

The Identity of French-Speaking Blacks in the context of other areas

Year: 2013

Place of fieldwork: Guadeloupe, France

Name: Natsumi Mitarai

Research background

“Noir et fier” (black and proud). For black people living in French-speaking Africa, the Antilles, and France, does this “noir” have the same meaning? In the 1930s, the literary movement called Negritude was begun by a Senegalese, Léopold Sédar Senghor, a Martinican, Aimé Césaire, and others. This movement focused on appreciating black culture and traditions and demanded the restoration of rights following the assimilation policy, which effectively sought to “whiten” blacks in France. After Senegal gained independence in 1960, Guadeloupe and Martinique became French overseas departments, although some Guadeloupeans and Martinicans argued for independence. France also has many black immigrants. I focus on their present blackness and their sense of African origin.



Research purpose and aim

The main purpose of this research in Guadeloupe is to examine how Guadeloupeans, including mulattos, understand their African origins and how their black identity relates to black people in Africa and Europe. I conducted a questionnaire and an interview survey about their languages, identity, and impression of African people, French people, and France.

Fieldwork results and achievements

The Creole language spoken in Guadeloupe is a French creole similar to French. However, it is not completely the same as other creoles in French-speaking islands, such as Martinique, Haiti, Réunion, Seychelles. Although they speak both languages, some Guadeloupeans prefer to speak Creole to French and some people refuse to speak Creole. I found unique relationships between these languages and it is clearly relatable to their identity. The questionnaire was given to men and women between 18 and 72 years-old. The questions about African people show a most remarkable tendency.

There were many tourists on holiday when I visited the popular area of Sainte-Anne. I had opportunity to discuss my subject with Guadeloupeans who moved to metropolitan France and who were born and raised in metropolitan France. It is clear that they have a more complicated mentality and behavior than the local Guadeloupean people. Further studies are needed in order to conduct a comparative survey between them.



Implications for future research

The same questionnaire and interview survey will be performed in Senegal. After that, I will focus on Caribbean and African immigrants and later generations who now live in metropolitan France.