its overtones, insisting that his emigration is not forced at all, and that he is going there, and that he will always come back whenever he wants. It is this piece of self-deception that the novel systematically undermines, as it shows how the literary and political approach of trading on the dissonance between a personal sense of self and a collective historical memory is central to the deployment of the vernacular and creolized forms in the literature of the Indian Ocean in the Francophone.

3.1 Forms of Resistance: Covert and Overt Acts

The analysis of these literary traditions shows similar thematic motives that emphasize the spirit of the in-

dentured workers which is indomitable and their ability to adjust and survive under new culture environments through active resistance to the unfavorable circumstances they have to endure. According to Nepomuceno et al. (2019) and Selvin (2022), various types of resistance, such as foot-dragging and disloyalty, even the rebellion, were the forms of resistance that destabilized the established power structures and were used by the indentured laborers to claim their agency in their restricted conditions. Ford et al. (2020) continue to suggest that such strategic acts of resistance, both explicit and implicit, reflect the indigenous ability to self-determine and aggressively restructure power relations, but Nepomuceno et al. (2019), basing their argument on Foucault's idea of counter-conduct, posit that such resistances do not just react to power inducements, but are active constructions of the new subjectivities and modes of protest themselves, of and through the very conduct of conduct. The subtle manifestations of every day resistance, as Selvin (2022) argues, that are frequently not recognized in the official histories directly shaped how indentured laborers lived and practiced their cultural life, and Ghaffari et al. (2019) explain the ways in which the powerless were ingeniously overturning the instruments and buildings of the mighty to create the spaces of autonomy and cultural continuity, which at the same time acted within the system, subtly undermining its discourse of absolute dominance.

Boadour a la Gange describes these resisting actions in a most intense way. The most programmatic pronouncement of resistance in the novel is given by Cagny and Soubarnesing who stipulate that they should be respected, and that, irrespective of how weak they are, their decency can never be trampled so hard without their resistance. This is what Ford et al. (2020) refer to as the indigenous determination of self-determination and active defiance against power relations, making resistance not just an effective adaptation to oppression but a basic statement of human dignity that cannot be stamped on the dust by the indenture order. The novel is also very sensitive to the unobtrusive, daily resistance which Selvin (2022) states are not recognized in official histories. At the moment when police agents come to make a manhunt of deserters, the indentured hands feign to go about searching the cane fields as the police agents introduce the black ants to each other, willfully guiding them through wasp nests, and into grass traps. It is exactly this mode of resistance that is the Foucauldian counter-conduct theorized by Nepomuceno et al. (2019) in its decision not to be rebellious but rather to engage in a regular, imaginative negotiation of the terms of subjugation that actively forms new subjectivities within the interstices of colonial power and what Ghaffari et al. (2019) refer to as the improvised repackaging of colonial structures to cut out spaces of agency. An obvious philosophy of strategic self-protection, which reflects the limited but real agency of the laborer, is also expressed in the novel: the concept of contestation was not blatant, and disobedience to the whites was met by ruthless retaliation, and it was preferable to become a frozen force and avoid orders, which is one of the most advanced forms of resistance, as Nepomuceno et al. (2019) develop in their analysis of counter-conduct. This most personal, domesticized form of resistance is packaged in the form of personal and domestic resistance, with flight forward and cunning being characterized as so many ways of saving your freedom.²⁶ This formulation captures what Selvin (2022) refers to as the everyday, improvisational nature of resistance in plantation societies, where an official collective action was silenced and that the only way to preserve your freedom was through using individual creativity and collective solidarity working under the veil of officiality. This portrays the other dimension of resistance taking place during the night, in the hours when the authority of the planter is absent, at the time when the white man stopped giving commands, the indentured worker felt alive, was himself, in his full measure, and no longer bowed his back, which is what Selvin (2022) describes as the temporal dimensions of everyday resistance and what Ford et al. (2020) term as the reclamation of selfhood, as an essential act of anti-colonial agency.

3.2 Cultural Hybridity and Creolization

This is a dynamic process of syncretism of cultures, commonly known as creolization, which resulted in the creation of specific cultural entities that incorporated the combination of ancestral cultures and the aspects of the colonial environment, which created new expressions and social structures. This fluid hybridity as Vora et al. (2018) suggest is present in second-generation immigrants or people in polycultural societies, and this concurrent immersion into streams of different cultures implies new identity formations instead of adaptations. This idea coincides with the idea of a third space, suggested by Bhabha and developed by Li et al. (2018) wherein cultural hybridization can occur due to the interaction of various groups of people forming new spaces that replace the histories of the original ones but leaving the remnants of the practices that they comprise. Zhang et al. (2021) believe that identity-making in the postcolonial countries tends to imply the reinterpretation of cultural tradition to form new, national solidarity, making use of the colonial messages and pre-colonial narratives in an essentially contradictory way, and Pederzini and Suarez-Barraza (2019) address the so-called schizoid dispositions that this clash of habitus presents as a characteristic feature of the postcolonial identity. Akintayo et al. (2024) also show that this constant negotiation of cultural identity emphasizes the importance of literature in investigating the subtle and frequently conflicting processes of postcolonial subjectivity, whereas Martinez et al. (2019) indicate that syncretic processes made it possible to retain the main cultural elements even in the circumstances of apparent assimilation. Giuliano and Nunn (2020) also observe that such cultural adaptations can be most fruitfully viewed not as authenticity losses but as the active reactions of communities employing agency into their cultural futures in the environments of structural constraint.

