

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

“French-ish”: Liminal Identities
in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy
in French and Francophone Studies

by

Bethany Lillian Margaret Schiffman

2022

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Doctor of Philosophy in French and Francophone Studies
University of California, Los Angeles, 2022
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“French-ish’: Liminal Identities in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana” examines the role of cross-media, hyper-contemporary folklore performances in the crystallization of national and regional identity. Due to their status as France’s only Caribbean overseas departments (DOMs), Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana are politically French. However, a fraught history and complex local reality create tension with French Republican ideals. As a result, questions of nationality are incredibly complex and this region occupies a liminal status I term “French-ish.” A dialogue of the theoretical works of Benedict Anderson, Homi K. Bhabha, Etienne Balibar, Pierre Nora, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Etienne Achille, Charles Forsdick, and Lydie Moudileno has proven essential in unpacking this complex positioning. The resulting framework illuminates not only how this liminal identity functions and is perpetuated, but also the key role that folklore performances play in its perpetuation.

The Introduction provides a broad discussion of nationhood, the history of folklore in the region, and my project. The first chapter then applies this framework to the region, illustrating how remembering and forgetting by different groups create competing national narratives that

forge the liminal, French-ish positionality. The second chapter provides a detailed description of the modern folklore performances—spanning books, Spotify, YouTube videos, social media, online publications, festivals, interviews, and more—that comprise my corpus, highlighting the ways that these performances are evolving. The third chapter analyzes the impact of these shifts in medium, arguing that modern iterations are ultimately less intersubjective and therefore meaning relies more on the performer’s intent. The fourth chapter examines individual performances, finding that regional “insiders” use Creole folklore primarily as a site of remembering while metropolitan French “outsiders” use it as a site of forgetting. The final chapter argues that, while globalization and capitalism influence all modern performances, tales told by insiders for outsiders are especially commodified. Ultimately, the application of my framework shows folklore’s function as a site or commodity both within and outside nationhood to reinforce, reify, and/or subvert Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana’s French-ish-ness.

The dissertation of Bethany Lillian Margaret Schiffman is approved.

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To my Family.

*And to those who
sing histories against History,
memories against Memory,
memory traces against the Monument.*

*May your whispers become shouts
and your songs echo through the ages.*

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REMERCIEMENTS

This project is indebted to so many that it is difficult to know where to start—or where to end. I have been incredibly fortunate to receive support for my work from a variety of grants and fellowships. Not least of these is the UCLA Dissertation Year Fellowship which made finishing this year possible despite the global obstacles.

It also would not have been possible without the logistical, emotional, and practical support of Kerry Allen. From answering my million questions about my accepted-student visit to encouraging me through my pregnancy and return to work to helping me coordinate logistics for attending the 2022 graduation ceremony, Kerry has guided and mentored me every step of the way. I cannot express what it meant to me knowing she always had my back.

I am also deeply grateful to the teachers and faculty that have taught and pushed me throughout this journey. I am thankful to my very first French teacher, Madame Beck, for her patience and forbearance teaching the French names for various fruits to a group of three-year-olds. My teachers at Friends School and faculty at NYU—especially Timmie Vitz, Claudie Bernard, and Nils Froment—fostered and grew this early Francophile passion and helped me navigate my way to graduate school. Learning from and working with the world-class minds at UCLA has been the experience of a lifetime. Thank you to the faculty who took the time to teach and shape my research and interests and were always willing to chat with me or provide advice regarding my academic and professional development, especially Laurel Westrup, Stephanie Bosch-Santana, and Kalani Michell. Thank you to Kim Jansma and Laurence Denié-Higney for teaching me how to teach and even more for providing such exceptional models of how to be an academic working mother.

And a special thank you to my committee. Laure Murat’s unending support of my work, my ideas, and my project made this process not only bearable but enjoyable. Tim Tangherlini’s belief in me from my first weeks at UCLA and support throughout the journey has been invaluable. Without his humor, wisdom, and words of encouragement I might not have reached this end. Lia Brozgal’s close reading of my work has improved it beyond measure. More important, the privilege of teaching under and alongside her is an experience I will forever remember. Her model of how to navigate the professional world with poise and grace is one I will always seek to emulate. Finally, my advisor and chair, Dominic Thomas, has inspired me from the beginning. His own intellectual rigor has motivated me to strive for excellence in my work and his feedback has proven invaluable in those efforts. As advisor he was able to achieve a remarkable balance between supporting and guiding me and allowing my project to develop in tandem with my growth as scholar and researcher. For all of his time, insight, and encouragement I sincerely thank Dominic.

I have also had the privilege and the pleasure of working alongside a wonderful group of emerging scholars. I am grateful for the collegial atmosphere in our department and the unending support of my peers. I am also thankful for the unquestioning support of my closest friends, even if they do not live close by. To Brooke, who has been with me from the start, thank you for the hours of phone calls and the endless interest (sincere or feigned) in my work and my process. To Leah, kindred spirit I would not have met had I not undertaken this journey, you will forever be my star. And to my “accountabuddy,” Cynthia, for providing all the support and encouragement (and more!) that sports metaphors can capture—coach, cheerleader, pacer, rabbit, drafter, peloton leader—in the final stretch.

To Mr. Cat, Ms. Cat, Sadie, and Mica, thank you for all of the cuddles, licks, purrs, tail wags, and hairballs. Your company throughout this process brought me joy and kept me going.

To Mark and Melissa, thank you for the encouragement (and the distractions!) along the way, and for all of your love.

To my brother, thank you for always showing me the way. Your strength and ability to move forward no matter the obstacles provided me an inimitable model of perseverance I can only hope to live up to.

To Annika and BB2, thank you for giving me a reason to keep striving. You make all of this worth it.

To my parents, thank you for being my first teachers, biggest cheerleaders, and best editors. To say I could not have done any of this without you is beyond an understatement.

And to my husband: Thank you. There are 137,711 words on these pages, about 130,000 words in the French language, and an estimated 171,146 words in the English language, but none of them are enough to convey the gratitude and love I have for you. I am absolutely certain that I would not be who or where I am today without you.

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"Yé Cric in the Absence of Yé Crac: Implications of Media, Genre and Language in Maggy Faraux's YouTube Recounting of a Traditional Antillean Folktale," South Atlantic MLA (SAML) 2019: Languages, Power, Identity, Relationship, Atlanta, GA Nov. 15-17, 2019

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"Maaraa puromu and Oraliture: Flora Devatine and the Meeting of Cultures her Poetry Explores," Midwest MLA (MMLA): Consume Cultures, Kansas City, MO, Nov. 15-18, 2018

"(Her)Story: An Analysis of the tale 'Le granger et le bourgeois' in the Context of the Nineteenth Century," Women in French (WIF): Le bruit des femmes, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL Feb. 8-10, 2018

"Chez Nous: The complicated Portrayal of French Multiculturalism in *Arab Jazz*," Brown Equinoxes: Memory/Rupture, Brown University, Providence, RI, Apr. 21-22, 2017

"Bubbling Beneath the Surface: A Folkloric Analysis Illuminating the Unspoken Tensions in *Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et demons*," Western States Folklore Society Conference, University of California, Berkeley, CA, April 8-9, 2016

INTRODUCTION

*O vieux paroleurs, maîtres
de la blague, conteurs des hautes
veillées, oui vous cueilleurs
du verbe dessous les désespoirs,
je reprends la parole où vous
l'aviez laissée, aussi libre et
infidèle que vous l'étiez vous-
mêmes. (Chamoiseau, *Au temps de l'antan* 9)*

Le conteur créole est donc le ressasseur d'une mémoire forcément fragile, sans cesse menacée mais dont tout un chacun, conteurs et assistance, sait au plus profond de lui qu'elle est l'indispensable lien avec les origines de la communauté, aussi brouillées et obscure soient-elle. (Confiant 13-14)

L'action folklorique est, du point de vue de la simple conservation d'éléments du patrimoine, absolument nécessaire. (Bernabé et al. 63n11)

Thus read the words of the foundational theorists and voices of the Creole movement in the French Antilles, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, and Jean Bernabé.¹ The first epigraph is the opening of Chamoiseau's collection of folktales, *Au temps de l'antan: contes du pays Martinique (Creole Folktales)*. The second excerpt comes from Confiant's discussion of the history and importance of Creole folktales and prefaces his own collection, *Les maîtres de la parole créole*. The foundational manifesto of Creoleness, *Eloge de la Créolité (In Praise of Creoleness)*, written by these three authors, is the source of the third. Significantly, these introductions to folklore and folktales all share one idea: memory. This thread can be traced from Chamoiseau picking up where his ancestors left off in telling these tales, to Confiant's assertion

¹ For readability I have quoted all three in the original French. However, moving forward, in this dissertation if a published English translation exists, I defer to it. It is only in cases where no official English translation has been published that I quote in the original French.

that the Creole storyteller is a dweller on an indispensable yet fragile link to the origins of the entire community, to the idea that folklore is an essential way to conserve national heritage.

Folklore is an essential cultural phenomenon in this region. This may seem to be such a common assertion as to border on cliché. However, when it comes to any discussion of the Caribbean *départements d'outre mer* (DOMs) of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana, no assumption can be taken for granted.² This is especially evident in lingering debates concerning the “sometimes French”—or as I call it, “French-ish”—status of these geographic spaces (Beriss, “High Folklore” 110). Similarly, while folklore and folktales are universally acknowledged to be culturally important, the forms that they take in our 21st-century globalized world and the ways in which they function have yet to be fully explored. In fact, an analysis of the role of Antillean folklore—specifically folktales and storytelling traditions—in these regions’ relationship to the rest of France reveals their unique function.³ Unusually, they are alternately and simultaneously *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) and *lieux d’oubli* (sites of forgetting), a status shaped by storyteller and audience. As such folktales function as a tool to reify and reinforce the tension between regional and French identity, i.e., Guadeloupean, Martinican, and Guinean “French-ish-ness.”

² Throughout this analysis I avoid the French tradition of listing the regions in alphabetical order in favor of listing them in their order of “importance” in the French psyche. Martinique has long been viewed as the “principal” Caribbean DOM with Guadeloupe as a “little sister” and French Guiana routinely forgotten or ignored. This hierarchy is, of course, problematic and creates tensions between the regions that I discuss in the next chapter. Referring to them this way nonetheless reflects important power dynamics relevant to my analysis.

³ Technically speaking referring to folktales from Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana as “Antillean folktales” is a misnomer. The name “Antilles” refers to the entire archipelago between the Caribbean, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Atlantic. It thus includes numerous islands that are not Martinique and Guadeloupe (the Bahamas, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Hispaniola, Antigua, Saint Martin, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago to name a few) and does *not* include French Guiana. That said, as we will see, most of my storytellers use the term to refer to themselves and their performances and the French word *antillais* generally implies some combination of specifically Haiti, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana. I therefore refer to these regions and their traditions with the term “Antilles” both in keeping with this common if inaccurate usage and in an effort to avoid repetition by finding alternative ways to refer to the geographic region of my study.

My objective in this introduction is therefore to lay the foundation for an in-depth analysis of the role of folklore in France's Caribbean DOMs. I begin by articulating a theoretical framework, pulling together a range of nation-building paradigms to better understand individual and group identity and how concepts of communal coherence are created and maintained. This will allow for an improved understanding of both the regions' relationship to Frenchness and French identity and the discourses in which folktales participate. I will then provide an overview of the unique role of storytelling tradition and exegesis in these regions, highlighting both what makes folktales worthy of study and the particularity of folkloric tradition in these regions. Finally, I will discuss the parameters of this project, the methodology, and what I see as its intrinsic significance.

Locating Identities

As we will see in the next chapter, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana occupy a liminal space between full membership in the French nation and regional conceptions of community or even nation as conceptualized by various nationalist movements. Therefore, in order to understand the role of folklore and folktales in regional and national identity, we must first understand the concepts and process of formation of "identity" and of "nation(hood)," as well as the role of sites of memory and forgetting within this. To do this, I begin with Benedict Anderson's definition of nation from his seminal 1983 book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. However, Anderson's focus on how the modern concept of nation-state was born and developed, though helpful, is not sufficient for the scope of this analysis. I thus dialogue his ideas with other theories of national formation and identity.

Specifically, the works of Homi K. Bhabha and Étienne Balibar are particularly useful in analyzing Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana's unique positionality in the modern French

nation. Bhabha's chapter "Dissemination: Time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation" from his 1994 collection of essays *The Location of Culture* is preoccupied with the discursive ways in which communal nationhood is created, especially as viewed in terms of members from its margins and questions of time. Balibar's 1990 essay "The Nation Form: History and Ideology" is a detailed analysis of how sovereign nation-states create and perpetuate their communities and shared sense of belonging. Together, Balibar and Bhabha's ideas provide a clear if general understanding of how individual nations can create and perpetuate their communities and ultimately provide the framework for a fruitful conversation with Anderson.

Building on this, French historian Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* and, more importantly, the ways scholars have built on and moved beyond his ideas, allow for a more specific understanding of how nation-state communities construct the shared history that binds them together. Nora's seven-volume work, *Les lieux de mémoire*, was published between 1984 and 1992 and then translated into three volumes in English (starting in 1996) as *Realms of Memory*. This work, while widely criticized for its narrow focus, has been highly influential in the field of memory studies and inspired ongoing discussions and debates. Particularly relevant to my project are Guy Beiner's insistence on the equal importance of sites of forgetting in his introduction, "Sites of Oblivion" to his 2018 book *Forgetful Remembrance: Social Forgetting and Vernacular Historiography of a Rebellion in Ulster*; Patrick Chamoiseau's conception of Memory Traces, especially as elucidated in his 1994 text *Guyane: Traces mémoires du bagne* (and translated in 2020 as *French Guiana: Memory Traces of the Penal Colony*); and the 2020 collection *Postcolonial Realms of Memory* edited by Étienne Achille, Charles Forsdick and Lydie Moudileno, which aims to address the significant blind spots in the aforementioned work by Nora. All these texts describe the importance of remembering and/or forgetting to a nation

and describe sites comprising these acts. They do not, however, explicitly engage with what a nation is or how it is formed or perpetuated. By allowing those considerations to be nuanced by various conceptions of realms and traces of memory and forgetting, we see how *lieux* influence the mechanics of nationhood and the insider-outsider dichotomies of the French DOMs. Once these ideas of nationhood and memory are in dialogue, we can elucidate how folktales in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana function as both sites of remembering and forgetting that simultaneously reify and undermine their place in the French nation.⁴

Let us begin, then, with a definition of the concept of “identity.” As I use it in this study, identity pertains to the ways in which an individual or group understand themselves, internally and as projected to others. Identity then is the assemblage of labels, beliefs, attitudes, etc. that constitute a person or community and demarcate a distinct “me” or “us.” Beyond this, there are several key aspects of this concept. Identity should be understood as changeable, in constant flux, and resistant to being fixed. Rather, the way one understands their person- or grouphood is mutable and in a constant state of production. It is not static but constantly evolving and shifting, constantly being (re)created and (re)thought depending on context, company, and circumstances.

It is worth noting that this is particularly complex in France’s Caribbean DOMs since it is part of the larger Black Atlantic and all of the complications of identity—individual, group, national, ethnic, etc.—that go along with that. In his seminal work *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy finds that “[t]he history of the black Atlantic yields a course of lessons as to the instability and mutability of identities which are always unfinished, always being remade” (Gilroy xi). An

⁴ Another famous theorist of (French) nationhood is Ernst Renan, particularly as articulated in his 1882 “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation ?” However, as this conceptualization predates so many aspects of (post)modernity, including the World Wars, decolonization, departmentalization, the Cold War, and more, I do include him in this synthetic dialogue of modern nationhood. That said, since many of my theorists explicitly engage with Renan and his writing (please see below), his ideas are nonetheless present in the creation of this analytical framework.

examination of this corpus reveals this mutability which both leads to and results from the constant creation and positioning of self through storytelling.

Second, identity is multi-faceted.⁵ One's image of oneself is not only dynamic, but also multivalent. An individual could, for example, simultaneously identify as a storyteller, as a Martinican, as an islander, as a French person, and as a woman. As Alan Dundes notes, definitions of this concept usually "assume personal identity to be a single entity, whereas, in fact, [it] is decidedly multiple in nature: there are many personal identities and many social identities" (Dundes 149). In short, individuals define themselves and the groups to which they belong or not in different, simultaneous ways.

Finally, a third essential factor of identity is the fact that "[i]dentity is an oppositional process [which] constitutes one of the common threads in both personal and group identity" (Dundes 150). In other words, the creation of one's sense of self is not only fluid and variegated but it also necessitates an understanding not only of self and "us" but also of other and "them." The concept of "me" can only exist if it is obvious that it is different from "you." When an individual identifies as a storyteller they are, intentionally or not, creating an insider/outsider dichotomy: they are a storyteller or part of a community of storytellers (insiders) which can only exist conceptually if there is also a group of non-storytellers (outsiders), presumably the audience listening to the stories.⁶ Similarly, labeling oneself or one's group as Martinican, an islander, or French only has meaning if we understand these terms as oppositional to a different group, to those who do not label themselves as Martinican, islanders, or French. Certainly, the label of

⁵ While arguably this idea is better known as being "intersectional," I avoid using that term because of its strong association with minority groups (e.g., the intersectionality between being Black and being a woman). In contrast, some of the identities I discuss here are not necessarily as enmeshed with questions of power.

⁶ Of course, as with many other things, it is easier to define what one is not than what one is. In this case, the identity of storyteller is in opposition to non-storyteller or to audience. But what a "storyteller" *is* is less clear, and likely conceptualized differently by each individual storyteller. *How* storytellers are conceptualizing their selves and communities is less relevant to this discussion than the fact that they *are*.

woman only has value in that it communicates a lived reality that is different for those who belong to this label (insiders) from those who label themselves as other genders (outsiders). In short, each statement or implication about “me” or identification of “us” will inevitably imply a “you” or “them.” In short, “identity” is conceptions of self- or group-hood which are, by nature, constantly evolving, multi-faceted, and oppositional. Shared identity in turn creates a nation.

What, then, is a “nation”? Anderson argues that “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined” (6). Specifically, he defines “the nation [as] an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (5-6). He clarifies this definition further, explaining that “[t]he nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries beyond which lie other nations,” that “[i]t is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm,” and that “[f]inally, it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7). In short, for Anderson any community too large for all members to know each other such as modern nation-states are imagined (kinship is presumed with those one cannot ever meet) but limited (not with all people in the world) with a presumed “right” to rule themselves.

However, while Anderson defines what a nation is and how the phenomenon came into being, he is less interested in how individual groups have cohered into modern nation-states or how these states are perpetuated. How do so many thousands of people, often separated by immense expanses of space, lived experience, perhaps culture or language or race, and even time, come to imagine themselves connected to each other to the extent that they would kill or

die for this imagined community? To better understand that I turn to the ideas of Bhabha and Balibar. Both take the imagined community as a point of departure. Bhabha refers to “the imagined community of the nation-people” before directly quoting Anderson (140-141). Similarly, Balibar argues that “[e]very social community reproduced by the functioning of institutions is imaginary, that is, it is based on the projection of individual existence into the web of a collective narrative, on the recognition of a common name and on traditions lived as the trace of an immemorial past (even when they have been created and inculcated in the recent past” (italics in original, 346). In short, Balibar begins with the idea that “*only imaginary communities are real*” (italics in original, 346). However, both Bhabha and Balibar move beyond Anderson and the nation as a modern phenomenon to further explore how individual imagined communities are created and perpetuated, and the dissonances or illusions that accompany that.

In his essay, Bhabha engages with ideas of national narratives. He introduces and then deconstructs his concept of epochal time as a nationalizing narrative by exploring and explaining its inherent contradictions. He begins with a definition of the concept of epochal time, or the idea that national identity is based on a single, foundational moment. In the case of the United States, the foundational moment is arguably the signing of the Declaration of Independence or the Revolutionary War. This moment functions as a unifying element—something with which every member of the nation can identify—and creates a sense of time as functioning on a grand, epochal scale. In this sense it exists in contrast to what he terms “everyday time,” which is quotidian life which may or may not relate to questions of nationhood or unity. However, his emphasis on the importance of this narrative includes its apparent naturalness: the “narrative of the nation...must mediate between the teleology of progress tipping over into the ‘timeless’

discourse of irrationality” (142). The nation is a concept that is the result of progress but also of irrational imaginings of timeless inevitable creations.

From this initial conceptualization of the nation and epochal time, Bhabha highlights three main contradictions. First, he argues there is a tension between epochal and everyday time and that members of any given nation are thus constantly, at least conceptually, forced to move back and forth between the two. The second contradiction according to Bhabha is that said citizens are torn between the role of subject and object of epochal time, always simultaneously the people they learn about (the objects) and the ones enacting epochal time and ever-creating national conceptions through signification and (re)definition (the subjects). The third contradiction he identifies draws on Jacques Derrida’s concept of the “supplement.” In this context a supplement is an addition compensating for a gap or missing knowledge or consciousness such as Black History Month in the United States. For both Derrida and Bhabha, supplements are problematic in that they both add to the narrative and replace it. However, Bhabha also notes that if the supplement truly worked it would render itself obsolete and argues that ultimately supplements simplify narratives by minimizing conflict, diversity, dissidence, etc. and rely on epochal narratives that become as problematic as the ones they are supplementing. In short, for Bhabha national identity is based on a national narrative, which is both created by and about the citizens of a nation, and which centers on a unifying, single, foundational moment with “supplemental” moments added to create a shared revised history intended to form a national identity that coheres and ignores or forgets moments that do not fit into this cohesive story.

Balibar also unpacks the creation of national identity through shared national histories and narratives. Again, Balibar’s point of departure is the idea that all communities including nations are socially constructed in that the group has to actively create a sense of belonging in

order to cohere. It is important to note that Balibar explicitly disproves the idea that group and individual identity are different or in tension: “it is not a question of setting a collective identity against individual identities. *All identity is individual*, but there is no individual that is not historical;” “[e]very social community reproduced by the functioning of institutions is imaginary, that is, it is based on the projection of individual existence into the weft of a collective narrative” (italics in original 347; 346). In other words, it is individual identities that create imagined communities because nations or other communities only exist if the people who are part of them understand themselves as such. France could not exist if Frenchmen did not understand themselves to be, and label themselves as French. This, in turn, raises “[t]he real question [of] how the dominant reference points of individual identity change over time and with the changing institutional environment” (Balibar 347). How do the individuals of nations conceive of themselves as part of this group, and how do they convince others/future generations to do so?

Balibar argues that the primary way of doing this is to create an insider-outsider dichotomy with each group existing in direct opposition to the other: “external frontiers have to be imagined constantly as a projection and protection of an internal collective personality, which each person carries within him/herself and enables him/her to inhabit the space of the state as a place where one has always been...at ‘home’” (348). The first step in creating this dichotomy is the creation of a national narrative, which begins with a defining moment much like Bhabha’s moment of creation in epochal time and then creates the illusion that the series of events that followed were natural and inevitable. According to Balibar, the foundational moment set the nation on a path to becoming that appears to have not been able to play out any other way and to be perfectly natural and desirable.⁷ Once this narrative has been created nations have to focus on

⁷ Balibar’s description of this as a double “illusion” evokes Bhabha’s dissonances: “The illusion is twofold. It consists in believing that the generations which succeed one another over centuries on an approximately stable

creating cohesion within the insider group, which he argues historically has been based around either language or race (broadly defined). The national narrative and this sense of “sameness,” then, work together to create and maintain nation-states as unified groups of people feeling allegiance to each other and to the state that represents them. For Balibar, too, nation-states rely on the social construction of sense-of-nationhood, specifically based on a unifying, natural, and inevitable national narrative and then the maintenance of an insider-outsider dichotomy through language and/or race.

When read together, Bhabha and Balibar both begin with the importance of the creation of a national narrative based on a single foundational moment. However, Bhabha then focuses on the role of the individual in this narrative and on the inherent tensions in the acts of remembering and forgetting that such a narrative requires. Balibar, on the other hand, then focuses on the constant creation and maintenance of boundaries between the insiders and the outsiders after the national narrative has been established. In combining these ideas of Bhabha and Balibar several key concepts emerge. First, there is a tension between the need to create or invent a shared past and the simultaneously need to make this cohering past seem historic, inevitable, natural, and organic (not invented at all). There is also the importance of the double-role of subject/object that Bhabha draws out. While he finds this double-role to be a site of tension or contradiction, read in conjunction with Balibar I argue it is actually a necessary prerequisite of insider status. If one is not both beneficiary and steward of the creation of nationhood, then one is not truly part of the nation. Third, the importance of methods of boundary maintenance emerges as a key element of establishing and understanding one’s sense of inclusion in a nation.

territory, under an approximately univocal designation, have handed down to each other an invariant substance. And it consists in believing that the process of development from which we select aspects retrospectively, so as to see ourselves as the culmination of that process, was the only one possible, that it represented a destiny. Project and destiny are the two symmetrical figures of the illusion of national identity” (338).

Most significantly, the dialogue between Anderson, Bhabha, and Balibar clarifies a key idea: National narratives based on shared historical moments play a linchpin role in the creation of imagined communities and nations. That said, it is important to clarify that the role of history in this narration creation is less an attempt to remember facts than to understand moments in serving the present. Beiner describes this as a practice “in which the past is evoked entirely for present purposes” while Nora distinguishes between history which “is a representation of the past” and memory which “is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present” (Beiner 17; Nora, “Between Memory” 8). As Nora’s quote suggests, in order to have this shared narrative based on communal foundational moments the community must be able to remember them. Accompanying this is the question of moments that are dissident with or even undermine the national narrative and the need to supplement or forget them. These essential processes of both remembering and forgetting bring us, in turn, to the last element of my theoretical framework: sites and traces of memory and forgetting.

Pierre Nora’s work on *lieux de mémoire* or sites of memory proved foundational, and in many ways subsequent conversations pertaining to sites, traces of memory, sites of forgetting, or postcolonial sites of memory can be seen as outgrowths of his initial arguments. His groundbreaking work has been applied to nations and communities around the globe, rethought and reworked time and again, and has reshaped the field of Memory Studies. However, while Nora’s work is based in ideas of Frenchness, my interest is to expand the context to the ideas of Anderson, Bhabha, and Balibar.⁸ I argue that the concept of sites of memory and forgetting are the missing puzzle pieces in these understandings of nation. I contend that sites of memory are

⁸ That said, Nora certainly takes Anderson’s ideas as a point of departure, even if he does not reference Anderson directly. Nora describes the overarching goal of his project: “to reinterpret the history of France in symbolic terms, to define France as a reality that is entirely symbolic, and thus to reject any definition that would reduce it to phenomena of another order” (italics added, “From *Lieux*,” xxiv).

the where and how the remembrance of foundational moments are created and maintained while sites of forgetting are the where and how of the burying of dissonant elements.

What, then, is the fundamental concept of this missing piece? While the concept of *lieu de mémoire* has expanded beyond Nora's original conceptualization, because he was the first to introduce the concept one must begin with his definition. Nora himself is reluctant to define the concept. He does, however, offer that "[i]f the expression *lieu de mémoire* must have an official definition, it should be this: a *lieu de mémoire* is any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community (in this case, the French community)" ("From *Lieux*" xvii). In fact, their role in collective memory is key to the concept in that Nora's project aims to analyze "the places in which the collective heritage of France was crystallized, the principal *lieux*, in all senses of the word, in which collective memory was rooted" ("From *Lieux*" xv). Sites of memory, in that they embody collective memory and heritage, are thus inextricably linked to concepts of community or nation.

Importantly, in talking about the material *or non-material* nature of sites of memory, Nora explains that "*Lieux de mémoire* are simple and ambiguous, natural and artificial, at once immediately available in concrete sensual experience and susceptible to the most abstract elaboration. Indeed, they are *lieux* in three senses of the world—material, symbolic, and functional" ("Between Memory" 18-19). Furthermore, "[c]ontrary to historical objects, however, *lieux de mémoire* have no referent in reality; or, rather, they are their own referent: pure, exclusively self-referential signs" ("Between Memory" 23-24). For Nora, then, sites of memory, may or may not be physical but must engage the senses and have both symbolic and functional elements carrying meaning for society as a representation of their shared past and/or present.

