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Student name: Arielle Ramkissoon
Student ID no.: 812002032
Degree Program: BA French
Supervisor: Dr. Raymond Weekes

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ABSTRACT

The work of 'Eloge de la Creolité' by Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphael Confiant and Jean Bernabé delves into the complexities of creolization, particularly within the Caribbean context. Other scholars delineate the process of creolization essentially as the imposition of one culture onto another, resulting in a state of constant adaptation and transformation, that is, a third space of cultural hybridity. Creolization in plantation societies manifests in various facets of culture such as language, religion and music to name a few. Despite challenges, including redefining identity and the sentiment of impermanence and displacement, creolization represents a dynamic exchange fostering cultural pluralism and adaptability. Drawing from Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival tradition, particularly the Dame Lorraine masquerade, this study explores creolization's manifestation within the framework of traditional masquerade. Rooted in historical context of French colonization and enslaved resistance, the Dame Lorraine mas emerged as a subversive theatrical performance mocking the elite's decadence and hypocrisy. Leveraging insights from the book 'Eloge de la Creolité', this thesis argues that the Dame Lorraine mas epitomizes creolization's creative expression with Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival, embodying resistance, cultural hybridity, and the resilience of a creole identity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	1
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	2
LIST OF FIGURES.....	3
INTRODUCTION.....	4
PARAMETERS	7
OBJECTIVES	9
METHODOLOGY	10
CHAPTER OUTLINE	11
CHAPTER ONE	12
CHAPTER TWO	17
CHAPTER THREE	24
CONCLUSION.....	34
BIBLIOGRAPHY	36

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Coloured Photograph of a Dame Lorraine in a yellow costume	20
Figure 2. Picture of table showing the population of Trinidad in 1803	25
Figure 3. Coloured photograph of a Dame Lorraine wearing a white mask	27

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally associated with the New World cultures of Caribbean and Latin American creole societies, creolization is now increasingly viewed as a universal process that could occur anywhere cultures encounter one another. (Baron and Cara 2003) An ethnically dominant group imposes one system on another group which is then forced into a state of constant shifting and diverting from their original nature into a new one (a third space), in order to survive and cope with the trauma. Baron and Cara found that the concept of creolization can be applied beyond plantation societies therefore resonating where any displaced people had the need to rise above oppression thrust upon them. They drew from the example of languages. The association of a particular spoken dialect with a certain level of social hierarchy is a timeless manifestation of their theory. Operating from an ambiguous space where one cannot pinpoint the origin of the countless pumpkin vines created, creolization applies to language, religion, dance, music, food, hairstyles, sports, and more. It is therefore understood why Baron and Cara stated that Creolization is cultural creativity in process as it involves a constant exchange of culture resulting in a hybrid creation. While hybridity is often associated with negative connotations, views of what is pure or impure must be discarded and replaced with an acceptance of pluralism, adaptability, and re-representation, to fully appreciate the beauty of Creolization. ‘Whether or not we can universalize the concept of creolization to apply to all cultures that meet in expressive interaction, creolity and the creolization process will always have its deepest and most resonant meanings for the peoples who forged new cultures in the emergent creole worlds of the Americas and in the islands of the Indian Ocean.’ (Baron and Cara 2003). Drawing from this, Creolization does not come without its challenges. The notion of impermanence, a need to re-define identities and establish a genesis story becomes more complex and creates a crisis with each generation.

Descendants are no longer connected to a single line of ancestry. Roger D. Abrahams therefore argues that Creolization is best understood through festivals in the creole world.

Trinidad and Tobago's traditional mas¹ is linked to a season of masquerade balls and plays that began during Christmas leading up to Ash Wednesday of the following year. This was during the late eighteenth century when French planters, slaves, and freed people of colour from neighbouring islands immigrated to Trinidad following the Spanish Cedula of Population Edict of 1783, proclaimed by the King Carlos of Spain. The French White settlers held annual masquerade balls. This was their Pre-Lenten season celebration of the Roman Catholic feast of Carnival which literally meant 'farewell to the flesh', where all inhibitions were thrown off before the season of fasting. The enslaved, whose morsel of freedom was limited to their private yards, held great fascination as well as contempt for the occasions. They mocked and mimicked their observations of the French elite's participation in these festivities with their gluttonous gouging of meals rendering them physically grotesque and inept. This indiscipline and lack of decorum were presented in parody by the enslaved, highlighting the hypocrisy of the elite and exaggerating their physical deformities. The mockery held an important meaning to the enslaved. It was an act of defiance against the pretentious, self-righteous, and allegedly respectable men and women in society. This theatrical performance is what we know today as the Dame Lorraine mas. It is part of Trinidad and Tobago's 'traditional mas' and more broadly, part of its Carnival.

Naturally, theatre has been used as a form of activism, resistance, a tool for social change, a bridge of reconciliation or simply a means of expressing protest for injustice. The creative

¹ Mas' is the short form of the word 'masquerade' and is a commonly used term in Trinidad and Tobago Carnival festivities.

'Masking is the presence of one or more masked characters while masquerades are important events involving masked dancers, musicians, attendants and audiences. Masks and masking precede the age of written history in Africa.' (Liverpool 2001, 57)

expression of the enslaved in the face of oppression and injustice at the hands of a more powerful group inspired the desire to explore the aspects of creolization involved in this theatrical performance. With primary assistance from ‘Eloge de la Créolité’, a study of ‘le mouvement Créolité’², published by three Martinican writers, this thesis therefore contends that the Dame Lorraine Mas is a manifestation of Creolization within traditional mas in Trinidad and Tobago Carnival.

