

Constructing and reproducing whiteness: An oral history of French Creoles in Trinidad

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Abstract

This study explores questions of identity and ethnicity in relation to white French Creoles in Trinidad, who represent an economically powerful, though socially and ethnically marginalised group. Very little scholarly research has been carried out on this group. This paper therefore seeks to understand what it means to be a white French Creole in a society that is politically, culturally and socially dominated by peoples of African and East Indian origins. Specifically, the study seeks to understand how white French Creole identity is subjectively constructed, reproduced, experienced and understood. This research sits in a symbolic interactionist framework, employing qualitative interviews with twenty-four white Trinidadian French Creoles, and uses discourse analysis to analyse their narratives.

The research findings suggest that white French Creoles retain a strong sense of racial superiority, based on their identities as white people. However, unlike the older generations, the younger generations tend to disregard their ethnic identity as French Creoles in order to assimilate into the Trinidadian society as a whole. Nevertheless, this appears to less than successful because of their subjective and objective whiteness.

1. Introduction

Economically powerful and influential white, yet marginalised, French Creoles in Trinidad have been neglected by scholars, despite their economic and cultural contributions to the island. However, despite this marginalisation, they continue to enjoy a privileged status, such as easier access to economic well-being, which is predicated on colonial notions of white racial superiority. This study aims to contribute to the emerging academic sub-field of white studies, specifically, Caribbean whiteness. The overall intention is to explore how the white French Creole identity is constructed and reproduced, and what it means to these people in relation to other population groups in Trinidad.

French Creoles, referred to in this study, are people of French descent born in Trinidad. However, what constitutes of 'French Creoles' is not universal. In

particular, the designation 'French Creoles' sometimes also includes Catholics of English, Irish, Scottish, Spanish, Corsican, Italian, Venezuelan, and German origins. Additionally, people born in Europe but resident in Trinidad for many years, and married into this group, are also considered French Creoles. Although, these French Creoles seem to put much importance on white racial 'purity', some non-whites have married and been accepted into this group.

Their ancestors arrived in Trinidad around 1783 from neighbouring French colonies, and later, from continental France. Indeed, these pioneering settlers were responsible for Trinidad's development as a sugar colony. The majority of the French settlers largely dominated the island's plantation economy which was developed in the 18th century. As a result, Trinidadian society and culture were governed by French morals,

customs and language. Even after independence from the British in 1962, although the French Creole community became smaller due to the loss of white hegemony, and emigration in the wake of the Black Power movement, they have still continued to hold an economically powerful and privileged status in a contemporary Trinidad society.

In this study, discourse analyses of narratives derived from twenty-four in-depth face-to-face oral history interviews were conducted in the framework of symbolic interactionism. This is because this methodological approach allows researchers to examine how individuals interact focusing on the creation of personal identity through interaction with others. These interviews were conducted in Trinidad during April 2006, March 2013, February 2015, and February 2016. The interviewees were gathered by a 'snowball' method, which relies on the respondents' contacts.

This study begins with an outline of the French Creoles' historical, social and cultural background. It then provides a literature review of several relevant theories and themes, such as identity, race, racism, ethnicity and whiteness. The next section outlines the methodology and methods of the study, as well as problems and difficulties encountered in the process of research. The following two sections present an analysis of the interviews, and the last section gives the conclusions.

It is hoped that this study will contribute to the scholarship on whiteness, and be especially of value to scholars interested in Trinidad society, Caribbean whiteness, creolisation studies and more general theories of race and ethnicity in the context of the Caribbean.

2. History

2.1. History of Spanish Settlement

On July 31 1498, Columbus accidentally 'discovered' Trinidad, where indigenous peoples had resided for many centuries. Trinidad subsequently became a Spanish colony, as the Spaniards set about attempting to Christianise the native peoples and appropriate raw materials, especially gold. However, for various reasons, early Spanish attempts at settlement proved unsuccessful. The failure originated from the

fact that Spain did not pay much attention to Trinidad, as it had neither gold nor silver deposits. As a result, the island was populated with a very small numbers of Spanish, which made Trinidad's development difficult. These difficulties increased when Spain prevented non-Catholics from participating in Trinidad's development, in order to retain Spanish control over the island's strategic location amongst Spain, Spanish colonies in the Caribbean and the Americas.

2.2. Arrival of the French Creoles

Trinidad would have to become a profitable slave colony, as other French and English colonies, such as Saint-Dominique (Today's Haiti) and Barbados respectively. Yet, the reality was that Spain did not possess enough planters, slaves or capital for Trinidad, where no precious metal was available. Not being able to send her own population, in 1779, Spain approved French and Irish (Catholic) emigration to the island.

In 1783, by petition of Roume de St. Laurent, a French planter in Grenada, the Spanish government issued the Cedula of Population, which encouraged the immigration of foreign Roman Catholics to Trinidad. This Cedula offered incentives to attract foreign capital, and promised land-grants and protection by an allied Catholic government. These immigration incentives attracted French planters, both whites and free-Africans, from the French islands of Martinique, Guadeloupe, Dominica, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and Grenada. Most were wealthy and experienced planters who brought slaves, capital, and knowledge of agricultural production. The Cedula, therefore, transformed an Amerindian settlement into a Spanish colony managed by Frenchmen and worked by African slaves.

The conditions of the Cedula brought significant results. Firstly, immigration turned out to be overwhelmingly, especially during the French Revolution, from continental France, the neighbouring colonial French islands, and few from Ireland, since only planters from those countries could fulfil the requirement of Roman Catholicism and alliance with Spain. Secondly, this formula was the passage for Trinidad to become a slave colony, because the Cedula linked the ownership of land with the ownership of slaves. The more slaves a planter owned, the more a

planter was able to cultivate. Thirdly, the Spanish government gave land to free-African and free-coloured immigrants as planters and slave-owners, though they received only half as much land as whites. Additionally, all settlers could acquire citizenship after five years, with no distinctions made between whites and free African immigrants. That the Spanish government was prepared to give free-African property-owners greater civil rights than those afforded to their counterparts anywhere else in the West Indies, inevitably attracted free-Africans of the French colonies such as Martinique, where planters were suffering from exhausted soil and vermin, and inequality against white counterparts. Consequently, a substantial non-white propertied class was established.

The Cedula immigration thus transformed the size and composition of the island's population. The population of Port of Spain increased from under 3,000 in 1792 to 10,422 in 1797^[1]. In 1803, the population of Trinidad stood at 34,285: 2,261 were 'white' (English 663; Spanish 505; French 1093), 3,724 were free-blacks and free-coloured, and 28,300 were slaves (Spanish-owned 300; French-owned; 28,000)^[2].

Year	Total	White	Free coloured	Slaves	Amerindians	Aliens
1733		162				
1783	2763	126	295	310	2032	
1797	17718	2151	4476	10009	1082	
1799				21975		
1803	34285	2261	3724	28300		
1819	40742	3716	12485	23691	850	
1828	49721	4326	16412	22436	727	5820

Table 1. Population of Trinidad ^[3]

In this way, the French settlers were largely able to control the island's plantation economy after 1783, cultivating cotton, coffee, sugar, tobacco and other export crops. As a result, Trinidadian culture and society, after the Cedula, were governed by French morals, customs, and language.

2.3. British Conquest

Spain was defeated in the War of Pyreness against France in 1795 and the signed the Peace of Basel, which was followed by the signing of alliance convention

between Spain and France. With an amicable treaty with Spain, Trinidad was taken over by the British in 1797, who at the time had already taken French colonies such as Saint Lucia. This was a disappointment to some French settlers, who had long hoped that they would become masters of the colony^[4]. However, the British occupation of Trinidad as a Crown Colony was favourable to non-British white inhabitants, who were mostly French, since they were granted legislative rights. Thus, the influence of French settlers remained significant after the British conquest. As a result, Trinidad became a British Crown Colony populated mostly by French-speaking people with a strong Spanish influence.

Following the abolition of slavery in 1838, Trinidad's population became more ethnically diverse. Attracted by high wages, the availability of land and jobs, considerable numbers of free-Africans in the Eastern Caribbean, such as Saint Lucia and Grenada, immigrated to Trinidad. Africans from Sierra Leone and Saint Helena were rescued from foreign slave ships, and taken to Trinidad. British civil servants also added to the numbers. Portuguese, Chinese and Syrian/Lebanese also came as plantation labourers, though they soon became successful traders and shopkeepers. The most important immigration into Trinidad during this era was approximately 134,183 East Indian indentured labourers for the sugar estates, which represented over 25 percent of the population by 1871^[5].

At this time, an ethnic/class structure emerged in Trinidad, which created sharp divisions between groups. There were three major socio-economic classes, which were linked to the three ethnic groups, European, African and East Indian. This ethnic/class structure was institutionalised politically, because racialisation, which was created in accordance with unavoidable genetic boundaries, permitted the justification of inequality and unequal treatment^[6]. As a result, white economic and political dominance continued until Trinidad's Independence from Britain in 1962.

2.4. After Independence

Since Independence, Trinidadians have consistently differentiated themselves and their place in society based on their ethnic affiliation. According to

the Trinidad and Tobago 2011 Population and Housing Census^[7], the population of Trinidad comprises: Indians 37.01%; Africans 31.76%; 'mixed' 23.52%; others 1.32%, and unspecified 6.39%. The 1.32% of 'others' can be categorized into Chinese, Middle-Easterners, Europeans, and others. There has been a trend in the census that compositions of Indians and Africans are decreasing, due to the fact that more people tend to identify themselves as 'mixed', due to the recent increased cohesion among ethnic groups. However, Trinidad's multi-ethnic society and its economic class distinctions have been, and still is well-defined in today's society, just as Kevin Yelvington argued in 1993^[8].

In the process of independence, as described in that Kevin Yelvington's work, nationalistic politics used ethnicity in the name of the anti-colonial struggle to encourage the rise of nationalism. During the rise of the Black Power movement in the 1970s, African political dominance was enforced and white economic dominance was attacked. The movement also successfully involved Indians, since the term 'African' was symbolically used to refer to the politically and economically disadvantaged 'black' against privileged 'white'. This sort of race/ethnic politics has also been used and abused in sport^[9], music^[10], carnival^[11], identity building^[12], gender^[13], business^[14], and national politics^[15]. Ethnicity was/is utilized in these ways in post-colonial Trinidad, to unite and divide its ethnically diverse society.

2.5. White Society in Trinidad

Trinidad's white society was divided into two leading groups until its independence from Britain in 1962: the English Creoles and the French Creoles, both born in Trinidad of European ancestry. These two did not share the same components of culture. The English Creoles are middle-class, urban, Protestant merchant class. In contrast, the French Creoles see themselves as constituting a genuine aristocracy through their descent from the pioneering settlers who developed the island from the late 18th century^[16]. As a group, the French Creoles place much importance on 'racial purity', aristocratic tradition, and Roman Catholicism. Indeed, Roman Catholicism has enabled Catholic people of

English, Irish, Spanish, Corsican and German origins to marry into Trinidad's French Creole society.

The French Creole planters dominated the sugar industry until it was taken over by the British in the late 19th century. They then turned their attention to cocoa production, which they had dominated by the early 20th century. By then, French Creoles, other white Creoles, and resident Europeans had come to dominate Trinidad's commercial sector. In the 20th century, after British and American capital developed the oil industry, which became the dominant sector of Trinidad's economy, local whites profited from leasing oil-bearing properties or working in supervisory positions at oil companies. During the rise of Black Power movement, many from the white population of the society, for example English Creoles, whose ancestors came to Trinidad for a temporary sojourn, migrated to North America and Europe, as white privilege was threatened; yet, few French Creoles left the island, and became involved in business, finance, the real estate development of the abandoned former plantations, and occupied supervisory positions. French Creoles, who came to the island as settlers, have built a sense of identity deeply rooted in Trinidad, but not in France^[17]. Hence, the French Creoles have become clearly Trinidadian in self-identification.