Perhaps more instructively, Nora offers a list of possible examples of French sites. He declares that in thinking of France our thoughts send us to “libraries, dictionaries, and museums as well as to commemorations, celebrations, the Pantheon, and the Arc de Triomphe; to the *Dictionnaire Larousse* as well as to the Wall of the Fédérés, where the last defenders of the Paris commune were massacred in 1870” (“Between Memory” 12). Similarly, the essays included in Nora’s work are illuminating, describing *lieux* ranging from France’s tricolors to the Marseillaise, from the names of streets to wine, from proverbs, tales, and songs to the French language itself. Clearly, the *esprit* of a nation and not any materiality defines a *lieu de mémoire*.

Finally, it is important to note that for Nora, *lieux de mémoire* are a modern phenomenon, resulting from a shift in how society today understands its past and itself. He argues that “[t]he moment of *lieux de mémoire* occurs at the same time that an immense and intimate fund of memory disappears, surviving only as a reconstituted object beneath the gaze of critical history” and that these “[l]ieux de mémoire originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarize bills because such activities no longer occur naturally...[thus] without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep them away” (“Between Memory” 11-12). In other words, *lieux de mémoire* constitute a relatively modern phenomenon that has emerged from a shift in Western society away from practices of memory to sites of it since tradition and memory are no longer embedded in the everyday and so must be memorialized in sites lest they be lost altogether.

However, even if the phenomenon of sites of memory is a modern one, it is one anchored in (or at least wearing the façade of) tradition and history. Sites are only meaningful when symbolically linked to the imagined community and its shared past, which is anchored in its

history. Many sites including tales or the French language are endowed with a sense of timelessness, of ancient history uniting a people across time and space. In this way, in their apparently-old-but-actually-new-ness, sites of memory are much like the ideas of nationhood that they serve to reify. Indeed, the shift that Nora describes from embodied to remembered history coincides with, or is even arguably mutually iterative with, the shift to the modern nation-state and resultant reconceptualization of community. Nora himself implicitly acknowledges this when he says that “[t]he new importance of memory and the search for the *lieux* that embody it, the return to our collective heritage and focus on the country’s shattered identities, are inscribed in this new constellation. This transition from one type of national consciousness to another, this shift from one model of the nation to another, is what underlies this project and gives it meaning” (“From *Lieux*” xxiii). This, in turn, illustrates their essential role in nation formation. The very fact of sites of memory, of creating “sites” that carry symbolic importance to an imagined community, was a necessary step in the creation of national narrative that is fundamental to nation-states. Neither sites of memory nor nation-states could exist without the other.

That said, sites of forgetting represent a final aspect which is essential to the formation and maintenance of national identity. As Anderson and Bhabha note, forgetting is just as important to nation formation as remembering. In approaching the idea of forgetting as an essential element of nationhood, Anderson quotes French scholar Ernest Renan who, in his 1882 address “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation ?” (What is a nation?) argues, as part of his definition of nation, that “l’essence d’une nation est que tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun et aussi que tous aient oublié bien des choses. ... Tout citoyen français *doit avoir oublié* la Saint-Barthélemy, les massacres du Midi au XIIIe siècle” (qtd. in Anderson 199). He then analyzes this idea, noting that “[o]ne is also struck by the peremptory syntax of *doit avoir oublié*

(not *doit oublier*) – ‘obliged already to have forgotten’ – which suggests...that ‘already having forgotten’ ancient tragedies is a prime contemporary civic duty. In effect, Renan’s readers were being told to ‘have already forgotten’ what Renan’s own words assumed that they naturally remembered!” (200). He analyzes the need to reduce events such as the Saint-Barthelemy massacre or the actions of William the Conqueror down to comfortingly fraternal clashes, not examples of clashes between disparate groups. Ultimately, Anderson concludes that “Having to ‘have already forgotten’ tragedies of which one needs unceasingly to be ‘reminded’ turns out to be a characteristic device in the later construction of national genealogies” (201).⁹ In other words, Anderson, in keeping with Renan’s nineteenth-century definition of a nation, feels that forgetting differences or inconsistencies with the national narrative is a key aspect of nationhood.

Furthermore, Anderson ties this forgetting to the ideation of national identity. Anderson, like Bhabha and Balibar, is aware of the tension between different modes of time in nation creation and maintenance and how it can lead to conflict for individuals. He argues that this “[a]wareness of being embedded in secular, serial time, with all its implications of continuity, yet of ‘forgetting’ the experience of this continuity – product of the ruptures of the late eighteenth century – engenders the need for a narrative of ‘identity’” (205). And, beyond this, “to serve the narrative purpose, these violent deaths [of “internal” conflict] must be remembered/forgotten as ‘our own.’” (206). In short, narratives of national identity are the direct result of, or solution for, the experience of simultaneous forgetting and remembering inherent to nation building and these narratives can only function if difference is forgotten and recast as similarity.¹⁰

⁹ It is important to note that he does not feel that this essential forgetting is necessarily conscious propaganda: “But it is surely too easy to attribute these reassuring ancient fratricides simply to the icy calculations of state functionaries. At another level they reflect a deep reshaping of the imagination of which the state was barely conscious, and over which it had, and still has, only exiguous control” (Anderson 201).

¹⁰ This begs the question of how forgetting works when differences cannot be sublimated to similarities (e.g., race, extreme power differentials, etc.). Please see the next chapter for a discussion of this.

Bhabha, too, in his discussion of supplements, draws on the ideas of Renan (and Anderson) in recognizing the centrality of forgetting to nation. He argues that “[t]o be obliged to forget – in the construction of the national present – is not a question of historical memory; it is the construction of a discourse on society that *performs* the problem of totalizing the people and unifying the national will” (italics in original, 160-161). In other words, forgetting is not simply about a failure to remember, but rather a necessity for performatively creating a unified nation, an imagined community. He also says that “[b]eing obliged to forget becomes the basis for remembering the nation, peopling it anew” (161). Forgetting, then, is just as foundational to the creation of a national community as remembering. Both are equally necessary for the creation of a coherent and cohering national narrative (or “metaphor of nation” in Bhabha’s words). For a disparate group of people to adhere into an imagined community, differences must be forgotten and similarities remembered.

Of course, as remembering is embodied in *lieux de mémoire*, so is forgetting dependent upon corresponding *lieux d’oubli*. In conceptualizing sites of forgetting, I am partly drawing on Nancy Wood’s definition: “sites that public memory has expressly avoided because of the disturbing affect that their invocation is still capable of arousing” (10). To this idea of sites that public memory avoids I add nuances from Guy Beiner. He builds upon Wood’s definition, articulating “realms of forgetting” as spaces “where individuals and communities anxiously try to conceal discomfiting skeletons in their cupboards” (5). He also describes a phenomenon “of social forgetting, whereby communities seemingly suppress public remembrance of historical episodes that do not correspond to present interests, and yet tenaciously find subtle ways to continue to remember these discomfiting memories” and “[t]he evocation of a subject in order to sanction its effacement, effectively ensuring that it will be remembered in an obscured form,

deserves further attention as a peculiar cultural practice that pairs memory with forgetting” (17). For Beiner then sites of forgetting are material or non-material artefacts that evoke memories that the national narrative is obliged already to have forgotten, in Renan’s words.

Furthermore, due to these artefacts’ reference to division over cohesion, they inspire strong reactions in the public, leading to an ebb and flow of remembering and forgetting. Social forgetting does not lead “to amnesia [but] is a way of preserving under the radar sensitive memories, which cannot be openly remembered. When these memories emerge to be celebrated in public, commemoration is often met with a violent response of decommemorating, which drives them back into the private sphere, but in turn may trigger initiatives for re-commemorating” (Beiner 41). They represent events which simultaneously must be and cannot be forgotten and are thus relegated to private and peripheral spaces. The acts of relegation, and reactions to their (re)emergence in the center, are extremely illuminating and rife for analysis, or as Beiner argues, are “by and large *terra incognita*” (5). As he says, “In short, social forgetting has a long and complex history waiting to be unveiled” (41).

It is essential to note, however, that some elements of shared history are more important to forget in nation creation than others. As Bhabha argues, “the belated postcolonial ... marginalizes and singularizes the totality of national culture. He is the history that happened elsewhere, overseas; his postcolonial, migrant presence does not evoke a harmonious patchwork of cultures, but articulates the narrative of cultural difference which can never let the national history look at itself narcissistically in the eye” (168). In other words, (post)colonial subjects challenge the national narrative, preventing the cohesion of an “us” because of the geographical, historical, and power-based divides between groups. As a result, the “postcolonial space is now ‘supplementary’ to the metropolitan centre; it stands in a subaltern, adjunct relation that doesn’t

aggrandize the *presence* of the West but redraws its frontiers in the menacing, agonistic boundary of cultural difference that never quite adds up, always less than on enation and double” (italics in original, 168). The colonial subject, in adding to the national narrative, somehow subtracts from it; their inclusion in national history subtracts from the greatness of that history and present and must therefore be forgotten. Without a doubt this is the case in France which exhibits what Forsdick calls “postcolonial amnesia [where] memories of colonial empire have been filtered, distorted, singularized, and often repressed” (*French Guiana* xi). This is of course one of the most important critiques of French colonialism, namely the symbiotic link between the ideals of Republic and overseas expansion that served to bolster notions of “grandeur.” Nora’s work essentially (perhaps even conveniently?) ignored that “history” that took place “elsewhere,” preferring instead to concentrate on the achievements of mainland France, also called “the Hexagon.”¹¹

But this forgetting nonetheless leaves what Chamoiseau labelled “memory traces” in his 1994 poetic-theoretical text and photo essay, *Guyane : Traces mémoires du baigne* translated into English in 2020. In it Chamoiseau “defines” or elaborates the idea of memory traces as “a space forgotten by History and by Memory-One, because it bears witness to the histories of the dominated and demolished memories, and it helps preserve them” (7).¹² He also says it “cannot be made manifest by a monument, by stélai, by statues, or by the cult of the document of our former historians,” that a “Memory trace is a frisson of life whereas the monument is a dead crystallization,” “*presence* whereas the monument points elsewhere,” “at once collective and

¹¹ For a detailed discussion of the history of this term, which dates back centuries, please see Nathaniel Smith’s “The Idea of the French Hexagon.”

¹² In writing “History” (“Histoire”) with a capital H, Chamoiseau is referring to official history sanctioned by the state. “Memory-One” or “la Mémoire-une” is a neologism which the translator of *French Guiana*, Matt Reeck, defines in his Translator’s Note as “that which has to [sic] authority to ‘organize a collection of memories’” and “the sort of memory that history with a capital ‘h’ writes – a memory, a history, which purports to be universal” (xxi).

individual, vertical, and horizontal, communitarian and cosmopolitan, unmovable and mobile, as well as fragile, whereas the monument always bears witness to the entrenched, vertical authority of the dominant power,” and that it is constantly evolving, unfathomable, and material or non-material (7-8). Significantly, memory traces also “bear witness to suffering. / They preserve suffering;” they are traces of trauma as well as of memory (5). In short, for Chamoiseau, memory traces are the disunified, fleeting, ephemeral sites and markers of memory and trauma that exist beside, beneath, and in opposition to the official histories and sites of memory.¹³ They are the marginalized memories that remain and remind of that forgotten by the dominant narrative.

Ironically, Nora’s text is in many ways a prime example of the kind of forgetting characteristic of History that Bhabha and Chamoiseau describe. Nora claims that the ambition of his project “is to think about the nation without nationalism and about France without any universalistic *a priori*” (“From *Lieux*” xxi). However, despite this goal Nora’s text does not engage with any colonial or postcolonial sites of memory or even acknowledge the imperial valences of the sites his collection does identify. In fact, Achille, Forsdick and Moudileno assert that “[i]t might indeed be argued that there is no entry in [Nora’s] original collection that would not benefit from scrutiny from a postcolonial perspective,” but that it is evident there was a “close control of any potential disruption of the centralized and centralizing narratives that such inclusion entails” (8; 12). Since its publication the project has been widely criticized “for implying not only an exclusively republican and ‘Hexagonal’ conception of history but also a classic, if not narrow, perception of national memory in which ‘the porosity of ‘Frenchness’”,

¹³ Memory traces are arguably either a name for or the flip side of the coin of the pieces of history of “certain minorities” that Nora describes as “a privileged memory that has retreated to jealously protected enclaves” (“Between Memory” 12). Memory traces are jealously protected and privileged sites of subaltern memory, those pieces that the colonizer did not quite manage to erase. It is only by jealously hiding these sites (even if in plain sight, as Chamoiseau argues is the case of folklore) that they are able to survive official writings of History at all.

the progressive hybridization of any such notion, its ability to be displaced and transculturated' are all absent (Forsdick, 2009: 278)" (Achille et al. 6). In short, the text is full of "blind spots concerning the French empire" (Achille et al. 1). In attempting to write a "non-national" French history based on sites of memory, Nora actually created an emblem "of a certain French incapacity and/or unwillingness to engage with the inherent and increasingly undeniable imbrication of the colonial in the *roman national* [national narrative] (Hargreaves, 2005)" (Achille et al. 5-6). The very text, then, that supplies the key piece of the national narrative puzzle in explaining how cohesive group memory is constructed and maintained is also a prime example of said memory in France. In remembering Frenchness it forgets all postcolonial, subaltern memories that threaten cohesion, leaving only traces to be sought and excavated.

It is this excavation that Achille, Forsdick, and Moudileno's collection of essays, *Postcolonial Realms of Memory*, pioneers.¹⁴ As they explain in their introduction, the "need to make visible the invisible thread that links the colonial to French culture is indeed more urgent than ever" (1). They assert and respond to "the urgency of asserting the central place of the colonial in the making of modern France, and of anchoring it in a collective memory that has often evacuated traces of empire, as if deemed unworthy of remembrance or simply considered marginal" (2). In order to do this, they bring together a series of essays much like Nora's original project that trace, describe, and render visible postcolonial sites of memory, building off of and expanding on Nora's project, his concept of "France" (to include, now "both the Hexagon and its overseas departments, regions, collectivities and territories"), and its History (Achille et al. 9). In

¹⁴ It is worth noting that the 2017 *Histoire Mondiale de la France*, edited by Patrick Boucheron, undertakes a similar project, creating "a counter proposal, or a complement, to Pierre Nora's seminal collection" (Barthe). That said, this collection of historical essays exploring France and its relation to the world does not frame itself in terms of sites of memory or Nora *per se*, and so is not as direct an example of the excavation of postcolonial *lieux de mémoire* that is so necessary.

so doing they offer this definition: “Postcolonial realms of memory, as we (re)conceptualize them, are therefore defined here as spatial/functional or immaterial sites, potentially subject to abstraction and imbued with a symbolic aura that, in the context of the French everyday, refers to more or less tangible memory traces linked to the colonial” (9). Postcolonial sites of memory, then, are sites related to France’s imperial past (or present).

This project seeks to expand the framework within which these memorial practices are in dialogue in these various works on nationhood, underscoring how various approaches have advanced the conversation, while also highlighting what we have to gain from strengthening the connections between their respective conclusions. This will hopefully provide a more nuanced approach to questions of identity and additional contextualization. Ultimately, in synthesizing the ideas of Anderson, Bhabha, Balibar, Nora, Beiner, Chamoiseau, and Achille, Forsdick, and Moudileno, it becomes clear that modern nations, or even communities, are comprised of disparate, heterogeneous individuals who imagine themselves—albeit in ways and alliances that are constantly shifting and negotiated—as connected to each other and separate from others, thus creating insider group(s) in opposition to outsider(s).¹⁵ This ever-shifting imagined community is created first and foremost by a shared national narrative that is historical and contemporary and itself in constant (re)negotiation. It is then policed through certain fluid tactics and features such as language, race, simultaneous subject/object status, etc. The shared national narratives, which are so essential to group cohesion, rely on both sites of memory and sites of forgetting in order to reinforce the similarities and to forget the differences within these groups and often take the form of imperial or minority histories or identities. Nonetheless, traces of memory and postcolonial

¹⁵ It is important to note, however, that, in keeping with Beiner, historian Chris Wickham, and anthropologist James Fenton, I am conceptualizing issues of national narrative, cohesion to group identity, collective memory and forgetting, etc. as individuals who, while subject to the influences of the community, are nonetheless distinct, autonomous entities, not automatons or robots (Beiner 23).

sites of memory exist below, next to, and in tension with the official national narratives and sites of memory, creating alternative narratives, memories, identities, and discourses. With this analytical framework of nationhood thus elucidated and ready to be applied to France and its DOMs in the proceeding chapter, I now turn to the other essential understanding foundational to my analysis: an awareness of the particularity both of folklore in general as a genre and of folktales specifically from this region.

Narrating and Performing Folktales

Again, the positioning of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana in the French nation is particularly complex and liminal. Folktale performances both reflect and reify this unique French-ish status. By performance I mean any recounting of a tale, whether it is printed and published, told to a live audience, written online, etc. Significantly, the use of performance as a way to evoke silenced memories of trauma, slavery, etc. is not new. Indeed, as Anny-Dominique Curtius argues in her chapter “Slavery Memorials” in Achille, Forsdick and Moudileno’s volume, there is an “immediacy and vitality of performing arts and its strong capacity to disrupt historical hegemony, dislocate tensions and interrogate tormented histories in communities of the global South” (175). Folktales builds on this power in their ubiquity, repetition, and anchor in tradition. In drawing from the field of folklore studies, I define folktales as stories that draw from traditions to which the storyteller may belong, but which do not belong exclusively to them. I set this in contrast to literature, which is an original story “belonging” to (a) specific author(s). There are, of course, many authors who draw on folkloric traditions in telling their stories, or even adapt existing folktales into novels, but these recountings still emphasize the writer over the tradition. All the performances in my collection, while they may highlight the storyteller as a purveyor of shared traditions and community, do not frame the stories as “original” nor

“belonging” to any individual. In other words, folktales are stories that are and have been and will continue to be told and retold. Folktales are a particular genre in several important ways.

First, they are especially reflective of their origins. As Diana Ramassamy says in her introduction to her 2016 collection of tales, *Les nouveaux maîtres de la parole créole*, “Si le conte est universel quant à sa structure et ses grands archétypes, il porte la marque du groupe social dont il émane parce qu’il est conçu à l’intérieur d’une tradition” (5). In fact, there are numerous vectors that influence each story, each performance. Certainly, there is the tradition from which the tales are born. There is also the influence of the storyteller: “Bien que les conteurs puisent ensemble dans la tradition orale créole, chacun d’eux, qu’il soit de sexe féminin ou masculine, a sa version du conte. Il n’existe pas deux conteurs qui racontent un même conte de manière identique. L’esprit du conteur reste un esprit de liberté, et chaque variante du conte traditionnel devient re-création” (Ramassamy 6). There is also the context and the audience of the performance: “le conteur, s’il reprend des contes de ses prédécesseurs, les accommode à sa façon, les adapte aux circonstances, au public” (Colombo, *Des Contes* 338). And, finally, with modern storytelling, more and more “le conteur doit se plier aux exigences du groupe, aux exigences de l’institution, à la politique du moment” (Colombo, *Des Contes* 338).

In other words, Folktale performances are an inherently fluid narrative form. Each time a storyteller performs a story, they subtly or overtly modify it, altering it to fit their lived experience, their audience, the medium they are using, etc. The result is that each telling has unique elements while maintaining the core traits that make it the story it is. Due to their identifying dynamic of simultaneous structure (from centuries of repetition of key elements) and flexibility (as details change with each telling), then, folktale performances are shaped by each teller, each telling, and the overarching cultural context.

Beyond this, since the dawn of writing tales have moved fluidly between oral and written recountings, with oral versions being written down and then those written versions re-entering oral traditions. The advent of the internet and new media both adds new elements to and perpetuates this cycle. Due to all these vectors this perpetual growth and evolution simulates the rings of a tree. The story's roots are constant, but each telling is a ring, embracing the rings that came before, yet shaped by storyteller, their worldviews, the audience, the medium, etc.—in short, by its environment. It stands to reason, then, that an analysis of a particular performance of a folktale allows for an understanding of the story's environment.¹⁶

Second, folktales provide particular insight into a group because they are arguably less imbricated with, and thus influenced by, the voices of cultural elite in the form of gatekeepers and may therefore represent voices that are not necessarily a traditional part of academic exegesis. Bourdieu defines the term “gatekeeper” as those who “perform the tasks of gentle manipulation” of creating consumers’ cultural “tastes,” or mediating between cultural producers and cultural consumers (Bourdieu 365). This includes all participants in the bureaucracies of cultural production, including publishers, editors, studios, record labels, critics, etc. These mediators wield a lot of power and influence in society, granting legitimacy and deciding which productions and voices will be distributed to audiences (and even, inasmuch as they influence and control economic capital, who can afford to remain a cultural producer at all). Indeed, “[w]ith the rise of the market as the most important structure for cultural production and distribution, institutions and agents who are in effect mediators have taken on an increasingly crucial role in the development of artistic careers and reputations as well as the formation of cultural tastes and consumption patterns” (Janssen and Verboord 1-2). In short, it is cultural

¹⁶ And the Antilles, as we will see, are a particularly rich environment creating fascinating rings.

gatekeepers who wield the most power in the decision of what constitutes “valid” (i.e., “high” or elite) art, culture, or literature and who should have the privilege of creating it. In today’s globalized market this extends even further, engaging with concerns such as which texts “warrant” translation and international distribution, etc.

Of course, cultural gatekeepers are not neutral. Rather, they generally represent a particularly privileged sector of society. Indeed, “gatekeeper studies have demonstrated that the process of ‘expert’ selection (or not) of media for publication or dissemination is subject to vagaries of personal subjectivity (David Manning White, 1950) or to bureaucratic routine (Walter Gieber, 1964)” and that “[d]espite its ‘liberal’ image, the distribution of power within the cultural industries is quite regressive and...decision-making power is often situated within small enclaves of privilege...[reflecting] the preferences and judgements of a small, relatively elite educated, middle-class, white male faction’ (Negus, 2002: 512)” (Adema). As a result, gatekeepers, or taste-makers as Bourdieu calls them, create and reify relatively narrow privileged definitions of what constitutes culture and thus of what culture is created. This is especially true in France, where all authors writing in French are dependent upon “Parisian literary institutions to obtain consecration,” even while “the very closed French world of publishing...is dominated by white men” (Vincenot 73; Francini). The French literary scene is quite problematic. As Claire Ducournau explains in her chapter on “Literary Prestige” in Achille, Forsdick, and Moudileno’s collection, “The French literary canon is home to a variety of authors who treated the colonial order as a matter not to be questioned, and even vigorously defended...[T]his textual corpus fed into a social discourse that served the colonial enterprise: it existed alongside administrative treatises, legal decrees, textbooks, newspapers, maps, religious texts and so on, all ‘vehicle[s] of imperial authority’ (2005:14)” (64). In terms of which authors are able to enter this exclusive

world, “[t]hree parameters can be highlighted: the place of publication of literary works, the cultural resources of the authors and the wider French political environment” (Ducournau 66). In short, to be part of the French literary scene, one must possess much cultural capital. This, in turn, perpetuates existing cultural power structures, reifying distinctions between social groups.¹⁷

Even texts that seem as if they represent alternative views such as those by postcolonial authors are influenced by these vectors. In order to be able to write at all (i.e., being literate, having the leisure to write, etc.), postcolonial authors typically already represent privilege and Western education which in turn influence their texts. Furthermore, their works are necessarily shaped by the expectations and tastes of the gatekeepers. If, in order to get published authors must appeal to white gatekeepers from the Hexagon, then said gatekeepers’ tastes must influence the texts. Even for “postcolonial” texts, then, “modes of reception are in play, the price of which the authors pay, adapting with varying degrees of success to the games of the media and francophone institutions” even while the “aesthetic or ethical content of their works also lend themselves to the expectations of legitimizing bodies that can prove favourable to amusement or appeasement, or to typical representations of minority groups, in a literary field that has been depoliticized since the 1970s” (Ducournau 68). In short, traditional cultural productions, to make it past the gatekeepers, must fit into their idea of what is “worth” making in the sense of both cultural and economic capital, and since the people making these decisions represent a restrictive worldview, so, too, must the texts.¹⁸ This process is, in fact, key to the perpetuation of inequality and social divisions (Ducournau).

¹⁷ It is important to remember that Bourdieu introduces this topic as part of his broader project of understanding how class distinctions are created and perpetuated.

¹⁸ A quintessential example of this type of text from the Antilles is Joseph Zobel’s 1950 novel *La Rue cases-nègres* which describes his journey from traditional storytelling, oral wisdom, and sharecropper/plantation background to French-educated elite. While the novel is often referenced as portraying “authentic” storytelling culture, the very fact that it was written by someone with so much cultural capital who had undergone such fundamental social shifts

In contrast, one particularity of folklore is that it is less encumbered by these processes than literature or film. At its essence, folklore is a performance- and orality-based practice not a literary art, and it faces different gatekeepers (if any at all). Beyond this, due to its imbrication in tradition, it has a built-in audience that makes it more likely that gatekeepers will take a chance on it even if it does not fit into Western literary traditions or tastes. Folklore thus arguably promotes diverse voices and the worldviews of non-Western(ized) non-elites because it is less subject to the biases of privileged cultural producers. It is perhaps better able to “question the genesis and presuppositions of French citizenship, the importance of the French language, silences surrounding slavery and colonization, or literary hierarchies that are not free from racism” (Ducournau 68). In this way folklore provides access to voices and viewpoints potentially distinct from those studied in traditional literary and cultural studies.

Furthermore, Antillean folktales are particular even within the genre. While all folklore features a mix of influences, the folklore from these regions represents a mixture remarkable for its geographic and cultural diversity. These stories thus provide unique insights into Antillean identity due to their long history in, and thus relationship with, the particularly rich history of the region. The back cover of Christine Colombo’s book *Des Contes de Ti Jean* highlights this unique, varied history: “Européens, Africains, Indiens, Chinois, Libano-Syriens, trace d’Amérindiens sont les composantes de la population de la Martinique.” All of these peoples and their traditions blend together in the folklore traditions of France’s Caribbean DOMs.

Without a doubt the strongest tradition is African (Condé, *Civilisation*). Confiant explains at the start of his collection, *Les nouveaux maîtres de la parole créole*: “À l’image même de la société antillaise, le conte créole est l’héritier de diverses traditions culturelles dont la principale

before writing the text and that it was accepted by French literary institutions in 1950 all mean that it is deeply influenced by French Western tastes, ideas, cultural status, etc.

est, sans nul doute, celle qui provient de l’Afrique-Guinée” (7). It is important to note that, however, there were two kinds of oral tradition in Western Africa, the origin of most enslaved peoples in the Caribbean: the official records and the profane traditions of everyday people.¹⁹ The official records, those known and passed on by *griots*, were not transported to the Caribbean. This is partly because not enough *griots* were enslaved and, more importantly, because those traditions were highly specific to particular groups while the enslaved persons in the Caribbean came from varied ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. The *griots*’ knowledge did not apply universally enough for it to be continued in the Caribbean. Profane folklore, especially proverbs and tales, however, were universal enough to survive and evolve (Condé, *Civilisation; Confiant*). This imported profane African tradition, however, did what folklore does: it evolved. As Maryse Condé explains in her analysis of Martinican and Guadeloupean folktales, *La Civilisation du Bossale*, when one looks carefully at Creole proverbs and tales, “on constate qu’en référence aux modèles africains, il se produit une profonde modification de contenu” (28). Creole folktales then, while anchored in African tradition, also reflect (and shape) the myriad influences of geography and culture.