² ‘Eloge de la Créolité’ translates to ‘In Praise of Creoleness’. This publication is considered ‘a hymn to the Creole identity’.

PARAMETERS

The delineation of Creolization depends on geographical, temporal, and sociocultural contexts, reflecting varying interpretations and perspectives. It is a term that involves language, food, race, ethnicity, music, festivals and more, and is not limited to one country or region. For example, prior to the Civil War, in Louisiana and New Orleans, mixed persons of African and French/Spanish European descent were referred to as Creole. African and European influences gave birth to jazz, as former slaves merged the Caribbean rhythms and street performance with American blues and European instrumental traditions of the cotillion, the parlour, and the military parade. Trinidad and Tobago's experience with Creolization resulted in other manifestations, therefore it is acknowledged that some elements of each region's Creoleness overlap while some differences exist. This proved to be a challenge when applying the concept to the Dame Lorraine mas as one would need to understand Creoleness in its entirety to accomplish the objective of this thesis. Subsequently, it proved inevitable to answer questions on whether or not something is Creole without beginning the answer with the words, 'It depends'. As difficulty was encountered in keeping this writing concise, in light of this, naturally, another parameter encountered would be the word limit of this project.

While it is not the primary focus of this thesis, with theories declaring that Creolization is a universal phenomenon that is not limited to regions with a colonial history, a challenge was presented to determine whether this thesis is for or against that idea. If the universal theory is true, it renders the idea of Creoleness mundane and would beg the question of whether Creoleness should just simply be called globalization or acculturation, furthermore, rendering the concept of Creoleness pointless. This thesis concludes that the existence of a former plantation society, or at least the existence of oppression by a dominant group over another, plays an

essential role in distinguishing Creoleness as its own phenomena separate from globalization and acculturation.

OBJECTIVES

This thesis aims to examine the historical evolution of the Dame Lorraine Mas, exploring instances of change and adaptation in its portrayal, in order to consider how ‘the mas’ responds to societal shifts and cultural dynamics. The diverse cultural elements, including music, dance, costumes and rituals presented in the Dame Lorraine performances will be analysed as it pertains to Creolization. The contribution of the Dame Lorraine mas to the process of creolization in Trinidad and Tobago will be examined to determine its role in the shaping of and the expression of cultural identity. This ultimately will lead to the assessment of the cultural significance of the Dame Lorraine within the context of modern Trinidad and Tobago. Based on these findings, this thesis hopes to offer at least one practical recommendation for the preservation, promotion and sustainable continuation of the Dame Lorraine tradition, considering its cultural importance.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the dynamics of creolization within the performance of the Dame Lorraine mas of Trinidad and Tobago. This method is deemed more suitable for capturing the depth of cultural phenomena to allow a thorough understanding of the subject.

Participant Observation: Engaging in participant observation during Dame Lorraine performances and related cultural events will offer first hand insights into the rituals and expressions of creolization within the masquerade tradition. This method allows for close observation of interactions, costumes, music, audience engagement, etc.

Limitations: It is acknowledged that this research is limited to a specific cultural context (Trinidad and Tobago) and a particular carnival tradition (The Dame Lorraine mas). References to other cultural contexts and traditions may only be briefly mentioned.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The first chapter explains where the term Creolization came from and its evolution as the notion permeated other regions and cultures. A timeline of movements exists that leads up to the notion of 'La Créolité'. This chapter narrows in on La Négritude, L'Antillanité and their influences on the eventual Créolité movement. These three movements all grapple with self-definition as a people in the New World era, post-slavery. This chapter's aim to gain insight into how an aesthetic approach helps a people re-construct an identity that was deformed by slavery and colonization, will set the stage for further exploration of the manifestations of creolization in, and the importance of, the Dame Lorraine mas.

The second chapter delves into the evolution of the Dame Lorraine Mas, namely answering why (reason for its creation), what (elements of the mas including its evolution over time), where and when (providing spatial-temporal context) and who (the participants or masquerades involved). This chapter is a journey from its inception to its present-day performance.

Chapter three deconstructs the constituent components of the Dame Lorraine mas, with each element subjected to scrutiny via-a-vis the overarching concept of creolization. The primary objective of this chapter is to elucidate the ways in which the Dame Lorraine mas embodies the characteristics of a creole tradition. This chapter also includes an analysis of the significance the Dame Lorraine mas holds in present-day Trinidad and Tobago society.

CHAPTER ONE

Creolization: Definition and History

La Créolité c'est 'le monde diffracté mais recomposé'³ (Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant 1993, 27)

Possibilities exist where the word Creole is derived from the Portuguese, 'crioulo', meaning infant, nursing, or sapling. The Spanish word, 'criollo', which is derived from the Latin verb 'criare', which means to 'raise' or 'to educate' or 'to create'. 'A creole is therefore someone born and raised in the Americas but not native to that region like the 'Indian' or 'Amerindian'.'

(Williams 1984) However, people alone cannot only be referred to as Creole as we'd be excluding plants, animals, music, food and more. The origin and history of creolization reveal a fascinating narrative of cultural blending, adaptation, resilience, and protest. Understanding its historical roots provide essential insights into the complexities of identity, language, and cultural expression. To trace the origin and historical development of creolization, we must briefly shed light on the intellectual and cultural forces that gave rise to this notion.