White Creoles were/are an integral element of Caribbean society. Trinidad's French Creoles claim identity as Trinidadians, unlike Jamaica, whose white community see themselves as English, regardless of the length of their residence on the island^[18]. Many English Creoles, often marrying British or North American spouses, migrated to England and North America, but French Creoles were less likely to marry people not born on the island^[19]. Thus, the French Creoles' sense of belonging to the island was real and deep. Nevertheless, Brereton argues that the sense of belonging of white Creoles has always been ambivalent, between Trinidad and Europe (France or Britain)^[20], as Robin Cohen describes this creolisation status as an imperial diaspora or colonial-diaspora, which maintains loyalty to the mother country^[21]. On the other hand, Anthony De Verteuil argues that French Creoles clearly and unequivocally regard the island as their home, much more so than the English Creoles^[22]. The reasons for this

might be that their ancestors, often Caribbean Creoles of other islands, had arrived earlier; their identification with France had been weakened by revolutions and republican regimes; and as planters, they were more settled than the English Creole as civil servants in a British colony^[23].

3. Literature Review

3.1. Introduction

This study aims to explore what the ethnic identity of French Creoles means to them, and how it is constructed and reproduced in contemporary society in Trinidad. Having examined the historical background of French Creoles in Trinidad, in the previous section, this chapter will consider how their identity has been constructed. Specifically, it examines how ideas of 'race', ethnicity, and whiteness in the context of the Caribbean are interwoven to shape their identities.

Whiteness has emerged as a sub-field of 'race' theorising, but much of this work has focused on the United States, where white studies was pioneered. As will be seen, whiteness is not universal, and is subject to temporal and spatial contingency^[24]. Whiteness in the Caribbean is diversified and stratified along socio-economic and other criteria. Therefore claiming whiteness is never straightforward. Its variability means that it changes across space and culture. Hence, whiteness represents a controversial if not problematical concept. Few studies have focused on whiteness in the Caribbean, such as Cecily Jones^[25], Hilary Beckles^[26], Verene Shepherd^[27] and Bridget Brereton^[28], and there exists only limited scholarship on Trinidad's French Creoles.

Caribbean whiteness is a product of the colonial experience, and the Caribbean islands are diverse in their cultures and elements in societies depending on their colonial histories. For example, Barbados and Trinidad were both 'discovered' by the Spaniards at the end of the 15th century and gained their independence from Britain in the middle of the 20th century. Nevertheless, during the colonised period of nearly five hundred years, those two countries experienced completely different colonial histories, resulting in markedly distinct demographics; as such, what constitutes the white segment of their societies are

different, and that is why the concept of white and whiteness are different in these islands. Cecily Jones's works on whiteness in Barbados in the colonial days^[29] indicate there was a sharp line between poor white and elite white women. On the other hand, being white women was synonymous with rich, elite and high social class women in colonial Trinidad, as Bridget Brereton^[30] and Verene Shepherd^[31] discuss. When studying one island, applying the same theories of whiteness, which can be applicable to another island, to that island might cause misrepresentation. This section seeks to theorise essential elements which influenced the establishment of French Creole identity in Trinidad.

3.2. Identity

Identities in the contemporary world derive from a multiplicity of sources, such as 'race', ethnicity, nationality, social class, community, gender and sexuality. Identity gives us an idea of who we are and how we relate to others and to the society in which we live. The problem of identity in the Caribbean, as Paul Gilroy explains, originates in the problem of colonial rule and the consequences entailed by that rule^[32]. Namely, identity is produced by 'the raw materials' which may be inherited from the past, and 'the raw materials' are also continuously working on creating in the present in Trinidad society. The 'raw materials' he discusses, I believe, are based on the notion of 'race', which can be traced back to the colonial era when Trinidad society was stratified on colour lines in the way Lloyd Braithwaite describes^[33]. In other words, the ontology of Trinidad society is constituted by the notion of 'race' which produces the identity of Trinidadians. In such a society, where European white planters defended white supremacy through their assertion of the inherent cultural, moral, religious, and economic superiority of the white race^[34], French Creoles as planters in Trinidad, to some extent, secured a tenuous white solidarity by applying the ideology of white supremacy, legitimated slavery, white rule, and authority. The history of Trinidad's race relations has greatly influenced the identity construction of French Creoles.

French Creoles in Trinidad self-identify as descendants of the pioneers who developed Trinidad^[35].

As planters, under the Spanish and British occupation, since indigenous people died out, they brought African slaves and East Indian indentured workers. Consequently, the island was populated with three distinct immigrant 'races': 'Europeans', 'Africans' and 'East Indians'. There are, less significant in quantity though, the 'Portuguese', the 'Chinese' and the 'Syrian'. Although the 'Portuguese' were from the European continent, they were not always considered among the 'Europeans' in colonial Trinidad, since the category 'Europeans' and 'white' in the context of Trinidad signifies 'the French', 'the Spanish', and 'the British' who were considered as 'masters' and 'rulers'. The reason for this is that 'Portuguese' came to colonial Trinidad as dependent labourers and traders. Thus, each of Trinidad's 'races' is derived from colonial social order: 'white' is a master; 'black' is a 'slave'; 'East Indian' is a dependent labourer^[36]. Therefore, the meaning of the word 'race', in the context of Trinidad, is rooted in colonial history. Additionally, this connotation allows contemporary white Trinidadians, especially French Creoles, whose ancestors belonged to 'masters' and 'rulers' class, to identify themselves to frame same superior 'we' and to exclude different 'they', in order to distinguish the category of 'we'. Namely, since 'we' as French Creoles are superior, 'we' are different from Africans, East Indians and other groups.

Some 'Portuguese' and 'Syrians', who had never been considered 'white' in the colonial era, became 'white' in the 20th century with their prosperity and their lighter complexion, the concept of sameness and difference, which affect the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion of 'white', are not fixed and they can shift at any time. This is echoed in the works by Cecily Jones on white women in colonial Barbados, stating that whiteness is variable, as it is always contingent on social, economic, historic and political processes, and its subjective identification is always subject to transformation across time and space^[37]. This unstable concept of 'white' and continuous threat to the privileged 'white' solidarity authorised French Creoles to defend their white supremacy, which they enjoyed in colonial society, by stressing unchangeable historical truths. Precisely, Bridget Brereton emphasises that French Creoles were pioneers of settlement who

populated a deserted Trinidad, along with Africans and East Indians, to develop Trinidad's agriculture, medicine, economy, judiciary, and administration^[38]. Meaning that French Creoles were the ones who established the foundation of modern Trinidad.

Simultaneously, examining other factors attributable to French Creoles, such as aristocratic background, Catholicism, extreme pride in birth and pedigree, sensitivity on family honour, and strong sense of the absolute need for 'racial purity', would distinguish French Creoles even more from other 'white', including the British, who entered Trinidad as a 'ruler', 'working class civil servant', 'administrative officer' or 'merchant' for temporal stay. It is true that identification with Britain and France conferred in a colonial society rarely questioned the superiority of Western culture and 'white' civilization. Yet, French Creoles were urged to barricade their French Creoleness in order to differentiate themselves from a just 'white' category, which shall include non-aristocratic, non-landowning class 'whites' and so-called local whites, who are tinted with African or East Indian blood. Nonetheless, even from colonial days, non-French but Catholic whites entered French Creole society. Thus, the constitution of French Creole is adaptable. Hence, French Creole identity has been constructed and reproduced historically, socially and continuously.

In this context, it is noteworthy to mention the challenges to maintain racial purity, especially in Trinidad, which has experienced demographic unbalance between white men and white women. Therefore, white men exploited non-white women's sexuality and reproductivity, resulting in the birth of many illegitimate racially mixed children out of wedlock. For this reason, it sounds rather ironic for French Creoles to stress their interest in their racial purity. However, the point of argument is, what exactly causes French Creoles to mention their racial purity, when they obviously know it barely exists. This might be rooted in a sentiment that French Creoles still live in the sense of the colonial society in the 19th century. As such, French Creoles tend to see others from stereotyped view: French Creoles are superior, African blacks are inferior, and East Indians are peculiar. The reason why their mentality remains in the colonial era might lie in

their prosperous past, when they benefited from a constructed absolute white superiority.

3.3. Race

The theories of 'race' have been altered since the idea of race was born in the 15th century, when the Spanish tried to identify the 'purity of blood' of Christians. According to Oxford English Dictionary, the word 'race' first appeared in the English language in 1570. At that time, it had a meaning of the 'chain of being' leading from heavenly creatures down to mankind and further on to the animal realm, plants and the mineral. However, this position of mankind within the animal creation did not sit in the Christian doctrine, which tells that all mankind is to be descended from Noah and his family. Moreover, it failed to explain why some human beings looked so different, and why some were civilised while others were seemingly primitive.

To explain these questions, the theory of climate was advanced and altered. Before the 18th century, the theory of climate was the reason for the difference of the physical appearances, and the levels of civilisation. In specific, in that theory, a geographically and climatically unfavourable environment would retard the process of civilisation and develop darker complexion. In other words, darker skin tribes in unfavourable conditions were uncivilised. This theory of climate was developed to embrace the idea that mankind's physical aspects, as well as mind, were a result of environmental influences. It means a savage tribe could be civilised and 'whiter' once a proper environment was given.

By the beginning of the 19th century, through the empirical evidence of colonisers and slaves, the theory of climate was no longer acceptable. Dark skinned slaves who were brought from unfavourable uncivilised environment to civilised Europe or the United States did not become whiter. Also, white colonisers, who lived permanently in uncivilised colonies remained white. In both cases, environment would never alter their physical aspects. Based on this experience, the 19th century racial theory developed to justify slavery and colonialism, from which ideas were initiated from ethnocentric belief codified as pseudo-scientific theories that the colonisers were superior to the colonised. A new theory was then developed to suggest that a genuine difference might

exist between the physiological types of savages and Europeans. In this sense, this theory was developed to adopt the idea that the human race is dividable into two originally distinct species: uncivilised savage inferior blacks and civilised superior non-blacks, which was welcomed among European whites, who were looking for scientific justification for the subordination of African blacks.

In sum, especially in the 18th and the 19th century, being backed up by those race theories, European 'superior' 'civilised' whites expanded colonisation outside Europe. By calling the darker skinned mankind the 'inferior' 'uncivilised' savage, Europeans tried to justify the idea of the colonialism and slavery of Africans. The basis of the idea is a demonstration of hatred or contempt for people who have different physical characteristics from our own, namely 'racism'. Thereby, 'racism' and 'race' are two different ideologies.

There are various 'chicken and the egg' arguments over when and where the idea of race and racism emerged, whether racism really began with plantation slavery in the New World, or if racism was firmly embedded and entrenched in European cultural and psychological history, which long pre-dated the establishment of slave-based societies in the Americas. The first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Eric Williams argued, showing an example of how white servants were treated as brutal as blacks were, that racism is not a product of slavery, but it is the result of slavery^[39]. Specifically, he argued that if the idea of racism existed before slavery, white servants would have never been treated as equal as African slaves. White servants received brutal treatment from their masters in the era of slavery, because the idea of racism did not exist. In this way, he contended that the idea of racism emerged from an experience of slavery. Mervyn Alleyne critically claims that Eric Williams' statement ignores particularly the complexity of New World history, by clarifying class prejudice in certain socioeconomic contexts could be as rigorous as race prejudice besides racism^[40]. There have been different forms of slavery and various forms and degrees of racism throughout world history. Additionally, it is notable that Eric Williams later stated that race became a factor in the special condition reserved for the

Americas, meaning racial differences made it easier to justify and rationalize Europeans' enslavement of Africans^[41].