While not always acknowledged, after African the largest cultural influence on these tales is European. In his introduction to his *Creole Folktales*, Chamoiseau notes that “the symbolic bestiary of Africa—whale, elephant, tortoise, tiger, brother rabbit—is introduced by the Storyteller to human or supernatural characters of a more distinctly European influence: The Devil, the Goodlord, Cétoute, Ti-Jean Horizon...” (ellipses in original, xii). (To be clear, while

¹⁹ In recognition of the power of language and labels, and in keeping with current enfranchisement movements, I refer to “enslaved people(s)” rather than “slaves” and “enslavers” rather than “(slave) masters” to highlight the enslaved people’s humanity, the temporality of their position, the injustice and inhumaneness of the system, and the Europeans’ agency in this atrocity (Norward). Similarly, in keeping with the Associated Press, I will capitalize Black in reference to race and/or culture but keep white lowercase (Bauder).

in many ways Ti Jean is a quintessentially Creole character, certain tales featuring him, including the tale “Ti-Jean Horizon” which is a version of AT tale type 1535, “Le riche et le pauvre paysan,” draw on European folkloric motifs and traditions.) Similarly, Condé contests that certain thematic changes in the tales, especially ones that appear grounded in Christian worldviews, are “principalement due[s] au contact de la littérature orale des maîtres eux-mêmes” (*Civilisation* 42). These influences come from a wealth of French folkloric tradition. Condé explains “que les colons français étaient principalement d’origine normande, vendéenne, bretonne... régions très catholiques et dont les contes et légendes, d’une grande richesse, mêlent un merveilleux et une philosophie chrétienne à un fond traditionnel plus ancien,” not to mention, she adds, the influence of the missionaries (ellipses in original, *Civilisation* 42). Condé also gives a list of examples of European influence, noting that the “récits de chevalerie popularisés dans la légende sont aussi présents dans Ti-Jean, à côté des avatars de Barbe-Bleue, Cendrillon...” and that many Creole tales featuring animal protagonists also feature “un type de merveilleux, fées, ogres, géants, bottes de sept lieues, baguettes magiques, visiblement d’origine européenne (ellipses in original, *Civilisation* 42 ; 40).²⁰ European influence on Creole tales is undeniable.

Confiant also acknowledges the significant influence of European tales, including the figure of the king or “La geste de Ti Jean l’Horizon, qui constitue une part importante du corpus des contes créoles...directement héritée d’une vieille tradition orale du pays gallo (frontière de la

²⁰ Interestingly, while Condé acknowledges that European tales such as “Barbe-Bleue, Peau d’Ane, Cendrillon, sont également très appréciés aux Antilles, au point que Mme Schont n’hésite pas à les inclure dans un petit recueil de ‘Contes créoles’ édité par l’Imprimerie officielle de Basse-Terre,” she also dismisses them : “malheureusement, ils ne témoignent d’aucune modification du contenu, réemploi du matériel, évolution du héros qui puissent justifier ici leur étude. Ils ne sont que la restitution des originaux français sans aucune créolisation” (*Civilisation* 45). While I absolutely understand Condé’s point, I also ask if there is something to be learned from the fact that these tales have traveled and survived in more or less “original” forms in this highly heterogeneous and blended region. Whether it reflects a universality of these particular tales that is worthy of mention, a greater identification with European worldviews than many Antilleans would like to admit, a way of Othering the tales, or something else, it seems remarkable and worthy of more than a casual aside.

Bretagne et du pays roman),” while also delving deeper into the reasons for this (12). He notes that Creole itself was a language created by both Africans and Europeans in the Antilles, in part because they cohabitated on the islands for over fifty years before the infamous 1680 “Code Noir” imposed structural and hierarchical separations.²¹ This common linguistic creation was also possible because at the time French was not yet standardized, so all the peoples in the islands, even those from different regions of France, spoke different dialects or languages and thus Creole was needed to communicate. Confiant explains that “l’intercompréhension entre Blancs, sans être aussi difficile qu’elle l’était entre Noirs, n’était pas totale et que c’est ce terreau d’instabilité linguistique qui a permis l’émergence d’une langue nouvelle, commune aux Blancs et aux Noirs, le créole” (12). This common language was inevitably intertwined with the creation of a common culture.

Confiant also notes that the European settlers were groups that would have had their own strong oral traditions. He reminds the reader that “la majorité des premiers colons, au début du XVIIe siècle, étaient des paysans ou des marins, parfois des malandrins, des voyous ou des prostituées expédiés de force aux îles d’Amérique” (11). Certainly, peasants and sailors are known for the strong oral culture and storytelling traditions. Similarly, of the specifically French colonizers, Confiant notes that “les premiers colons normands, vendéens, poitevins ou Bretons étaient...pour la plupart illettrés” (12). Again, these regions are known for their strong oral traditions and the illiteracy of the colonizers further suggests they relied on and imported a strong oral European tradition which, in turn, helped influence and shape the Creole folktales.

²¹ The “Code Noir” or Black Code was a decree by King Louis XIV codifying (mostly limiting) the rights of slaves, (including their transfer as property and their mandatory conversion to Catholicism) and freed Blacks, as well as the expulsion of Jews from French colonies. It was not until the early eighteenth century that a series of degrees limited interracial contact and marriage.

Beyond this Afro-European intermixture, other cultures also influenced Martinican, Guadeloupean, and Guinean folklore given that these islands were transnational sites of intercultural mixing. Another significant influence is Amerindian. Confiant cites the figure of “la Maman d’eau (“Maman Dlo” en créole)” as a lasting example of this influence (11). He also notes that “[l]a plupart des noms de plantes et d’arbres par exemple ont été empruntés à leur langue pour la bonne raison que ce sont eux qui ont aidé les Blancs et les Noirs à s’adapter un environnement qui leur était inconnu” (11). In Martinique and Guadeloupe, in large part because the Amerindians were, “hélas décimés une cinquantaine d’années après le début de la colonisation européenne,” it is only traces of their culture that remain in tales from these regions.

In contrast, due to its slightly different history and the survival of some of its native tribes, Guianese folklore has a much stronger Amerindian influence.²² Mauricienne Fortino’s book featuring its “récits, totalement inédits, [qui] ont été recueillis par Mauricienne Fortino auprès de Antonia Felici Inacio, chef coutumier du village amérindien de Kamuyene à Macouria en Guyane [et] écrits en français par Mauricienne Fortino [qui est e]lle—même Palikur [et] consacre une grande partie de sa vie à collecter et sauvegarder la tradition de son peuple,” reflects this heightened intermingling (11). A publicity release for Guianese storyteller David Mérour (featured in my corpus) for a then-upcoming performance at the 2017 Fête Mondiale du Conte, which notes that he has a universe that is “multiple et s’exprime tant à travers ses racines bretonnes que par la parole créole ou la légende amérindienne,” does so as well. (“David Mérour | Fête Mondiale Du Conte”).²³

²² Please see my next chapter for a more thorough discussion of the histories of the regions and their peoples.

²³ Highlighting the small world of particularly Antillean storytelling, the website’s banner image for the festival features a group of storytellers including Magguy Faraux, also part of my corpus. For a brief discussion of my corpus and selection criteria please see the next section of this Introduction. For a detailed description of each text in my corpus, please see my second chapter.

A final significant influence on Creole folklore is the nineteenth-century addition of South Asian traditions. These further contributed to the remarkable transcultural encounters that had historically shaped identity in the region. After slavery was abolished in the French colonies many planters imported large numbers of indentured laborers, primarily from the Tamil region of India. This new group of disenfranchised oppressed peoples also brought their own traditions, cultures, and beliefs with them, significantly their version of “l’hindouisme Populaire, celui des campagnes indiennes et des basses castes, assez différent de l’hindouisme pratiqué par les Brahmanes” (Confiant 12-13). As Confiant explains, “[l]a créolisation des Indiens entraînera aussi une indianisation de la culture créole et Raymond Relouza [dans son *Nature et Culture dans le conte créole*] a montré que dans maints contes créoles, on retrouve non seulement des personnages indiens mais aussi des croyances relevant de l’hindouisme, appelé ‘Bondieu-kouli’ en créole” (13). South Asian culture, then, features alongside Western African, Euro-Francophone, and Amerindian influences in Creole folktales. Finally, as the back jacket of Colombo’s book implies, twentieth and twenty-first century immigrants, including those from China, Libya, and Syria are further influencing Creole tales. Folktales in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana, then, represent a unique creolized blend of cultures.²⁴

²⁴ Indeed, a note at the very end of Rutil’s collection highlights this: “L’archipel des Caraïbes est un lieu de contact entre divers peuples et civilisations. S’y sont rencontrés et souvent confrontés : Caraïbes, Européens, Africains et plus tard, des communautés venues de Chine, du Moyen-Orient, des Indes. Leur coexistence a engendré des attitudes et des habitudes originales qui sont propres à chacune des îles. Ce sont ces affinités que les Edition CARIBÉENNES tenteront de mieux faire connaître en jetant des ponts culturels par-dessus les bras de mer.” The Editions’ choice to create a folklore collection to achieve this goal underscores the important role that folklore plays in bridging these cultures. Similarly, in her collection *Des contes de Ti Jean...Aux réalités de la Martinique*, Christine Colombo quotes Thérèse Georgel’s beautiful summary of this confluence of influences: “Thérèse Georgel dit des contes antillais qu’ils n’ont pas d’âge ; ‘ils sont venus aux isles [sic] avec des conquérants d’Europe, avec les esclaves enlevés à leur belle Afrique libre, avec les coolies transplantés, et même les Chinois attirés par le gain dans le petit commerce des boutiques. Ils se sont mêlés aux récits des Caraïbes, qui alors peuplaient les isles [sic]” (qtd. in *Des contes* 23).

Of course, beyond these cultural influences, the folktales are also shaped by the land and social structure from which they emerged. As Confiant notes, African folklore could not survive the forcible transmission to the Caribbean unchanged because “le Nègre est placé dans une situation inédite à laquelle il lui faut bien, non sans d’énormes difficultés, s’adapter : un nouvel environnement de nouvelles ‘races,’ les Blancs et les Amérindiens, de nouvelles pratiques culturelles et culturelles. L’Afrique se perpétue donc dans le conte créole mais en se déconstruisant pour permettre une réadaptation de l’homme noir aux Amériques” (8). Certainly, as Confiant notes, the inclusion of Amerindian terms for flora and fauna and food reflects this evolution of story to fit its new world.

However, most significantly, Creole folklore had to shift and adapt to the new harsh reality of the sugar cane plantation and its back-breaking exploitative labor (first in the form of enslavement and then as indentured laborer and/or sharecropper). There is certainly the practical, superficial evidence of slavery in the tales: presence of enslavers, references to being enslaved, references to sugar cane or labor in the fields, to shacks, etc. However, thematic analysis of the tales also reveals deeper ways in which the society and culture of these regions influenced the Creole folktale. Chamoiseau gives a good overview of these influences, acknowledging the tales’ ludic function while also arguing that “when taken as a whole, these tales provide a practical education, an apprenticeship in life—a life of survival in a colonized land” (*Creole Folktales* xii). He continues:

The Creole tale says that fear is inevitable, that every blade of grass may conceal a monster, and that one must know how to live with this. The Creole tale reveals that overt force guarantees eventual defeat and punishment, and that through cunning, patience, nerve, and resourcefulness (which is never a sin), the weak may vanquish the strong or

seize power by the scruff of the neck. The Creole tale splatters the dominant system of values with all the immoral—or rather, amoral—guile of the poor and downtrodden. Yet these stories contain no ‘revolutionary message, and their remedies for misfortune are not collective ones. The hero is alone, and selfishly preoccupied with saving his own skin. And so we might conclude, as Edouard Glissant suggests, that what we have here is an *emblematic detour*, a system of counter-values, or a counterculture, that reveals itself as both powerless to achieve complete freedom and fiercely determined to strive for it nonetheless. (*Creole Folktales* xii-xiii)

For Chamoiseau, then, the influences of slavery and the horrors that accompany it are prevalent and obvious in the Creole folktale.²⁵

Alain Rutil, Confiant, and Condé agree, giving their own examples. In his application of Propp’s schema to Antillean folktales, Rutil highlights their uniquely Caribbean functions and characteristics. First he discusses the fact that Propp’s traditional “situation initiale se confond et se superpose à la fonction principale du manque” (291). Where European fairytales can create a “problem” in any number of ways, Antillean folktales are primarily preoccupied with lack, reflecting the reality of life on a slave plantation.²⁶ Rutil also notes that “Plusieurs contes de

²⁵ In his introduction to Rutil’s collection Guy Tirolien says much the same: “Contrairement à la tradition africaine, l’homme tient plus de place dans nos contes que les animaux, ce qui s’explique aisément par l’importance attachée au travail humain dans une société issue de l’esclavage et de l’exploitation de l’homme par l’homme” and “Dans les contes africains, il est fait appel, plus couramment, à l’intervention miraculeuse des Dieux et des Génies de la brousse ; ici, l’homme se tire d’affaire en usant de ruse et de débrouillardise. Rien d’étonnant à cela, si l’on songe que les rapports de maître à esclave favorisent le retour à la ruse comme principale arme de salut” (10).

²⁶ In his Introduction to his *Creole Tales* Chamoiseau further specifies some of this lack: “When you consider, for example, that it took a law, a statue, a ministerial memorandum, and a gubernatorial decree (1845-46) to persuade the French Béké masters to distribute a few pounds of manioc flour and two or three tail ends of codfish to each of their slaves every week, you can readily understand why hunger figures as a constant torment in our Creole tales, which obsessively depict food as the most precious of treasures” (xii-xiv). Interestingly, this Creole folktale emphasis on hunger is reflected and refracted in Chamoiseau’s reflection on life in the *bagne*: “The stomach – the final hold – the only intimacy. The secret double of the walls and the shadows. But intimacy existed only inside the stomach. There they hid their treasures, their money, their tools for escape, their means of survival. Terrible suppository. No blockhouse, no cell, no wall recalls privacy, and that’s why no individual presences can be recovered there. They were no more than the secret doubles of a haggard mass rendered into numbers, a milling,

notre corpus connaissent un dénouement tragique pour les héros,” a pattern reflecting the difficult realities of slavery (292). Indeed, Rutil’s lament that Propp’s system lacks a “fonction échec” highlights the degree to which this predisposition to failure and unhappy endings diverges from European storytelling traditions.

In the recurring character of Compère Lapin and his unscrupulous self-serving behavior, Confiant sees “l’individualiste né, forcené, parfaitement adapté au monde esclavagiste au sein duquel le maître récompense l’esclave docile et obséquieux en lui octroyant un travail peu fatigant” (9). Similarly, Condé sees in Creole proverbs “aucune exhortation à la bonté, à la douceur, à la persévérance ou à la fraternité ; mais à l’égoïsme, à la ruse, à la dissimulation, parce que ce sont les armes qu’il convient à l’esclave d’utiliser, qui sont assorties à l’univers dans lequel il se maut” (*Civilisation* 32). Beyond this, Condé sees in the recurring theme of bastardization the enslaved people’s search for a lost history, a lost identity: “Le père est perdu, il faut le retrouver. Le père est inconnu, il importe de découvrir son nom. Et cet inconnu, cet absent correspondent dans l’inconscient de l’esclave à l’ignorance de son origine” (*Civilisation* 42). And when the father is found, it “illustre donc à sa façon la conception qui sera celle de Schoelcher et des abolitionnistes : le Noir peut mériter la liberté, le Noir peut prouver qu’il est digne d’être considéré comme un homme, mais n’y parvient cependant qu’en refusant sa véritable identité, en se donnant un nouveau père, en empruntant une nouvelle origine” (*Civilisation* 43). Both the peoples and geographic and social conditions of Antillean folklore, then, have left indelible marks on the tradition. These marks, in turn, represent the long and unique history of folktales from Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana, the tracing of which again

ambiguous mass – humanity dehumanized. They returned to their bodies to preserve some measure of an individual life. Only the stomach...” (ellipses in original, *French Guiana* 18).

provides unique insights into their history and present. In this way, folktales are cultural artefacts, reflecting the factual reality of their Creole origins.

In fact, this reflection means that Folktales are not simply cultural artefacts but also sites of memory. Nora argues that “*Lieux de mémoire* are created by a play of memory and history, an interaction of two factors that results in their reciprocal overdetermination” (“Between Memory” 19). This is certainly the case with Antillean folktales, where their historical reality coalesces with their social role and how they exist today in Martinican, Guadeloupean, and Guinean imaginaries. In other words, with Antillean folktales, one can look “beyond the historical reality to discover the symbolic reality and recover the memory that” they sustain; they thus clearly function as realms of memory (Nora, “From *Lieux*” xvii). Nora tells us that the study of realms of memory is less interested in historical fact than in present understandings of the past and how they shape the here and now, “a history that is interested in memory not as remembrance but as the overall structure of the past within the present” (“From *Lieux*” xxiv).²⁷ The morphology of folktales from this region, then, is only interesting to us in relation to how it is understood by Martinicans, Guadeloupeans, and Guineans today.²⁸

²⁷ The full quote is somewhat poetic and helps clarify what he means by this: “Adopting such a view opens the way to a new kind of history: a history less interested in causes than in effects; less interested in actions remembered or even commemorated than in the traces left by those actions and in the interaction of those commemorations; less interested in events themselves than in the construction of events over time, in the disappearance and reemergence of their significations; less interested in ‘what actually happened’ than in its perpetual reuse and misuse, its influence on successive presents; less interested in traditions than in the way in which traditions are constituted and passed on. In short, a history that is neither a resurrection nor a reconstitution nor a reconstruction nor even a representation but, in the strongest possible sense, a ‘rememoration’—a history that is interested in memory not as remembrance but as the overall structure of the past within the present: history of the second degree” (“From *Lieux*” xxiv).

²⁸ This is not to say that the morphology of folktales is unimportant. If Guinea’s *case créole* can function as sites of memory due to their physical status as “physical ‘crystallization’ of the various stages of Reunion’s history – from trading post to pioneer settlement to thriving plantation colony to *département d’outre-mer* – and as potent symbol of a lost ‘art de vivre réunionnais,’” then so, too, must the layers of meaning in Antillean folktales outlined above render them sites of memory (Waters 150). Rather, it is to say that these layered folktales become sites once they enter into modern, popular consciousness. It is the meaning currently attached to these layers that make them important to us.

Indeed, an extreme particularity of Creole folklore is the ways in which folktales penetrate all levels of society. In Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana there is an ethnographic interest in folktales which exists both within *and beyond* academic departments of anthropology or folklore. People from all levels of society and across media show an interest in folklore, in listening to it, telling it, and talking about it, often in order to try to define a personal or collective identity. These discourses—both at the academic and popular levels—simultaneously shape and reflect the conceptualization of folklore’s past within the present. Certainly, their deeply historical nature is understood, as is their value as cultural artefacts. But they are also viewed as tied to Creole selfhood, as a record of the lived experiences of enslaved forebears whose lives and voices were not recorded in any other way, as a way of remembering an almost-lost past. This particular Antillean conception of folktales has existed at least since their first academic discussions of folklore penetrated Western discourse. A brief history of discourses surrounding Creole storytelling illuminates the particularities of the region and provides an historical understanding that further illuminates modern practices.

If telling folktales has always been an important aspect of Caribbean culture, discourse *about* folktales has its roots in the Western academy and began around the turn of the twentieth century. It began with Western specialists, especially ethnologists and anthropologists, who collected, transcribed, and commented on folktales from these regions, among them the noted American Elsie Clews Parsons and European Lafcardio Hearn. Their Western paternalistic perspective is problematic and Condé condemns it: “Depuis des générations, ce peuple dépendant est à la recherche de son identité, et cette fois encore, les termes de cette identité lui sont dictés. Des chercheurs, Européens en majorité, se sont efforcés d’évaluer dans quelle

mesure, le peuple antillais est ‘demeuré’ africain, ou, ‘devenu’ européen” (*Civilisation* 6).²⁹ This outsider interest is neither unique nor particularly relevant to this study.

Of much more interest are Antillean understandings and representations of the role of folktales as inextricably linked to local identity. Of course, there could not be Antillean academic interest in folklore until the emergence of an Antillean academic elite, which did not occur until later in the twentieth century. The first Antillean intellectuals to publish discourses about folktales in the Caribbean were the trio Aimé Césaire, Suzanne Césaire, and René Ménéil, most notably in their co-edited journal *Tropiques* which they published under Vichy rule from 1941-1945. *Tropiques* thus represents the first characterization of folklore in France’s Caribbean DOMs by writers of academic and literary texts from that area. The journal frames the folktales it includes as a way of connecting with a lost or “true” past and thus present.

In its second issue, Martinican intellectual René Ménéil “exhorts his readers to abandon European literature in order to ‘find themselves’ in the surrealist ‘merveilleux’ of local folk tales” (Britton 175). He begins by calling on his Martinican audience to reject the problematic canonical literature of Europe and especially France: “[w]e are searching for our true face. We have sufficiently condemned the artificial literature which claims to give us its image: retarded poets, heroes of the cliché, superstitious manufacturers of alexandrines, cowards with nothing to say” (qtd. in Britton 175). He then poses the question “Martinican Narcissus, how then will you recognize yourself?” before answering it: “Gaze deeply into the mirror of the marvellous [sic]: your folktales, your legends, your songs. There you will find inscribed luminous, the real image

²⁹ Significantly, she continues by framing the European characterization of the Antilles: “Le monde antillais serait celui où les civilisations se côtoient, en une mosaïque d’éléments assez disparates, même si en fin de compte, elle séduit. *Car on parle beaucoup de la séduction des Antilles*” (italics added, *Civilisation* 6). This discourse around seduction is in evidence in my corpus, most strikingly in the description of Guianese storyteller Didier Lemaire, who on the back cover of his collection *Contes et Récits Métissés de Guyane* is described as a “métro qui a subi un double envoûtement, celui de la Guadeloupe et de la Guyane, au point de se métisser.”

of yourself” (qtd. n Britton 175). This early insider understanding of folktales, then, saw in them a vision of Antillean’s deepest selves.

Similarly, in Ménénil and Aimé Césaire’s co-authored “Introduction au folklore martiniquais,” in the fourth issue of *Tropiques*, they proclaim: “Quand on aura dépouillé toutes les archives, compulsé tous les dossiers, fouillé tous les papiers des abolitionnistes, c’est à ces contes que reviendra celui qui voudra saisir, éloquente et pathétique, la grande misère de nos pères esclaves” (Césaire and Ménénil).³⁰ In other words, from the beginning of Antilleans talking about their own folklore and traditions, it has been intimately tied to tradition or history and identity, and associated with Western archival traditions. Already we see in *Tropiques* an interest in ethnographically interpreting folktales as a window into the grand misery of the previous generations, as a way to (re)connect with a lost past, that of slavery and, before that, Africa. Another way of saying this, of course, is that for Ménénil and the Césaires folklore represented a site of memory that anchors and memorializes unique aspects of Antillean history.

However, Antilleans have not always embraced this memory and its traces of trauma. Three events, the end of *Tropiques*, the contemporaneous end of WWII, and the induction as equal members of the French nation through departmentalization were accompanied by a period of diminished cultural interest in folklore. Alain Rutil describes this shift, noting that “le conte était entendu, jusqu’aux années cinquante,” during which time its popularity diminished dramatically (23). And he insists that “la société du conte – telle qu’elle existait au début du XXe siècle, ou même après 1945 – a perdu bien de ses caractères originels et originaux” (24). Simply put, in the

³⁰ It is important to note that Ménénil’s opinion of folklore evolved. In his 1964 essay “Problèmes d’une culture antillaise” (featured in his 1981 collection of essays *Tracées: Identité, négritude, esthétique aux Antilles*), Ménénil argues that folklore “tend à figer, à fixer la vie dans les gestes du passé et, à cet égard, il n’est pas la culture, il n’est pas la lutte culturelle. Il en est même, sous certains aspects, le contraire si on ne cherche pas à le dépasser en créant les nouvelles formes de la vie de demain” (42). Of course, this evolution on Ménénil’s part does not change or diminish the impact *Tropiques* had in linking tales and identity or featuring storytelling and exegesis side-by-side; this trend lived on in the common consciousness and Antillean academic discourses.

middle of the twentieth century there was a decline in the popularity of folklore and storytelling in these regions. Christine Colombo offers this explanation: “Le déclin du conte s’est amorcé à partir du moment où les colonies de Guadeloupe, Martinique sont devenues département français. La culture locale a été repoussée pour faire place à une francisation à outrance” (*Des Contes* 17). During this time, “le conteur était traité par beaucoup avec un certain mépris. Il était traité de *vié neg* ‘vieux nègre’ ; c’est ainsi qu’on qualifie en Martinique les personnes ‘peu évoluées’” (Colombo, *Des Contes* 17). She goes on to explain that people who were regarded as “little evolved,” or associated with traditional culture, evoked thoughts and memories of past traumas; storytellers, and their association with slave traditions and with Creole, were doubly evocative and thus problematic in their un-French-ness (and thus “backwardness”). After Césaire and Ménil, then, folklore was temporarily relegated to the shadows as a place of anti-modernization-cum-assimilation remembering.

Of course, this relegation did not last. And while Césaire and Ménil’s characterization of folklore has had significant and lasting influence, the next generation of Antillean scholars to engage with folklore did not allow it to go uncriticized. To wit, Condé’s 1978 *La Civilisation du Bossale* represents the beginnings of a renewed interest among Antillean scholars in folklore. She implicitly criticizes the older generation, “celui des nègres instruits qui n’ont pour se différencier de la masse de leurs frères, ni la terre, ni la fortune, mais la possession de la culture du maître. Mais la maîtrise du verbe” (52).³¹ She continues by paraphrasing, and agreeing with, Roland Suvélor’s position that “l’absence de littérature proprement martiniquaise était due à

³¹ This critique feels particularly descriptive of Césaire when one remembers that his own brother-in-law, Aristine Maugée, wrote an article entitled “Aimé Césaire, poète” that acclaimed him as revolutionary because of his “natural” ability to prolifically create poetry as refined and sophisticated as European poetry. In her article “How to be Primitive: *Tropiques*, Surrealism and Ethnography,” Celia Britton summarizes Maugée’s description of Césaire as a poet who “succeeds in combining formal sophistication and primitive instinct, and so gives his readers the best of both worlds” (173). This description of Césaire sounds strikingly similar to those Condé is critiquing.

cette impossibilité des nouveaux citoyens de s'affirmer culturellement différents, et d'utiliser un mode d'expression qui leur soit propre" (52).³² In short, despite the fact that they began this tradition of linking folklore to Antillean self and memory, for Condé, Césaire and Ménéil skewed too far towards the outsider academic and were not enough part of the "us" of the society.

Despite this critique, ultimately Condé agrees with their position on the importance of folklore and its imbrication with Antillean national identity. Her analysis of the themes of the tales and the ways in which they reflect slave culture represent a quintessential example of the unique Antillean interpretation of folklore: she does an ethnographic study in order to better understand (or even remember) her own roots, her own (shared) identity, and targets a broader audience than exclusively academics.³³ Beyond this, she also explicitly states that "l'univers des contes est la restitution de la quotidienneté de la vie de l'esclave" (*Civilisation* 34). Even more strikingly, Condé begins her book with an emphasis on the Antillean's dependance on others (asserting their status as the only people to have not chosen where they live, nor how their world was structured, nor their lived reality) and then immediately notes that "[l]'esclave baptisé ne recevait aucune instruction, n'apprenait ni à lire ni à écrire, mais était autorisé à chanter et à danser le Samedi ou le Dimanche, loin du Maître dont il ne fallait pas troubler le repos" (*Civilisation* 5). She begins her text, then, with a direct connection between folklore and slave culture and with the implication that traditional dancing, singing, and (by extension) tales were

³² Britton makes this critique more explicit. She notes that the three folktales Césaire and Ménéil included in *Tropiques* were either recorded by a friend, Georges Gratiant, or by Lafcadio Hearn himself; none come directly from Césaire or Ménéil. They quote Hearn several times in their "Introduction au folklore martiniquais." According to Britton, this reliance on others, and especially on European Hearn, "strongly suggests that, as Hibrán indeed pointed out, they have no first-hand knowledge of [Martinican folklore], but are forced to depend to a significant extent on a nineteenth-century European traveler and amateur folklorist; overall there is little sense of them 'recognizing' their true identity in their native folklore, as Ménéil had been urging them to do" (176).