The Négritude movement, led by Martinican poet Aimé Césaire, French Guianese poet Léon Damas and poet and former Senegalese President, Léopold Sédar Senghor, is presented in Césaire's 'Cahier d'un retour au pays natal' as synonymous with revolt, a liberation of black people and a quest for an identity. Born in the 1930s until the years following the Second World War, La Négritude negated and rejected established norms or accepted truths about the former enslaved, acting as a direct response to the cultural oppression of the French colonizer towards the colonized. Césaire's 'Cahier d'un retour au pays natal' sought to use the European French

³ English Translation: Créolité is the world diffracted but recomposed.

language against the colonizers who intended to use the very same to destroy the colonized. Known for his polemic discourse, he appropriated the words such as 'nègre' that were used to enslave and belittle, and then transformed them into a language of freedom and vehicles of positive representation for Africans. The movement, affiliated with an awakening to black consciousness and black solidarity, pushed the idea of 'a return' to African roots. The poets created a discourse disassociating black people from all Victorian or European systems. 'Damas, Césaire, and Senghor defended native African culture as rich, pure, authentic, and equal to European culture.' (Lewis 2006, 30) This Afro-centric movement rejected their geographical reality and gave the impression that the founders wore blinders to anything that was not African. Césaire heavily criticized Europe as being indefensible considering their hypocrisies. 'A civilization that uses its principles for trickery and deceit is a dying civilization.' (Williams 1993, 172) '...no one colonizes innocently, that no one colonizes with impunity either; that a nation which colonizes, that a civilization, which justifies colonization - and therefore force - is already a sick civilization, a civilization that is morally diseased...' (Williams 1993, 176)

Next, Edouard Glissant's theory of 'L Antillanité' or Caribbeanness, emerged in the 1960s, affirming that the Caribbean is 'notre lieu' or 'our native land', and acknowledging that African cultural elements of the heritage of the former enslaved have undergone an involuntary transformation in this new diasporic space (the Caribbean and by extension the Americas) but is nevertheless now part of their identity. He presented his idea of the potential for a wider community, the importance of collective memory, and the notion of reversion and diversion in the collection of essays, 'Caribbean Discourse'. 'The Caribbean in general suffers from the phenomenon of a non-history. No collective memory, no sense of chronology.' (Édouard Glissant and J Michael Dash 1999) Glissant goes on to explain how the concept of reversion are

for those obsessed with permanence and a single origin. ‘Slave trade population were not capable of maintaining the impulse to revert. This impulse will decline as memory of the ancestral country fades. The impulse to revert will recede little by little with the need to come to terms with the new land.’ (Germain 2016) Glissant’s theory essentially breaks down the different phases that forcibly displaced Caribbean people experienced in an attempt to cope with their trauma. Naturally, there’d be that longing desire to hold on to what was, only to have to redirect and modify due to oppression to survive. Particularly, the notion of diversion leans closer toward the Créolité movement as Glissant draws examples of diversion from Creole language and religious syncretism where a blend of what was with what is presently, come together to form something hybrid.

The Créolité movement of the 1980s, led by Patrick Chamoiseau, Jean Bernabé and Raphael Confiant, heavily critiques the Négritude movement and arguably takes Antillanité a step further. Whereas Antillanité calls the Caribbean our native land, Créolité challenges the definition of a native land altogether affirming that our complex roots do not lead to one distinct origin. Creolists disrupt the binary black/white label and function from a third space or a perspective of being ‘in-between’ or ‘hybrid’. In ‘Eloge de la Créolité’, Chamoiseau, Bernabé and Confiant encourage readers to re-read Césaire’s works without the lens of his polemic style of writing. La Créolité settles within the category of heterogeneity, plurality and open-endedness as opposed to the homogeneity of La Négritude. In his work, ‘Texaco’, Chamoiseau describes a genealogy of Caribbean people that begins with enslaved ancestors in the Caribbean as opposed to precolonial Africa. While the notion of ‘retour’ or ‘return’ is not of any importance, the reinvention of self is. As generations go by, this proves to be an action without end, without absolute resolution, ever changing and evolving.

As a brief but essential note, some tension has been observed between Césaire and Creolists regarding their critiques of each other's works, with others publishing their own perspectives on la Nègritude versus la Créolité. Some of these publications declare them to be more similar than different, arguing that they both reject notions of racial inferiority perpetuated by colonial ideologies and instead affirm the beauty, resilience, and cultural contributions of Caribbean people. Furthermore, both movements represent forms of resistance to colonial oppression, advocating for self-determination. Nevertheless, 'Eloge de la Créolité' acknowledges that the initial concept of la Nègritude has contributed to the journey which brought us to la Créolité. 'La Nègritude césairienne est un baptême, l'acte primal de notre dignité restituée. Nous sommes a jamais fils d'Aime Césaire.'⁴ All the same, the notion of return is seen as a means of support in our reflection of what used to be. It is important to commit ourselves to understanding the past as it is part of our timelines, and therefore contributes to the shaping of our future. 'L'Antillanité ne nous est pas accessible sans vision intérieure.'⁵

All things considered, defining the term 'creole' poses challenges due to its multifaceted usage and subjective interpretations, wherein its significance varies according to individual perspectives and contextual nuances.⁶ The term 'Creole' is commonly employed to encompass the identity and cultural milieu of Caribbean populations. Drawing upon extensive scholarly sources, this thesis endeavours to contextualize creolization within the broader framework of