The modern ideas of race share many points of similarity with theories in the 18th and the 19th centuries. Examining how the word 'race' is used in the contemporary world, Miles and Brown argue that it continues to be used in at least three different discourses^[42]. Firstly, 'race' appears in the discourse of the biological sciences, specifically genetics. This can be seen in that geneticists argue that mankind can be categorised easily by identifying different genes, not by phenotypical feature, and it should be labelled 'races'. For example, genetic variation is greater between Australian Aborigines and Africans than that of between Australian Aborigines and Asians.

Secondly, 'race' is in the discourse of social sciences. In this sense, race is socially constructed, discursively perceived, and used to denote common-sense categories of people, usually identified by skin colour. It is true that social scientists argue that 'race' does not exist; therefore the word 'race' is meaningless. However, there are social realities that 'races' are used politically, which can be explained by socially constructed 'races', which is easily recognised by physical differences. In other words, 'races' are self and other identification. In this context of 'races', the 'Europeans' and 'Africans' are also referred to by binary opposite words, 'white' and 'black'. Thirdly, 'race' is used widely in everyday and political discourse, and it constitutes sometimes a key element of taken-for-granted common sense. This notion sometimes poses race as problematic. For example, if a report that African Americans are more likely to be diabetic than Asian Americans is published, simply African American, in other words, black, is considered as a problematic race. Being black is not a cause of diabetes; however, African American's lifestyle and food might be.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to discuss whether there is one race or there are some races. If there is only one race, it is impossible to distinguish a person from others who have obvious differences. If there are several races, such as white, black, yellow and red, it is easier to choose and apply for oneself. Therefore, to

distinguish one person from others, we need more than one race. However, for a person with a mixed race background it is problematic to apply one race. Also, it is impossible for an individual to claim 'racial purity'. For instance, people in the Caribbean, especially in Trinidad, racial mixing, in some cases, became too complicated through colonial and post-colonial society. Consequently, it is impossible to distinguish what 'races' constitute them. As discussed above, races are ambiguous categories and race ideology will not fully explain which race is applicable to each person. Thus, it seems to imply that no matter what genetic differences 'races' have, as Katy Chiles proclaims, science uses a set of physical characteristics to create imaginary race(s), and therefore, in reality, genetically different racial categories do not exist^[43].

The Human Genome Project (HGP), which was formally launched in 1990 and completed in 2003, proved that 99.99 per cent of genes are shared by all human beings^[44]. The HGP, an international scientific research project to identify and map all of the genes of the human genome from physical and functional stand point funded by the United States government as well as many international agents confirmed that, scientifically speaking, the human race does not exist. Although it might be debatable that the rest of the 0.01 per cent makes all the difference of how individuals look, it is not practical to attempt to explain all everyday experience with such 'unsatisfying' biochemical genetic evidence. Putting the scientific talk aside, despite the concept of race refers to biologically-based human characteristics, selection of these particular human features for the purposes of racial distinction/identification is always and necessarily a social and historical process. For example, immigrants from Syria or Portugal to Trinidad, as independent labourers and traders in colonial Trinidad were never included into a racial category of 'white', which was synonymous to economically advanced 'master' and 'ruler' kind of people; yet, they became a part of 'white' segment of the society in the late 1900s, mostly due to their relatively whiter complexion and comparatively stronger economic power than the rest of the mass population in a modern society, which is constituted by former slaves and indentured labourers. Another

example is a racially mixed people with very light complexion. Once you were 'tinted' with non-European blood, you were not 'white' anymore and you were non-white or even 'black' in the colonial Trinidad; however, in recent days, if you have 'white enough' light complexion and retain 'white' physical features, you are included into 'white'. In other words, 'race', therefore, is not a genetic attribute, but rather a socialised perception of biological phenotypical characteristic.

3.4. Ethnicity

Ethnicity, which is sometimes used as a synonym to race, in this study, is used as opposite to race. This is attributed to the fact that ethnicity, as well as race, are based on the notion of 'we' and 'others', and one of the important determinants for identifying individuals^[45]. The difference is that race is an objective notion, whereas ethnicity is a subjective notion. Specifically, individuals are given their race category in relation to others, and it is impossible to choose their own race. On the other hand, ethnicity can be selected by individuals, and no one forces ethnicity on individuals. Consequently, since this study attempts to explore the French Creole identity, and identity is a result of subjective self-construction as opposed to others, the term ethnicity, which is a subjective identity, is used, instead of objective race.

Ethnicity refers to a sense of belonging to a particular ethnic group. However, what constitutes this sense of belonging has been debated by numerous academics. In particular, ethnicity refers to ethnic group identity, some of the determinants of which are a social category 'race', religion, language, and commonality, such as history and phenotype. Glazer and Moynihan developed ethnicity as the pursuit of interest, specifying it indicates political resource and basis for mobilisation together with affective ties^[46]. This concept was popular in the 1960s, in response to the rise of the Civil Rights Movement. African Americans, as an ethnic group, bonded together to pursue their political goal. The obvious weakness of their theory was pointed out by Steve Fenton, which was to ignore the structural and historic difference in the circumstances of, especially, the difference between African American, as former slaves almost all through America's history, and

European immigrants as white immigrants in 1920s^[47].

This point was further explored by Omi and Winant pointing out that not all ethnic groups are in the same social structural position, meaning that the tendency to couple the idea of ethnicity with an expectation of assimilation and social mobility, could not be equally applied to all ethnic groups^[48]. This argument supports the idea of Frazer that the concept of ethnicity should not overlook slavery, colonialism and colour discrimination where applicable. In other words, what we should not ignore is that African Americans are diverse in ethnic differences as in the case of African Trinidadians^[49]. This is particularly obvious in former colonial countries, such as Trinidad, where after the abolition of slavery, labourers from India and China were brought into the European and African double layered society, following the holocaust of indigenous Amerindians. In colonial Trinidad, heterogeneous white, enslaved and free Africans, Muslim and Hindu Indians were embedded in a hierarchical class structure, which developed in accordance with their shades of complexion, their historically specific origins and backgrounds, and the unequal biased evaluation of cultures. As such, ethnicity is not just about differences but also about structural inequality and the hierarchy of difference.

3.5. Ethnicity in Trinidad

Race relations and ethnic relations in the Caribbean are important grounds to understand its society. These relations are distinguished in a sense that race relations are an objective perception of others, based on physical differences. These are diagnostic feature of 'races', which can be defined as inheriting physical differences that underline and support social behaviours. In contrast, ethnicity, which is not judged only by physical differences, is concerned with culturally-determined features, such as language, religion, dress, cuisine, and like aspects of social behaviour. Accordingly, 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic relations' are more suitable phrases than 'race' or 'race relations' to describe how people in Trinidad identify themselves, since European white Portuguese were excluded from 'white' category in colonial Trinidad, because they entered, not into ruler/master class, but into non-landowning class to

work as independent labourers, which belonged to lower caste.

There is no question that ethnicity is at the centre of politics and social relations in Trinidad, whose history consists of not only ethnic, but class, cultural, and religious boundaries between people from Africa, India, Europe, China, the Middle East, and the native Amerindians. The race/ethnic relations in Trinidad, as John La Guerre argues, have been historically characterized by mutual antagonism, hostility and distrust, which originates from the experience that the assimilation of inhabitants of Trinidad under colonial rule and in the post-independence era has not been successful^[50]. Of course, in the colonial society, whites as masters and rulers would never possibly assimilate with their slaves and workers. Therefore, discussion focuses on relations among enslaved Africans, free-Africans, and East Indians. In such an impregnable hierarchical caste society, if the other workers observed the white masters' more brutal treatment to African slaves, which is driven by the erroneous notion of their inferiority, the workers, including free-Africans, would not prefer to assimilate with those who receive brutal punishment. The post-Independence assimilation process also failed, as argued by many academics such as Selwyn Ryan, because Eric Williams, the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, initially at least, politically abandoned Trinidad's Indian population, as a result of being too obsessed with slavery and applying the Afro-American model to enhance Black Power^[51]. By doing so, the first Prime Minister intentionally empowered Africans, who were oppressed in the colonial era, leaving East Indians side-lined in their communities, and selected some whites out of guilt towards slavery. Hence, it is clear, despite their colonial pasts, the experience of other Caribbean countries, whose majority of population is Africans, have experienced totally different post-colonial assimilation processes, which established their own versions of the concept of ethnicity, and Trinidad's ethnicity has become fundamentally different from that of other Caribbean countries.

Further, in Trinidad, ethnicity is implicated in the power struggle of everyday life, as it became established combining all of the society's cultural, political and

economic institutions and practices. As a result, it grapples with the legacies of colonial labour schemes that partially determines accessibility to the means of production, wealth, political power and prestige. It refers to that, as proceed the colonial social economic ethnic hierarchy, whites or 'whiters' have easier access to privileged advantages. This is why, in Trinidad, there is so much emphasis on race relations, based on criteria such as colour, hair and other phenotypical criteria along with history, religion and culture.

In Trinidad, with a few exceptions, inter-ethnic relations have not caused serious inter-ethnic rivalry and violence, as compared to other former colonies, such as Fiji. Ethnic politics in Trinidad uses ethnicity in the anti-colonial struggle and in the inter-group struggle by politicising ethnicity as a strategy to control state resources, and is reflected in how ethnic structure employs colonial stereotypes. Therefore, this politicisation of ethnicity is in response to ethnic/class relations, which is structured hierarchically the same as in the colonial era, based on the utilisation of colonial stereotypes in the struggle to control the whole country of Trinidad. Based on colonial ethnic/class structure, stereotypes, which emerged or were constructed politically during the colonial period, informs contemporary relations. In the 19th century, there was an ethnic division of labour. Whites are plantation owners, Chinese and Portuguese are traders, some blacks and mixed individuals were moving into professionals, and East Indians were agricultural peasants. From these divisions, negative stereotypes were superimposed by the influential standpoint of planters, such as Africans and East Indians are lazy, irresponsible and prone to profligacy. In sum, if colonial stereotypes are still alive in everyday life, it means that the planter elite ideology is embedded deeply and psychosocially, and it still controls society.

Although most of contemporary Trinidad race and ethnic studies have focused on African-East Indian relations, investigating how these two groups have interacted in relation to the more powerful group in Trinidad, the planter elite white, is key to understanding ethnic relations. A reasonable explanation has been given by Kevin Singh that the two largest ethnic groups have helped to strengthen the

dominance of European descendants, who have already had the strongest presence in trade, finance and industry, by leaving them to continue occupying the same managing and owning positions they used to have in the colonial days^[52]. As a result, an ethnic/class structure, which has existed in Trinidad since the beginning of the 19th century, continues to exist today.

3.6. Whiteness

Studies on whiteness are relatively new and have focused almost wholly on the context in the United States^[53]. The literature on whiteness has concentrated on three approaches; critical, relational, and contextual. In particular, whiteness is critically argued, by Anoop Nayak for example, as being an advantageous location of race privilege^[54]. Also, relational whiteness is discussed by academics, such as Howard Winant, in relation to how whites position themselves in relation to others^[55]. Whiteness matters, because of the existence of no-whiteness. Whiteness is also related to its cultural context, found in the normative production in popular culture, in which whiteness is usually unmarked and unracial.