³³ This trend of analyzing folktales to unearth the memories buried within is in keeping with Nora's argument that the essence of a *lieu de mémoire* is both "its original intention [and] its return in the cycles of memory...all *lieux de mémoire* are objects *mises en abîme*" ("Beyond Memory" 20). Folktales have an original function of entertaining and instructing and have cycled through Antillean memory as such and more.

the only things Antillean slaves could control. They represent what is authentically Antillean. In other words, for Condé, while Césaire and Ménénil were too French to fully escape the cultural influence of the Hexagon, they were on the right track in their recognition of folklore and its study as a source for reconnecting with their own personal pasts and shaping their presents.

The next generation of Antillean intellectuals interested in folklore, which saw a resurgence in the 1980s, take Condé's position a step further both in their own folktale recounting and their discourses about this tradition.³⁴ Particularly important in this resurgence were Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphael Confiant who became pillars of modern Martinican intellectualism. After studying law in Paris, inspired by his friend Edouard Glissant, Chamoiseau returned to his home, Martinique.³⁵ In 1988 he published his second novel, *Solibo magnifique*, about the death of a Creole storyteller.³⁶ In her dissertation entitled *Mort, Mots, et Liberté: L'écriture de l'identité dans les œuvres de Césaire, Chamoiseau et Condé*, Rose-Myriam Réjouis elegantly and succinctly characterizes *Solibo magnifique* as portraying "le site mythique d'un arrière-pays dont la figure principale est le conteur créole, celui qui prend la parole le soir (dès l'époque des plantations)" (114). She emphasizes Chamoiseau's portrayal, in this novel, of the danger departmentalization poses to Martinican culture and the importance of folktales in combatting this danger: "Le message qu'il apporte est celui de l'éveil : il existe une culture

³⁴ Colombo discusses this shift in attitudes towards folklore across time, noting that for the "conteur lui-même, sa fonction, son lieu d'intervention, son statut ont subi une profonde métamorphose avec le temps. Jadis aimé et respecté, il a été renié puis récupéré sous des formes diverses. Nous pouvons décomposer son évolution en trois périodes : une période faste, une expérience inédite, un renouveau" (337). The diminishment and then resurgence of interest in folklore parallels, and is due to the same factors as, the shifts in these regions attitudes towards Creole as described in the next chapter.

³⁵ Glissant, a prominent figure in the Antillean writing scene since the 1950s, was beginning to emerge as a prominent thinker as well. He published his seminal text *Le Discours antillais* in 1981, both reflecting and inspiring a growing interest in questions of Antillean identity.

³⁶ His 1982 play, *Manman Dlo contre la fée Carabosse* and his first novel, *Chronique des sept misères*, published in 1986, while already featuring the early stages of what would become his signature style intermixing oral and literary, French and Creole, to create a hybrid language, and exhibiting Black Caribbean characters, do not focus on folklore or storytelling per se. His third novel, *Texaco* (1992) achieves the full realization of his signature style, which won him le Prix Goncourt, but is still not explicitly about folklore.

martiniquaise *riche de contes*, de traditions et de savoirs (culinaires et médicaux). Si les Martiniquais continuent d'absorber la culture métropolitaine, ils perdront leur âme" (italics added, 20). In this novel Chamoiseau thus arguably articulates the idea, in keeping with Nora's argument that "the historian has become no longer a memory-individual but, in himself, a *lieu de mémoire*," that the storyteller is, himself, a realm of memory ("Between Memory"18). In this first text of Chamoiseau's that deals explicitly with folklore and storytelling, then, he is already emphatically continuing the tradition of Césaire, Ménénil, and Condé, underlining the importance of folklore as a way of reconnecting with Martinique's lost past and combatting the dangers of encroaching Frenchification. In this way he highlights them as a postcolonial site of memory that can stand against official French narratives.

With their 1989 publication of *Eloge de la créolité (In Praise of Creoleness)*, Chamoiseau and Confiant, along with co-author Jean Bernabé, continued the Antillean intellectual tradition of explicitly lauding ethnographic study of folklore as a connection to a lost past and broader present selfhood. This text, originally a talk given in French, is essentially a manifesto declaring the need for Creoles to cultivate and celebrate their Creoleness. It consists of three main sections or arguments: a brief history of previous Martinican writers and thinkers (with a focus on Césaire and Glissant); a new definition/valorization of Creoleness as a worldview; and a linguistic, literary, and stylistic program for Caribbean literature as living Creoleness. As part of their artistic program, they insist upon a need to return to an oral past in order to enrich and bring tradition into the present. As quoted at the start of this introduction, they even explicitly state that "[t]he work of folklorists is absolutely necessary for the simple conservation of the elements of national heritage" (129). These intellectuals, then, highlight the

ethnographic and cultural value of folktales and explicitly connect them not only to questions of identity but also themes of heritage and memory.

However, it is in the 1980s and 1990s, and among these intellectuals that a significant shift began to occur: those theorizing both folktales and what it means to be Creole also became tellers of them, linking identity and storytelling even more closely and fusing theory and practice. While previous intellectual engagement with folktales would often appear alongside folktales, they were not necessarily authored by the same person. For example, *Tropiques* featured not only analyses of folktales but also transcripts of tales, but these transcripts were not of tales told by the Césaires or Ménéil. Nonetheless, even this early imbrication of storytelling and story analysis in the Antilles is unusual and worthy of note. Traditionally, folklore scholarship more closely resembles the work of scholars such as Hearne or Parsons, that is intellectual “experts” from outside the community (in terms of time, geography, or both) who study the community’s folktales hoping to understand this Other culture. That the very first generation of Antillean intellectuals who were neither anthropologists nor folklorists not only lauded folklore, but explicitly portrayed it as simultaneously having ethnographic and personal value, even personal value *because* of its ethnographic value, is significant and unusual, rendering folklore from this region even more unique. It also established a foundation for future generations of elites’ relationship with folklore.

It is this tradition that authors expanded in the 1980s and 1990s. With his publication of his folktale collection *Au Temps de l’antan*, also in 1989, Chamoiseau created a storytelling alter ego, cementing his own role as storyteller.³⁷ Significantly, even in this text, where Chamoiseau takes on that role, he highlights the connection between folktales and identity. In his

³⁷ For more information on this text, and other ones discussed here which are part of my corpus, please see my second chapter.

introduction, which begins with another of this chapter's epigraphs, he describes the sugarcane plantations, slavery, and then an old enslaved man who emerges at night, dispelling his lethargy to become the Master of Words. He then explains that "[o]ur stories and our Storytellers date from the period of slavery and colonialism. Their deepest meanings can be understood only in relation to this fundamental period in the history of the West Indies. Our Storyteller speaks for a people enchained: starving, terrorized, living in the cramped postures of survival" (*Creole Folktales* xii). In other words, the storyteller and the stories he tells represent an (exclusive) memory. Furthermore, in this description of the region's "traditional" storytelling, Chamoiseau describes the imagined archetype of storyteller and storytelling performance. He characterizes an old, non-descript, enslaved man telling tales born of the history of slavery around a fire at night. This is *the* archetypal image of traditional storytelling in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana.³⁸

Confiant's 1995 collection *Les maîtres de la parole créole*, also an offshoot of his work and ideas in *Éloge*, goes in some ways a step further than Chamoiseau, and also depicts the quintessential image of an old, male, enslaved storyteller which has come to embody the principal link to that history and thus today's modern Creole. He, too, describes the "porteur de cette parole populaire[,]...le conteur créole [qui est] doué d'une mémoire fabuleuse," who, "un jour venu, ou plus exactement une nuit, alors que rien auparavant ne le distinguait de ses

³⁸ One essential aspect of traditional Antillean storytelling is perhaps so deeply rooted in the culture that Chamoiseau need not explicitly describe it. Diana Ramassamy does, however, in her introduction to her 2016 collection of tales, *Les nouveaux maîtres de la parole créole*: "Dire le conte c'est suspendre le temps, autoriser celui qui l'écoute à s'échapper un temps du poids du réel. Pour ce faire, il est besoin d'une formule spéciale, d'un rituel langagier, capable de détacher l'auditoire de toute entrave spatio-temporelle, c'est le *Yé krik !, Yé krak ! Yé mistikrik ! Yé mistikrak !* Formules d'introduction et de clôture que nous ne pouvons pas traduire, tant elles renvoient à un lieu hors de tout lieu" (6). This call and response between storyteller and audience (as well as the almost-as-traditional "est-ce que la cour dort ? Non, la cour ne dort pas !") are as deeply embedded in the Antillean imaginary as the archetypal storyteller and audience carrying out the conversation. One might even argue that, contrary to Ramassamy's claim that this pattern transports one to a non-place and non-time, that it in fact transports one directly back to the times of slavery, that they are traces of the forefathers who spoke those very same words in evocation of the same tales, the same lessons, the same connections.

semblables,” takes over for the tired master storyteller and tells his own story, thus claiming the title “maître de la parole” for himself (13). He underscores the fact that this storyteller undergoes no official training but only needed “d’ouvrir grand ses oreilles et d’enregistrer ce qu’il aura entendu dans son enfance et son adolescence” (13). Confiant then continues by once again emphasizing the role of folklore as connection to history and thus an important aspect of identity: “Le conteur créole est donc le ressasseur d’une mémoire forcément fragile, sans cesse menacé mais dont tout un chacun, conteurs et assistance, sait au plus profond de lui qu’elle est l’indispensable lien avec les origines de la communauté, aussi brouillées et obscures soient-elles” (14). He also explicitly ties folklore to slavery : “Riche donc de multiples apports, le conte créole s’est déployé pendant les trois siècles qu’a duré la société de plantation de la canne à sucre” (14). Of course, the main body of his text is a compilation of tales collected from traditional storytellers and is thus a performance of folklore. Confiant, then, like Chamoiseau, both studies and (re)tells folktales, explicitly framing storytelling tradition (including tales and teller) as an essential link to Antillean history and thus modern identity.³⁹ They exemplify this generation of Antillean intellectuals that both studies and tells folktales as part of their own heritage and understandings of self.⁴⁰

³⁹ It is worth noting that while these men held similar views about the importance of oral tradition and Creole, as their co-authorship of *Éloge* illustrates, their approach to putting their words into action take subtly but significantly different shape. Chamoiseau drew on the oral tradition in order to author his own version of the tales, playing self-consciously with the line between oral and written yet undeniably creating a written text. (For a more thorough analysis of the lines he walks and the games he plays in this collection, please see my fifth chapter.) Confiant, in contrast, sought to record and save the words of other, illiterate, oral storytellers. Chamoiseau drew on the oral record to (at least attempt) to create a distinctly Creole cultural book, which (he argues) is part of defining Creoleness. Confiant sought to create a record the oral culture itself.

⁴⁰ Rutil is yet another example of this, including both many stories and much paratext in his collection. He also explicitly links folklore and conceptions of self throughout his text: the book’s dedication reads “Ce recueil de contes est la mémoire de notre peuple,” an inset at the back of the book highlights the originality of folklore as well as its importance to the culture, “Puisse ce recueil de contes de Marie-Galante contribuer utilement à la nécessaire reconnaissance d’un héritage culturel sans lequel l’avenir n’aurait qu’un visage de désolation,” and even within the text comments such as “Nous autres Antillais [non-conteur], avons découvert un peu tardivement que le conte pouvait nous permettre de comprendre notre univers disparate” emphasize folklore’s importance to the culture and cultural memory (25).

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This shift to performer-analyzer also reflected and shaped an ongoing evolution of how and where people were telling stories as well as stories about stories. With this resurgence of the 1980s and 1990s, the figure of the storyteller and his role in society as living archive became firmly rooted as an archetype in the Antillean psyche, moving beyond academia into literature and popular culture. Ramassamy describes these writers' roles in integrating this shift into the broader Antillean zeitgeist, explaining that the "écrivains de la créolité ont décrit la figure d'un conteur qui, durant la période coloniale, prend la posture d'un homme esclave auquel succède un héritier, un maître de la parole. Ce n'est qu'à la nuit venue que cet homme se transformait en délégué d'un peuple enchaîné" (5).

The embedding of this romanticized image took place even as storytelling itself experienced radical evolution due to coming face-to-face with the global upheavals of the new millennium. These two vectors, while apparently oxymoronic are in fact mutually iterative. The very threat of modernity reinforced a growing interest in the old ways and traditions. And these "ethnographers," like all such posterity-minded folklorists, were aware of this tension and

portrayed themselves as recorders of a dying tradition. This framing, in turn, has implications on understandings of identity. At the end of his Introduction, Confiant describes these societal changes and the threat they pose to this dying tradition:

L'effondrement de [la société de plantation] au tournant des années soixante du XXe siècle et son non-remplacement par un système économique et social cohérent provoqueront une espèce d'hébétude de la langue et de la culture créole, désormais aussi menacées que la société qui leur avait donné naissance. La parole du conteur se figera net, au bord du gouffre, se répétant à l'infini, inlassablement, comme prise de vertige, incapable de se reproduire, d'évoluer et de s'adapter à la modernité sauvage qui affecte les îles depuis une cinquantaine d'années. La tradition de récitation de contes au sein des veillées mortuaires était en voie de disparition dans les années quatre-vingt lorsque l'association 'Kontè Sanblé' décida de lui donner un second souffle. Rassemblant les derniers vieux conteurs traditionnels[,]... 'Kontè Sanblé' opérera un véritable travail de collecte des contes... afin de sauver une tradition et un imaginaire qui ne peuvent plus trouver place dans le monde moderne. En effet, de jeunes et brillants conteurs ont pris la relève, mais leur dire, leur phrasé est différent, le parlé 'en rafales' du conteur traditionnel n'est plus de leur apanage. Ils doivent adapter leurs contes à un univers désormais dominé par un nouveau type d'oralité, celui de la télévision, néo-oralité aussi diffère de l'oralité traditionnelle autant que l'écrit sur papyrus diffère de l'écrit sur papier imprimé. S'ils figurent dans cet ouvrage, c'est parce que nous ne sommes pas des passésistes et que nous croyons qu'ils représentent la créolité moderne, celle qui n'est plus directement liée à la société de plantation et que l'on voit émerger en dehors des Antilles parfois, dans les banlieues ou les ghettos des grandes villes d'Europe et d'Amérique du

Nord. Ainsi, grâce à l'écriture, sera préservé à travers les siècles un peu de la magie de la parole de nos vieux conteurs traditionnels. Honneur et respect sur leurs têtes ! (15)

Modern folklore is thus doubly a site of memory in that it memorializes both the deep past of slavery and the recent past of previous storytelling traditions. The modern storyteller perpetuates and functions as site of memory of trauma and tale, plantations and performance, history of living and history of telling.

Indeed, another particularity of folklore is that its role as a site of memory is one that is widely understood (if not in those words) in the region today. Almost all the storytellers in my corpus talk about folklore this way. Confiant says as much in the quote above. Chamoiseau's quotes also allude to it, as well as his assertion that "Our stories and our Storytellers date from the period of slavery and colonialism" (*Creole Folktales* xii). Rutil echoes it in saying that one must seize the occasion to "apprécier les dépositaires des archives de nos traditions" or that "Nous autre Antillais, avons découvert un peu tardivement que le conte pouvait nous permettre de comprendre notre univers disparate. C'est encore un des véhicules culturels de premier ordre à notre disposition" (25). Other published collections all, one way or another, also allude to this shared memory and folklore's unique role in accessing it.⁴¹

Of course, as the storytellers of my corpus remind their audience, the tradition exists today beyond published collections and this expansion of the tradition also expands the

⁴¹ Ramassamy, too, eloquently presents folktales as more than just stories, beginning her entire collection with this idea: "À l'origine, le conte s'inscrit dans la tradition orale. Dans les sociétés créoles, le conte est un genre littéraire très répandu. Il a pour singularité d'être une histoire impersonnelle et codée qui nécessite la présence d'une personne pour en déployer les contenus cachés et lui attribuer une portée symbolique. Il permet d'entrer dans le système de représentations et le discours interne d'une société. Le conte a longtemps fait figure, pour les sociétés créoles à tradition orale, de précepte fondamental dans la transmission de certains aspects structuraux. Il a permis, depuis des temps immémoriaux, d'atteindre les métamorphoses de la sensibilité, les rêves de l'imaginaire et les visions collectives du monde" (5). In referring to tales as sites of transmission of imaginaries and worldviews, in referring to folktales as a system of representations inside a community, as having symbolic weight, Ramassamy says without saying that tales are sites of memory for Creole communities.

imbrication of identity, performance, and discourse. As Ramassamy affirms in her introduction, “De nos jours, l’art du conte est toujours vivant. Des festivals, des rencontres, des séminaires foisonnent dans le domaine du conte et témoignent d’un renouveau, perceptible dès le début des années 1990” (5). New forms of folklore have and are emerging and merit study. However, while where and how storytellers are telling stories is evolving, storytellers today are maintaining Creole folklore’s particularity by still explicitly linking ethnographic study of folktales and performance of them to questions of self and memory. The fact that the website Potomitan—whose name asserts its status as the “poteau central” (i.e., central support) of Creoleness and who describes itself as being “pour tous ceux qui s’intéressent à la culture créole” and as “un des piliers des langues et cultures créoles”—features tales as such a key part of its intended purpose highlights folklore’s continuing prominence in the Creole and Antillean zeitgeist.⁴² Notably, with its essays about folklore alongside transcriptions of tales themselves, it continues the perhaps uniquely Creole tradition of simultaneously discussing and telling tales.

Other modern performances take this even further, continuing to intermix discourse about and performances of folktales and to explicitly link them to past and current identity, both individual and communal. Christine Colombo’s collection *Ti-Jean et Monsieur le Roi* features analysis and storytelling side-by-side. Furthermore, in her introduction, not only does she describe traditional storytelling as exclusively for other enslaved people and hidden from enslavers or with a double meaning because enslavers are present, she also explicitly links traditional Antillean folktales to rebellion against white hegemonic powers. She notes that maroons lived in the heights of the islands, which is also where the best storytellers are found,

⁴² Again, for more information about Potomitan.info, and the other texts in my corpus, please see my second chapter. For a detailed discussion of Potomitan as both a site of forgetting and of remembering, please see my fourth chapter.

and that therefore one could suppose “que les Marrons ont joué un rôle important dans la transmission de la littérature orale. Cette pratique était sans doute une forme de révolte, un autre moyen de se libérer” (*Ti-Jean* 22). This is a clear positioning of traditional storytelling as a direct link to enslaved and maroon forebears and of the tradition to a practice of revolt and assertion of non-hegemonic identity. Eric Navet also expresses this idea in his introduction to Colombo’s other collection, saying that “le conte joue ici un rôle essentiel dans cette préservation de l’esprit de résistance,” and that “[d]ans toutes les rues *caz nèg*, les forçats de la canne se retrouvent, le soir, autour des flambeau, et ceux qui connaissent les histoires et savent les raconter, les conteurs, parlent de révolte contre les puissants, de résistance à l’oppression, de redressement des torts et des injustices” (*Des Contes* 10-11). In focusing on the tradition of folktales and rebellion, Navet and Colombo are highlighting them as a site of anti-French memory.

Antillean folktale performances also link the tales to definitions of self. In a 2016 TEDx talk at Point à Pitre which was then posted to YouTube by user TEDx Talks on December 1, 2016, storyteller Gilda Gonfrier begins by telling a folktale and then talks about the power of tales. She concludes that “on est fait d’histoires” and in fact, “on est tellement fait d’histoires que les marchands l’ont compris, et pour nous faire acheter des choses dont on n’a pas besoin, le plus souvent, ils les emballent avec des histoires” (“Tales”). She argues for the power of listening to *and telling* tales to make one “plein à l’intérieur,” which, in turn, leads one to be “plus ancré, plus enraciné;” for her, tales are an “éveil à soi-même” (“Tales”). In short, in this TEDx talk in Guadeloupe, Gonfrier highlights the importance of folklore in the creation of self.⁴³

⁴³ Similarly, if slightly less pertinently, in a 2017 TEDx talk at Paris-Saclay (posted to YouTube by TEDx Talks on January 22, 2018), storyteller Sylvie Mombo talks about her storytelling before telling a tale. She begins by talking about her history with storytelling: “Depuis Presque 20 ans je me sens liée aux racines du conte par des hommes, des femmes, des conteurs, des conteuses qui depuis le grand matin du monde, génération après génération, ont porté jusqu’à moi des récits, des récits qu’ils ont nourris de leur vie, de leur vécu, de leur vivant” (“Le Conte”). In other words, this storyteller (born in France but with parents from Gabon and Guadeloupe), both talks about and performs folktales for a wide, non-expert or academic audience. And, in so doing, she begins—she anchors—her discussion

The website Antanlontan, too, focuses on this link. On the site's Homepage, the author Marie-Andrée Blameble, explains the site's goals by explicitly linking the tales on the site to a desire to remember and reconnect with the past. She begins by lamenting the modernization of the world: "La Terre tourne, le monde change, évolue, 's'ultra-modernise' et personne ne peut empêcher cela. Le regard tourné vers l'avenir, on ne vit presque plus le présent, on regarde de moins en moins vers le passé. De ce fait, les choses se perdent et sombrent dans l'oubli." ("Page d'accueil Antanlontan"). She then explicitly links this work to collective memory, a shared past, and current identity: "La mémoire collective s'estompe peu à peu et les nouvelles générations ne savent presque plus rien des pratiques et des savoir-faire des anciens. Pourtant, il est bon de ne pas oublier les époques qu'ont vécues nos parents, nos grands-parents. Car le passé explique et donne souvent un sens au présent." ("Page d'accueil Antanlontan"). Finally, she characterizes the goals of the site as "de dresser une liste des coutumes, des traditions et des 'façons de faire' qui ont existé et dont certaines subsistent encore en Guadeloupe et en Martinique" ("Page d'accueil Antanlontan"). In other words, she too combines storytelling and discourse about folklore, connecting folktales explicitly to issues of collective memory and the past and implicitly to the present and future, and to individual and group definitions of self. Hyper-contemporary Antillean storytellers thus maintain the particular practices and discourses born in the 1980s and 1990s, combining performance and discussion, and treating folktales as sites of memory, as ways of accessing the past that inform the present and future.

In Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana, then, there exists both the reality of folklore and the view of it. The reality is that folklore in these regions survives in diverse ways and is a reflection of a range of influences, including cultural (African, European, Native American,

and performance with the idea that folktales are from time immemorial, by linking her performance to a long history that informs her identity today.

Indian, etc.), geographic (sea, mountain, flora and fauna, etc.), and socio-political (slavery, departmentalization, today's globalized and post-Internet world, etc.). Admittedly, the discourse around folklore is much more romanticized. Its connection to Africa and slavery dominates the discourses, often overshadowing or completely silencing the influences of other ethnicities. But it is always tied to questions of memory and identity, rendering it a significant postcolonial site of memory for the region.

Martinican, Guadeloupean, and Guinean folklore in particular is worthy of study for a variety of reasons, including their embodiment of voices often silenced in academic discourse, the reality of the ways they were shaped by and thus reflect the peoples, places, and cultures that created them, and their social significance today as sites of memory. Indeed, the very fact that people from all levels of society, from academics to authors to theorists to performers to lay audiences so unusually share a common perspective on the value of this art form, let alone show both academic and cultural interest in it, highlights the unique role of folktales in this region today. Recognition of folktales' ethnographic and entertainment value are part of the social zeitgeist and exist side by side. The very people who are analyzing these stories are also telling them, and any- and everyone can do so (as Gonfrier's exhortations illustrate). In traditional folklore studies, folktales are often used as a window to an Other culture, but in the Antilles, unusually academic and lay folklorists alike are studying their own. Creoles' enforced rupture with their own pasts has engendered their recognition of the ethnographic merit of folktales as factual and imagined sites of memory ripe for analysis, all while they maintain these very traditions by continuing to tell these same stories. That said, the impact of modern influences on both the process of storytelling and the roles of these stories as sites requires further analysis.

Because, in fact, while their role if not their label as sites of memory seems to be widely incorporated into the regional zeitgeist, folktales actually represent much more than that. They are not simply sites of memory. They are also postcolonial sites of memory that exist in (con)tension with official French History, traces of trauma, and sites of forgetting. Certainly, Chamoiseau's description of his storyteller hints at this complex role of folktales. In his introduction, just after describing his Creole storyteller, Chamoiseau goes on to describe the storyteller's "paradoxical situation: the master knows of his tales and allows him to tell them, and sometimes even listens to them himself, so the Storyteller must take care to use language that is opaque, devious...Edouard Glissant is right to emphasize that the Storyteller's object is almost *to obscure as he reveals*" (italics in original, xiii).⁴⁴ The tales reveal, they record and convey the lived reality of slavery. They preserve traces of the trauma of this horrific system. However, official French narratives tend to forget or suppress memories of the trauma French imperialism has inflicted. And so, as the original stories obscure, the current iterations become sites of forgetting for the outsiders, the French auditors represented in Chamoiseau's text by the white enslavers. Ultimately, in their revealing while obscuring, the tales function as postcolonial sites of memory that function in the face of official narratives' desire to forget.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ While Chamoiseau and Glissant were friends, and Chamoiseau took much inspiration from Glissant, the two also diverged on several important points, including their view of the role of Creole and folklore. While Chamoiseau felt them critical to the creation of Creoleness, Glissant, ultimately felt them too embroiled in slavery and colonialism to be truly liberatory. As Réjouis eloquently summarizes, "Tout romantisme mis à part, Glissant insiste sur le fait que le créole est un élément opératoire dans le monde de la plantation et qu'il ne fut donc jamais un moyen de résistance. Glissant n'exempte même pas la tradition du conteur créole de ce jugement. Le conteur est né dans une culture soumise au colon" and so, for Glissant, "[p]rendre le créole 'comme noyau' (Eloge 34) d'une résistance culturelle qui critique l'assimilation socio-économique et culturelle de la Martinique...[est un] démarche problématique" (168-169). Both Glissant and Chamoiseau, then, recognize folklore's imbrication with Creoleness. Glissant, however, finds this fact damning, focusing on the violence of slavery and colonialism and its impact on folklore while Chamoiseau finds it liberating, focusing on its roots in and remnants of a time before today's modernized, Frenchified, commodified culture. For the former, slavery is the greatest evil while for the latter departmentalization and modern threats are. This shapes their opinions of folklore.

⁴⁵ For more on the varying roles and functions of folktales as sites, please see my fourth and fifth chapters. For a detailed discussion of Chamoiseau's performance in particular, please see my fifth chapter.

If we define folktales as traditional stories passed down orally, changing with each telling but maintaining a recognizable essence, then they have existed since time immemorial. All peoples have stories they tell to help make sense of themselves, of others, and of the world. However, the specific role those stories play, and how they have evolved and endured within modern cultural systems, varies from region to region. In Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana, folktales endure and represent endurance. They are a repository of real and imagined knowledge, history, and identity that does not exist anywhere else and that speaks truth to efforts to silence it, even as they are also traces of trauma, and can be repackaged as sites of forgetting. Still, As Myriam J. A. Chancy states in her book *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women*, “In communities of the African diaspora, and most especially in the Caribbean, orality equals survival” (74). But, if folklore equals survival, how does folklore survive?

Creole Folklore in Global Contexts

Around the world, and especially in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana, folklore continues to evolve, including expanding into new media, groups, and social contexts. While folkloric practices including traditional storytelling no doubt continue in intimate spheres, these types of performances are not of interest to my project. Rather, this project is interested in the contemporary ways that folklore is surviving and changing, the ways in which it expands into public spheres, and the ways in which it travels in today’s globalized world. In looking at how storytellers are recording their stories, how those records travel and are received, and especially how those records (i.e., storytelling performances) are talked about both by storyteller and audience, one can begin to understand how folktales are being conceived and employed as tools in navigations of identity and belonging in broader, globalized contexts. My corpus, then, consists of eleven published print folktale collections; ten Spotify tracks of storytellers

recounting folktales; fourteen videos of storytellers telling folktales posted on the internet (mostly on YouTube); 140 transcriptions of tales from a variety of webpages; and a wide range of meta-data consisting of discourse about folktale performances, all recorded at least partially in French between 1980 and the present by storytellers explicitly linked to (“from”) Martinique, Guadeloupe, or Guiana. In collating this corpus I made a series of decisions that merits enumeration and explanation.