⁴ English Translation: Césairian negritude is a baptism, the primal act of our restored dignity. We are forever Césaire's sons. (Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant 1993, 18)

⁵ English Translation: 'We cannot reach Caribbeanness without interior vision.' (Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant 1993, 26)

⁶ 'There [Trinidad and Guyana], it signals the difference between those of "Indian" and "African" descent. Guyanese talk about "Indians or Creoles," and by Creoles they mean "blacks" (whatever their actual skin color), descendants of Africans born in Guyana, whereas "Indians" refers to the indentured population from Asia. These examples suggest that "Creole" remains a powerfully charged but also an exceedingly slippery signifier. It seems impossible to freeze this term in its meaning, or to give it any kind of fixed or precise racial referent. (Ibid.: 14)' (Rouet 2019, 134)

resistance, rebellion, coerced labour, and other facets of colonialism, elucidating the socio-cultural ramifications that therefore ensued. Thus, the central inquiry guiding this thesis is: In what way(s) does the Dame Lorraine mas exemplify creolization?

CHAPTER TWO

The History and Evolution of the Dame Lorraine mas.

‘A carnival figure of a man dressed as a woman with exaggerated buttocks and oversized breasts...the buttocks sway in a comical fashion when the masquerader walks.’ (Green 2007)

An initial step in delving into the historical background of the Dame Lorraine mas entails an examination of the origins and evolution of Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago itself, providing essential context for understanding the development and significance of the mas.

Due to a petition of Phillippe-Rose Roume de Saint Laurent in 1783 to the king of Spain, a new royal cedula on population offered handsome and free land grants to all new settlers in Trinidad, both white and free coloured. He was impressed by Trinidad’s agricultural potential after the 1776 population edict and had convinced some French planters of other islands to consider moving there upon given the opportunity. The conditions of the new 1783 cedula mandated that new settlers be of Roman Catholic faith only and must take an oath of allegiance to the king.

The emigration of French speaking settlers and their slaves gave way to their Catholic tradition of masked balls which were held in their great houses and ran through the Pre-Lenten season from Christmas time to Ash Wednesday of the next year. The word ‘Carnival’ comes from the phrase ‘carne vale’ which means ‘farewell to flesh/meat’ and is a season where the French elite would gorge on extravagant meals and avoid physical labour before embarking on a period of fasting. The sloth and gluttony would result in physical maladies and deformities that most likely went untreated due to lack of medical equipment and qualified personnel on the islands. The enslaved would secretly observe and scrutinize their masters in their hypocrisy as the behaviour of the latter reflected the very uncivilized demeanour that the enslaved were accused of innately

possessing. It is not hard to believe that the enslaved would be privy to the hidden misdemeanours and ailments of their masters including adulterous activities and sexually transmitted diseases. Their mocking of this hypocrisy in an early form of street theatre brought about the specific character we know today as the Dame Lorraine as well as the characters that are a part of the Dame Lorraine family.⁷

Hollis ‘Chalkdust’ Liverpool aptly describes what the early masquerade looked like at that time. ‘It was a complex performance involving several dances, starting with a ‘haughty’ butler announcing the names of the couples who entered the stage dancing. The butler was followed by a ‘schoolmaster’ in a frock coat and a long whip in his hand, who, in parody, turned the stage into a classroom with the pupils mocking the mannerisms and pretensions of the phony upper-class people. In the parody, the physical features [...] were exaggerated to show bulging buttocks, oversized female breasts, penises, hernias and hanging scrotums: coconuts, pads, stuffed pillows and bags were used to portray these characteristics. [...] the Dame Lorraine players ridiculed them in dance by attempting to either walk, strut, gyrate, wiggle, sing or talk like them [...] Meanwhile, the ‘schoolmaster’ pretended not to understand or see any vulgarity in the dance performances, and this made the audience laugh even more.’ (Liverpool 2001, 264-265)

It would be erroneous to assert that the Dame Lorraine mas, and by extension, Carnival, was solely created or inspired by French Europeans. Elements of the French elite’s festivities likely resonated with African slaves due to familiar aspects observed in the masked balls organized by French masters. This recognition underscores the complex interplay of cultural influences and

⁷ ‘These included Misie Gwo Toti or Gwo (Mr. Big Penis), Misi Gwo Koko (Mr. Big Balls), Ma Gros Tete (Madame Big Breast), Ma Gwo Bunda (Madame Big Botom), and Ma Chen Mun (Miss Frigid).’ (Henry and Plaza 2019)

traditions that contributed to the development of Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago, and of course, the Dame Lorraine mas. 'Masking, rooted in the Catholic festival of Carnival as a symbol of deception, no doubt because of Judas Iscariot's deception of Christ, had special meaning for the slaves because masking was also a big part of the culture of many African peoples, especially in their rituals for the dead.' (Anthony 2011, 3) Hollis 'Chalkdust' Liverpool dedicated himself to educating individuals about the historical inaccuracies surrounding the association of Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago solely with France. He sought to raise awareness regarding the significant contributions of African communities to the development and evolution of Carnival traditions, which remain underappreciated and overlooked by many. The enslaved would have had to re-adapt a variety of their traditions and practices that were linked to their beliefs or religion to create their own space.