Since not all whites are white in the same way, being white has often been defined not in terms of what whites actually are, but rather by what 'others' are and what whites by implication, are not^[56]. For example, white in the United States principally meant WASP, white Anglo-Saxon and protestant people, and South Europeans were excluded from white. In former colonial countries, such as Jamaica, a reverse version of 'one drop rule' can be seen. Specifically, a person who shares black and white biological characteristics and stronger white social behaviours are treated as white and given category 'so-called white'. Furthermore, this relationship between whites and non-whites has been constructed hierarchically as one of white racial dominance and control, meaning through the establishment of relations of oppression, subordination, and resistance, these relational definitions are created^[57]. In other words, whiteness and blackness are understood as political categories that have been historically constructed on the European belief in racial supremacy.

The history of whiteness can be traced back to the West European colonial expansion era. In this era, the

concepts of whiteness and Westernness were constructed, and they produced the recognition of 'others' and the sense of superiority to proceed colonisation. As a result, colonisation also occasioned the reformulation of European selves in return. Recognition of cultural and physical characteristics of others, which is different from Western white colonisers, produced the white European self. That is, as Frankenberg argues, being centred in colonial discourses is the notion of the colonised subjects as irreducibly 'other' from the standpoint of a white 'self'^[58]. Specifically, whites often see themselves as non-racial or racially neutral, which is a result of the way of thinking about self and other. Namely, the standpoint of marking other leaves Westernness unmarked at centre. Others are marked, because they are different from us, Western whites. 'We' do not need to mark ourselves, since 'we' are not different from 'us'. Effects of these procedures universalise and leave whiteness and white culture unmarked.

From the above, we can therefore say that whiteness is variable, depending on subjective identifications which is subject to transformation across time and space. For example, whiteness in the east coast of the United States in the 21st century and whiteness in Trinidad in the Caribbean in the 19th century are different. This is because white subjectivity is constructed in relation to non-whites at a particular historical moment in a specific place. Therefore, whiteness is not a fixed or natural identity, but it is always contingent on social, economic, historic and political process, and white identity is influenced by gender, social class and sexuality and other modalities which are available at the time and space of white subjective identification to non-white others.

3.7. Whiteness in the Caribbean

In the Caribbean, whiteness and white identity, which has scarcely been studied, were constructed through the assertion of inherent black inferiority when the plantocracy attempted to justify the enslavement of Africans. The few works which have been produced range from a discussion of the white minority in the slavery era, such as the studies by Cecily Jones^[59] to a consideration of the contemporary role and status of

white elites in the post-colonial context, as in the works by Verene Shepherd^[60]. The territories studied are scattered throughout the Caribbean. Having diversity in history, social construction and demography among all Caribbean islands, the context of whiteness in one island is not always applicable to other islands. This section aims to present the common features and emphases which have emerged from the select theories to make sense of the society in the Caribbean.

The white minority in the Caribbean was not monolithic but was remarkably differentiated along class, ethnicity and gender lines, as well as identity by Creole or European origins. Also, a class structure of white in the Caribbean varied in each island. For example, the existence of a working class, or furthermore slave 'poor white' is significant in Barbados in the 17th century^[61]. On the other hand, most of whites in Trinidad were more than middle class, and mostly elites^[62].

The concept of 'whiteness' has changed over time and temporally across space. Describing race in the Anglophone Caribbean, Stuart Hall argues race is not a 'pure' category in the Caribbean, and defined socially in relation to strong white local elites^[63]. In other words, each former colony has each different meaning of white, because each island has different white local elite society. Whiteness was associated with elite status, and societies were constructed caste-like with white at the top. There was a time in Jamaica when phenotypical whites of Scottish, Irish or German origin would never enter 'white'. On the other hand, those whites were welcomed, if they were prosperous enough, to enter 'white' in Trinidad.

3.8. Whiteness in Trinidad

Before theorising proceeds, it needs to be noted, that whiteness in contemporary Trinidad has never been sociologically studied. Therefore, theorising current Trinidad whiteness is challenging, and this section attempts to grasp an outline of the modern whiteness which emerges out of existent historical studies of the white society in Trinidad by the middle of the 20th century. The components of the white elite, who were planters from France or French neighbouring islands, or British colonial officials, have changed over time, as

newcomers, namely Syrians and Portuguese, successfully move into this grouping due to certain characteristics, such as prosperity and fair complexion.

As Trinidad's whites were not homogeneous, Trinidad's whiteness was not homogeneous, because the island had been under Spanish, and then British, rule with a large French community. Trinidad's white society consists of people of Spanish, French, British, German, Corsican and Venezuelan ancestry, and did not include a real 'poor white' community. The majority group is the French Creoles, which is understood to include those of Catholic English, Irish, German, Corsican and Venezuelan ancestry. Trinidad's white community is therefore divided along lines of ethnicity, national origins, culture, language, religion and 'class'. One of the significant characteristics of the white community in Trinidad might be the division between French and English Creoles. Under British rule, French Creoles tended to stress their position as the island's native aristocracy, distinctive cultural traditions and differences from the English, such as religion.

Ethnic divisions within the white community have been discussed by Bridget Brereton, as being weakened by the early 1900s, because the whole white community united to defend their white hegemony up to the middle of the 1900s, when black and brown leaders emerged as from the Black Power Movement^[64]. Also some Portuguese and Syrian/Lebanon descendants with economic power joined the white society. However, these phenotypically non-whites existence in the society as whites, gave a whole white society more complexity. In this sense, some academics point out that divisions do not exist anymore at all^[65]. However, in contemporary society, it is suspected that these divisions still exist, but they might not be in rivalrous ways. For instance, Bridget Brereton explains that intermarriage between French Creoles and other whites were rare in the colonial days, hence, French Creoles were able to maintain their 'racial purity', Roman Catholicism and their genuine native aristocratic class, which is inherited from the ancestral pioneers of settlement. In recent years, however, because of the very small 'white' community in Trinidad, any whites marry each other within the community regardless of their background as far as the person is white and of a high class. Despite this reality,

because French Creoles still appreciate their ethnic identities as French Creoles, they would tend to identify themselves as French Creoles, instead of 'whites'.

In an ethnically diverse society, Trinidad whites, especially French Creoles, had a strong sense of the necessity for 'racial purity' and were nervous about having African ancestors to be 'tinted'. Historically, legitimate marriage or even a close connection to anyone non-white would have caused a falling out of the white elites, or even viewed as immoral. Interracial marriage meant a loss of colonial power and privilege. Nevertheless, as Bridget Brereton states, it is essential to note that, although interracial marriage was illegitimate, it was common for white men, including elites, because of the shortage of 'racially pure' white young females, to enjoy non marital sexual relations with non-white women as mistresses; however, marriage between French Creoles and black, East Indian or mixed women of darker shade was illegal, and it was considered immoral^[66]. On the other hand, in the case of white women, if they had non marital sexual relations with non-white men, and produced racially mixed offspring, they would no longer be considered as part of white society. Children from those unions sometimes entered 'white' and some not, in a few cases white fathers provided generously for the racially mixed children; however mothers of those children would never be a part of 'white'. It is therefore important to note, that the sexuality of white women was very controlled, and sexual contact with non-white men directly meant a loss of 'white' privilege. This was the double standard of morality which white men maintained; having a coloured mistress and children, while restricting sexuality of white women. Consequently, to maintain their racial purity, inbreeding and incest were the safest way to avoid undesirable connections. In sum, whiteness is also gendered and shaped by religion, social class and ethnicity.

3.9. Creolisation/Creole Identity

The meaning of the term 'Creole' has been argued to be varied in different societies and over time. At the beginning of the European expansion, a single definition of 'Creole' may have been adequate for all cases. However, due to colonial and post-colonial

experiences, the Creole population of these colonies or former colonies structured various social, political, and economic positions for themselves; therefore, 'Creole' came to possess different meanings. In general, 'Creole' refers to people and cultures derived from the Old World, but developed in the New World. In specific to the context of the Caribbean, 'Creole' refers to a local product which is the result of a mixture of various ingredients that originated in the Old World. The Caribbean Creoles or the creolisation process experienced in the Caribbean, as Michael Smith views, have its historical base in slavery, plantation systems, and colonialism, meaning its cultural composition mirrors its racial mixture: European and African elements as a base, and East Indian, Native Amerindians, Chinese, Portuguese, Syrians and whoever entered in the Caribbean as immigrants^[67].

As it is a blend of various components of Creole societies, some academics, such as Nigel Bolland, claim the potential of Creole culture for national integration^[68]. In particular, that creolisation will blend the diverse elements to conceive a new cultural unity. For example, Trinidad Carnival has its origin both in French Catholic and African folkloric customs. However, costumes, music, and dance used for Carnival are not of French origin or African origin, but of Trinidad origin, which is a mixture of diverse culture of people in Trinidad of diverse origins. The traditional Carnival character, *Jab Molassie*, is a good example of Creole culture. 'Jab Molassie' translated to English, comprises 'Jab' the French patois for *Diable* (Devil) and *Molassie* is French Patois for *Mélasses* (Molasses), and the character *Jab Molassie* is often covered with tar, grease, lard, various types of dyes, most commonly blue, and sometimes with molasses. The character oftentimes uses metal shackles and restraints to imitate slaves, and the grease, dyes and molasses used to cover themselves is a way to mimic the slaves at the cane field fire covered with soot. Another example is *Shouter Baptist*, which emerged in Trinidad as a mixture of Christianity and traditional African religion. This religion was born out of the blend of the Baptist faith, which was brought into Trinidad in the 19th century by former-African slaves from the United States, and a worship focused on spiritually going back to Africa and in praise of Africanism, which

was a mixture of reflections of the joys, tribulations and frustrations of ancestors who were dehumanised and deculturised, and then taken from Africa. Apart from these examples, examples of creolisation can be seen anywhere at any level in societies in the Caribbean, even in languages, food and music. Therefore, when Creole gained popularity, the image of Creole culture and a Creole society emphasises social unity: the new Creole Trinidad^[69].

In this way, all the people in Trinidad are active agents to construct a Creole society. However, the concept of Creole society, when used in the Caribbean, largely stresses the active role of the African cultural traditions. It also insists that the majority of the population, such as slaves, free-Africans, and indentured workers are the active agents in the historical creolisation process. Indeed, they were, no doubt, important elements in contemporary Trinidad culture; however, the important roles of European whites, who brought those people and gave cultural, economic, political foundation to Trinidad, should not be neglected. It is important to note that not only Trinidad, but all Caribbean societies and cultures can no longer be imagined as the result of oppression, namely, strong 'superior' European culture upon passive 'inferior' African culture. This is because, creolisation is not a one-way process. It is not that African culture had to be absorbed into European culture and disappear. Instead, especially after ideological decolonisation started in the 1970s at the start of nation-building, after the independence, the new and distinctive cultures of the Caribbean region has been shaped with cultural contributions from all the segments of the society^[70]. Due to demographic diversity in each island, the Caribbean islands started shaping their own unique culture. In case of Trinidad, that is Europeans, Africans, East Indians, Chinese, Syrians, Portuguese, and other active agents of the society that started shaping the Creole culture of Trinidad. Thus, to analyse modern Trinidad Creole society, it is essential to take into consideration, all the historical elements, such as the reason for European expansion, slavery, and the plantation system, because Trinidad is built on those elements.