First, all the texts are folktale performances. I conceptualized “folktales” as social or cultural narratives anchored in tradition and circulating across cultural networks. All of the tales fit this description. Furthermore, the vast majority of tales in my corpus are explicitly labeled as such, featuring the word “conte” (or Creole “Kont”) in the title or description and/or the storyteller as a “conteur” or “conteuse.” More significantly, most (if not all) of the tales feature the recurring characters and themes that characterize Creole folktales.

Second, the focus has been provided by tales in media and a language (French) that can and did travel internationally and globally. I did this partly for purely practical reasons—such tales are accessible even during a global pandemic. However, more importantly, such tales are much more pertinent to questions of national identity formation and sites of remembering and forgetting. Beiner notes that ethnohistorians have long “made use of folklore and oral traditions for emic fieldwork that aims to reveal how indigenous societies perceive their pasts” (10). While folklorists from Hearn to Christine Colombo have done this by collecting tales “on the ground,” the practice of “distance ethnography” of the tales and the discourses around tales that travel is an underexplored avenue. Additionally, in looking to understand and amplify the voices of these storytellers I am less interested in how they portray themselves to their intimates (e.g., by telling tales at bedtime) than to the world. Similarly, I am uninterested in how the stories travel within

academic circles. If the goal of this project is “a *democratic history*, which will faithfully represent the historical experiences of common people (*demos*) and give recognition to how they themselves choose to recall their history,” then public texts where Antilleans present themselves to others are key to accessing this communal understanding of their experiences (Beiner 9). In other words, the focus of this study is how these stories are not only told by real people, but to other real people not necessarily from the community and certainly not face-to-face.

Furthermore, this project is particularly interested in how tales function as sites of memory and forgetting. Such sites are by definition public. Social memory is based on a “public history [which] is generally seen to be performed in the open, without concealment, in a public sphere which allows free discussion” (Beiner 11). Social memory also serves the purpose of publicly uniting an imagined community that extends beyond one’s intimates. The sites that concretize this community by fostering social memory must then also be public and accessible outside one’s immediate sphere, i.e., stories that can travel beyond the confines of the French Caribbean *départements*.

Finally, in focusing on stories that can and have traveled the reality of modern storytelling emerges. As these practices evolve with today’s modern globalized world they also take on new forms. Any story told online is accessible to anyone, and stories are moving online because the rest of the world is, too. Similarly, stories told in books, by the very nature of the medium, become accessible to a much wider public, and books are still a principal medium for recording stories for posterity.⁴⁶ In other words, the reality is that folkloric storytelling has moved well beyond stories told around a fire at night and academic analysis needs to reflect this.

⁴⁶ For more of a discussion on the impacts of media on storytelling, please see my third chapter. For more on the reasons behind recording stories at all, whether online or in books, please see my second chapter. For more on the impact of language, please see my first chapter.

Furthermore, the dissemination of non-literary media, especially online, further bypasses (or at least complicates) the issues of cultural gatekeepers. Due to the unique structure of the internet, many of the online performances did not need the imprimatur of such gatekeepers and so are arguably a less-filtered illustration of the storytellers' worldviews. In short, in analyzing the ways that stories survive today, and especially how they survive in the public sphere and a shared, communal imaginary, academic rigor demands examination of stories that travel.

Public storytelling performances today in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana, then, primarily take the form of books, online texts, and curated folktale performances or festivals. I selected printed collections striving for a representative sample featuring a range of storytellers (in terms of gender, origin, experience, etc.), goals, and intended audience. The online elements feature every tale from these regions accessible online as of January 2021. Finally, the meta-data feature a range of sources, from paratext included in my corpus to newspaper articles to promotional materials for live performances.⁴⁷ In keeping with the reality of modern Antillean storytelling and tales that travel, all my data, whether performance or paratext, are recorded in some way (written, video, or audio recording).

The exclusive reliance on recorded folktale performances may seem counter-intuitive or even problematic, given folktales' malleable nature. In writing down or video or audio recording a tale are we not fixing it, condemning it to a state of suspended animation, ending its ability to evolve, and decontextualizing it much like a mask in a museum? In short, no. Any performance is fixed. Once the words of the tale have been uttered, they cannot be changed any more than those of a published text (even arguably less, since a published text can be edited before publication). The fluid nature of folktales is thus based not in the fluidity of a given performance

⁴⁷ Please see my second chapter for more detail regarding the individual works in the collection.

so much as in the fluidity of the tradition of performance, or of a specific tale that evolves with each telling. In recording a given performance, this version is available for repetition, but the tale itself is not any more fixed than it was before. In fact, some of the performances in my corpus explicitly request that the audience use their work as inspiration for their own (re)performances.

Since the dawn of writing tales have traveled between written and oral tradition. This reveals a key difference: unlike a mask in a museum, the majority of these folklore performances are not removed from the society that created them but are rather records inscribing memory in and to tales, *in service of community*. The tree does not need to cut itself down to study its own rings and these “fixed” versions are, in fact, more rings of the tree. It is only when outsiders record stories and remove them from the tradition that one must draw comparison to examining a single ring of a felled tree, incapable of growth. It is only when outsiders record stories outside of the living tradition, and then remove it from that tradition, (e.g., the work of Hearn or Parsons) that the tree is killed in order to access its rings and that the tradition cannot continue to grow and build around itself.

It is folktales’ oxymoronic immutable mutability that highlights their role as sites of memory. Sites of memory, too, are defined in analogous ways:

The *lieux* we speak of, then, are mixed, hybrid, mutant, bound intimately with life and death, with time and eternity; enveloped in a Möbius strip of the collective and the individual, the sacred and the profane, the immutable and the mobile. For if we accept that the most fundamental purpose of the *lieux de mémoire* is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial—just as if gold were the only memory of money—all of this in order to capture a maximum of meaning in the fewest signs, it is also clear the *lieux de mémoire*

only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications. (Nora, “Between Memory” 19)

Realms of memory, then, locate things (ideas, concepts, symbols, moments, etc.) in evolving ways and in service to an ever-changing tradition and worldview. This is the very dynamic we see in folktales, where every performance is fixed but only in service to a dynamic tradition. Recorded performances amplify this since they are arguably more fixed in that their forms exist beyond the temporal and spatial limits of unrecorded sound vibrations. They are able to travel and endure, and in so doing have a greater reach and influence on the living tradition than a single in-person performance can. Indeed, the doubleness of folktales’ immutable mutability due to their own nature and their role in the Antilles as sites of memory renders them particularly valuable for studying questions of personal and national identity.⁴⁸ In working with contemporary, recorded tales that travel, then, I am ultimately engaging with their complex function as sites of memory and forgetting.

That said, this conceptualization of folktales as immutably mutable forces me to interrogate myself and my project. I am the quintessential outsider in that I am neither French-ish nor French and the language of access to my corpus (French) is not my native language but a second language for me as well. My grasp of Creole is limited, and I am conducting my research from an extreme geographic remove. While this status is ideal for studying how the tales that travel function, and provides me with a unique perspective free from insider biases, it also means that my work is removed from the living tradition of folklore in the Antilles. I have no

⁴⁸ As Beiner notes, “Peter Burke was quick to realize the value of social memory for historical studies and pointed out that ‘if we refuse to use such terms, we are in danger of failing to notice the different ways in which the ideas of individuals are influenced by the groups to which they belong’” (24). It is exactly this interplay between individual and group that is so rich in this region and to which folktales allow unique access.

expectation that this tree-trunk core sample will be grafted onto the tradition (as in fact Hearn's work was in some places), or sprout its own roots. It is, rather, a study of a moment, a mask in a museum, removed from the dynamic tradition in order to help those outside the community understand it, and to help those outsiders understand the breadth of a tradition that has grown, ring by ring, for 400 years, and its relevance in today's globalized world.

Third, my choice of defining "contemporary" tales as dating from 1980 is driven by the significant cultural shifts that took place globally, nationally, and regionally at this time and which created a natural division of "before" and "after" for storytelling in these DOMs. The first two shifts are on a more global scale. Academically, as Beiner explains, "[s]ince the 1980s, history of 'ordinary people'" has become more central and important (10). And there have been major shifts in this popular history and vernacular historiography: "modern communication technologies—namely radio, television, and cinema—created platforms for the broadcasting of history to the general public and have become leading agents in shaping popular perceptions of the past" leading public history to "become increasingly transnational" (Beiner 16). Furthermore, "[s]ince the end of the century, the cyber revolution has created new forms of 'digital history' that can be accessed online and shared through social media. Concurrently, folklore has partly shed its old-fashioned image...[and] history outside of academia is actually flourishing" (Beiner 16). Finally, the broadest significance of 1980 is the fact that it corresponds roughly with the invention of the internet. It thus creates a continuity across my different texts (regardless of medium) of having been created in a post-internet world. On a global scale, then, 1980 represents an academic and social rupture with a rise in interest and fundamental shift in popular history, a renewed interest in folklore and history in non-academic populations, and, most significantly, the birth of the internet.

In addition to this, the 1980s were a time of significant changes in France. The first is the one that inspired Nora's work. He argues that his *Lieux de mémoire* came about due to "two developments in France that give it meaning: one a purely historiographical movement, the reflexive turning of history upon itself, the other a movement that is, properly speaking, historical: the end of a tradition of memory" ("Beyond Memory" 11). This shift, and the publication of the work born of it, obviously have a significant impact on conceptualizations of the role and import of folklore and thus on my corpus.

The 1980s were also witness to a range of cultural, political, and social transformations in France, many of which were directly related to racial dynamics and to shifting views on racial identity. While during the three decades after departmentalization, the *trente glorieuses* (a term used to describe the three-decade period of relative post-WWII economic growth), France tended not to acknowledge or engage with race and even actively sought non-white immigrants to fulfill the labor shortage born of a booming economy, the economic downturn that began in the 1970s introduced new challenges. With the recession came a loss of jobs and sudden surplus of non-white, unemployed laborers living in France which, in turn, created a new level of racial awareness among minorities and white French citizens.

The early 1980s were therefore a time of awakening consciousness and activism. For example, the children of North African immigrants coined a new term, "Beur," a backlang playing on the words "Arabe" and "beurre" (butter), that would reflect their feelings of cultural "in-betweenness," and "[b]y the early to mid-1980s...the pendulum of anti-racism appeared poised to swing toward an 'American' model of ethnic identification and race- or ethnicity-conscious politics, as national-level *beur* organizations sought to mobilize *beur* votes and the FAS decision-making machinery was reorganized to include representatives of different ethnic

communities” (Bleich 174).⁴⁹ In schools, too, “[t]he 1980s were a watershed decade for these so-called second- and third-generation immigrants” especially because of the “1982 report *Pour un college démocratique*, [which] aimed to redress ongoing problems of social inequality in the *college* [and] made the question of classroom diversity a central concern” (Sachs 35, 40). Finally, it is only “since the 1980s [that] publishing houses and collections specifically reserved for authors from Africa and/or the Caribbean have emerged in France,” a trend which has significant impact on Antillean storytellers’ ability to publish folktale collections (Ducournau 66). While this increased racial awareness would, in turn, provide the oxygen for a burgeoning far right (a dynamic that remains very much in evidence today), the 1980s nonetheless can be associated with the birth in France of a new kind of racial consciousness, one very different from the social consciousness which led to Vichy collaboration, which continues to have direct impact on the role of the Caribbean DOMs and their majority-Black citizens in greater French society.⁵⁰

Finally, the 1980s were also a time of significant cultural changes in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana. This decade saw the rise of a fierce, often-political revalorization of Creole in the Caribbean generally and these regions in particular (Schnepel). In 1981 a pan-Creole movement called *Bannzil* was born, which was closely interrelated with the Martinican *Association le GEREC-F (Groupe d’Etudes et de Recherche en Espace Créole et Francophone)* founded in 1976, and similar movement in Guadeloupe and Guiana (Schnepel 171-172). There was also a simultaneous renewed interest in folklore in these regions, as well as the birth of a true Antillean literary public: “C’est au cours des années 1980 que la littérature antillaise (écrite

⁴⁹ The term *beur* is a particular kind of pig-Latin-esque French slang, *verlan*, for “arabe” and refers to French citizens of North African descent.

⁵⁰ Again, for more details on this, please see my next chapter.

en français) voit son lectorat antillais s'étoffer" (Lesne 612).⁵¹ These movements were mutually iterative with a broader movement in all three regions of a nationalist bent. Édouard Glissant's 1981 publication of his *Le Discours antillais* introduced several influential ideas, not least of which was his concept of *antillanité*. For Glissant, *antillanité* is a distinct kind of Antillean identity that is separate from French or Negritude conceptions. He thus introduced a revolutionary kind of nationalism to the region. His text also discusses the impact of slavery and colonization on the regions' culture, positing that Martinique is a prime example of a people with a "nonhistory" because a series of ruptures has erased the collective memory. His text both reflects and inspired a burgeoning movement of specifically regional "nationality," a rejection of the Frenchification of the *trente glorieuses*, and one tied up with renewed interest in the Creole language and Antillean culture and cultural productions.

The 1980s, then, mark the onset of significant academic and popular changes on global, national, and regional scales. The burgeoning of the internet was a seismic change in and of itself, and an accelerant for other changes. The growth in academia of popular history, and the growing interest in history among non-academics also influences the demarcation of my study. Similarly, in France at the time, the way in which history was viewed and experienced was shifting, as were views on or even recognition of race. Finally, the 1980s were a time of a cultural awakening in the DOMs themselves, one centered around questions of regional identity (including Creole and folklore), collective history and memory, and their place in the broader French nation. These vectors' essential relationship to the central questions of my dissertation clearly established 1980 as a necessary starting point for the development of my corpus.

⁵¹ Again, please see the next chapter of my dissertation for more information on the ups and downs of interest in Creole and folklore in the region. This birth of an Antillean literary audience is related, no doubt, to the creation of specifically Caribbean literary institutions in France.

The final choice made in delineating this project was the focus specifically on Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana, and there are three main reasons for this. First, their uniquely diverse history and range of cultural influences have created a particularly complex folkloric tradition that deserves further study. Furthermore, while their strong folkloric tradition is well-documented, modern iterations have yet to be fully explored. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, their status as *départements d'outre-mer* makes questions of their national identity particularly worthy of study. These departments both are and are not French, both are and are not separate cultures, rendering questions of their “national” narrative(s) and folklore’s role in those narratives a particularly rich vein worthy of mining. In fact, it is specifically because of the complex dynamics created by departmentalization that Haiti has been omitted from this study. I also limited myself to these three DOMs because of the unity that the Caribbean has created among them. While these regions are still distinct from each other, they have much more in common with each other than they do with France’s other DOM-TOMs.⁵² France’s Caribbean DOMs, then, share many cultural elements including a variegated history influencing their strong folkloric tradition and the political particularity of departmental status.

In analyzing these post-1980 folktale performances that have traveled from Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana, my study mixes methodologies from a range of disciplines. There is an element of distant reading, not so much in breaking the texts down into pieces that can be tracked across large data sets so much as in working with an unusually large corpus and looking for trends within and across these performances. That said, the distant reading is intermixed with moments of close reading that allow me to identify and isolate implication and nuance that would be invisible in a strictly “zoomed out” study. In short, when I “zoom in” to particular

⁵² While for the sake of this study I was forced to limit myself to this region, the role of folklore in national identity of other DOMs-TOMs such as Reunion or Tahiti is ripe for further analysis.

texts, paragraphs, sentences, and word choices it is in order to identify trends before I then “zoom out” to trace the trends across my corpus. My analysis seeks to provide both an ethnography of the particular and a big-picture ethnography. The “ethnography of the particular,” or the study of individual people, moments, interactions, etc. is an idea coined by Lila Abu-Lughod which she defines as the idea that the “dailiness, in breaking coherence and introducing time, keeps us fixed on flux and contradiction” (157-158). It is for this reason that I not only focus on but indeed highlight the individual choices of distinct folktale storytelling moments and how they are characterized by meta-data. These events, in pointillist fashion, contribute to a broader canvas depicting the role of folktales as sites of memory and forgetting in France’s Caribbean DOMs.

To arrive at that depiction, I begin in my first chapter with a much more detailed analysis of the history and present relationship between the Hexagon and the departments of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana. This chapter uses the theoretical framework elaborated above to unpack the cultural politics at stake in this study. Doing so highlights the French-ish status of the region and the role of folklore in negotiating that status. I then turn to contemporary folktales in my second chapter. It consists of a detailed description and discussion of the individual texts in my corpus and thus a deeper understanding of folklore as a site of memory in the Antilles. This understanding of the state of storytelling today serves as a foundation for an in-depth analysis in my third chapter of the impact of (new) media on storytelling experiences and how this influences the re-memoration of tales. It is with this combined understanding, then, of the region, the corpus, and the implications of the ways that storytelling and these sites are evolving, that we can turn to a detailed analysis of the function of folktales themselves. The fourth chapter thus discusses tales told by insiders for insiders (which I call “by us/for us”) and solicited by outsiders

for outsiders (“by them/for us”) and how these two types of tales function today as the primary folkloric sites of memory and forgetting. In the fifth and final chapter I turn to questions of globalization and commodification and how they have shifted the tradition into avenues stripped of function, transforming performances of insiders telling stories to sell to outsiders (“by us/for you”) into simple commodity. This analysis of region, post-1980 storytelling and the impact of media on it, and the ways that both performers and audience use and understand the tales performed, highlights the complicated function of folktales in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana as they claim their status as both part of France and not.

This study is therefore simultaneously responding to and building upon earlier scholarship and research and endeavoring to answer their calls. Nora describes the goal of his work: “In each case the goal is the same: to restore the original strangeness of the subject, to show how each element reflects the whole and is involved in the entire national identity” (“From *Lieux*” xx). Not only does this study reify folklore’s strangeness in analyzing its involvement in the whole, but it also unpacks its function as site of remembering—and forgetting. There is, Beiner argues “an evident need for major historical studies of *lieux d’oubli* to counterbalance the studies of *lieux de mémoire*” (29). Beyond this, as he notes, “[i]f forgetting—*pace* Renan—can be observed at a national level, it is even more interesting to examine forgetting in a provincial context, where negotiations of memory between centre and periphery are at play and vernacular history is particularly prominent” (29). In looking at sites of remembering and forgetting in the relationship between France and Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana, I am doing just this.

Similarly, Achille, Forsdick, and Moudileno “invite readers in their own identification and visiting of specific sites, in their reading, study and research, to reflect on extending and

diversifying the range proposed in this volume” (14).⁵³ This call for greater diversification and more inclusive scholarship is timely, since “[i]n spite of continuous resistance by some in the conservative sphere, an increasingly critical postcolonial discourse on French historiography provides momentum for engaging in a project seeking to discern and explore an initial repertoire of realms (*lieux*) around which cohere traces of colonial memory” (Achille et al. 2). Certainly, folktales constitute one such extension and diversification. Furthermore, such work “allows us to redefine more effectively the parameters of urgently required debates about the future of the French Republic” and “prize open France’s multidirectional pasts and mobilize their postcolonial afterlives in a more productive way” (Achille et al. 16). The description and recognition of folktales as a postcolonial site of memory, then, as well as the in-depth understanding of the regions’ status in the French nation, contribute to an ever more urgently needed understanding of what it means to be French today.

Beyond this, understanding the role of folklore, and amplifying its voice, is essential to the very core of Creoleness itself:

The gestures, the habits, the trades, the silent forms of knowledge, the corporeal forms of knowledge, the instinctive forms of knowledge, the symbols, the emblems, the words, the songs, the Creole language, the landscape, the old trees, the cooperative societies, the cane fields, the quarters – these are the Memory traces that we must now learn to

⁵³ In support of the postcolonial sites of memory project, Achille, Forsdick, and Moudileno have since hosted other forums of discussion about postcolonial realms of memory. For example, the description of their 2021 virtual conference reads, “This conference seeks to consolidate and diversify further the volume’s work in making visible the thread that links the colonial to various manifestations of French heritage. The objective is to bring into sharp focus the ways in which the colonial aspect is inextricably intertwined with collective memory, and in particular to consider *lieux de mémoire* that are not covered in the volume, but which are also important parts of the network of sites and memories that have often been silenced by French national memory” (“Postcolonial Realms of Memory: Sites”). Certainly, this project is an example of a *lieu de mémoire* not covered in either volume but which is also important for networks of memory silenced by French national memory.

recognize, to catalogue, and to explore with the aim of patiently weaving together the open complexity of our creole patrimonies. (Chamoiseau, *French Guiana* 8)

Folktales, then, are essential not only to what it means to be French (to the extent that one is) but also to what it means to be Creole. Ultimately, however, the most important aspect of my project does not have to do with me at all. Chamoiseau begins his *French Guiana: Memory Traces of the Penal Colony* with the idea that “Our Monuments remain like suffering. / They bear witness to suffering. / They preserve suffering” (5). He continues by noting that while there are many physical remains from the colonial era in these regions, “if they bear witness to European colonials, they don’t bear witness to other populations (Amerindians, African slaves, Hindu immigrants, Syrian-Lebanese, Chinese) that thrown onto colonial lands, and, once there, had to find a way to survive, then to live together, and eventually to produce an original culture and identity” (5). Indeed, in contrast to the European colonizers whose story is visible in every street, monument, plaque, and city, “The trajectory of these people was silenced. Not included in the colonial Chronicle” (5). Rather, their “trajectory came alive in their arts, their resistances, their heroisms, without stelai, without statues, without monuments, without documents. Only the word of the Elders that circulates beneath writing—oral memory—bears witness” (5). As Chamoiseau so eloquently describes, folktales are necessary to witness those who monuments forget, those who have been silenced.

Unfortunately, as he again poignantly observes, in Western society, “a word doesn’t make a monument. / A word doesn’t make History. / A word doesn’t make Memory” (*French Guiana* 5). While folktales are sites of memory for those “other populations,” they have not yet sufficiently penetrated into more official recognitions in French History and Memory. Even projects such as Nora’s, which purport to do exactly that, to turn word into Memory, ignored the

calls of Antillean storytellers. In French Guiana, as in Martinique and Guadeloupe, “dominant official memory practices, particularly those privileging colonial, political, and military officials [are] evident in statues and plaques [which eclipse] persistent yet often silenced oral memories” (Chamoiseau, *French Guiana* xiv). In the creation of his photo-poem-essay, Chamoiseau sought to create a new kind of monument, to engage “in a recovery of those voices often systematically silenced by officially endorsed narratives of the past,” to capture the reflection “of ‘the histories of the dominated and demolished memories’” (*French Guiana* xv). In crafting this study, I seek to amplify these too-oft-silenced voices, to allow their words to make Memory, and thereby to offer a more inclusive and therefore accurate discussion.

In his introduction to Chamoiseau’s *French Guiana*, Forsdick argues that “alternative forms of engagement [with the past] permit access to interstitial spaces, between the cracks of the ruin – it is from these that muffled, forgotten and otherwise marginalized voices will whisper back” (xvi). Folktales are one such alternative form of engagement. If the “creole peoples of the Americas are tormented by their stifled collective memory and their subterranean histories,” and if “A word bears witness in traces, in reminiscences,” then in collecting, collating, and amplifying these traces academics can begin the work of unmuffling these voices and these peoples. Chamoiseau proclaims: “I, a creole American, sing histories against History. / I sing memories against Memory. / I sing Memory traces against the Monument” (*French Guiana* 7). Only too aware of the privileged academic location from which I write, I remain determined to trace these memories and histories, to amplify these whispers, uncover these subterranean histories, and blast open the cracks in order to enhance the appreciation and understanding of complex and multi-dimensional Creole histories.

CHAPTER ONE

Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana's Liminal "French-ish" Status

[T]he creation and assertion of cultural difference within a particular society can best be understood by examining the terms by which that society structures itself, by looking into the processes by which certain ways of defining identity and difference have come to be dominant... Depending on the society, ideas about race, blood, religion or any number of other factors may be used to define the distinctions between groups. ("High Folklore" 108)

The overseas departments of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana occupy a somewhat unusual, liminal position in the French nation, one created by a tension between forgetting and remembering.⁵⁴ Residents of these spaces are legally French citizens. However, in many ways they are not considered French and their lived realities are different from that of citizens living in metropolitan France. In their self-perception and the ways non-Caribbean French perceive them, they are consistently Othered. If, for a nation-state to exist as a unified social entity, "external frontiers have to be imagined constantly as a projection and protection of an internal collective personality, which each person carries within him/herself and enables him/her to inhabit the space of the state as a place where one has always been – and where one will always be – at home," then, the status of France as "home" for citizens of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana is problematic (Balibar 348). Folklore is deeply imbricated in the negotiation of this identity.

Many scholars from a variety of disciplines have described this dynamic of simultaneous identification and distancing. In her essay "Péyi an nou: Conceptualizing Language, Place, Race, and Identity in Guadeloupe," linguist Katha Managan explores how those living in Guadeloupe use language, and especially "reference to places to index cultural, racial, and linguistic

⁵⁴ In describing the positionality of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana as liminal, I am referring to the term's denotation as occupying a unique position, literally or metaphorically, that is in or on both sides of a boundary or border. In this case, these regions are both French and not; they occupy a position that is simultaneously on both sides of the French/not-French boundary.

difference” to highlight their not-quite-French status (151). She concludes that while they “are all French citizens and recognize themselves as such in certain contexts, [Franco-Caribbean] identity is seen as something distinct, both by Guadeloupeans and by mainland French” (Managan 148). In her dissertation, “Creole Citizens of France: The Trans-Atlantic Politics of Antillean Education and the Creole Movement since 1945,” historian Sara Thompson explains that citizens of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana “benefitted from French citizenship and were politically included in the nation; yet, culturally, they [remain] distinct and subject to discrimination on these grounds” (27). Anthropologist David Beriss, who has done much research on the region and its complex positionality, explains how “[i]n their own eyes, as well as from the point of view of many metropolitan French people, Antilleans are both French and ‘other’” (*To Not be French* 30). In short, Martinicans, Guadeloupeans, and Guineans inhabit and embody a unique, liminal status that is more French than some citizens (e.g., those from France’s former colonies) but less French than others.

Due to this strange status, Beriss labels these regions and their citizens as “sometimes French” (“High Folklore” 110). This term implies that in some situations they are French and in others not, that they are one or the other depending on context. It denies the possibility of being simultaneously “French and ‘other.’” While this framing is in keeping with French universalist values, and the ostensible reality of what it is to be French, it is not in keeping with the lived reality of these citizens. As Managan, Thompson, and Beriss note, there are *facets* of these citizens’ identities that are French, and *facets* that are not. While which facet shines at any given moment depends on context, each identity is comprised of all facets at all times. I prefer a descriptor that acknowledges both a multi-faceted shape that shines differently in different lights, and the liminal status this reality of being French-but-not creates. Therefore, in order to designate

this precarious status, I have opted for the term “French-ish” as a way to encapsulate the standing of Martinicans, Guadeloupeans, and Guineans.