Late eighteenth-century French slave owners noticed the correlation between religion and rebellion amongst the enslaved Africans. All things African were outlawed, such as drums, an important instrument for the enslaved serving as their chief amusement and a connection to former traditions. The drums were thought to be used to send coded messages across distant plantations and fuelled their passion to revolt. The agenda to replace African culture with more Eurocentric values and traditions sought to concretize the perception that African cultural and social traditions are inferior, hedonistic, backward, and evil. Consequently, African slaves, in their forced displacement at the time, had to accommodate changes to their daily lives, learning new languages and a new religion all for the sake of becoming more 'civilized'. Oppressed and condemned, the enslaved had little means if any at all, of leisure and self-expression. Finding a

way to not only enjoy themselves but also to mainly criticize their oppressors, the mockery was held in the domain of the privacy of their yards.⁸



Figure 1. Carnival Institute of Trinidad and Tobago (CITT). *Dame Lorraine*. 2020. Coloured photograph. *National Carnival Commission of Trinidad and Tobago*. Accessed March 23, 2024, [Traditional Mas Characters - Dame Lorraine \(ncctt.org\)](https://www.ncctt.org/Traditional-Mas-Characters-Dame-Lorraine)

Dame Lorraine is said to mean ‘fashionable lady’ (Hill 1997, 40) and enabled the enslaved to adopt fictitious roles and encroach social boundaries that would otherwise restrict them. The

⁸ This was a common living space of the enslaved. ‘In short, before Carnival, the unsanitary barrack yard became the Carnival tent in which bands of masqueraders planned, sewed and tried on their costumes [...] The yard was therefore the theatre of the African population.’ (Liverpool 2001, 260)

two-act performance took place at midnight on Dimanche Gras into Carnival Monday, and a 'family' was created as each Dame Lorraine character held specific intentions in their portrayals. While this character was initially performed by men, as time went along, the Dame Lorraine mas has given different groups (women eventually joined the men in the portrayal of the Dame Lorraine family and is predominantly played by women today) the chance to portray pride in their own values as well as ridicule the phony upper class. Even white male, French masters engaged in transvestism adorning themselves in the clothing and accessories of French elite women to also mock and make fun. In the course of time the act entered public theatre for a paying audience until the beginning of the Second World War. Exaggeration was key to create that comedic element to the mockery. After all, while the performance was a form of revolt, it was also meant to be laughed at. Each performer's entrance would be announced with lengthy, pompous, pseudo-impressive sounding names. The shows would be staged in a rustic barn-like environment to represent where the enslaved perceived the elite to belong.

Post-emancipation, Dimanche Gras replaced the last night of the calypso tent, and the Dame Lorraine Mas was replaced by public and private dances all over the town. The French elite's bigotry is exposed in this powerful mas by the seemingly powerless enslaved, who found power and their voice in this creative act of rebellion.

The researcher considered why the name 'Dame Lorraine' was chosen for this dramatic performance. While Errol Hill mentions the name to mean 'fashionable lady', no further commentary exists on where this was established or who established it. Perhaps the reason has never been recorded because there is nothing much to record. The researcher endeavoured to undertake their own subjective interpretation given the lack of documentation behind the name. The term 'Dame', connoting a woman of esteemed social status, juxtaposed against the

exaggerated physical attributes of the character, may serve as a source of irony contributing to the comedic and satirical elements of the portrayal. Additionally, the name ‘Dame’ would be suitable considering the character served as commentary on the French elite. To further contribute to the comedy and satire, it is plausible that the designation of the word ‘Lorraine’ may have originated from the difficulty the enslaved faced in articulating the European French word, ‘la reine’ meaning ‘queen’, exposing the ostentation and hypocrisy of their masters.

A distinct melody accompanies the performance of the Dame Lorraine mas today, yet its origins explaining where it came from and when it started, proved difficult to find. Audio of this specific melody can be found on YouTube as part of the album ‘Kaiso’, recorded in 1973.⁹ Whether or not it is an original composition of John ‘Buddy’ Williams, is not confirmed.

Today, the Dame Lorraine mas is performed by both men and women. The ‘Old Yard’¹⁰ is an annual event held by the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine UWI. The Department of Creative and Festival Arts (DCFA) plays a pivotal role in safeguarding, presenting, and passing on cultural traditions through events like this. Both students and regular practitioners of various masquerade characters participate in the ‘Old Yard’ for an audience of other students, foreigners, and locals. Firmly committed to highlighting the value of the arts within the university and its broader impact on the region, this event preserves Trinidad and Tobago’s cultural legacy.

In addition to the ‘Old Yard’ at U.W.I., the National Carnival Commission incorporated ‘Viey La Cou’ into its calendar of events during the Trinidad and Tobago Carnival season. First held in

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3416ivywM2A> – Video title: ‘John "Buddy" Williams Orch. – Jouvert’

¹⁰ Formerly called ‘Viey La Cou’, the Creole term for ‘Old Yard’.

1988 in collaboration with the Queen's Hall board at Queen's Hall in Port-of-Spain, participants compete for prizes within their respective categories.

In the contemporary Trinidad and Tobago Carnival of 2024, the Dame Lorraine masquerade, along with traditional masquerade practices in general, finds itself overshadowed by what is commonly referred to as 'pretty mas'. The predominant imagery projected to the global audience regarding Trinidad and Tobago Carnival revolves around elaborate costumes consisting of minimal attire such as panties, bras, shorts, beads, feathers, cloth, and the like. While societal transformation is an inevitable aspect of cultural evolution, it is imperative that we remain mindful not to overlook the timeline of our history. By maintaining an awareness and understanding of our cultural heritage and historical trajectory, we are better equipped to appreciate the origins of our cultural practices and the forces that have shaped our collective identity.