With regard to Caribbean people, the creolisation

process is indeed experienced differently by each individual, regardless of racial/ethnic backgrounds. In the examination of the creolisation process for a person of both European origin and non-white origin, who might have lighter complexion but not 'completely' white, Percy Hintzen highlights a problem of the 'whiter' Creole's development of a Creole identity, and proclaims that white creolisation leads to the non-problematisation of whiteness. In other words, whiteness is problematic, when it is used by 'tinted' whites, who might have non-white blood. Whiteness of white Creole serves to protect their social and economic privilege in anti-colonial nationalism by claiming they are the hybrids of culture and race in the territory. Consequently, whiteness becomes invisible in the context of rejection of white supremacy^[71]. In this way, white creolisation will encourage non-problematisation of whiteness, which result in post-colonial version of racial capitalism, namely, the domination of whites and 'whiters' in the private sector.

It is true, especially Trinidad, that being white means possessing unconditional easy access to those privilege. What is problematic here is the privilege, which is only accessible by white Creoles, and later in history, 'whiter' Creoles too. It is also indisputable, under colonialism, that the possession of white purity is a symbol of the colonial upper class. At the same time, impurity, believed to be caused by cultural and sexual contact with the Africans, would mean exclusion from colonial power and privilege. In this context, when Percy Hintzen's argument applies to Trinidad, it implies that creolising whiteness means that their representation as hybrids of culture and race as Trinidadians, and their claims of being natives to the territory, tends to protect their social and economic privilege in the crucible of anti-colonial nationalism, with its anti-European and anti-white implications; therefore, such representations make whiteness invisible and unproblematic^[72]. Nevertheless, it could be argued that white creolisation does not only work negatively in the territories, since white Creoles can be used as international brokers for economic privilege. The reality therefore remains that creolising white creoles possibly enriches the regions economically, socially and culturally.

Despite those privileges, as a small minority,

French Creoles might have felt social, economic and political insecurity in terms of their position in Trinidad society in relation to two large majority groups; Africans and East Indians, whom French Creoles oppressed in the country's colonial history. Therefore, to avoid provoking feelings of hostility towards French Creoles, by these two major groups, in response to expressing French Creole's specific identity, there is only one direction possible, which tends to be forward into a more integral, peaceful new identity: French Creoles as Creole Trinidadian.

Indeed, based on its colonial history, French Creole identity must have been built simultaneously, successively and gradually with the sense of gender, race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, civil rights and various advantages that is only accessible because they are white. Their identity is explored more in relation to the ancestral motherland, France, by Robin Cohen, stating that French Creole has an identity which is called imperial Diaspora, meaning it tends to maintain ties of loyalty and deference to the mother country^[73], in this case, France. On the other hand, a process of creolisation leads to a stage of quasi-diaspora^[74], which occurs when French Creoles turn against their homeland, France. The French Creoles' sense of identity is based on two accepted notions. The first is that of loyalty to the mother country, France. Another one is a creolised identity, which is rooted in Trinidad. The idea of loyalty to a distant homeland tends to defend the legitimacy of the imperial presence. The legitimate French existence in Trinidad is, therefore, an integral part of Trinidadian identity.

With regard to imperial diaspora, the argument developed by David Brookshaw further extends the understanding that it tends to fail when its legitimacy is no longer recognised, or is forgotten by the mother country, or loses its status as a result of political change, which usually originates from the need by the mother country to decolonise, relinquishing power to an indigenous majority, or to accede to the historic claim over territory by a larger neighbour^[75]. This claim explains why French Creoles, especially who came after the French revolution, strongly express their sense of belongingness to Trinidad. It is understood that they lost their position in mother France because of the revolution,

so that they had to consider Trinidad as their new motherland. Thus, as discussed above, Trinidad's French Creoles identify themselves as white, genuine Trinidadian with a French background.

4. Methods/Methodology

4.1. Methodology

This section discusses the research methodology employed in this study to explore how French Creole identity is constructed and reproduced. This study positions itself to assert that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social interactions^[76] within the framework of symbolic interactionism, which explores the process of interaction in the formation of social realities for individuals^[77]. In particular, individuals exchange symbols with each other to gain meanings, specifically realities, which have been incorporated into their experiences^[78]. Generally symbolic interactionism implies the use of ethnographic research, such as participant observation and interviews, which involve the face-to-face interaction of the researcher and the researched. As one of the typical symbols is language, it allows researchers to examine how individuals communicate with each other in words focusing on the creation of personal identity through interaction with others^[79]. Since its particular interest is the relations between individual behaviour and group pressures, to examine how individuals make sense of their world, symbolic interactionism functions powerfully^[80].

4.2. Methods

As stated earlier, few studies on French Creole identities, or indeed Caribbean whiteness exist, resulting in a paucity of literature about French Creoles and their experiences. This study seeks to produce knowledge of the hidden histories of marginalised French Creoles through in-depth face-to-face interviews as a means of creating oral history. This collected data was later transcribed and then analysed.

Conducting oral history to discover opinions and experiences which have been ignored, misrepresented or suppressed is ideal, because this method allows the researcher to gather 'stories' from seldom heard interviewees^[81]. In particular, this method places the

subjects at the centre of research, and examines their deep and rich individual perspectives through a direct connection between the interviewer and the interviewee^[82]. Although it might not be able to generalise or produce scientific statistical data, it produces insights, explanations and space for interpretation^[83]. For example, it depends on individuals' memories, all the data gathered through interviews needs to be verified, analysed and placed in an accurate historical context. In this way, critical interpretation of the oral history data will yield rich informative and complex historical information.

4.3. Access

A 'snowball' approach was used to obtain a non-random sample of French Creoles. Four persons functioned as gatekeepers who enabled my access to French Creoles: two of them are Trinidadians, and the other two are Japanese who reside in Trinidad. This approach depends on the interviewees to find additional potential interviewees who were willing to be interviewed and who would then supply me with further potential contacts. Given the limited time spent in Trinidad, only twenty-four persons were interviewed. Though this might not be a representative number, and as such limits the ability to generalise, rich, in-depth data was obtained.

After one French Creole agreed to participate, it was relatively easy to contact other prospective respondents. Eventually interviews were conducted with 24 respondents: 11 males and 13 females aged from 18 to 74. Each of these proclaimed themselves as French Creole, though one respondent questioned the identity of another, on the grounds that he is 'tinted'. Nevertheless, since he considered himself a French Creole, and since he was acknowledged by other French Creoles as their peer, it was decided to include him.

This research acknowledges the problems of using gatekeepers, such as the possibility that gatekeepers might introduce only those people whom the gatekeeper considers will present certain views. It is believed that this manipulation did not occur.

4.4. Interviews

Interviews were conducted with twenty-four

respondents in four phases: 14 in March 2006, 4 in August 2009, 3 in February 2015 and 3 in February 2016. However, in this research, the data from only four respondents were analysed due to the size and content interests for this research. All of the interviewees were born in Trinidad, and their families have resided in Trinidad for more than three generations. Since some of the questions were sensitive and personal, the anonymity of the interviewees was strictly maintained. However, the small size and closeness of the French Creole community, which was appreciated at the sampling stage, did not allow absolute anonymity. Some respondents knew others who were interviewed. Also the nature of this topic easily allowed others to guess the identity of the other informant. Nevertheless, in the analysis, names of the informants are all anonymous.

Once informed consents and recording permissions from the respondents were gathered, interviews started with icebreaking questions on family background. Interviews were designed to be completed in 45 to 60 minutes. However, some interviews lasted even longer. This is because respondents were much more willing to talk about their family historical backgrounds than expected. Attempts were made to ensure that interviews were conducted in a comfortable space, and a rapport was developed with the interviewees. During the interviews, notes were sometimes taken. All the recorded interviews were transcribed for analysis. The analysis of gathered data is discussed in the following sections.

4.5. Ethics

This study is particularly interested to avoid the following: any harm to participants, deception, a lack of informed consent and an invasion of privacy. Also this research was aware that interviewees provided very sensitive information and opinions which dealt with race related issues, and therefore it could be harmful to their images in social domains. Anonymity, thus in their names as well as interview records were taken very seriously.

4.6. Difficulties

The concern before conducting interviews was the Trinidad-accented-English with Trinidadian

expressions which the researcher was not necessarily perfectly familiar with. Although the researcher had resided on the island long enough, this concern was taken seriously, because failure to interpret the context can lead to misrepresenting collected data and its reliability^[84]. However, no difficulties were experienced in communication with the interviewees. This might be because all of the respondents were attentive and considerate with regard to the fact that the researcher is a foreigner.

Furthermore, regarding interracial interviews, which were conducted, although ethnic matching strategy is an example of ethnic sensitivity in research, which is argued to be practised whenever possible, this was unfortunately impossible in this research. The methodological literature mainly discusses racial and/or ethnic matching and its effects^[85], which centre on the relationship between white researchers and the minority, presumably powerless non-white subject. Yet, in this study, as a non-white Japanese female, the researcher conducted research on a powerful white minority, and felt vulnerable. Nevertheless, what was experienced in these interviews was a confronting of the complexities of 'race' and ethnicity in the Caribbean, and to confront the meaning of 'race' and ethnicity for both the researcher and in the context of the ongoing own research. Indeed, race/ethnic matching strategies would be effective to build rapport, cooperation and trust, and to gain access to the authentic views and experiences of minority research participants^[86]. Had the researcher not been Japanese or an outsider, and instead been white and French Creole, different data might have been collected. Nevertheless, at the same time, as Dorrine Kondo experienced, being of the same race, ethnicity, or gender does not guarantee difficulty-free research^[87].

Indeed, the researcher's gender, as a female, sometimes played as 'resource'^[88]. As many female fieldworkers report their experiences as being treated lightly as a mascot rather than a researcher: some male respondents sat for interviews with the researcher, as if they were going out on a date with someone for the first time. In particular, they seemed to be more interested in chatting with the relatively young female researcher, rather than being interviewed by her. Some male respondents took advantage of the situation and tried to

talk about inappropriate and or private topics, which made the researcher feel vulnerable, humiliated and sexually harassed. In these circumstances, when the interviews started, the researcher tried to be in control by sharing the researcher's background and knowledge about French Creoles to gain interests from the interviewees, build trust and encourage responsiveness. Judging from this experience, it was effective: after listening to this account, the respondents seemed to be more open to speak, and reveal more personal matters. Thus, being a non-white, non-Trinidadian Japanese female, as an interviewer on the topic of Trinidad's French Creoles, might not be the best condition to elicit un-manipulated and in-depth data from the respondents. However, the researcher emphasised her ability to research this topic from an unbiased and objective point of view. This is because, although it is considered to be one of the critical points of an interviewer-interviewee relationship, the researcher was regarded as an outsider.

4.7. Analysis

In this study, discourse analysis was employed in order to aim at reconstructing the structure of the interview transcripts and field notes by paraphrasing, categorising and contextualising statements in the text^[89]. This research method for this study is justified, because it believes how certain words are used reveals reality. Specifically, discourse analysis studies how aspects of mind, such as identity and memory, emerge in relation to the language use in discursive contexts^[90], and how political concerns shape the language use. For example, in interviews, different terms were used for describing a person of African origin, depending on the contexts of discourse, such as 'African', 'black', 'Negro', 'nigger', 'the native', and 'those people'. Therefore, discourse analysis represents an effective method to examine how different peoples build narrative discourse about the social world.

Discourse analysis in this study followed the procedures discussed by Fran Tonkiss^[91]. Data was organised into key categories of interests, themes and terms, such as racism, whiteness and self-identification. Secondly, these themes were shifted and contrasted within the categories to see how they emerged within the data, paying attention to the patterns of variation

within the different narratives^[92]. Additionally, the data analysis for this study tried to examine deeper connotations of the discourses on these themes, such as clustering ideas and representations, and established associations among them.