Despite the common understanding in academia of these regions’ unique positioning, there has been little analysis of how the French and the French-ish delineate what it is to be French, what it is to be “other-than-French,” or folklore’s role in this process.⁵⁵ In other words, in order to understand the ways in which the citizens of France’s Caribbean DOMs identify, one must first recognize the ways in which both groups are creating and maintaining their cultural boundaries. Who is an insider, who is an outsider, and how is that decided or indicated? To understand that we must (re)turn to theories of nationhood.⁵⁶

This chapter begins, then, with the concept of “national narrative” that occupies a central place in the works of Homi Bhabha and Etienne Balibar. An in-depth consideration of France’s own unique national narrative, and Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana’s complex status as both *part of* and *separate* from that narrative, will allow us to shed light on their distinctively liminal positionality. The next step will be to explore the relationship between the Hexagon (mainland France) and these regions through the lens of the significant boundary enforcers Balibar identifies: language (here French and Creole) and then race. An understanding of national narrative, language usage, and conceptualizations of race, taken together, stand to offer a clearer picture of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana’s unique status. As a whole, this framework serves to improve our understanding of not only *that* they are different, but also *why* and even *how* this liminal status is reified and reproduced.

⁵⁵ Again, I conceptualized “folktales” as social or cultural narratives anchored in tradition and circulating across cultural networks. For an overview of my project, the history and particularity of folklore in the region, and a brief overview of my corpus, please see my Introduction. For a detailed description of my corpus, please see my second chapter.

⁵⁶ While there is, in fact, a difference between nation and state (please see Balibar), for the purposes of this study, which is focused on the modern nation-state of France, I will use these terms more or less interchangeably.

National Narratives and Nation Formation

A key aspect of both Bhabha and Balibar's definitions of nationhood, which plays an integral role in the creation and maintenance of French and non-French identities, is national narrative. National narratives, in turn, are influenced by both history and geography. In this case there are several interwoven layers of national narrative.⁵⁷ The official national narrative of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana, is, of course, symbiotically linked to that of the French Republic. They are, after all, administratively part of the French nation. However, the region has a unique historical background that contributes to another overlapping narrative. To explicate the differences, and tensions, I begin with the Republic.

Modern France's national narrative begins with the "foundational moment" of the French Revolution which began in 1789 with the storming of the Bastille.⁵⁸ The revolution brought with it new questions of what it means to be French. The revolutionaries, as they grappled with what their government should look like, faced questions of who was being governed, how that group was defined, and what rights they held. The resulting *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen de 1789*, another key moment in the national narrative, (theoretically) established France as a nation of free individuals protected equally by the law throughout French territory. This declaration and its tenets are still part of the French constitution and, more importantly, still part of the French zeitgeist.

The *Déclaration* raised complicated questions about specific societal groups. How, for example, would the shunned groups of actors and executioners be categorized? What about Jews,

⁵⁷ While strictly speaking there is only one nation—the French nation—in this discussion, I am using the term nation more broadly. I use it to discuss a sense of belonging to any group larger than a local community, whether that of a specific island, the Antilles, the Caribbean, Creole, or French.

⁵⁸ That July 14, Bastille Day, is still celebrated in France highlights the importance of this event in the national consciousness. This is a quintessential example of an act of remembering that Bhabha and Balibar highlight as key to unification of a national narrative.

who had their own societies with their own laws and judges within the borders of France? And what about France's slaves, outlawed in the Hexagon but legal and multiple throughout its territories? The challenge therefore is to determine how these disparate groups fit into the ideal of national equality before the law. In his December 23, 1789 speech about the role of Jews in the new French nation, the Count de Clermont Tonnerre articulated what ultimately became France's approach to all ethnic and cultural sub-groups: "We must refuse everything to the Jews as a nation and accord everything to Jews as individuals" (Hunt 88). He went on to make his point even more emphatically: "They must be citizens individually. But, some will say to me, they do not want to be citizens. Well then! If they do not want to be citizens, they should say so, and then, we should banish them. It is repugnant to have in the state an association of non-citizens, and a nation within the nation...In short, Sirs, the presumed status of every man resident in a country is to be a citizen" (ellipses in original, Hunt 88). In essence, with the founding of the modern French nation came the worldview that differences of profession, religion, or race do not matter to the state; all are equal and free before the law, so long as the individual is willing to be a member of the state first and foremost.⁵⁹ This idea, one born with the French Revolution, has become a core tenet of Frenchness.⁶⁰ The national narrative, then, takes the French Revolution

⁵⁹ Of course, the national narrative conveniently elides (or forgets) the historical realities of this. In fact, the initial Declaration of the Rights of Man "excluded or at any rate did not explicitly include several important segments of the population, notably, women and slaves" (Schor 47). And the fate of slavery was hotly debated for years before a 1794 law temporarily freed the enslaved peoples in France's colonies—including in Guadeloupe and Guiana (Martinique being under British rule at the time) before Napoleon's rise to power reinstated slavery in France's territories for another almost 40 years.

⁶⁰ In her article "The Crisis of French Universalism," Naomi Schor argues that, in fact, the French Revolution and the *Declaration* were not the birth of Universalism per se, but rather that "[w]hat the French Revolution crucially instituted was the association of universalism and human rights; what was missing from pre-Revolutionary accounts of universalism was the modern humanistic doctrine of universal human rights" (46). Regardless, the Revolution and resulting Declaration function as a foundational moment in the French national narrative and thus their national understanding of self.

and its Republican ideals of a colorblind, universal equality as the unifying moment that both Bhabha and Balibar describe.

From that moment, according to the national narrative, the country inevitably and naturally (albeit circuitously) developed into the modern, putatively egalitarian and colorblind democratic Republic we see today. Napoleon's *Code civil* and the institution of the Third Republic are other important moments in the national narrative. Humanitarian authors from the seventeenth to twentieth century (from Rousseau to Voltaire to Hugo to Sartre) function as key unifiers in the contemporary narrative. Moments that contradict this narrative, however, are forgotten or redirected.⁶¹ Eric Bleich describes this in his essay "Anti-Racism Without Races: Politics and Policy in a 'Color-Blind' State." France, he argues, employs "selective memory, 'trumpeting' as Adrian Favell has put it, 'the grand moments of modern French self-definition in 1789 (the universal declaration of the rights of man), 1804 (the Code Civil), 1870 (the Franco-Prussian war), 1905 (the separation of church and state...); and forgetting the rest'" (brackets and ellipses in original, 167).⁶² This allows for the implication that "the principles embodied by this selective memory...have been embraced virtually without interruption since the fall of the Bastille" (Bleich 167). Selective remembering and forgetting create a national narrative.

Today in France, as a result of this selective remembering (and forgetting), "[l]eading scholars, policy-makers, and activists often argue that France simply cannot think in terms of racial groups because of its Revolutionary and Republican principles. Authors highlight the

⁶¹ Anderson argues that earlier, pre-nation violent conflicts are refigured in the national narrative "as reassuringly fratricidal wars between – who else? – *fellow Frenchmen*" (italics in original, 200). Slavery, in that it is pre-nation, and many of the territories where it existed are now French, making it a clash between Frenchmen, should be framed similarly. The fact that it is not illuminates the ways in which these regions are still not conceptualized as being completely French.

⁶² Bleich's own analysis revolves around two examples of "the rest" of the moments, the forgotten parts of the narrative where France was explicitly color-conscious, specifically the foundational anti-racism law of 1972 and the Gayssot Law of 1990.

continuity between the egalitarianism of previous centuries and today's politics, often summarizing French history in terms of a tradition of individual assimilation" (Bleich 167). In short, selective memory creates a sense of naturalness and inevitability that is used to define the nation today. Ultimately, as Naomi Schor argues in her essay "The Crisis of French Universalism," "[a]ccess to the universal, which at least since the French Revolution has defined France's singularity, its 'exception,' stubbornly remains a key phrase in France's discourse of national self-representation and identity" (48). Dominic Thomas also refers to this singularity in his chapter "Les Sans-Papiers" in *Postcolonial Realms of Memory*: "The French Republic enjoys a further particularity enshrined in the first constitution of 1791, according to which one finds the commitment to protecting the rights of all citizens regardless of ethnicity, religion or other social associations" (259). The French national definition of self, then, is based upon the mutually iterative national narrative and its Republican ideals, both of which serve to unify the country, creating insiders (those who are both subjects and objects of this Republican idealism) versus outsiders (those who are not). These kinds of issues and questions have shaped the critical reception and response to Pierre Nora's multi-volume work on "lieux de mémoire" (realms of memory) and its various blind spots, many of them having been addressed in *Postcolonial Realms of Memory*, a book edited by Etienne Achille, Charles Forsdick, and Lydie Moudileno.

This process of creating national identity, anchored in French Republicanism, ultimately creates a culture where "[t]o be French is to be a member of the nation whose heritage is the French revolution, a nation of individual citizens of the Republic. The values promoted by the Republic are to be understood as universal human values that can be applied to all people" (Beriss, "High Folklore" 106). As a result of this, in the French psyche, "[t]o be French is to be the member of both a particular nation and a representative of a universal ideal, [but] to be other

is (at minimum) to be only particular, a condition that may be escaped only by becoming French” (Beriss, “High Folklore” 106).⁶³ According to this mentality, Frenchness emerges as the primary and often only acceptable form of public identity. This is contained in the French constitution of 1793, where one reads that “The French Republic is one and indivisible.” The very foundation of unity is therefore determined by “sameness,” leaving very little space for “otherness,” such that assimilation “cannot accommodate the copula, the alliance of a universal and particular identity” (Schor 54).⁶⁴ In Balibar’s terms, the *official* narrative uses citizenship and the implied assimilation of Republican values in lieu of racial, ethnic, or religious ones that accompany it) as the foremost marker of insider status.

Working with this definition of national identity, Martinicans, Guadeloupeans, and Guineans are considered insiders. Their connection to France is centuries old. Both because of their long shared history with France and their political status as DOMs the French national narrative and universalist ideals are theirs. They are citizens. The very nature of France’s national narrative, and the mutually reinforcing cycle it creates, renders it the only “valid” option for these regions. Antilleans are French, so must automatically embrace the French national narrative, which mandates that they identify as French first and foremost and subjugating other aspects of their identity which, in turn, requires them to embrace the French national narrative. This mutually iterative cycle requires them, at least in theory, to recognize *only* the French national narrative as their own. They learn about and participate in it, which tells them that they can *only* be French, in a specific and narrowly defined sense of the term.

⁶³ In his dissertation, Beriss articulates this differently: “It is not so much private beliefs or practices that present a challenge to dominant discourses of French national identity as it is the public representation of cultural distinctiveness” (*To Not be French* 28)

⁶⁴ While these universalist principles may seem absurd or discriminatory to anglophones used to a more multiculturally celebratory approach to identity, it is born out of ideals that resonate across the western world: “A core concept of republican universalism is that of the autonomous rational individual, a rational being whose identity is free and distinct from determinants that are not of his or her own choosing (such as race or gender)” (Sachs 36).

However, their history with France is complicated. Until European settlers invaded, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana were inhabited by the Arawak peoples and then by the Caribs (Cornevin, “Guadeloupe;” Cornevin, “Martinique;” “French Guiana”). Guiana was also home to other peoples such as the Galibi, Palikur, Teko, Wayampi or Oyampi, and the Wayana (“French Guiana;” Réno and Phipps). All three regions’ first contact with Europeans was with Columbus but none were then officially “settled.” In 1635 France established settlements in Martinique, initiating a 150-year struggle for control of the island between the Caribs, French, British, and Dutch (along with Dutch Jews expelled from Portuguese Brazil and many French Huguenots before they fled increasing religious persecution). While England controlled the island from 1794-1815, the end of the Napoleonic Wars and its related negotiations definitively returned Martinique to French control. Similarly, the French had expelled a small colony of Spanish from Guadeloupe in 1626, again battling the Caribs and British for control of the island before the 1815 Treaty of Vienna gave them internationally recognized domain over the island (Cornevin, “Guadeloupe;” Cornevin, “Martinique;” Thompson; Watts).

In Guiana, France instituted several failed attempts at settlement (including in 1624, 1630, 1643, 1664, and 1667) but were consistently repelled by the Indigenous peoples, Portuguese, British, and Dutch. Finally, in 1763 the Treaty of Paris granted France rights to Guiana at which point Louis XV sent a large contingent to settle the area. Most succumbed to disease, greatly influencing French feeling about the territory and leading to it becoming a prison colony. The French then lost the territory to the Portuguese in 1809 before definitively regaining it, also in 1815 with the Treaty of Vienna. Due to the difficulties France continued to face in settling this colony, in 1852 they began shipping chained convicts to Guiana, officially rendering

it a(n infamous) penal colony (“French Guiana;” Hoefte et al.; Redfield; Réno and Phipps). In short, the regions’ relationships with France far predate assimilation as official departments.

Of course, the impetus behind France’s interest in the regions (along with that of other European countries’) was the regions’ ability to grow highly profitable crops. The primary crop in all three was sugar, but coffee, cocoa, hardwood, Cayenne pepper, and other spices were also major exports. To maximize profit from these economies, France instituted a system of free labor in the form of enslaved peoples. Starting in the mid-seventeenth century, the French “imported” and enslaved thousands of Africans, subjecting them to notoriously horrific working conditions on plantations, and officially instituting slavery with the *Code Noir* in 1685. The French Revolution brought about a temporary abolition of slavery in France and its territories in 1794 (this excepts Martinique, which was under British control). However, as Thompson notes, even “these principles of universal inclusion quickly became layered with practices of racial exclusion. Colonial officials excluded former slaves from full citizenship by arguing that they were not yet capable of possessing the rights and privileges of a French citizen [and] that slavery had damaged slaves’ moral and intellectual capacities” (8-9). Beyond this, in 1802 Napoleon reinstated slavery, returning these “freed” people to bondage. It was not until the Second Republic that slavery was definitively abolished in France in 1848. The outcome was hardly egalitarian; France’s Caribbean lands had a minority white, privileged, and powerful population with a large, Black, oppressed, and disenfranchised majority. Despite these ongoing inequalities, colonial status was conferred on all those living in these regions; they became colonial subjects of France. They were, at least technically, French (insiders).

The end of the nineteenth century, the height of France’s colonial empire and the Third Republic reinforced this status. Republican institutions, including administrations and schools,

were instituted throughout France and its colonies, including Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana. Moreover, it is in the late nineteenth century that Jules Ferry both articulated the goals of France's *mission civilisatrice* (its duty as an enlightened and civilized nation to bring light and knowledge to the rest of the world) and established a national, free, obligatory, and secular school system in France. This included in its colonies where "colonial officials purportedly implemented the same national school system that it was employing in metropolitan France to spread Republican ideology and create French citizens out of the diverse peoples of the provinces" (Thompson 31). These schools, with their French curricula, taught French history, the French national narrative, and love of country to all its citizens. It was this that made them citizens. France, as Leon Sachs argues, is "a country whose very identity hinges on the school as an engine of national unity and egalitarian democracy. This idea is a cornerstone of republican memory" (Sachs 34). It certainly applies to the colonial citizens descended from formerly enslaved peoples in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana. This schooling further conferred French insider status on these not-from-the-Hexagon, non-European citizens.

In fact, access to education was greatly valued by the citizens of France's Caribbean DOMs. After all, education has, historically, acted as the ultimate mechanism for assimilation. For non-white populations in the Antilles "[e]qual access to education became an important part of the political agenda for [those] that favored greater political and cultural assimilation into France" (Thompson 32). However, in these regions local whites opposed these efforts, afraid of the challenge to their power and privilege that equal education represented. Their resistance to Black social mobility was perceived as in direct conflict with metropolitan French efforts to provide education in order to fully assimilate them. In the Antilles, in distinction to France's other more recently conquered colonies, the "contrast between a liberating government and a

repressive local social hierarchy created a sense of fierce loyalty to France among Black Antilleans. They viewed the Republic as their protectors against the white settlers who wanted to keep them in subordination” (Thompson 10). Indeed, “[t]he former slaves believed in the republican ideals of equality and that true political and social liberation could only be achieved if Guadeloupe and Martinique remained politically united with France” (Thompson 10-11). After an already-long history with France, Antilleans began learning and adopting France’s national narrative as their own, which, thanks to the metropole, led to greater social mobility and consequent loyalty. They were not only politically French, but ideologically as well.

The *mission civilisatrice* solidified these regions’ Frenchness not only in the islands themselves but also for the mainland. The church and the schools played a determining role in this. The Frenchness of these Caribbean territories was highlighted by the comparative non-Frenchness of France’s new colonial acquisitions: “In the colonial imagination, Guadeloupe and Martinique were ‘evolved’ territories that had become economically and socially integrated into metropolitan France during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries” (Thompson 11). They were so integrated that “Guadeloupe and Martinique became colonial officials’ models for politically and culturally uniting France’s new empire and the newly colonized to metropolitan France” (Thompson 11). Similarly, the crimes worthy of punishment by exportation to Guiana were downgraded in 1885, aligning the colonists in that territory more closely with mainland France as well. By the end of the nineteenth century, then, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana had already been intertwined with France for more than 200 years and both sides of the Atlantic considered them to be French, politically and ideologically.

While the first half of the twentieth century was tumultuous for these regions (as it was for the rest of the world), in many ways these upheavals served to further unify the regions with

France. In 1902 Mont Pelée in Martinique erupted, destroying St. Pierre, killing 30,000 people, causing major population shifts (including the moving of the capital to Fort-de-France), and creating lasting scars in the islands' psyche. The first World War rocked the regions. Due to their connection with France, citizens from all three regions fought and died in this Great War. In most cases this served to strengthen their allegiance to France and inspired them to demand full citizenship. During the inter-war years, Black elites from around the French colonial empire, including Martinican intellectual Aimé Césaire, met while doing their higher studies in France, and from these encounters the Negritude movement gradually emerged. This movement did not push for separation from France but rather for a reconnection with African roots and advocated for racial equality. As previously discussed, this era and movement represented a time of French Antillean cultural awakening. During WWII all three territories came under Vichy control until 1943 when they were recaptured by Free France. Again, WWII combat experience only heightened calls for full French citizenship and equality with mainland France.

It is thus with the end of World War II that the question of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana's official relationship with France came to a head. While in the decades following the war most of "France's newer colonies claimed their independence, Guadeloupe and Martinique strengthened their political and cultural ties with France" (Thompson 13). In 1946, all three officially became French overseas *départements*. Local, colonial governments were dissolved and national structures instituted (including election of representatives to the National Assembly in Paris) and colonial subjects became full French citizens with all the rights and privileges as those in metropolitan France. In short, due to their long historical intertwinement with the Hexagon, Martinicans, Guadeloupeans, and Guineans have been politically French for several

generations and ideologically French and immersed in the French national narrative and its Republican, universalist ideals for centuries.

Indeed, these regions' Frenchness is visible in many ways. Frenchness has "historically been an important part of the construction of Antillean identity. Because they have been educated in the schools of the Republic and have lived all their lives within French political and administrative structures, Antilleans think about society in much the same manner as metropolitan French people" (Beriss, *To not be French* 30). In other words, the French national narrative and its consequent sense of nationhood comprises (at least part of) the Antilleans'. In a 2020 interview with the *New York Times*, French author Tania de Montaigne, whose parents are Martinican and Congolese, objects to modern Pan-African movements: "They say that there's something, wherever you are in the world, whatever language you speak, whatever your history, this Black nature endures...But that's exactly how you make it impossible to become a citizen, because there will always be something in me that will never be included in society" (Onishi).⁶⁵ This is a clear example of the French, Republican, universalist mindset that helps define Frenchness and marks Montaigne as a national insider. Indeed, it seems significant that in this *New York Times* article about the status of discourses about race in France, the only Black intellectual quoted to provide a universalist perspective is descended from a Martinican. Espousing French, Republican ideals is a mark of Frenchness; it is emblematic that July 14 is just as significant a holiday in the DOMs as elsewhere in France.

This Frenchness is, in fact, part of the broader cultural zeitgeist. The Franco-Congolese author Alain Mabanckou has satirized this in his 2009 novel *Black Bazaar*. He includes a Black

⁶⁵ Interestingly, Norimitsu Onishi, the author of the article, specifies that Montaigne's "parents *immigrated* from Martinique and the Democratic Republic of Congo" (italics added). Her choice of words seems to forget Martinique's French status.

Martinican living in the Hexagon who is not only conservative (lauding, for example, *la loi* N°2005-158 which included a paragraph stating that French schools must teach the positive aspects of French colonialism) but also spouts blatantly racist and anti-immigrant rhetoric.⁶⁶ Readers do not learn of his racial identity until the novel is quite advanced, thereby allowing Mabanckou to further complicate the dynamic. While the character is satirical, he represents the reality of (some) Antilleans' French worldviews and identities. To summarize, Martinicans', Guadeloupeans', and Guineans' national narratives are undoubtedly those of the rest of France, including subscription to Republican, universalist ideals. These ideals label and define them, just as they do metropolitan French. Embracing this narrative, and the allegiance it forms, renders them insiders of the French nation.

Martinicans, Guadeloupeans and Guineans may well be legally French and share some French history and ideals, but there are also multiple factors that distinguish them from the rest of France. These differences create a conflicting national narrative. The first factor, geography, is fairly self-explanatory. While these regions are politically part of the French nation, they are geographically removed from it. There are more than 4,000 miles between mainland France and the nearest of these regions. A whole ocean separates them. They are located in different time zones, on different continents, and have very different climates, as is the case with the overseas department and single territorial collectivity that is the island of Mayotte in the Indian Ocean. Thus, decades before the age of instant communication, these distinguishing cultural and geographic truths were incorporated into this other narrative. Still today, the quotidian lived experiences, the daily life, of metropolitan French is vastly different from that of people living in

⁶⁶ Mabanckou himself identifies with the novel's immigrant protagonist, not this character's Martinican community. His satire underscores that fact that this character more resembles the immigrants he despises than the Frenchmen with whom he identifies. For more on this tension, see my discussion below.

France's Caribbean DOMs. This, alone, has always diluted their identification with France's national narrative and definition of self.

Of course, these regions also have their own histories distinct from the experiences of the Hexagon. Consider the varied European invaders, use of enslaved laborers, and geographical realities such as archipelagic isolation and high rates of disease. These all add nuance to France's national narrative, helping to create a distinct Antillean national narrative and sense of self, as if to say, "we are the only French about whom this is true." Significantly, there are also aspects of these regions' histories that are in direct tension with France's national narrative. Of course, As Bhabha notes, having a minority narrative that challenges the national narrative is not unusual. What makes this particular tension noteworthy is the ways in which Antillean national narrative does not dispute French national narrative so much as supplement while aligning. It is the degree of alignment that makes these regions unique and French-ish rather than simply "other."

Specifically, in their long history with France there are many instances where France failed to uphold or act in accordance with the Republican national values that serve as foundation for its and thus the regions' national narratives. The regions' very histories begin with France subjugating and terrorizing large portions of its populations—first the natives and then enslaved Africans. Even with the abolition of slavery, Republican values were not truly part of this supplemental narrative. The white, French colonial administration maintained control of "all aspects of local administration, including the judiciary system, the police, education, and the press. When former slaves exercised their freedom and left the plantations in search of better economic opportunities, colonial officials put in place a series of laws [which] effectively tied the *noirs* to the plantation, and ensured that they remained economically and socially subordinate" (Thompson 9-10). In short, France did not treat its Black colonial subjects in a

colorblind or universalist manner. In fact, as the Cameroonian philosopher and political scientist Achille Mbembe has repeatedly argued, the problem with French universalism resides in the fact that “[t]he perverse effect of this indifference to difference is thus a relative indifference to discrimination” (136).

France subjugated other groups as well. Deprived of African enslaved labor, plantation owners in Martinique “imported” workers from India and China. In Guadeloupe white plantation owners forcefully transported indentured laborers from the French colony of Pondicherry in India.⁶⁷ In Guiana formerly enslaved peoples left the plantations for the jungles. Without enslaved African or Indigenous laborers, many plantation owners were ruined. In 1850, a resourceful few did “import” Indians, Malays, and Chinese to hopefully work the fields. However, many of these peoples worked in the cities, forcing France to export criminals to Guiana as laborers. By the middle of the nineteenth century, then, these regions consisted of extremely diverse populations with complicated social and political hierarchies and complex, rarely egalitarian, and often antagonistic relations with France.

Similarly, in the twentieth century, the reality of departmentalization was less-than-universally-Republican. The establishment of French institutions brought with it a wave of privileged “immigrants” from mainland France into the newly formed departments, exacerbating class conflicts and highlighting social inequalities. This influx was intensified in Guiana in the 1950s with the closing of the infamous prisons and even more so in 1964 when French Prime Minister Charles de Gaulle chose that department, located near the equator, as an ideal location for France’s space program. As a result of these changes, Guinean modernization and urbanization rapidly increased, with a rise in unemployment (especially among the youth) and a

⁶⁷ Significantly, if not quite relatedly, while formerly enslaved peoples were granted French citizenship and the right to vote in 1849, these Indian inhabitants in Guadeloupe did not gain these rights until 1923.

resultant mass “migration” to the Hexagon in search of jobs and education. Despite being an equal part of France, opportunities in all three regions were not equal to those of the mainland. Unsurprisingly, “[t]hese dual migratory flows created new tensions between Antilleans and the French on both sides of the Atlantic. As the islands’ social and economic problems persisted and became worse under departmentalization, certain Antillean activists began to question the benefits of assimilation and whether or not integration into France was desirable for the Antilles” (Thompson 15). Even prominent thinkers such as Césaire questioned this, founding the Progressive Party of Martinique in the 1950s.⁶⁸

Even into the twenty-first century, inequalities inconsistent with Republican ideals persist. In her book *In Search of a National Identity: Creole and Politics in Guadeloupe*, Ellen Schnepel draws out a list of lasting “social contradictions or tensions” (55).⁶⁹ The first is that between the *békés*, or local whites, and the metropolitan power, based mainly on vying for economic and political power. Another is between the *békés* and the Black working classes, most frequently today taking the form of struggles between “white owners and managers of the means of production (i.e., sugar and banana industries and more recently commercial enterprises) and the black laboring masses [with e]xtreme forms of social conflict generally occur[ring] in the rural areas” (55). There is tension between those of African descent and those of East Indian descent, although less so with their increasing intermixing. Yet another tension stems from Guadeloupeans (or Martinicans or Guineans) organizing against the metropolitan French; since 1946 and departmentalization, some factions have seen any influence from the Hexagon as

⁶⁸ Césaire’s involvement in the Negritude movement, and his reliance on folklore specifically as a way of connecting with African roots (including publishing many folktales in his journal *Tropiques*) are not irrelevant. Martinique’s premier intellectual, then, used folklore as a way to remember alternate aspects of nationhood and to craft self-image that was in contradiction to, or at least in tension with, the one inherited from France.

⁶⁹ While she is focusing on Guadeloupe, the similarities in history and present between the three Caribbean departments suggest that there exist the same or similar tensions in Martinique and Guiana as well.

further colonization. Complicating a not-quite-French narrative is a not-quite-Antillean tension. Guadeloupeans see themselves in competition with Martinicans, especially for local jobs and administrative posts. This “goes back to colonial times when Martinique was favored by the French and Guadeloupe was administered by its ‘sister island.’ Inter-group complexes have also been fueled by cultural, racial, and color distinctions between the two islands” (56). Even within Guadeloupe there are tensions between Guadeloupeans and immigrants. In short, both the history of France abandoning its universalist Republican ideals in the region, and current divisions within and between parts of the region, create different groups of insiders and outsiders.

These complex positionalities create an ongoing dissonance between local and French national narrative. As Patrick Chamoiseau argues, Antilleans’ very identity, their very existence, requires them to remember what France would wish to forget: “French Guiana was born from these silent memories and from these subterranean memories, as well. All of these memories are a part of the country. If even one memory should be missing from the inventories of meaning, then French Guiana wouldn’t know how to know itself” (*French Guiana* 10). Everything—from the continued cultivation and exportation of sugarcane and other slavery-era crops, to the lasting racial and class tensions, to the variegated backgrounds of citizens of these regions—forcibly reminds Martinicans, Guadeloupeans, and Guineans of these moments where France did *not* uphold its Republican ideals.

Ironically, their inclusion in the French nation and assimilation of the French national narrative requires remembering these less-than-Republican moments. If they were to forget France’s history of enslaving and colonizing, they would forget the very origins of their Frenchness—their very reason for participating in the Republican universalist narrative in the

first place. In remembering their place in the nation they are forced to also remember its fissures in a way that those from the Hexagon are not.