CHAPTER THREE

Creolization in the Dame Lorraine Mas

‘Neither Europeans, nor Africans, nor Asians, we proclaim ourselves Creoles. This will be for us an interior attitude – better, a vigilance, or even better, a sort of mental envelope in the middle of which our world will be built in full consciousness of the outer world... They proceed from a sterile experience which we have known before committing ourselves to reactivate our creative potential, and to set in motion the expression of what we are.’ (Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant 1993, 75)

Comprehending and articulating the concept of creolization presents some complexities and challenges. A pragmatic approach to assessing how the Dame Lorraine mas embodies creolization entails categorizing the masquerade into distinct thematic domains, including language and linguistic diversity, costume, and theatrical performance, which all unavoidably tie in with the notion of agency. This chapter also touches on a problem of disparity among Trinbagonians¹¹ that the researcher encountered with the concept of Creolization and the Dame Lorraine mas in the contemporary context of Trinidad and Tobago.

(i) Language and Linguistic Diversity:

‘As a linguistic and cultural process, change will occur wherever cultures meet in expressive interaction, but creolizing meetings occur in oppressive moments like the slave trade [...]’ (Baron and Cara 2011, 179) French Patois was the language employed to name the characters

¹¹ ‘Trinbagonians’ is a word commonly used as a shortened version of the term ‘Trinidadians and Tobagonians’.

depicted during the performance in the private yards of the enslaved: Misie Gwo Coco, Madame Gwo Patat, Misie Gwo Genou, etc. The utilization of Patois within the Trinidadian context serves as a tangible illustration of the linguistic pluralism that existed. French Patois was created out of necessity and functioned not only as a means of survival and forced adaptation but also as a form of resistance against hegemonic linguistic norms. ‘To speak...means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization.’ (Fanon 1952, xv) Language is a museum of cultural practices, beliefs, and traditions, and serves as a means of transmitting cultural knowledge from generation to generation otherwise historical narratives can be lost along with a sense of identity. The creation of the creole language of French Patois and its subsequent utilization in the Dame Lorraine mas became oral documentation of the linguistic diversity that prevailed, owing not only to the presence of Spanish and French colonizers on the island, but also to the diverse origins of Africans and their descendants of various tribal origins including Yoruba, Ibo, Congo, Mandingo, among others. See table below.

Rituals of Power and Rebellion

Table 1⁽¹⁶⁾
Population 1803

	Whites	Coloureds	Enslaved Africans	
English	663	599		
Spanish	605	1,751		
French	1,093	2,925	20,464	
Total	2,361	5,275	20,464	Total 28,100

Figure 2. This table was first taken from Hollis Liverpool’s ‘Rituals of power and rebellion: the Carnival tradition in Trinidad’. Liverpool cited the source of this table as follows: L.M. Fraser, *History of Trinidad*, Vol. 1, 149.

Concurrently, the French elite, lacking formal educational provisions (or lack of willingness to provide such) for the enslaved population, enforced a monolingual approach, compelling individuals to mimic French language patterns as a means of communication. Faced with the challenge of communication in a multi-lingual environment, the need to establish a language tailored for the specific purpose of inter-group communication was made necessary. The Creole language that emerged from this oppression reflect not only the cultural hybridity that resulted from colonialism and slavery, but also reflect the resistance and resilience of the enslaved.

Coming from cultures that placed great emphasis on oral traditions, the creation of the Creole language sabotaged the goal of banishing the native language that housed their heritage. The creolization of a language usually results in simplified grammar, phonology, and lexicon, drawing upon vocabulary and structures from the language of both the dominant European colonial power and the diverse African languages spoken by the enslaved population.

‘Languages in contact would tend not to borrow entire systems, but would borrow selectively.’
(Shepherd and Richards 2002, 253)

The adoption of grandiose, pretentious names of each character serves as poignant commentary on the French elite. Innovatively utilizing language as a tool of defiance is reflective of Césaire’s method of using the very language meant to oppress the enslaved, to instead critique the oppressors, thus shifting the power dynamic. These titles of ‘Monsieur’ and ‘Madame’ which evoke notions of nobility and refinement are deliberately bestowed on each Dame Lorraine character as a form of satire and subversion. The noble names are transformed to ‘Misie’s’ and ‘Dame’s’, and subsequently ‘Misie Gwo Lolo’s, Misie Gwo Coco’s, Madame Gwo Buden’s’ and so on. ‘We made the French language ours. We extended the meaning of some of its words, deviated others. And changed many. [...] In short, we inhabited it. It was alive in us. In it we

built our own language [...] viewed as a profanation of the idolized French language. Our literature must bear witness of this conquest.’ (Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant, 1993)

(ii) Costume:

As previously noted, the French do not hold sole responsibility for the genesis of Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival. The contributions of African traditions, including those integral to the Dame Lorraine mas, often remain marginalized. Yet another form of syncretism occurs in this creole mas through the costuming as complex and multiple processes become involved due to the contact of different cultures.