This study wholly understands the challenges and critiques that discourse analysis faces: it is difficult to produce generalisation and representative findings. In other words, discourse analysis cannot claim external validity, referring to whether the findings are generalisable to other findings by other researchers, due to the nature of discourse analysis, which is to 'challenge, interrogate taken-for-granted meanings, and disturb easy claims to objectivity'^[93]. Further, since discourse analysis tends to deal with a relatively small amount of data collected from specific settings such as interviews, the findings are unlikely to be representative. Thereby, this tends to cause problems for generalisation.

Despite the difficulty in achieving representation and generalisation with regard to the findings being difficult to achieve, it is essential to note that they are obtainable by reflexive researchers, who have completely critical and open attitudes towards data, research process and setting, finding, and writing style^[94]. Therefore, the validity of analysis is dependent on the quality of the rhetoric^[95]. Consequently, firm arguments will produce dependable accounts. Hence, discourse analysis can be considered to be robust, since insight and knowledge will emerge from strong grounded arguments.

5. Analysis: Whiteness and Its Relation to Non-whiteness

5.1. Introduction

Contemporary French Creoles remain a neglected group within sociological studies of Trinidad. This chapter and the next examine how they differ from their ancestors in colonial Trinidad, what aspects they have inherited to construct a French Creole identity, and what this identity means to them. This chapter explores how the sense of white superiority, combined with racism, continues to shape relations between French Creoles and the Africans and East Indians.

The theoretical framework used for this analysis is symbolic interaction theory, which relies on the

symbolic meaning that people acquire through social interaction with others. The topics this chapter explores, such as white supremacy, race, and identification as white, are socially constructed notions, that is, the symbolic meanings of these concepts precede their actual facts. This chapter examines how those concepts were developed through historical and social experiences, and how they fed into the society to develop Trinidad's racial relations, by paying attention to what the interviewees mean and do in the conversations with the researcher.

5.2. Relationships with Africans: 'Black is death'

The relations between whites and non-whites in former colonies can only be understood within the powerful binary oppositions of the coloniser/colonised, powerful/powerless, white/black, and rich/poor, which constructed the colonial economic structure. Consequently, this structure tended to produce another perception among economically disempowered non-whites; 'You are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich'^[96]. It is not surprising to see how enthusiastically French Creoles try to preserve their whiteness, which assures them of their social status. On the other hand, non-whiteness is interpreted as synonymous with hardship, poverty, inferiority and savagery.

From the standpoint of French Creoles, one respondent, Marc explains:

...When they meet a European or a cosmopolitan person, they could appear to be modern. Among themselves, they are racist. They talk in terms of races ... racism in part of the conversation to define them, between them and niggers... Black is death...^[97]

It is notable that Marc used the third person 'they' to describe French Creoles, as if he did not belong to this grouping. This might originate from the fact that he is an octoroon, a term used to describe someone with one-eighth African ancestry, and he had a non-white wife. Marc said that 'because of my appearance', he was able to move in and out of the French Creole society.

However, in the researcher's eyes, his appearance seemed no different from 'pure' white.

Marc's grandmother is non-white, yet since his childhood, he and others have identified him as white, a label that has much ambivalence for him. Indeed, when he talked about his childhood, he distinguished himself as an 'Afro-French Creole'. He provided an example of one instance when he was approved of as 'white' by four French Creole young women, saying 'yeah, he could pass'. As an octoroon, Marc could pass as a white person. Though self-identifying as an Afro-French Creole, Marc nevertheless felt a sense of pride that he could 'pass' for white, possibly because it allowed him to access the social privileges of whiteness.

The above 'yeah, he could pass' as *white* means that the young white women who voiced that comment knew Marc is not white, but black. What they meant was they knew Marc is black, but people who do not know him could label him as white; therefore Marc could claim whiteness as he is passable, if and when he wishes. As seen in the previous section 3, race is an objective notion and ethnicity is a subjective notion of self. His racial category depends on who labels him as what. From the perspective of the white community, he is black, yet the non-white community or people who do not know his background consider him to be white. Given that ethnicity is a subjective notion of self, this does not necessarily mean that Marc himself has chosen whiteness just because "he could pass".

In Trinidad, the word 'race' and 'ethnicity' are used interchangeably by people in everyday conversation. Marc's self-identification of blackness and whiteness, mobility between blackness and whiteness, reality of octoroon and passable-as-white, interwoven with his wish and reality, construct his ethnicity through interaction with others in the society. Similarly, his physical appearance leaves some room for others to identify him as a particular race. From the researcher's perspective, his appearance does not have any specific non-white physical features, such as skin tone, hair type and nose shape. He can be white. Yet, the small white community in Trinidad tend to know the particular marital and familial details of those that make up that community, and as such, many people know about his family and his racial background as octoroon.

Marc's very strong expression 'black is death' indicates that, especially when his octoroon background is taken into consideration, being black in Trinidad tends to align with a destiny that is hopeless. This is because, as discussed before, the socio-economic position of Africans in the colonial era was constructed along racial/ethnic differences opposed to the position of whites, who dominated Trinidad economically. The researcher is unsure whether he made this comment from the standpoint of a black or white person. As he claims blackness now, it is assumed that he meant being black does not have the same access to the privileged opportunities and networks, associated with upward social mobility, usually only accessible by whites in Trinidad. Since Marc has experienced the reality of both sides: black and white, this comment 'black is death' is based on this unique perspective .

5.3. Mixed Marriages: 'nobody wants to get black'

Undoubtedly, his experience as an octoroon made Marc politically conscious. He expresses awareness of the circulating beliefs in white superiority and black inferiority, and acknowledges that whiteness in the Caribbean remains associated with wealth, power, competence and authority. He dismissed such beliefs when the Black Power movement arose, and 'became black for a while'. He explains that he wanted to support black people having seen injustice towards blacks in the world and having thought of his experience as an octoroon. Moreover, around the same period, Marc married a non-white wife, a marriage not wholly approved of by his father:

...he said to me 'why are you marrying "those people"?' This point of view is that you can screw them, but don't marry them. You can have illegitimate children if you like, but don't marry them...^[98]

What Marc mentions is echoed by other male interviewees, in the way that they have told their sons and male relatives that they could have non-white partners and even racially mixed children, but never as a legal spouse. In contrast, among the female respondents there was no mention of having racially

mixed children outside of wedlock. Here, it is clear that whiteness is gendered, and non-white women's sexuality and reproduction are subject to abuse.

Despite his father's disapproval, Marc married one of "those people". Marc understands what his father meant by "those people". Marc's father actually tried to remind him that the non-white blood from "those people" will have negative consequences for him and any mixed offspring from that marriage, in the social context in Trinidad. Indeed, that is exactly what Marc has experienced throughout his life: his octoroon background, having the blood of "those people", has challenged his life as white French Creole, and he knew it would never work to his advantage. Marc's father questioned him as to why he was willing to give up the privileges and the advantages that whiteness assures, and instead go through difficulties that marrying "those people" will make him face.

From this discourse, it is not clear what he experienced from having a non-white wife. Verene Shepherd suggests that a non-white woman is able to enter French Creole society, if she is recognised as having high social status^[99]. Therefore, Marc's wife might have been approved of as a French Creole. Nevertheless, Marc displays some ambivalence about mixed marriages. As he explained:

...although you would want your children to marry a white person, you know, you would want it, because you're living in a white world...but you don't want them to marry the Negros... because nobody wants to get black...^[100]

This is interesting to see the way Marc reacts to the idea of his children marrying non-white women. As established earlier in this paper, Marc married a non-white woman ("those people") in spite of his father's disapproval, and they have two sons. After he divorced, he married a white woman from Europe. The above quote is Marc's response to the researcher's question on whether he would mind if his sons marry non-white women. After he shared the fact that one of his sons married a 'Chinese-Portuguese-African-Indian' woman, meaning a non-white, he started indicating his preference by using impersonal *you*. From the

researcher's perspective, this usage of impersonal *you* sounds as if Marc wanted to justify his preference that his sons maintain his family's whiteness, in spite of the fact that Marc is an octoroon and married a non-white woman. Also Marc knows that being white is an absolute advantage in postcolonial 'white world' Trinidad; his blackness via his octoroon background has made him well-aware of powerful white privileges which he is able to enjoy conditionally and occasionally. Therefore, as a father, Marc wants his sons to belong to a white community in order to have a better life.

Marc's business suffered financial difficulties in 1991 when Trinidad's economy went into recession because of the price of oil. In order to recuperate his business interests, Marc found that he would prosper better if he once again embraced his whiteness and returned to the fold of French Creoles.

As Ruth Frankenberg argues, whites who experience an interracial relationship are more likely to be more aware of race and racism^[101]. It is possible to assume that Marc experienced racism during his Afro-French Creole childhood before he came to pass as white because of his light skin. Later, the promises of the Black Power Movement inspired him to become black again; then, when his business venture failed, he reverted to whiteness. However, he is now black. It is assumed that even though he was accepted as white in his childhood and adulthood, his whiteness was unstable, because of his octoroon background. For him, being black is more comfortable than being white, since his whiteness is more questioned than his blackness. This explains why his 'white' phases were always short-term.

Two other respondents, Earl and Marie, who are both considered 'pure' whites, also expressed reservations about interracial marriages. Earl states:

...I wouldn't like it. I don't think I would approve of it. It is very difficult for parents to tell their children who they should marry... fall in love with anyone, but if you start looking and thinking what's right and what's wrong... it's a straightforward question of how many male good species and how many female good species... I have never told my children who to marry. But tell them, look before you make a decision, what's in

it...^[102]

Marie's first son has an illegitimate daughter with an East Indian woman. Marie clearly felt some anxiety about mixed marriages:

...I personally don't like it. But I'm perfectly at ease with her [the East Indian woman]. We have a very good relation, so I just accept it. But it's not something that I would personally have looked for... that definitely was a feeling of rejection of coloured people...^[103]

For Earl, as a white French Creole, marrying a non-white woman is wrong, because, according to him, non-whites are not of good species. It is actually rare nowadays to listen to someone speaking of pseudo human race theory of non-white people's inferiority. As with Marc, Earl expressed his dislike of the idea of his children to marry non-whites. Instead of not telling his children not to marry non-whites, he suggests them to think carefully how marriage to non-white women will affect their lives. Of course, in his sense, those marriages will only bring about negatives and disadvantages to his family.

Marie however, insisted that she had nothing against non-whites, did not believe that whites and blacks were any different from each other, but nevertheless admitted to a dislike of mixed marriages, voiced the opinion that she did not wish to see her own children in mixed marriages. This is because of her 'feeling of rejection of coloured people'^[104].

This 'feeling of rejection of coloured people' may come from her personal experience: Marie experienced colonial Trinidad where non-whites were considered 'dirty' and 'inferior'. Therefore, she does not like the idea of her children marrying anyone inferior, who are, in this case, non-whites.

5.4. 'Racial purity': 'not attracted to anything completely dark'

The population of French Creoles has decreased since the colonial era. With a smaller marriageable pool from which to find spouses, many young people now

have to seek non-French Creole spouses. Hence, it has become much harder for them to retain their 'racial purity' – if indeed it was ever possible to do so even during the colonial era, at a time when interracial marriages were illegal. To maintain boundaries around their aristocratic group, and against the British non-aristocratic Protestant class, French Creoles began to form marital unions with non-French Catholics. Even today, it is difficult for French Creoles to find 'pure' French Creole partners, and the community has had to adjust and expand the pool from which acceptable spouses may be drawn. This does not mean however that they are ready to approve of marriages with non-whites. An emphasis on retaining 'racial purity' remains, and marriages with other Catholics – so long as they are regarded as pure white – are tolerated, as are, in some instances, marriages to lighter-skinned non-whites.