In *Boadour a la Gange* the creolization starts at the very moment when the ship is being built, and the laborers have not yet come. The caste divisions start to melt away as the crossing becomes longer, with the concerns of caste being forgotten almost instantly as every individual felt solidarity with the rest and formed an impression of belonging to the same family (Vora et al. 2018). This immediate effect of the formation of the solidarity across caste lines is the first example of the third space formation that Li et al. (2018) theorizes with references to the works by Bhabha in that coming into contact with the common external threat creates the new social formations that neither reproduce the original culture nor conform to the colonial This hybridity is spatially manifested in the stratified but rather close coexistence of the white man and the priest in the grand house, the Indians in their camps, and the former slaves in their shacks, but even here, with the close contact of the structurally positioned communities, new cultural alliances emerge across ethnic and historical boundaries.⁸ The goal of conscious syncretism that Sariana articulates with the statement about going to the church without abandoning her practices and her own gods³⁰ is exactly the process of dynamic negotiation in terms of cultural retention under the impact of assimilationist forces that are identified by Martinez et al. (2019) as syncretic. Following the baptism ceremony, the novel continues with a pointed irony when, in response to the religious assimilation of baptism, arrived an even greater appeal of Africa fighting back their loss of identity,³¹ and reflective of what Vora et al. (2018) refer to as mutually irreconcilable streams of imposed and ancestral cultures, Pederzini and Suarez-Barraza (2019) identifies the conflicting habitus in which colonial subjects maneuver, responding to the competing demands of these two systems. It is the most visionary statement of creolized identity in the novel, as Cagny pronounces that their children will live in the country where they were born, that regardless of their colour and depths of soul influenced by their parents, they will

⁸ « Quelle étrange cohabitation ! Le blanc et le curé dans la grande demeure, les indiens dans leurs camps et les anciens esclaves dans leurs cabanons ! » (p. 48)

breathe India and yet remain themselves, that is, combining their thoughts with their brothers in struggle, and living their own identity⁹.³² It is also a statement of the postcolonial process of identity-making, as described by Zhang et al. (2021), and a manifestation of what Akintayo et al. (2024)

4 Conclusion

The reverberations of indentured labour are still visible in present-day Francophone Indian Ocean literature, with the theme of fractured identity, displacement, and a sense of perpetual longing to belong being played out in the stories. It is this constant re-articulation of identity, as Li et al. (2022) suggest, that is a form of communal processing of trauma that is capable of equipping communities with a shared knowledge of their past and bargaining their current situations. This greater literary and cultural tradition is what is giving the piece of writing *Boadour a la Gange* its final meaning. The novel of *Lacpatiya* is not a droning record of the indenture system, but the enactment of what Coraiola et al. (2023) call the condition of postcolonial historical agency, thus restoring the interiority, communal relationship and future of people the colonial regime attempted to bring down to the status of contractual trade and corporeal goods.

This paper has argued that the concept of survival in the novel is three-dimensional and interconnected. Physically, *Lacpatiya* gives the plantation an insatiable sense of loss the traveling to Calcutta, the work under the sun, the lack of medical care, which in its turn replicates the logic of slavery in a new legal form. At the cultural level, the book illustrates how the experience of depriving language, religion and ancestral practices of indentured labourers of their voting rights was not emancipating, but actually stimulated a survival adaptation. The reconstitution of tradition as a practice called the Pongol rite, the refusal of baptism to her son by Boadour, and the preservation of the use of Tamil through the generations are the examples of the reconfiguration of tradition that is defined as an active process by Giuliano and Nunn (2020) and the cultural resilience promoted by Willmott et al. (2016). The notion of transmission of memories as the survival in itself is the psychological assumption of the novel: the necessity of Boadour, telling her son about his roots, is a branding of India, Calcutta, and the suffering of displacement, but it is not sentimentality, as defined by Gonzalez et al. (2021), Nagata et al. (2024).

Survivance, a relational, dynamic, and continuous presence, as opposed to a passive endurance, and is the overriding idea that flows through the three dimensions. This can be best explained by the last image of the novel; a community that worked on a few grains of sugar, suffered humiliation and sweat to make its country prosperous in the country, but saw that country as their own. The defiant refrain which is used as the epilogue of the story- “one day, perhaps will come... one day, certainly...- defies the closure of the colonial narrative and marks its incompleteness in the future. According to Gone (2025), the resistance to erasure is not some incident but the prerequisite to survivance, which is a conceptual idea and a political stabilization.

As such, the study of Francophone post-colonial literature is divided into two aspects, namely *Boadour a la Gange*, which has garnered a critical and influential status in history as a form of historical fancies and as an immensely thought-provoking endeavour into the aspects of dignity, memory and belonging politics. As this paper evidences, literary analysis of indenture narratives shows that the dimensions of survival are subjective, relational, and intergenerational, which cannot be entirely examined using historical and

⁹ « Nos enfants vivront dans ce pays, car ils y sont nés. Malgré leur couleur et le fond de leur âme modelée par nous, ils respireront l'Inde tout en étant eux-mêmes, ils métisseront leurs pensées avec leurs frères de lutte, et vivront leur propre identité. » (p. 89)

economic narratives alone. These dimensions are active and they are influenced by communities of Indian Ocean world.

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