Figure 3. A masquerade as a Dame Lorraine wearing a mask. (Photographer Unknown. *Visual Culture: Ten Traditional Mas Characters You'll Find At Trinidad Carnival*. 2016. Photograph. *Largeup.Com*, February 8, 2016, [Visual Culture: Ten Traditional Mas Characters You'll Find At Trinidad Carnival - Page 8 of 11 - LargeUp](#))

Early evidence of masking practices in Africa can be traced back to rock paintings discovered in regions such as the Tassili-N-Ajjer and Hoggar, situated within the Sahara Desert. These depictions portray masked dancers and suggest a belief system wherein individuals could assume alternate human or spiritual identities using masks. For instance, the 'Ikechi' mask of the Igbo tribe, translating to 'God's Power,' served the purpose of facilitating successful crop production. Masks were crafted from various materials including wood, cloth, beads, fibre, and metal. While a purely aesthetic display of masks was not customary, a sacred procession of the masqueraders was conducted, underpinned by the belief that each mask harboured the presence of a spirit. Thus, for the respective practicing tribe, masks held a significant supernatural significance.¹²

The masked balls hosted by the French elite during the Pre-Lenten season would have evoked profound resonance among the enslaved African population. The emergence of the Dame Lorraine masquerade tradition was not arbitrary but rather drew from elements that were familiar to the enslaved. Presently, the Dame Lorraine mas remains characterized by a procession or presentation of distinct characters, each accompanied by unique dances or movements aimed at satirizing various afflictions experienced by the French elite.

In the context of the French influence, the use of elaborate masks and costumes were also reminiscent of French masquerade balls. Resorting to using whatever material accessible, through resourcefulness and ingenuity, the enslaved created makeshift petticoats, fans, headdresses, and other accoutrements of the French aristocratic society. While inspired by European aristocratic attire as well as the costuming of African traditions, the costumes of the

¹² 'Information on mask, masking and masquerades was gained from my visits to Senegal, Gambia, Nigeria, and Ghana, and from observing Carnivals in New Orleans, Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad, London, New York, Miami, Toronto, Montreal, Houston and Nigeria. The Seattle Art Museum in Washington also provided me with primary source materials.' (Liverpool 2001, 58)

Dame Lorraine mas have been adapted to suit the local environment of Trinidad and Tobago as well as the materials available, therefore demonstrating impressive creativity and successful subversion. Due to the co-existence of diverse cultural groups, the formation of a hybrid culture or ‘third space’ was inevitable. ‘Trinidad Carnival is constructed out of the grafting together of the African ‘ole [old] mas’ – ragged in appearance, satiric in emphasis, and using African religious colour symbolisms – and ‘pretty mas’, utilising the decorative colour combinations of European masked ball and carnival costumery.’ (Shepherd and Richards 2002, 248) The enslaved found themselves in a state of liminality where they were unable to practice their indigenous traditions while simultaneously unable to fully identify and assimilate with Eurocentric culture. The masqueraders gathered whatever items they could and created the wardrobe for a new cultural tradition. We can think of culture as a library of collective and shared experiences that result in the establishment of unique cultural codes. The collective trauma endured during slavery was channelled into creative theatrical performances within the Dame Lorraine mas and by extension, other portrayals in traditional mas, thereby serving as a cathartic release and a means to reclaim agency and foster a re-invention of self.

(iii) Theatrical Performance:

The Dame Lorraine mas provided a unique space for the enslaved population to articulate observations and critiques that were otherwise systematically silenced within the structure of colonial society. The brutalities of chattel slavery tore families apart and subjected individuals to inhuman conditions of forced labour. In this environment, they were rendered voiceless, unable to challenge the lies created by the French elite to spread the view that they were inferior beings that deserved no humanity. The Dame Lorraine mas therefore became a form of visibility and an

assertion of agency. Furthermore, there is once again a constant mirroring of Césaire's method of transforming tools of oppression into tools that shift power dynamics.

The very 'yard' that were the enslaved's confined quarters - the physical manifestation of colonial domination and control - served the purpose of segregating and marginalizing the so-called savages from the supposed civilized. The luxury of the feasts and festivities were beyond the reach of the marginalized and not meant for 'their kind'. Much like Césaire's utilization of language as a tool of resistance, the performance of the *Dame Lorraine* mas in these yards subverted the power dynamics, shifting the ridicule and negative connotations towards the French.

Furthermore, the elaborate costumes made from scraps of barely anything, the intricate choreography and narrative involved in the performance, demonstrated profound capacity for innovation, artistic expression, and intellectuality. '[...] for creativity is necessarily a function of a subjective reading of the world.' (Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant 1993) The high degree of critical thinking and interpretive skill required to create and perform this theatrical form of social commentary and political satire reflected a keen awareness of current events and societal issues. Masqueraders employed humour, irony, and symbolism to critique power dynamics, challenge stereotypes and provoke thought which was quite the opposite to the narratives that colonizers created to describe the enslaved.

The mas also provided a means for enslaved communities to forge collective identities and solidarity, fostering kinship and community not only in the face of adversity but also considering that they all originated from different African tribes. They were therefore able to affirm their cultural connections and ancestral legacies while creating a space of belonging within their hostile environment. Even as Roger D. Abrahams stated that creolization is best understood

through festivals, it is clear how the arts (dance, music, theatre, etc.) becomes a stunningly effective vehicle for agency.