Not only do local narratives, and their contradiction to France's, problematize Antilleans' self-conception as French insiders, so, too, does the role the regions play (or lack thereof) in France's narrative. If Martinicans, Guadeloupeans, and Guineans cannot forget France's non-Republican history because to do so would mean losing the explanation for their very existence in the nation, mainland France faces a very different problem. France's history as enslavers and colonizers is completely incompatible with the ideals of universal, Republican equality. It is, therefore, something they must forget. As Bhabha notes, the French national narrative is obliged to elide this part of its history for remembering these moments would challenge the narrative and thus the very essence of Frenchness and the heart of what it means to be French. This creates a paradox: How can the Hexagon remember their DOMs while forgetting these moments of anti-Republican action?

The obvious answer is that they cannot. Rather, the easiest way for France to resolve these moments of contradiction and avoid their cognitive dissonance is to simply forget about the existence of their (Caribbean) DOMs. In other words, while citizens of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana remember that they are French, the foundational moment of the French Revolution, and have integrated the national narrative into their own self-image, this positioning is not necessarily reciprocated in the Hexagon. Metropolitan French citizens generally either do not remember their Black, Caribbean compatriots or at least do not remember their co-citizen status. As Beriss argues, "Antilleans in France are not seen as individual French citizens, but as representatives of a foreign culture, dependent on France, but different from it...Antilleans are not seen, in metropolitan France, in the same way as other French citizens" ("High Folklore"

113). As a poignant example of this, Beriss notes that although “they study French citizens, social scientists who specialize in the French Antilles are understood, in France, to be americanists or caribbeanists, not specialists in France” (“High Folklore” 113). In the Hexagon, Martinicans, Guadeloupeans, and Guineans are not automatically seen as French.

French-Belgian author Didier Van Cauwelaert provides a telling satirical example of this in his 1994 novel *Un Aller simple*. In it, the French government’s new policy to export undocumented immigrants gets off to a slow start. Before exporting the protagonist, the only “immigrant” they are able to export is a Guadeloupean. It is only after they forcibly eject him from the Hexagon that they realize that Guadeloupe is, in fact, part of France. The officials in this book quite literally forget the fact that France exists beyond the borders of the Hexagon.

This forgetting also exists in the broader French zeitgeist, often in less self-aware ways. A prime illustration of this not-quite-French status is provided by the government organization le Bureau pour la développement des migrations intéressant les départements d’outre mer (the Office for Migration from the Overseas Departments), or BUMIDOM. This government organization, which existed from April 1963 to December 1981, existed for the sole purpose of overseeing migration from the periphery to mainland France. Thompson describes how BUMIDOM, in its role from overseeing the transfer of migrants, to family reunification, to providing courses in mainland France that taught said migrants skills and French culture, functioned as an organization “to step in and provide Antilleans with a unique form of social aid that would ensure assimilation by managing and controlling every step of the migration process” (64). She argues that the organization functioned as “part of the paternalistic heritage of the colonial state,” especially because “the Ministry of the DOM viewed BUMIDOM as benevolent organization that helped Antilleans, France’s less fortunate citizens” to successfully assimilate to

French culture (64-65). Of course, the very fact that the government felt a need to create an entire organization to oversee the migration and assimilation of those from overseas departments, despite their status as French citizens, highlights the ways in which they were not seen as fully or truly French, or even in which their Frenchness was “forgotten.”

This forgetting continues even today. For example, a July 11, 2020 promotional email from Air France, with the Subject Line “Les îles vous attendent dès 415 €,” offered discount fares to some of France’s island DOM-TOMs (“Les îles”). The very top of the email, just below the Air France logo, is an image of a generic, exotic white-sand beach with crystal blue water, palm trees, beach huts, and a long dock under which are written the words “La Guadeloupe, La Martinique, Saint Martin, La Réunion: Ces îles vous offriront une expérience tropicale inoubliable, avec des plages de sable blanc, des eaux turquoises, une faune et flore marine exceptionnelles. J’en profite !” (“Les îles”). This language, especially with its emphasis on an unforgettable, tropical experience and its exceptional flora and fauna, exoticizes and highlights the foreignness of these islands even as they are part of the country of France.

The email then features short descriptions about each individual destination mentioned above, along with the price of a plane ticket to that destination. The description of Martinique continues the exoticizing language : “En Martinique il y a le ciel, le soleil et la mer...et tant d’autres choses encore. Île de carte postale La Martinique se révèle pleine de trésors” (ellipses in original, “Les îles”). Significantly, the description of Guadeloupe takes this even further: “Une île de contrastes entre terre et mer. Découvrez cet archipel exotique situé à quelque 7 000 kilomètres de la France métropolitaine” (“Les îles”). The idea that the metropolitan French audience need to discover their own country certainly highlights its difference from what they know; AirFrance is encouraging French metropolitan citizens to discover a part of France they

have forgotten exists. (There is no promotion of unknown parts of the Hexagon.) This description continues by explicitly referring to Guadeloupe as exotic and then emphasizing its distance, and arguably difference, from the Hexagon.⁷⁰

A similar, if less elaborate, email from January 14, 2021 entitled “Réservez votre petit coin de paradis dès 319 €” features similar themes of Othering (“Réservez”). In this email there are neither pictures nor descriptions but the subject line and list of possible destinations are significant. The list of destinations includes 5 DOM-TOMs (Martinique, Guadeloupe, Saint Martin, French Guiana, Reunion), Tahiti (an “overseas country” or *pays d’outre-mer*), and then four other exotic locales, Dubai, Cancun, Abidjan, and San Jose. The grouping of France’s DOM-TOMs with international, exotic destinations while not a single part of metropolitan France is on the list, and the labeling of them as “paradise” all, once again, Other these regions and highlight their exoticism and difference from France.⁷¹ Certainly this language and framing stands in stark opposition to a December 2020 email exclaiming “Plus besoin de partir loin pour faire un grand voyage ! La France dès 39 €” and whose link brings you to a list of possible destinations, all in mainland France or, at the furthest, Corsica (“La France”). Despite the fact that both emails are marketing flights within the country of France, one advertises “La France” while the other highlights the exotic “îles.” These promotional emails, then, from a French company for a metropolitan-French audience not only make a clear distinction between France and its DOM-TOMs, it also insists on their non-Frenchness and even Others them in a way

⁷⁰ This trend is even more explicit in the email’s description of Saint Martin: “Voyageurs en quête d’authenticité et de beauté intacte, vous êtes aux portes d’un monde vierge qui vous est encore inconnu” (“Les îles”). The description of this virgin island and the assertion of its status as still unknown to the metropolitan-French audience is striking.

⁷¹ This language is in keeping with Beriss’s assertion that “[f]or most metropolitan French people, the Antilles represent the exotic tropics, places of magic, mystery and sexual vitality” and that even important intellectual movements such as the *Créolité* movement or Césaire’s work are not treated “as intellectual commentary on a level with that of metropolitan cultural critics, [but] their work is characterized as the spicy productions of residents of the tropics” (“High Folklore” 113).

suggesting citizens of the Hexagon need to be made aware of their existence.⁷² In short, as far as mainland France is concerned, the existence of France's Caribbean DOMs, and of the troubled history that led to their being part of the nation in the first place, are a quintessential example of Bhabha's forgetting. This forgetting accommodates the official national narrative and perpetuates an inevitable and inviolate sense of national self. This necessarily renders these regions and their citizens outsiders no longer part of the unifying national narrative, even as that narrative ostensibly functions as their own.⁷³

Interestingly, the mainland French citizens who move to the DOMs demonstrate a kind of inverse forgetting. Managan explains how, because "Guadeloupe is a part of France, most metropolitans I spoke to were not prepared to deal with these cultural differences and sometimes resented having to adapt to life in what they consider their own country" (154). This suggests that these metropolitans, those drawn to the DOMs, do not forget their existence so much as forget their difference. While this is the inverse of forgetting the regions exist, it functions the same way: in either case, French metropolitans erase the cultural difference and distinctness of the DOMs that might threaten the French national narrative. The remembrance of their existence or of their difference would necessitate remembering why they are different, how they are different, and, why this difference is labeled as "French."

One needs to compare this reality of forgetting with Bhabha's assertion that a key part of epochal time is that citizens of a nation are always simultaneously objects (the people featured

⁷² Interestingly, a 2021 *France-Antilles Guadeloupe* article exhibits this forgetting from the Antillean side by referring to the "passagers en provenance de l'Hexagone et de Guyane" as "les touristes" (Dinane and Birhus).

⁷³ This raises the question of why France is able to use the Vichy regime as example of the importance of their ideals but not slavery. The answer to this question is a dissertation in itself and outside the scope of this paper. Suffice to wonder if some of it has to do with an ongoing failure for the West on a global scale to reckon with their culpability in the Atlantic slave trade., as well as the logistical difference of violence done on mainland soil and done in distant, exotic locales. There is, of course, the added difference of Hitler and the Nazi party providing a kind of scapegoat to carry some of the blame.

in) and subjects (the people enacting). While Bhabha finds this status contradictory, reading his ideas in conjunction with Balibar's, it becomes evident that this duality is actually essential to the creation of nationhood and Balibar's insider/outsider groups. It is the very fact of simultaneously embodying and learning about one's group that marks one as an insider. France's omission of its Caribbean DOMs denies this duality to those citizens. These regions and their citizens are subjects enacting a narrative, but they are not the objects of it in that they are not part of—have, in fact, as a matter of necessity been erased from—the stories they are telling, the narratives they are remembering. Indeed, “the establishment of French republican schools mean[s] that Antillean history, culture, and language were absent from the curriculum. Schoolteachers taught Antillean children that they were French, erasing the history of their Creole culture and identity” (Thompson 32). Martinicans, Guadeloupeans, and Guineans are *not* objects of the nation and narrative. This contradiction, especially alongside the tensions between local and national narratives, obviously problematizes and obfuscates their insider status.

This, in turn, has led since departmentalization to conflicting movements in the regions between those who see themselves as French insiders and those who wish to officially renunciate this status and fully embrace their outsider status. In fact, the second half of the twentieth century saw increased agitation in favor of independence from France. In December 1959 there were riots in Martinique followed by further tensions in 1962 and 1974. In Guadeloupe the “Massacre de St. Valentin” happened in 1952 and racial tensions exploded into riots in 1967. While in Martinique the independence movement lost much of its power when economic hardships in the 1970s highlighted the island's dependence on France, the Hexagon did gradually grant it greater political autonomy throughout the '70s and '80s. The growing independence movement in Guadeloupe led France to change its status to French region in 1974 and by the '80s armed

militia groups such as the *Groupe de libération armée* or the *Alliance révolutionnaire caraïbe* had formed. It is also during the 1980s that prominent separatist Antillean intellectuals started to call for independence or autonomy, including Edouard Glissant, Patrick Chamoiseau, Jean Bernabé, and Raphaël Confiant. In Guiana, a large influx of Laotian refugees in the 1970s exacerbated issues of unemployment. And the *Parti Socialiste Guyanais* as well as other campaigns for increased autonomy gained traction in the 1970s. In 1996, 1997, and 2000 there were protests for increased autonomy that ended in violence. The culmination of these movements was greater autonomy for Guadeloupe and Guiana in 2000. Beyond this, it is estimated that today there are “800,000 people of French Caribbean birth or descent presently living on the French mainland...this is almost twice as many people as the entire population of Guadeloupe and Martinique (with just over 400,000 inhabitants each),” resulting in Paris sometimes being called “the third island” (Murdoch, “BUMIDOM” 244).⁷⁴ All of this both reflects and reinforces these regions’ French-ish status.

That said, it is important to note that there have been varied approaches to resolving the regions’ French-ish-ness, and especially their problematic national narrative. One is an effort to add these citizens back into the French national narrative in order to solidify their French status. For example, and most notably, in 2001 Christiane Taubira was the principal author of the Taubira Law, which officially recognized France’s participation in the Atlantic slave trade and slavery as crimes against humanity. It specifically required schools to develop a rubric on the Atlantic slave trade and slavery as a way to provide an accurate record of these crimes and to maintain their memory. Read through the lens of Bhabha and Balibar, this law plainly serves two

⁷⁴ For more information about the complex history and present of migration from these regions to the Hexagon, as well as the impact of race on these “migrants” lived experiences, please see H. Adlai Murdoch’s chapter “BUMIDOM” in *Postcolonial Realms of Memory*.

functions. First, it acts as a supplement, an attempt to fill in the gaps, the forgotten moments, of the national narrative. Second, it is a French-ish attempt (Taubira is a Black Guinean) to reintroduce franco-Caribbean citizens into the narrative, granting descendants of enslaved peoples the dignity of finally being both subjects and objects of the national narrative, as white French citizens have been for centuries.⁷⁵

The other approach to resolving the region's French-ish status, on the other end of the continuum, is to create a national (perhaps also a political) identity that is distinct from France's. This begs an alternative national narrative of Martinicans, Guadeloupeans, and Guineans where they are both object and subject. In fact, many Creole intellectuals, including Aimé Césaire, René Ménil, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, Jean Bernabé, and Édouard Glissant, have argued for alternative local, Creole national narratives that take Africa and enforced departure from it as foundational moment. Of course, as we have seen, folklore plays a key role in this alternate narrative, serving as a site of memory (one accessible beyond literacy) of both the foundational moment (enslavement) and an ongoing negotiation of non-French sense of self and creation of a natural, continuous, and inevitable (local, non-French) community.⁷⁶

Folklore serves as a site of resistance to the exclusively French national narrative. As Eric Navet poetically explains, "Si la colonisation et l'esclavage avaient maté les corps, ils n'avaient

⁷⁵ It is significant, and indicative of France's determination to *not* include these moments in their national narrative, that this law met with much resistance. Ultimately, Taubira's law inspired an uproar and there were successful efforts to undermine it. For example, in 2005 law N°2005-158 required the teaching of the positive aspects of French colonialism, effectively re-erasing contradictory moments that explain the presence of so many non-whites in France today.

⁷⁶ Understood this way, it is clear why the resurgence of Creole folklore coincides with the loss of Memory Nora describes. Nora argues that "[t]he passage from memory to history has required every social group to redefine its identity through the revitalization of its own history. The task of remembering makes everyone his own historian. The demand for history has thus largely overflowed the circle of professional historians. Those who have long been marginalized in traditional history are not the only ones haunted by the need to recover their buried pasts. Following the example of ethnic groups and social minorities, every established group, intellectual or not, learned or not, has felt the need to go in search of its own origins and identity" ("Between Memory" 15). It was during this shift that Nora describes (over the course of the twentieth century) that folklore became once again relevant and valued in the Antilles; it is a quintessential tool in individuals and groups finding their own origins and identity.

pas tué l'esprit, ils n'avaient pas tué le rêve, le terreau et le ferment indéracinables – même la mort n'y peut rien – à partir desquels ils puisèrent la force de se révolter. Et le conte joue ici un rôle essentiel dans cette préservation de l'esprit de résistance" (Colombo, *Des Contes* 10).

Arguably, read in the context of this discussion, part of the uniqueness of folklore (discussed in the Introduction) is its role in creating and perpetuating alternative national narratives in these regions.⁷⁷ This alternative national narrative is, of course, in direct tension with France's in that it revolves around remembering a moment, the enslavement of African peoples, that France's national narrative relies on forgetting.⁷⁸ Antillean self-conception is an ongoing negotiation between the two, and folklore plays a key role in this negotiation.

Even today, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana are evidently both part of the French national narrative, in the Bhabha and Balibar sense, and separate from it. The unifying, natural, and inevitable French national narrative of colorblind, universalist, Republican ideals theoretically is as much the narrative and identity of citizens of France's Caribbean DOMs as it is of metropolitan France. Indeed, even in the face of strikes and political turmoil protesting unequal participation in the French economy and governance in Martinique and Guadeloupe in 2009 and 2010 and in Guadeloupe and Guiana in 2017, voters still feel French identity strongly enough to vote to remain part of France (Bareto). But the regions' geography, history, and lived

⁷⁷ One can also read folklore, in its role as widely disseminated site of memory of African heritage and oppression, as a Bhabha-esque supplement, a way of filling in gaps in the French national narrative. However, if conceived this way, it is significant that Antilleans engage with and propagate this supplemental narrative, but metropolitan French do not. (See my fourth and fifth chapters for further discussion of this.) It is also important to note that folklore is not the only memorial of this history (please see Anny-Dominique Curtius's chapter "Slavery Memorials" in *Postcolonial Realms of Memory* or Anne-Elizabeth Artsen's article "Josephine2b : le plaidoyer pour la nature de Chantal Loïal" for discussion of some others), merely that it is an under-discussed and infrequently-recognized one.

⁷⁸ It is important to note that while this tension has long existed, it has become increasingly public and thus increasingly problematic. As Beriss explains, it "is not so much private beliefs or practices that present a challenge to dominant discourse of French national identity as it is the public representation of cultural distinctiveness;" French national identity does not deny individuals hybrid identity, it is only challenged by expressing that hybrid identity in public (*To Not Be French* 28). In other words, as globalization and new media have moved these postcolonial sites of memory more and more into public spaces, so has the tension grown.

reality all complicate this affiliation. Their own experiences, and thus narratives, are in direct contradiction to France's. Furthermore, they are omitted from France's narrative, making them subjects but not objects of the nation and the stories it tells to define itself. Obviously, these contradictions problematize Martinican, Guadeloupean, and Guinean insider status, rendering them simultaneously part of and different from the French nation. However, it is not national narrative alone that contributes to their ambivalent status as French-ish.

Language and Nation Reification

National narrative is a key part of the creation of a unified nation, but it alone is not enough. It functions as a starting point, but as Balibar says, the true "problem posed by the existence of social formations is not merely that of their beginning or their end, but primarily that of their reproduction, that is, the conditions under which they can maintain this conflictual unity which creates their autonomy over long historical periods" (334-335). Ultimately, then, for nationhood to exist and be perpetuated, the nation must agree on to whom the national narrative applies and to whom it does not. Balibar calls this agreement "ethnicization" and notes that nations do not possess "an ethnic base naturally, but as social formations are nationalized, the populations included within them, divided up among them or dominated by them are ethnicized, that is, represented in the past or in the future *as if* they formed a natural community, possessing of itself an identity of origins, culture, and interests which transcend individuals and social conditions" (349). In other words, nations are not naturally coherent groups that transcend individual identity; in order for them to exist and perpetuate they must appear as if they are, as if the insider population has natural and inevitable factors in common.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Appearance and reality are at odds in this. They must appear natural, but in reality, Balibar argues that "the general form of the history of national states has been the instability of frontiers and their constant 'redefinition,' with its direct impact on the external and internal perception of 'national identity'" (337).

So, then, “[h]ow can ethnicity be produced? And how can it be produced in such a way that it precisely does not appear as a fiction, but as the most natural of origins” (Balibar 350)? How does such notion operate in France, a country in which regional identities have, and continue to be, important? As I have already argued, one element of this (re)production is the ongoing status of insiders, or citizens, as simultaneous subjects/objects in a national narrative. But there must also be conceptualizations of shared group characteristics. Balibar argues that historically there have been “two great competing routes to this [creation of shared characteristics]: *language* and *race*” (italics in original, 350). France has followed both routes to varying degrees at different times in its history. Both continue to play a role in creating and maintaining understandings of who is French and who is not—and who is French-ish.⁸⁰ As with national narrative, in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana, language serves to reinforce the liminal positionality of the region.

Language, while seemingly abstract, is actually the more straightforward boundary enforcer. It is “concrete since it connects individuals with an origin which may at any moment be actualized and which has as its content the *common act* of their own exchanges, of their discursive communication, using the instruments of spoken language and the whole constantly self-renewing mass of written and recorded texts” (italics in original, Balibar 350). In other words, the exchange that is possible when people share the same language creates a sense of unity, of commonality. Insider status requires being able to enter into those exchanges. Balibar clarifies that this does not even need to be a direct exchange: “Even if it were the case that

⁸⁰ It is important to note that the French national narrative does not accommodate any such understanding of how group identity is formed. The very concept of universalism “implies that the French nation is a political construct rather than a predetermined ethnic community” (Mazataud). A founding principle of the French national narrative, then, denies the role that language or race or anything other than strict citizenship plays in delineating and perpetuating these boundaries. Lived reality, however, tells us that they do, in fact, play a role.

individuals whose social conditions were very distant from one another were never in direct communication, they are bound together by an uninterrupted chain of intermediate discourses” (350).⁸¹ Language, then, binds groups together in its ability to foster communication and shared discourses, and thus conceptualizations and worldviews. As Anderson notes, this is even true across time: “nothing connects us affectively to the dead more than language...Through that language, encountered at mother’s knee and parted with only at the grave, pasts are restored, fellowships are imagined, and futures dreamed” (145-154). Language, then, through shared discourse and culture, creates a shared community.⁸²

Balibar also underlines the role that language serves as a proxy for culture more broadly. He argues that regardless of class (i.e., dialect), all “linguistic practices feed into a single ‘love of the language’ which is addressed not to the text-book norm nor to a particular usage, but to the ‘mother tongue,’ that is, to the ideal of a common origin projected back beyond learning processes and specialist forms of usage and which by that very fact becomes the metaphor for the love the nationals feel for one another” (351-352). In its appearance of being natural—the very term mother tongue suggests ancient genetics—in its shared meaning, in its conflation with other elements of habitus, language thus becomes a symbol for broader understandings of “culture.” Of course, for this to obtain, everyone must have common associations with the language. This is a primary function of schools; they are essential as places that standardize and naturalize language, creating universal understandings both of what the language is (and is not) and with

⁸¹ It is significant to note that Balibar emphasizes the fact that the exchange can and does take place (primarily?) through variously recorded, shared texts. Similarly, Anderson explains that “These fellow-readers, to whom they were connected through print, formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community” (44). Folklore undoubtedly fits into this grouping.

⁸² Of course, as Balibar and Anderson argue, for language to serve this purpose, there must be “translators” who transcend regional dialects to create a cohesive, seemingly-natural language community and that in “modern national formations the translators are writers, journalists, and politicians, social actors who speak the language of the ‘people’” (Balibar 351). Storytellers undoubtedly belong on this list.

what and whom it is to be associated. In this way, language can be used across generations to create and understand (and reinforce) the boundaries between insiders and outsiders.⁸³

Indeed, in France, language and republican universalist ideals (i.e., national sense of self) are deeply intertwined. This entanglement is longstanding. Nora acknowledges as much, noting that France is “a country in which the relation between language and literature on the one hand and political power, the state, and the national idea on the other hand has always been close” (“From *Lieux*” xvi). Similarly, Ducournau refers to “the particularly strict link that exists in France between nation, language, and literature” (64). Furthermore, in her book *Colonizer or Colonized: The Hidden Stories of Early Modern French Culture*, Sara Melzer argues that in France (as part of their colonial enterprises in the New World) there was already, as early as the 17th century, an openness to assimilating outsiders and a corresponding, simultaneous obsession with Frenchness. This assimilation took the form of conversion to Catholicism and the learning of the French language.⁸⁴ Arguably, then, long before France viewed itself as a nation (in the sense of modern nation-states), it was already preoccupied with defining who was and was not

⁸³ A number of theorists stress the importance of schools in nation building. Balibar argues, “Let us simply say that schooling is the principal institution which produces ethnicity as linguistic community” (351). Schenepel explains: “That the criterion of nationality has so frequently been found in the shibboleth of language has been attributed to language’s essential tie with the glorious past and its link with the authenticity or the uniqueness of a people. Not only is the mother tongue connected to one’s greatness, it is the substance of it, especially for ‘peoples without history’ for whom language and history are one and the same – the two together being the first needs of a people” (24). In his famous essay “On Violence” Fanon asserts that “education, whether secular or religious, ...instill[s] in the exploited a mood of submission and inhibition which considerably eases the task of the agents of law and order” (3-4). Schor refers to “the French educational system [as having been for] so long one of the prime disseminators of republican ideology and values” (53).

⁸⁴ In fact, as Anderson argues, this was not uncommon, arguing that “from the start the nation was conceived in language, not in blood, and...one could be ‘invited into’ the imagined community” (145). While France originally conflated religion and language, over time the importance of religion was minimized. This is due to several factors, including the increasing secularization of the country (especially after the French Revolution), and the limitations of religion as a way of defining the boundary between insider and outsider. Historically, as a boundary-enforcer, language “is frequently selected over religion as a symbol because the unity of language is viewed as more durable for survival and permanence in the world,” because religion is too often shared with other peoples, and because it has its own elite which makes it a difficult tool for national power manipulations and machinations (Schenepel 25). However, it is important to note that French humanistic universalism is a direct descendent of Christian universalism (Schor).

French. And language played an essential role in this: the “religious origins of universalism are buttressed throughout the early modern period by yet another form of universalism, which is bound up with the rise of the absolutist monarchy: I am referring to France’s *linguistic* universalism” (Schor 44). Throughout the Early Modern period, then, the French language and French definitions of self (Catholic, universalist, etc.) were symbiotically linked.

The Enlightenment and French Revolution only further strengthened this association. Balibar argues that “The French ‘revolutionary nation’ accorded a privileged place to the symbol of language in its own initial process of formation: It bound political unity closely to linguistic uniformity, the democratization of the state to the coercive repression of cultural ‘particularisms,’ local *patois* being the object on which it became fixated” (358). Similarly, in her chapter “French Language,” Cécile Van den Avenne explains that with the French Revolution today’s understanding of the French language was born: “French as a national language, and in a way as guarantor of the French nation. Indeed, French republican linguistic ideology makes a strong link between language and national identity” (327). This view of French was due, in part, to the understanding that “[t]he supposed universality of the French language converges with the supposed universality of the French republican model and, in that perspective, French becomes the ideal medium for the transmission of human rights and Republican values” (Van den Avenne 328). Finally, Schor explains how “[t]ranscultural, transhistorical human nature was posited as identical, beyond particularisms, just as the universal French language promoted by [French-language defender, the Marquis de] Rivarol was a language cleansed of its impure forms: patois and regional dialects” (46). With the French Revolution and its emphasis on defining who was and was not French came a focus on

standardizing language across France, revealing the role that language played in creating and maintaining the French ethnicity and thus the nation.

This conflation of language and Frenchness became even more enshrined during the second French colonial empire. In France, Thompson notes that “[h]istorians have pinpointed the late nineteenth century as a moment of nation building in France,” that French identity was more regional than national until the Third Republic and the implementation of “mandatory and universal education as a strategy for instilling in peasants an awareness of being French and belonging to the nation of France. They contended that by introducing schoolchildren to the nation’s language, history, and culture, public education fostered the development of a national consciousness” (29-30). She narrows that focus by adding, “More specifically, the establishment of French as the unifying national language of France was central to state officials’ nation-building project. According to the state, the French language was the essential marker of Frenchness that signified national belonging. They argued that the ability to speak French gave people in the provinces the linguistic tools they needed to be full participants in the national culture” (30).⁸⁵ In its colonies, French colonialism “associated the spread of the ideals of 1789 with the dissemination of the French language” (Schor 46). The French language was the primary tool for spreading universalist ideals that were viewed as what made France unique; the French language equated to Frenchness.

This equation is still part of the national psyche. In Benin in 1995, France’s then-president Jacques Chirac delivered a speech “on the occasion of the sixth summit of *la francophonie*” (Schor 45). In this speech he argued that “Every language has its genius. The one

⁸⁵ Put another way, Thompson also argues that “France has historically used public education in both the metropolitan and colonial contexts to promote assimilation and make republican citizens. The dissemination of French was at the heart of this expansion of republican education. State officials viewed the mastery of the French language as the first step in the process of assimilation” (28-29).

we [Francophones] share predisposes to a certain vision of the relationships between men and communities. A vision that inspires the values of solidarity, fraternity: a sense of the universal” (quoted in Schor 45n5). In short, “[t]o this day French national identity remains bound up—at least in official discourse, but also in ongoing intellectual debates—with universal human rights, of which France considers itself the inalienable trustee. French, accordingly, is the idiom of universality” (Schor 46-47). Undeniably, then, language has been the primary and explicit producer of French ethnicity for at least as long as its self-conceptualization as a nation and longer than its national narrative itself. This ethnicity was easiest to internalize within the Hexagon, where French was (at least a variant of) the language of one’s ancestors.