Class remains an important factor in the marital stakes, however. Marc explains:

...The French Creoles today would not bother so much about religion. French Creoles would bother more race and class. Whiteness and respectability, whiteness and class would bother most French Creoles of my age... although increasingly their children are marrying mixed or coloured people...^[105]

In general, not limited to the case in Trinidad, a 'mixed' person implies someone who has a racially and ethnically mixed background, which may also be referred to as a 'coloured' person. Yet he uses one term parallel to the other. In analysing his use of both words, 'mixed' refers to someone with both white and black ancestries in their family trees, no matter how far back. On the contrary, 'coloured' people, for Marc, refer to East Indian, Chinese, and 'mixed' background persons without any African physical features, including dark skin. By mentioning these two categories of non-white people, in this discourse, Marc explicitly expresses what French Creoles value: whiteness.

Claire has dated mixed race males, but admits she is 'not attracted to anything completely dark'. Her mother gave her approval to Claire's mixed race partner

– even though she believed that a marriage between her daughter and a mixed race person would mean that she would not have pure French Creole grandchildren. As Claire explained:

...I don't think they are going to want me to go out with somebody extremely dark. I think they oppose to that... but they always taught me that it's fine whatever you choose, once he is a person of class. That's always they are talking about...^[106]

As we see, there is a contradiction here in that Claire's mother, as with other parents in the study, had raised their children to feel that they were free to marry another individual regardless of their race, but yet still retained reservations when the prospects arose of having mixed race grandchildren. In this case, Claire's mother did not mind if her daughter married a mixed race spouse, though they were unhappy should she date a black person. Here, not race, but shade of skin is more important.

From the respondents, it is clear that French Creoles' insistence on the necessity to maintain racial purity and their insistence on Catholicism has changed. The extent to which these changes are acceptable does however vary from family to family and between generations. Younger generations are more open and liberal, but older generations display more conservatism and seek to maintain the white racial purity of French Creoles.

Despite more liberal attitudes toward 'race mixing', the younger generations nevertheless retain some reservations over mixed raced marriages. Many of their fears apparently stem from a belief that mixed race children will ultimately not only disrupt French Creole identity, but could ultimately threaten French Creoles' access to white privileges.

5.5. Relation to others: 'comfort level'

As seen in the previous section, modern French Creoles' notion of superiority rests on colonial racialised stereotypes. Earl describes this situation: 'there are plenty of French Creoles who live still in the 19th century'^[107]. Additionally, Marc admits: 'my

relationships with black and [East] Indian people tend to be very stereotyped. It is from the point of view of master and servant'^[108].

Lopez argues that postcolonial whiteness, which has moved out from absolute colonial privileged whiteness, has not yet come into existence. In order to integrate with non-whites in a post-colonial society, whites attempt to distinguish post-colonial whites from the colonial racist 'self'; however, it has not been successful to examine their whiteness in relation to histories of oppression and hegemony of non-whites^[111]. This argument is supported by Claire, who despite attending a predominantly black school, still has few close non-white schools friends:

...My friends are predominantly white. It's like you're not open to make new friends, because everybody at my work is my friend, everybody I went to school with are friends... so, I have plenty coloured friends ... but my call girls that I call everyday are white. So that's your comfort level...^[109]

It depends on the concept of 'friends' though: the comfort level, which Claire mentioned, is the intimacy with 'others', which would not disgrace or invade French Creole's pride, class lines, and sense of belonging. Claire was the only white girl in a class; however, after she left school, her friends became mainly whites. She admits that being amongst white friends represents her 'comfort level'. Claire claimed not to know what it meant to be French Creole, but it is evident that she is clearly aware of her whiteness. In the following speech, instead of speaking about whiteness, she mentioned class, which is believed to be a euphemism for whiteness:

... honestly, the only thing I picked is that we are all Trinis, first of all. The only thing different is that there's a different class of people. I think they all come down with class and none's with money. Nothing to do with race. It's class...^[110]

Among French Creoles, there is a notion that seeing race means being racist, and being racist means being 'bad', or 'unsophisticated'. Claire tries to eliminate the reality of colour in Trinidad. This intentional colour-blindness, which is revealed in her speech, refers to all Trinidadians, regardless of their ethnicity, or more frankly, skin colour. In other words, when any person of colour is perceived as being good in the same way as 'us', such as white Trinidadians, their colour can be ignored. Frankenberg explains that this is the virtue of a 'non-coloured' or white-self. Everybody can become as 'good' as 'us' whites, so race is not the entire cause of problem; however, 'class' difference is the problem^[11]. Furthermore, this notion can be interpreted as that race is inherited and unchangeable, but class is changeable, if you do good. In this sense, racism and the power structure are still seen in this young French Creole woman. Claire attempts to position herself as a liberal non-racist. Her insistence that 'race does not matter' can be understood as a desire to distance herself from racism. However, Claire's notions of non-white 'them' and white 'us' remain deeply rooted in racialised colonial ideology.

5.6. Conclusion

It is of interest at present in Trinidad how the senses of inter-subjectivity and mutual recognition between postcolonial whiteness and others have been developed and will be developed in the framework of racial identity and how racism shape French Creoles lives. Looking at French Creoles' relations with Africans and Indians, how racial identities, race privilege, and racial subordination have constructed French Creoles' position in a Trinidad society which is still racially hierarchical, must be analysed in relation to the subordinated positions of people of colour.

By contrast, an octoroon French Creole's relations with non-white people are in a context in which an octoroon French Creole has become much more conscious of the racial order of society. It is also true that, for many of the French Creoles that I interviewed, relations with non-whites followed from close connection with non-white communities and knowledge of racism and race privilege.

6. Analysis: French Creole Identity as Trinidadian

6.1. Introduction

As seen in the previous chapter, French Creoles retain colonially-derived notions of white racial superiority. Examining the discourse on French Creole identity sheds light on what their identity means to them. This chapter explores how French Creoles position themselves in post-colonial Trinidad at the beginning of the 21st century.

This section also analyses discourse in the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism; therefore, how the respondents use one of the symbols, words, and what meaning the respondents apply to those words, is examined to see how the French Creole identity as Trinidadian is produced to construct and reproduce their whiteness in the postcolonial Trinidad. In particular, this section demonstrates how the French Creole interviewees uses the words that concern French Creole topics, such as aristocratic background, slave owning history and sense of belonging in Trinidad.

6.2. Identity: 'Mental complex'

Trinidad's French Creoles' sense of identity derives from a belief in, and the practice of, white supremacy, which has been constructed and reproduced historically, socially and continuously, by asserting an inherent cultural, moral, religious, and economic superiority. As discussed in a previous chapter, French Creoles in Trinidad self-identify as descendants of the aristocratic planters who populated and developed Trinidad with various unfree and free labour forces, such as African slaves, free-Africans and indentured labours. Therefore, their identity is constructed in oppositional relation to other non-aristocratic non-landowning whites, such as the British, and against all non-whites.

However, some French Creoles have come to possess a mental complex, which Africans and East Indians force them to recognise. This means that French Creoles are made to be politically aware of their ancestral history; they profited from harsh plantation slavery. Earl states how the non-white population react when something happens, such as a car accident:

... because French Creole is associated with the white plantocracy ...when you look at somebody to pick on, it is easy to go after whites and white planters five generations ago.... There are some people who may have a complex of having their ancestors owned slaves in the early 17th and the 18th century, 19th century ...^[113]

In this discourse, Earl claims that his non-white counterparts in Trinidad society, blames the white population for anything and tries to apply their ancestral inhumane behaviour, namely exploitation of slaves, to the recent incidents that accidentally happened. He indicates blaming whites for something their ancestors did is not reasonable, yet he shows understanding why the white population is picked on. Actually, Earl had a coconut plantation which he inherited from his father, and hired labourers living nearby. Of course, slavery was abolished officially in Trinidad in 1838; therefore, there is no way Earl had experienced owning any slaves. Nevertheless, the ancestors of those labourers who Earl hired as plantation workers may have been slaves who worked in the plantation owned by Earl's father or grandfather

Earl shared a memory from his young days that he used to play with a 'negro kid as a friend' when he was little, and he remembered that he felt 'a bit of shock' to know that 'the Negro man who used to fan' him for hours during the hot days was the negro kid's father. The other episode was when Earl started schooling in France at a young age, when he came back from France for vacation, he found out that the machinery incidents in his father's plantation caused the death of 'the negro friend' who already started working at the plantation. When Earl told these stories, he slowed down his talking pace, used a lot of pauses to look for the most suitable words to describe the situation. What impressed the researcher most, was that Earl avoided eye contact with the researcher when he started sharing his story of his 'negro friend'. After Earl told the researcher about the death of his 'negro friend', he became silent for a while and said '...he was a kid, too...'

Even though slavery was already abolished when Earl was a child (in the 1930s), it can be assumed from Earl's discourse, that the labour system, which was at

the core of the island plantation business, did not change much from the days of slavery. It is not without a doubt, that if you were born into plantation owning family, your identity as white French Creole of planter class would be constructed with some colonial notions of whiteness that are inherited from the colonial days.

In particular, there are some French Creoles who feel guilty for plantation slavery and the hardship their ancestors forced on labourers. Although claiming not to know what it means to be French Creole, Claire often sought refuge in this identity when the power of white Trinidadians was criticised or attacked. Current problems are understood to have their roots within the colonial past, though the younger generation tends to reject feeling of guilt.

... because of the background, I guess. I think all it traces back to the slavery days, plantation days ... I mean it is still obviously part of the history, you know. I wasn't even born then ... I don't grow up with the mind set or anything ...^[114]

Claire insisted many times that she knew nothing about French or French Creole. Yet, this discourse shows she clearly understands what her grandparents and great-grandparents did as plantation owners, namely slave owning. However, Claire did not seem to fully understand the social and economic inequality, which was caused by the social hierarchy that was constructed in the colonial era, and is still experienced today. For instance, she kindly listed the tourist sites that she thought the researcher should visit. What she put on the list were a little creek, a plantation mansion and cocoa plantation in somebody's plantation, and also a gorgeous house in one of the 'Down d (the) Islands' in Western Trinidad, where only whites had an access to, until the 1970s. Most of the places Claire wished the researcher to visit are privately owned by the descendants of former plantation owner families, meaning she herself enjoys privileges of having an access to those places, because she is also a part of the plantocracy community. It was very kind of her to try to show her native land to the foreign researcher, but at the same time, the researcher was struck by the innocence

that this young French Creole woman in her 20s had.

Although she does not know much of French Creole history, she recognises the historical fact that her family had slaves. According to her discourse, she does not feel comfortable to be blamed for what her family did in colonial days. Unlike Earl, Claire attended schools in Trinidad all her life. Unlike Marie who is in her 70s, Claire's schoolmates are mostly black. Claire's discomfort towards the accusation for the connection to slave owning must be developed out of her interaction at the schools she attended. In this discourse, she also tries to distance herself from the inhumane behaviour, saying she does not grow up with the mind set of justifying the inhumane behaviour of exploiting labourers by owning them as slaves for their business to flourish. Although this is her view, the rest of the society does not seem to look at the white in the way Claire may want them to.