(iv) Mas and Creoleness in Trinidad and Tobago today:

In a country where political division is primarily based on race, that is between Afro-Trinbagonians and Indo-Trinbagonians, creolization can lead individuals to grapple with conflicts of belonging and cultural heritage. In the contemporary context of Trinidad and Tobago, persons still attempt to affirm the notion of cultural purity and authenticity by separating themselves from a group they subjectively deem as 'other'. For example, the term 'Creole' would be referred to, by some Indo-Trinbagonians, as persons of African descent. 'Creole' would also be used to refer to what is considered Afro-Trinbagonian food such as coo-coo, callaloo, oil-down or pelau. Carnival, included, is seen by some as a 'black people thing'. This reflects the complex interplay of cultural dynamics and individual experiences in Trinidad and Tobago. Some Indo-Trinbagonians hesitate to identify themselves with Carnival. The researcher acknowledges this assertion is based on lived experiences and may not be corroborated by existing scholarly literature however results of some research suggest a degree of resonance with this claim. 'There is a deep heritage of African spirituality in our carnival traditions, a heritage that is often not known or widely recognised," says Eintou Pearl Springer.' (Ali 2019)

Riggio's 'Playing and Praying: The Politics of Race, Religion, and Respectability in Trinidad Carnival' delves into the Asian influence of Carnival that came along with the East Indian indentureship period. Here is where a parameter of this thesis comes into play as her writings differentiates 'Creole' from 'Coolie'. The experience of East Indian indentured labourers at the

time differed from that of the former African enslaved population. While both groups faced forms of exploitation, discrimination and labour coercion, any resulting creative tradition would be undoubtedly formed under different circumstances. This, however, did not stop the syncretism of traditions between African and Indian populations.

‘While Afro-Trinidadians born in the Caribbean were identified as African Creoles, Indian laborers—the jahaji bhai (the brotherhood of the boat)—were called “Coolies.” Nominally separate, these two laboring forces, the Afro-Creoles and the indentured Indians who lived in barracks and worked under conditions not much better than enslavement, were in practice often entwined with each other, particularly through their festivals [...]’ (Riggio 2020)

‘Neither stickfighting nor whipcracking originated in carnival. The traditions from which they derived were carried to Trinidad, where they evolved within the local Afro- and Indo-communities. T&T Carnival provided the opportunity to publicly perform ritualized martial arts that were in essence religious rites, throughout the island of Trinidad (and ultimately Tobago) in “rings” and “gayelles” (stickfighting rings).’ (Riggio 2020)

Given their differing historical backgrounds and experiences, it is understandable that some descendants of East Indian indentured labourers may not feel as connected to aspects of Carnival. More specifically, their absence during the inception of the Dame Lorraine mas factors in to their disengagement. Nevertheless, both groups contributed to the rich tapestry of Trinbagonian Carnival culture.

As this thesis also aims to assess the cultural significance of the Dame Lorraine mas in contemporary Trinidad and Tobago, said citations demonstrate a parameter mentioned. The concept of Creolization poses significant challenges in terms of definition and interpretation,

highlighting the complexity of cultural exchange and adaptation in a society divided along racial lines. It is safe to say that while traditional mas historically provided a platform for solidarity and cultural expression for the enslaved, its contemporary significance may be subject to varying interpretations and levels of engagement among different communities, thus realizing the socio-cultural and spatio-temporal factors to be considered in the definition of creolization. Its process involves perpetual shifting and re-defining.

CONCLUSION

The concept of Creolization proves to be quite problematic because it is difficult to give a concise definition without the feeling of missing some elements due to its multi-faceted nature. Creolization exhibits a constant state of evolution, that is, a variability influenced by temporal dynamics, societal structures, cultural contexts, spatial dimensions and more. While it involves loss and erasure, it also involves creation of something new. While it involves fragmentation and brokenness, it also involves solidarity and repair. While it involves trauma, oppression and displacement, it also involves assertion of agency, catharsis and creation of a third space. '[...] enriched by all kinds of mistakes and confident of the necessity of accepting ourselves complex. For complexity is the very principle of our identity.' (Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant 1993)

Through the lens of creolization, the Dame Lorraine mas emerges as a manifestation of the initial stage of loss and erasure in the context of healthy familial structures, as evidenced by the disruption of traditional African kinship ties and the imposition of European social hierarchies. Then, it becomes a representation of a space of adaptation, where the enslaved community creatively reimagines and reinvents their cultural traditions in the face of colonial oppression, thus forming something new. Despite the various fragments of co-habiting cultures, the masquerade is a unifying force in the midst of the community's shared struggle. Masqueraders assert their humanity and their right to self-determination in the face of abuse and cultural genocide.

In the contemporary Trinidad and Tobago context, citizens undervalue the nation's cultural identity and heritage. This sentiment is exemplified by recent discourse surrounding the educational pursuits of renowned soca artiste, Machel Montano, who is currently engaged in his

Carnival Studies master's degree. The ensuing discussions on social media platforms, such as commentary from a Facebook post by Phillip Edward Alexander on December 13, 2023, have disparaged the value of a degree in Carnival Studies, labelling it as unworthy of public investment. The failure to recognize the profound potential in scholarly exploration of Trinidad and Tobago's history and cultural identity suggests retrogression of the powerful agency attained by the oppressed who came before us. Academic inquiry into subjects such as Carnival Studies not only serves to deepen our understanding of the intricacies and significance of our cultural practices but also plays a pivotal role in the preservation and international dissemination of our national heritage. Even as our ancestors reclaimed their stolen humanity and value, we must continue to safeguard that mentality and foster a sense of collective pride. Thus, it is imperative to recognize the intrinsic value of academic exploration in safeguarding and celebrating not only the unique cultural tapestry of Trinidad and Tobago, but the complex and perpetually evolving process of creolization in our mas.

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