This sort of criticism of the French Creoles by non-whites is, I suppose, not only for what their forefathers had done to 'others' and to Trinidad, but for the social inequities that persist in contemporary Trinidad. There is still much non-whites' criticism of white privilege and power, and a sense that non-whites still remain locked out from access to social power, even after fifty years of independence. What is interesting is that, while Earl and Claire complain of being blamed for the sins of their forefathers in relation to the past, it appears that few non-whites articulate resentment against French Creoles for their ancestors' involvement in slavery. Yet, many feel a strong sense that they are being blamed though they have not actually experienced any direct verbal accusations from non-whites. It is clear that a sense of guilt over the colonial past remains.

6.3. Identity: 'The real thing'

To examine how French Creoles position their sense of belonging in Trinidad, I asked two questions: if they consider themselves Trinidadian, rather than as French; and what makes a person a Trinidadian. There are considerable differences in self-identifications amongst French Creole interviewees, depending on each individual's gender, age, and educational background.

Earl, the oldest male respondent, who was

educated for twelve years in France, says:

...In Trinidad, I consider myself a Trinidadian. In France I consider myself French. Trini French or French Trini... To me, French Creoles are just white Trinidadians of French background, even mixed with English or whatever... It depends on how much percentage...how far back you go...^[115]

Earl has a dual self-identification: French and Trinidadian. He was educated in France, and spends half of the year in France. In addition, his brothers, sisters and children are living in France, where his deceased parents are also buried. It was his father's intention, much against Earl's will, that he should inherit the family coconut estate in Trinidad after schooling in France.

Earl's forced return to Trinidad, while the rest of his family remained in France, encouraged the development of a stronger sense of belonging to France. Although he claims he is a French Creole, he does not look like a Creole person, who would share the Creole culture which is the result of integration of all the inhabitants in Trinidad, and show a considerable attachment to Trinidad instead of ancestral homeland. He states:

...I don't feel uneasy at talking to the natives. Every one of us has superiority complex, and we feel as the best. What is wrong with that? I feel better than anybody else...^[116]

Since the native Amerindians died out in colonial days, the real 'native' does not exist in Trinidad. The 'native', in his narrative, refers to non-whites and his terminology harks back to the colonial days. In particular, Earl believes 'we' French Creoles are superior to the non-white native 'them', Africans and East Indians. It is interesting to hear Earl's account that he does not consider himself a native of Trinidad, especially because Bridget Brereton lists 'genuine native aristocracy'^[117] as French Creole identity. Therefore, he might be less Creolised than those French

Creoles whom Bridget Brereton discussed or I interviewed. In this way, Earl considers himself a member of French Creole society, since he was born in Trinidad, but his sense of belonging to Trinidad is much weaker than any other French Creoles I interviewed.

The oldest female respondent Marie, educated in Trinidad, states:

...I suppose that the fact I was born here, got educated here, my parents were also born here, and live here all my life ... I'm nothing but Trinidadian...^[118]

Marie has visited France and other European countries. Unlike Earl, since she was educated in Trinidad and spent all her life in Trinidad, her sense of belonging to Trinidad is strong. Her children were all educated abroad, but they all returned to Trinidad, and her parents and one of her sons were buried in Trinidad. Consequently, she identifies herself as 'nothing but Trinidadian'.

The liberal and young Claire claims:

...I don't call myself French Creole...because I am a Trinidadian. I do consider myself a Trini. I don't know my French ancestry. ... To me, once you were born and raised here, you're more Trinidadian than anything. Generations. My grandparents were born here, great grandparents were born here, my parents were born here, I was born here. I, honestly, only know Trinidadian culture. I don't know nothing about French. ... What I consider Trinidadian is everything around you ...^[119]

Unlike Earl and Marie, who went to school where the majority of the students were white, Claire attended a predominantly black school, and was one of a few white students in the school. Treated as special by teachers and called by classmates 'Barbie doll', she remembers that she did not feel that she belonged, and that she experienced great difficulty adjusting to an environment in which she knew no-one.

As an adult, Claire's circle of friends is small and is usually known to her family. Her parents, as do many older French Creoles, have a profound knowledge of the family backgrounds of all French Creoles. Consequently, as a young girl, the family backgrounds of Claire's friends were well-known to her, a fact that enabled her to develop a sense of security. In school however, Claire's position as one of a minority of whites forced her to adapt to her new environment. She tried not to emphasise her whiteness, and she concealed her French Creole background in order to mingle with black classmates.

Marc observes French Creoleness and its whiteness subjectively and objectively, since he has moved in and out of the French Creole society, because of his octoroon background. According to his observation:

...French Creoles see themselves as Trinidadians, but French Creoles see themselves as special Trinidadians. The real thing. ... because they came first ... we made this place. We made the first economy. We made the first culture...^[120]

Earl adds, using the third person,

...They [French Creoles] developed economy, culture, carnival, built a university, dams, legal system everything. Oil sector, agriculture, since they landed here They came here to make a living ... they are all educated here, and so and so...^[121]

These claims are exactly what Bridget Brereton introduces as French Creole features. They take pride in the fact that they opened up Trinidad from the 18th century, and built Trinidad's economic and social foundation^[122].

6.4. Identity: 'changing'

Claire realises the difference of the younger generation's sense of perceptions of French Creole identity from her parents' generation:

...My generation are the ones with most changes, because I think we're open ... the whole society and the whole community and the whole world is changing ... from a very kind of small island life to something ... you can't expect thing not to change when the world is changing ... It will never completely fade away, but French Creoleness will never stay as strong as up here [in present-day], because perception and people changing...^[123]

As Claire states, before the remarkable progress of information and aviation technology, French Creoles were able to maintain tighter boundaries around their small community. However, information technology, such as the internet and the ability to travel abroad, has exposed many Trinidadians of all ethnic groups to the wider world, and this has inevitably had the effect of forcing many Trinidadians to confront the inequities in their country. Younger French Creoles appear more critical of and question the racialised superiority and privileges of whiteness, though their sense of whiteness seems to be still core to their identity, and they are still embraced with those privileges despite their criticism.

6.5. Conclusion

French Creole individuals appear to have different ideas about what it means to be French Creole. For some individuals, their identity as French Creoles serves to distinguish them from the inferior 'other' Trinidadians. Some utilise their French Creoleness to claim for themselves an identity as the 'real' Trinidadians. Younger generations, however, appear to place less stress on their identities as French Creoles as they accept the need to become more closely integrated into Trinidadian society. They have come to realise the inequalities in Trinidad, which originate from the social hierarchy system developed in colonial days from which the French Creoles benefited. They are less likely to adhere to colonial-bound notions of white superiority and black inferiority, and see the abandonment of such ideas as the means to progress. It is rather sad that they have to disregard their ethnic identity in order to assimilate as 'Trinidadians' into Trinidad society. As Daniel Crowley argued in 1957, before Trinidad's independence from Britain, there should be a way for

the French Creoles to integrate into 'Trinidadians' while maintaining an appreciation of their own ethnic identity^[124].

7. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to analyse how French Creole identity is constructed and reproduced historically, and what this identity means in modern Trinidad. Although lack of generalisation is a shortcoming of an exploratory study, this research has produced valuable findings to enrich our knowledge of the realities of French Creoles in contemporary Trinidad.

In-depth face-to-face oral history interviews were conducted with twenty-four respondents in the methodological framework of symbolic interactionism, which enabled the researcher to examine how individuals interact, focusing on the creation of personal identity through interaction with others. The narratives, which were collected by the interviews, became the source for the discourse analysis and oral history, which enables marginalised French Creoles to be heard.

The research findings suggest that ethnic identity as French Creoles in Trinidad means different things to individual French Creoles. The older generations see French Creole identity as representative of a superior form of racial identity, and hence, retain a strong sense of pride. For younger generations, French Creoleness sometimes signifies their negative historical roles as the oppressors and beneficiaries of the labour of enslaved Africans and later, indentured Indians. Therefore, they respond by denying their French Creoleness in order to distance themselves from their plantocratic past as they attempt to forge closer relationships with Trinidad's 'others'.

It is interesting to see their double-layered French Creole consciousness: how the sense of colonial superior whiteness is deeply rooted in the minds of the young French Creoles, who have not experienced colonial days, and how the younger generation try to downplay their sense of white superiority in order to assimilate into non-white Trinidadians. Indeed, they strive to acknowledge the racism of their society and how they have benefited from white privilege, though retaining a strong sense of their own whiteness – this is the standpoint from which they see 'others'. Yet,

simultaneously, many expressed racism and a rejection of 'others'. Most strongly disapproved of mixed marriages, which enable 'others' to marry into 'us' and thus potentially disrupt the perceived racial purity of French Creoles. Hence, while claiming to be more critical of older notions of white racial superiority, they nevertheless remain ambivalent about allowing non-white 'others' into their society.

Through the interviews, a great deal of valuable, previously unheard history of French Creoles and Trinidad emerged. This history is beyond the scope of this study; nevertheless, it is worthwhile to collect as much French Creole history as possible, especially from the elder French Creoles who lived through the colonial period in Trinidad. From those oral histories, the lives of French Creoles in the colonial era will be captured. At the same time, seen through their lives, new aspects of Trinidad history will be revealed. Moreover, comparative study of French Creole creolisation in other Caribbean islands will enrich our understanding of whiteness in the Caribbean.

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Abstract (Japanese)

本稿は、植民地時代より圧倒的な経済的且つ文化的な影響力を持ちながらも、長らく研究の対象とされてこなかったトリニダードのフレンチ・クレオールと呼ばれる人々の白人性について探求した。白人性は非普遍的で時と場所により異なる概念を持つが、植民地時代から現代のトリニダード社会において、貴族性や徹底的な白人純血性を誇るフレンチ・クレオールが、非白人に対する根拠のない差異と優越性を信仰し社会経済的特権を享受する「白人性」をどのように構築、継続、再構築してきたのかを探った。

トリニダードにおいて、フレンチ・クレオールの白人性構築過程に関連する一次資料の収集を行った。雪達磨式標本抽出法により集めた 24 名のフレンチ・クレオールに対し、オーラル・ヒストリー法を用い対面聞き取り調査を行い、談話分析を通して体験談の分析を行った。調査結果によると、トリニダードのフレンチ・クレオールは、世代に関わらず、強い白人優越性を持つことが明らかになった。一方で、植民地時代を経験した世代とは異なり、若年層はマイノリティとして、アフリカ系・インド系がマジョリティのトリニダード社会への同化を試みるため、フレンチ・クレオールとしてのアイデンティティを軽視すると発言する。しかしフレンチ・クレオールとしての主観的、また総人口の 8 割を占めるアフリカ系・インド系などの他社会構成員による客観的な白人性が原因となり、フレンチ・クレオールは現代トリニダード社会へ完全には同化していない。

キーワード：白人性，トリニダード，フレンチ・クレオール，クレオール化，オーラル・ヒストリー



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Areas of interest include socioeconomic development and social issues relating to race and ethnic relations, gender, identity, whiteness and sexuality in postcolonial societies in the Anglophone Caribbean. Those interests derive from the experiences gained while working in Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and Barbados for ten years in the field of socioeconomic development with the United Nations, the Government of Japan and various NGOs.

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専門は旧英領カリブ海地域におけるポストコロニアル社会の政治・経済，社会経済開発，社会問題。在トリニダード・トバゴ日本国大使館専門調査員や駐ガイアナ国連機関プログラム・オフィサー等として，ジャマイカ，トリニダード・トバゴ，ガイアナ，バルバドス等，カリブ海地域での延べ 10 年間に亘る駐在中に見聞した問題を中心に研究している。