The importance of the French language as a marker and symbol of national identity raises the question, however, of how bilingual French-Creole Antilleans can be situated in this paradigm. To arrive at an answer, we must first understand the history of Creole and French in the region. As a language, Creole, too, has a long and complex history, predating even the official institutionalization of slavery. Not surprisingly, language has been and remains an important subject of discussion, as well as a key tenet of identity. In his introduction to *Les maîtres de la parole créole*, Confiant details its origins as a “nouvelle langue créée au sein même de la plantation, le créole, née du besoin urgent de communication efficace entre les maîtres blancs et leurs esclaves noirs” (9). He qualifies this by noting that “cette langue se met en place, se structure entre 1625 et 1650 ou 60, c’est-à-dire bien avant la mise en place de l’esclavage institutionnalisé, lequel n’interviendra qu’à l’occasion du succès de la commercialisation du sucre de canne en Europe, vers 1660 ou 70” (9). This is significant because, since during “les quarante premières années du défrichement des ‘Isles d’Amérique,’ Blancs et Noirs vivent sensiblement sur le même pied d’égalité (bien que les Noirs occupassent des fonctions

subalternes) et surtout les deux groupes raciaux sont en nombre sensiblement égal. La langue créole est donc la création commune des Blancs et des Noirs” (9). At its most basic origins, then, Creole was a shared creation by both Blacks and whites, Africans and French, symbolizing a need (and desire?) to connect and communicate across cultural and linguistic divides.

Of course, it quickly became devalued. The implementation of the *Code noir* in 1680 forcibly separated Blacks and whites in the French colonies, creating (as it intended) a generally unbridgeable chasm between them. Once this separation was in place, more slaves were imported. Confiant notes that after 1680, as “des bateaux négriers, transportant plus de deux cents esclaves chacun, débarqueront dans les ports des Antilles et...progressivement le nombre de Noirs deviendra trois fois, puis quatre fois, puis dix fois plus important que celui des Blancs, l’influence nègre prédominera dans le créole et dans la culture qu’il véhicule” (Confiant 10). As a result, whites rejected “dans la nègrerie la langue qu’ils avaient contribué à créer et ne se reconna[issaient] désormais plus que dans le français” (Confiant 10). In short, with the oxymoronic shift of power after 1680—where whites were increasingly outnumbered but legally more powerful—there was an increasing devaluation of Creole due to its association with enslaved peoples. As Schnepel reminds us, Pierre Bourdieu “has shown that language is a central medium of social reproduction and that all linguistic exchanges, however insignificant, bear the marks of the social structure that they help to reproduce...[in other words,] a language is worth what those who speak it are worth” (220-221). As more and more enslaved peoples adopted Creole as their native language (their varied origins demanded a *lingua franca*) it became increasingly devalued, leading white enslavers to turn to French, the language of power, in a self-perpetuating cycle. By the end of the seventeenth century, then, French and Creole were on their way to their respective roles as language of power and language of disenfranchisement.

However, while on the slave plantation Creole may not have carried cultural capital in the Bordieuan sense, that does not mean that it had no value. On the contrary, Creole was a significant site of culture for enslaved peoples, serving as a tool for unifying, remembering, resisting, and (re)asserting their humanity in the face of the unimaginable traumas and violence of slavery. As Ngugi wa Thiong'o argues, "[t]he diasporan African reacted to the decimation of his inherited languages and the imposition of those of the conqueror by creating new languages they variously called patois, creole, or what Kamau Brathwaite now calls nation languages. Their very creations were acts of resistance" (49). Indeed, "the zone inhabited by colonial subject and largely marked by African languages became an area of light where it had been assigned to darkness. In their [newly created] languages they could sing the songs they wanted; they could shout any joy, engage in whispers of love, and organize conspiracies" (49). In other words, Creole was a tool for the perpetuation of folk beliefs. From its very origins, then, the "value" of Creole as a language was a site of debate and tension, serving different roles for different groups.

Furthermore, folklore and Creole have been closely interrelated from the beginning. Confiant explains that, for the tales that enslaved Africans brought with them to the Caribbean, "en changeant de continent et d'inscription sociale, le conte africain change aussi de langue :"
Creole (9). In changing language and context these African tales became intermixed with other influences, becoming unique to the region and culture, and shaped by their language—hence their common appellation as "Creole tales." As Confiant argues, the very "apparition de cette nouvelle langue, le créole, témoigne dans le même temps de l'émergence d'un nouvel imaginaire fait d'apports africains, européens et amérindiens mêlés, inextricablement mêlés, à tel point que le conteur et son auditoire sont parfaitement incapables de décider de ce qui ressortit à l'une ou l'autre de ces influences au sein du conte créole" (10). For Confiant, then, the hybridized

worldviews contained in Antillean folklore are also represented in the Creole language that is used to tell them. Antillean folklore, the Creole language, the Creole culture, and even resistance are inextricably intertwined.⁸⁶ Creole, like French, functions as delineator of cultural boundaries. In many ways Creole also functions as a site of remembering for the enslaved peoples—remembering their culture, their beliefs, their origins, their songs and tales, their humanity.⁸⁷

In part due to this function of Creole as a postcolonial site of memory, there is also a long history of tension between French and Creole in these regions. Historically, they have vied for cultural capital—a fact which illustrates the importance language has in policing boundaries. In the days of slavery, the more important Creole became to enslaved peoples as a way of reifying and communicating their humanity, the more it was affiliated with them, the more French speakers devalued it and the less cultural capital it carried within the Antillean social power structure. Creole became a marker of outsider, enslaved persons' status and was thus subject to the same devaluation that regional languages or patois in France suffered during the Enlightenment and Revolution. As French became the primary language associated with republican universalism, Creole became the illegitimate child that reminded France of its failures. If French represents a pure people and language then Creole must represent impurity.

⁸⁶ In his chapter “Inscribing Caribbean Orality: The Polysemic Discourse of Patrick Chamoiseau,” H. Adlai Murdoch expands on this: “In the orally-grounded communities of the Caribbean, where the subtle strategies of resistance were embedded in the structural complexities of Creole and its critical mediation of tradition and social identity, the seeds of this transformative tension that bind the ‘conteur’ to the ‘marron’ take hold from almost the inaugural moment of the slavery/plantation regime itself” (360). He continues by highlighting the importance “of the transmission and transformation of Creole tradition that ultimately engendered these complex patterns of identarian self-assertion whose foundation lay in the political tension and cultural dispossession that framed the colonial encounter” (360).

⁸⁷ This role of Creole as a site of remembering is not surprising. One’s language is “connected to one’s greatness, it is the substance of it, especially for ‘peoples without history’ for whom language and history are one and the same – the two together being the first needs of a people. The purported continuity of language is the authenticating device for finding, claiming, and utilizing one’s inheritance and later handing it on to other generation” (Schnepel 24).

Unsurprisingly, then, the Second Colonial Empire saw a continuation of the valuation of French over Creole. As Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana officially became colonies, the same language dynamics at play in other colonies emerged there as well. The goal was to be French, speaking French equated with that, ergo French was valued. Similarly, as in other colonies, the native language of the majority of the regions' inhabitants was regarded as an uncivilized language that needed to be replaced with the universal, civilized language of the motherland.⁸⁸ As France established national schools in these regions as part of the civilizing mission, French gained even more cultural capital. In these schools, educators "privileged French language instruction as a tool of assimilation, and forbade the use of Creole, the maternal language of most Antilleans...For metropolitan and colonial officials, successful education was measured by Antilleans' identification with French cultural models, their ability to speak proper French, and, most importantly, their loyalty and attachment to the French nation" (Thompson 32-33). The existence of a generation of French-speaking, Hexagon-educated, Antillean intellectuals such as Césaire or author Joseph Zobel attests the success of this.⁸⁹

This trend further intensified after departmentalization. During this era, anything associated with the culture created on plantations was viewed as "little evolved:" to be "considéré comme peu évolué, celui dont les habitudes trop imprégnées de la culture créole, rappellent à l'Antillais noir ses origines, son passé d'esclave ou encore ses ancêtres africains" (Colombo, *Des Contes* 17).⁹⁰ Certainly, Creole falls into that category. In a time where French

⁸⁸ For more on the power valences of Creole versus French in these regions, as well as the double-edged sword that was French in the colonies, please see Cécile Van den Avenne's chapter "French Language" in *Postcolonial Realms of Memory*.

⁸⁹ It is significant that even at the height of the Negritude movement, where Césaire was championing a reconnection to lost African roots, he was doing so primarily in French. Creole was not a significant tool of liberation for Césaire. A fact which arguably betrays the degree to which the Negritude movement is shaped by French ways of thinking.

⁹⁰ It is interesting that this devaluation of Creole coincided with a valorization of "regional" languages in France (Murphy 339). This suggests that Creole is perhaps more racialized than other regional languages; it is only once

had all the currency—it was the language of the administration, of the privileged elite, of education and advancement, of the “benevolent” whites in the Hexagon (as opposed to the local *békés*), even of international diplomacy—Creole and associations with an enslaved past were to be avoided at all costs.⁹¹ As Martinican Christine Colombo explains, during her education in the 1950s and 1960s, “Ne pas s’exprimer en créole, s’exprimer en français était une preuve non seulement d’éducation, mais également de progrès. Celui qui parlait ‘un gros créole’ en société était considéré comme non civilisé, voire grossier” (*Des Contes* 17). She remembers how, as a student herself, she and her peers were “fiers de montrer aux aînés comme nous manions bien le français, preuve de civilisation et d’intégration” (*Des Contes* 18).⁹² In contrast, “le créole était devenue la langue de libération, la langue de la détente, celle que nous utilisions quand nous étions entre pairs et que nous pouvions enfin nous laisser aller, loin des adultes ; à ces moments-là, nous l’apprécions au même titre qu’un fruit défendu” (*Des Contes* 18). By the mid-twentieth century, Creole had been banished from public spaces, it had become a clandestine pleasure of freedom of expression, a tool for the maintenance of a not-entirely-French identity in the only place the French national discourse allowed: behind closed doors.⁹³

Blackness began to be valorized (in the 1980s) that Creole could be, too. That it is so intimately tied to African roots, at the expense of other Creole speakers such as those of Indian descent, further highlights the racialization of the language itself (Schnepel 215).

⁹¹ Christine Colombo poignantly describes the power French had to help the disenfranchised: “Dans les familles modestes également, la pratique du français était d’autant plus importante que l’école apparaissait pour les Martiniquais des couches défavorisées comme, à la fois le moyen de sortir de la pauvreté, et un vecteur d’ascension sociale. Il faut dire que si l’abolition de l’esclavage en 1848 a donné à tous la liberté tant espérée, les terres, principales sources de revenus, sont restées aux mains des Békés et les anciens esclaves n’avaient pour toute richesse que leur force de travail...Devenus des Français à part entière, dès 1946, où les autorités françaises ont entrepris une véritable politique d’assimilation, les Martiniquais...ont vu dans l’instruction le moyen de s’approprier une partie de cette propriété à laquelle ils avaient tant donné” (*Des Contes* 21-22).

⁹² With this devaluation of Creole came a corresponding devaluation of folktales; the two are so related in the regional zeitgeist that one cannot suffer without the other. While exegesis of folktales continued in French (e.g., *Tropiques* or *Civilisation du Bossale*), it was not until the 1980s that folktales also started to be published in Creole.

⁹³ Managan succinctly summarizes the status of Creole: “As in many Creole-speaking areas, for much of [Guadeloupe’s] history, Kréyòl was viewed as inferior to French. Until recently, even its speakers disparaged the language as ‘broken French,’ and the language was stigmatized as a symbol of a lack of education, backwardness, and poverty (Schnepel; Bébel-Gisler; Prudent). In contrast, French was upheld as a symbol of civilization, education, and upward mobility” (149).

However, the emergence of Creole nationalist movements in the second half of the twentieth century led to a shift in the status of the Creole language. A large minority of Martinicans, Guadeloupeans, and Guineans were against departmentalization to begin with, and more were disillusioned with its results. As early as the 1960s there were independence movements on the islands. Additionally, in the 1970s and 1980s there was growing openness in France (and the world) to regional particularities and multiculturalism.⁹⁴ As ever-more-powerful “globalization increasingly produces a homogenizing effect on local cultures, there [is] more of a need to (re)assert one’s particularity and specificity;” difference, therefore, gained cultural capital in a new way (Schnepel 245). In other words, while earlier assimilation and complete adherence to being French was the most effective way of participating in power structures, highlighting difference from France now represented enough value that for some groups, at least, it was a worthwhile endeavor. And Creole was essential in this.

Creole “served as a primary icon distinguishing Guadeloupean identity from French identity” (Managan 155). This emphasis on Creole, and enhanced valuation of anything “non-French,” simultaneously reified French ideology of language to code or establish national identity. The interweaving of Creole language and identity, and thus its role as creator-of-insider-status, was true both in terms of function and form. Due to its (re)appropriation by political groups, “Creole became the chief political claim and symbol of the nationalists in their opposition to centuries of French domination” (Schnepel 142).⁹⁵ Similarly, by the 1970s “language activists joined independentists in mobilizing Kréyòl as an emblem of French West

⁹⁴ Please see the next section of this chapter for a detailed discussion of the fluctuations in France’s openness to cultural differences.

⁹⁵ Schnepel explains that “[i]n following the evolution of the Creole movement in the 1980s, it is clear that each political party’s position on the status of Creole corresponded to its own stand on Guadeloupe’s political status in relationship to France” (202).

Indian identity,” thus reinvesting it with cultural capital (Managan 155). This was so successful that for the “ordinary person...The message of independence was so linked to Creole as its conduit and container that the code and message became one: *kréyòl = lendépandans* (‘Creole = independence’)” (Schnepel 211). It also was intimately linked with culture and a cultural reawakening, including a renaissance of lay interest in folklore.⁹⁶ By the 1980s, “un groupe d’intellectuels a entrepris de donner à la langue créole la place qui lui avait été ravie jusque-là, grâce au courant dit de la créolité” (Colombo, *Des Contes* 19-20). This, in turn, is intimately linked with the birth of the Creole novel, whose authors (including Chamoiseau and Confiant) Colombo describes as having the goal “de réhabiliter le créole tout en l’anoblissant” (*Des Contes* 20). It is also during this time that Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant launched the *Créolité* movement with their book *Eloge de la créolité*. Functionally, Creole had grown in importance and increasingly served as marker of non-Frenchness.

This was also true at the level of form. Linguistically, individual word choices and terms are used to refer to those from the Antilles versus those from France, highlighting their cultural, linguistic, and geographic remove (Managan). Linguistic Creole choices provided Martinicans, Guadeloupeans, and Guineans a way to “separate [themselves] from the French through an identity based on a negation (*nou pa fwansé*, ‘we are not French’)” (Schnepel 216). Even the choice of script distinguishes these regions from France: “The phonemic script demonstrated how linguistic choices depended upon nationalist considerations. An image of Creole that was quite separate and distinct from the French language had been created, mirrored in and reinforced by the proposed orthography. Form fit function, too, as the revitalized and re-equipped language reflected in a very symbolic way the new political community” (Schnepel

⁹⁶ Please see my next chapter for a detailed discussion of the history and ups and downs of folklore in this region.

115). In short, Creole language and culture gained a new kind of cultural currency in the late twentieth century, serving an essential role in Antillean nationalist movements and functioning as a symbol of non-French-ness or outsider status.

Of course, this mobilization of Creole as a nationalist tool created competing uses of the language (not unlike competing national narratives) depending on the nationalist agendas of the Creole speakers. Creole was a primary battleground for political and cultural questions of identity and belonging, “open to manipulation by all political parties or individuals” (Schnepel 212). Even as nationalist and anticolonialist groups used Creole as a form of resistance, “other groups and individuals with divergent political orientations and agendas became involved in the local Creole debate. Assimilationist parties, pro-French groups, far-right associations, as well as state and capitalist interest became involved in the language questions” and these right-leaning groups’ primary goal was “to wrest Creole from its original advocates who had nationalist sympathies, by smashing the language of its symbolic potential and new meanings. Their strategy was to render Creole banal and defuse it as a nationalist weapon” (Schnepel 172).⁹⁷ This coopting of the language was also seen in the marketplace: “multinational and commercial interests used [Creole] in advertising slogans to promote their products, but they chose the French etymological spelling for the language” (Schnepel 213). Eventually “[e]ven right-wing departmentalist groups – from individuals and associations with long-established interest in Creole to one far-right political organization – began to undertake research in Creole and oral traditions and to promote alternate Creole orthographies in their publications” in order to “co-opt

⁹⁷ Schnepel explains in more detail “Through reformist legislation in education and in audio-visual regulations that allowed for Creole broadcasting on the free or private radio stations, and to a lesser extent on RFO-Guadeloupe, the Socialist government used Creole as a political concession. This was a conscious strategy to maintain the territorial and political integrity of the French state, since Creole could not realistically be promoted – in its own right or at the expense of the French language – without threatening the French community, alias the French nation. By generalizing or popularizing Creole’s use, the Socialists and departmentalist groups could hold in check the vernacular’s effectiveness as a nationalist weapon, thereby defusing its power” (213).

Creole, which they viewed as a neo-Romance language, and to insure its place in the French fold along with its speakers” (Schnepel 213).⁹⁸ Creole was simultaneously a symbol of separation from and incorporation into France.

It is also important to note that even as various groups were promoting Creole as a marker of non-French identity, these promotions were still occurring in French, highlighting the role of French as the means of national communication, even in arguments to reject it. This is intimately tied to scholarly debates around world literature and major and minor languages. As scholars have noted, world literature is an inherently limiting term, one “necessarily structured around a limited selection of internationally canonized works and a normative set of literary practices” and where “there seems to be no getting away from major/minor questions” (D’Haen 37; Ferré). In such an inherently biased system, then, there is immense benefit to authors of “minor” languages to either make an effort to transform their minor language into a major language, or to translate their work into a major language. An attempt at the first, whereby minor languages which were historically oral transform through “emergent writing phenomena [which are] quickly attracting international attention and often acquiring a considerable prominence on the global literary market,” was visible in the creation and promotion of a written Creole especially through the creation of the *CAPES Créole* (Łukaszyk 14). The second tactic, where authors of “[n]ew literatures of minor cultures, in search of the reading public and the organized book markets, often adopt major languages” appears to be that of the Creolists (Łukaszyk 14).

However, due to the history of Creole as tool of subversion in the face of French hegemony, the Creolists choice to publish in French is still significant. It highlights the contours

⁹⁸ This is very much in keeping with the broader workings of the “French state [which] operates in a wide variety of ways to mask, incorporate or limit the possibilities for the assertion of difference within French society” and “where the ‘low’ culture produced outside the circuits of government sponsored galleries, concert halls, theaters and museums is seen as ‘folklore’ that contributes to the national cultural wealth” (Beriss, “High Folklore” 109).

of the liminal zone the Antillean French occupy as shaped by language. *Eloge de la créolité* was published *monolingually* in the major language of French. As an ode to the Creole language and a call to Creoles everywhere to give the language new life, should it not have at least been published bilingually? In fact, this choice had important political implications. As Schnepel notes, “[t]he fact that the debate was conducted often in French – certainly in the case of the written press – seemingly legitimated the anti-Creole opposition’s charge of the hypocrisy of the Creole partisans. Here was a language movement that resorted to French to promote Creole, led by personalities who were evidently more at ease speaking and especially writing the Gallic tongue” (171). In short, promoting Creole was simultaneously functioning as marker of non-Frenchness and of French-ness, and its role and identity were hotly debated in the 1980s and ‘90s across Antillean society.

Unsurprisingly, these debates quickly entered the classroom. As we have seen, education historically played an important role in undermining Creole and promoting French. But, as “this movement was a quest for the reclamation of Creole as part of Antilleans’ true cultural identity,” (and in response to this history) the rehabilitation of Creole “was intrinsically linked to the elevation of Creole’s role and status in public education” (Thompson 35). As Thompson argues, “Creole activists chose education as the forum of the Creole movement not only because of its importance to the republican assimilation project, but also because it was an institution where French officials had articulated concrete policies to erase Antilleans’ Creole language and culture, and make them into French citizens” (36). They did this in part by reintroducing the Creole language and culture into French curriculums and classrooms. But they also instituted Creole as an official language of study in the broader French school system. Colombo explains that “L’association le GEREC-F (Groupe d’Etudes et de Recherche en Espace Créole et

Francophone), créée et présidée par Jean Bernabé en 1976, a fortement participé à la promotion de cette langue et a élaboré une grammaire en pleine évolution” (*Des Contes* 20).⁹⁹ This effort was furthered by other intellectuals, including those in my corpus such as Alain Rutil, Confiant, or Hector Poulet and Sylviane Telchid. This turn to schools betrays a French mindset.

However, the debate also extended beyond the classroom into broader society. Colombo describes how, even “si ces diplômes universitaires donnent une légitimité à la langue créole, ce nouveau créole, né des intellectuels, et pratiqué dans le milieu universitaire, s’avère parfois difficile à comprendre même pour un créolophone, pour qui le plus souvent, le créole est la langue de la détente et non de la réflexion, laissant ainsi toute liberté à celui qui le pratique” (*Des Contes* 20). In Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana there was “an image or stereotype of the Creole partisan as a bilingual civil servant, recipient of the 40% salary benefit, whose Creole when spoken publicly was marked by the intrusion of French vocabulary, French grammatical structures, and French discourse strategies, or worse still, infused with neologisms incomprehensible to a monolingual Creole speaker or even a competent bilingual speaker” (Schnepel 211). This academic Creole being promoted by intellectuals such as the GEREK introduced a new layer of tension, between them and both other intellectuals and speakers of the everyday Creole actually used in these regions.

The intellectual Hector Poulet was deeply critical of Jean Bernabé and his intellectual Creole dialect: “In [Poulet’s] opinion, the highly academic nature of Bernabé’s work was a ploy to manipulate and control the Creole field through a mystification of the language that reeked of elitism” (Schnepel 150). The intellectual approach of GEREK “became increasingly resented on Guadeloupean soil. Hard-line Guadeloupean nationalists perceived Bernabé, and to a lesser

⁹⁹ This is the origins of the Potomitan site that is now part of my corpus. Please see my next chapter for more detail.

extent his local proxy Prudent, as interlopers and meddlers” (Schnepel 172). Even within the ranks of the GEREC there was debate. At issue were the relative merits of the original Creole (referred to as the *basilecte*) and the modern, intellectual Creole (the *interlecte*). There were “the ‘radicals’ with Bernabé, who promoted the *basilecte* as the most authentic form by virtue of its being the most removed from French; and the ‘moderates,’ led by Prudent, who viewed the *interlecte* as the form most current in usage” (Schnepel 211). Even among those who promoted Creole as a language of identity, then, there was tension and contention.¹⁰⁰

Debates around the role and usage of Creole even existed between islands. It is significant, but not surprising, that many of these debates fall along these geographic dividing lines. Certainly, there are linguistic differences between the different French Creoles: “même si un créolophone Martiniquais est capable de comprendre le créole haïtien ou sécheyllois,” there are still differences and, in fact, “le créole martiniquais, s’il est assez proche du créole guadeloupéen, est plus éloigné des exemples cités, du créole de la Guyane et encore plus de celui de la Réunion” (Colombo *Des Contes* 20). However, it is more than simple linguistic differences. Guadeloupe has a history of resenting Martinique’s status as “favorite” of France, enjoying greater power and privilege. As a result, “[a]ttempts by Martinicans to create pan-Creole solidarity tended only to reinforce balkanizing urges in Guadeloupe. Guadeloupean militants did not strive to join a regional movement, especially if led by ‘imperialist’ Martinicans. In the interests of not sacrificing a local identity to a larger one, Guadeloupean strategists were asserting their own distinctiveness and independence,” including through promoting their less-academic version of Creole (Schnepel 218). Indeed, even today, linguistic usage in Guadeloupe

¹⁰⁰ The vitriol of these debates is not surprising when one considers both that Creole had an early, eighteenth-century written form that was repressed by the French and that the codification of language—and especially print language—is key to nation formation (Van den Avenne 329; Anderson).

highlights the degree to which “Guadeloupeans do not generally conceive of their identity in terms of something shared with others within the pan-Caribbean [but rather as] very much defined by one’s cultural practices and rootedness to the island” (Managan 159). In addition to Creole’s role as site of remembering or contesting French identity, then, it also functioned as a site of contention between pan-Caribbean and island-specific identity.

Ultimately, by the second half of the 1980s there were numerous Creole supporters but also numerous agendas resulting in divisions along any number of lines. There were lines along “island identity (Guadeloupean versus Martinican), socioprofessional status (teacher versus university professor), political orientation (autonomist/independentists versus assimilationist), social-class background (petty bourgeoisie versus peasantry and working class), strategies and goals (populist versus elitist), and cultural identification (Creole/local versus French/metropolitan)” (Schnepel 172). Creole was clearly a site of remembering and boundary negotiation, but who was remembering (or forgetting) what was highly variable and hotly contested. Nonetheless, the character and language of these debates illuminates the French viewpoint of the centrality of language in demarcating insider and outsider boundaries.

More broadly, Creole as a whole was (re)appropriated by French nationalist groups, undermining its valences of independence. France has “a well-entrenched and unusually elaborated ideological and institutional apparatus aimed explicitly at consolidating, preserving, and asserting a nationally uniform cultural identity” (Rogers 208). One of these apparatuses is for the government to appropriate regional cultural differences and incorporate them “into French national ideology as elements of a diverse past that contributed to the rich national cultural present” (Beriss, “High Folklore” 114). Thus, the definition of French insider can be “characterized by diversity, but that diversity is contained through ‘organic solidarity’. It

provides France's cultural patrimoine [wealth] and can be represented as part of 'who we all are'" (brackets in original, Beriss, "High Folklore 110).¹⁰¹ As we know this was exactly the tactic of many Antillean right-wing politicians, departmentalists, and French national groups (political or commercial). For them Creole, "a neo-Romance language," is merely an example of a regional language representing the laudable cultural diversity of France; Creole becomes a symbol of French insider-ness and belonging.

Ultimately, this movement was relatively successful in the Caribbean and Creole became successfully appropriated and depoliticized into a "simple" cultural marker. In the end, the right's attempts to divest Creole of its separatist power were largely successful even as various political factors undermined nationalist movements more generally. As a result, Creole came to form "part of a generalized, popular acceptance of a local cultural identity. Rather than its being primarily associated with the *indépendiste* current, by the 1990s all political parties from the left to the right in Guadeloupe had accepted Creole as a regional language" (Schnepel 233). This does not mean, however, that its integration was free of tension. In 2001 the rehabilitation of Creole and the work of the GEREK "a été couronnée par l'institution du Master de Créole à l'université, d'un CAPES et d'un Doctorat faisant ainsi du créole une langue à part entière et non plus un idiome" (Colombo, *Des Contes* 20). However, the announcement of this led to heated debates between French linguist Robert Chaudenson and Creolists including Confiant, Bernabé, and Pouillet, so much so that "the launching of the CAPES has certainly been complicated by the vitriolic exchanges between Robert Chaudenson and Raphaël Confiant" (Schnepel 237).¹⁰² By

¹⁰¹ This is in keeping with the progression of memory Nora describes: France goes "from a 'royal memory' of the feudal age to a 'state memory' of the absolutist monarchy to a 'national memory' of the immediate post-Revolutionary period, and from there to a 'citizen memory' of the republican schools and finally to the 'patrimonial memory' of our age" ("From *Lieux*" xx).

¹⁰² The disastrous first year of the CAPES and the eventual apology from Pouillet to Chaudenson where he recognized "his error in following the combative and hard-line course of Confiant [and] expressed his apologies" further highlight the ongoing divisions around Creole and the CAPES (Schnepel 240).

the early 21st century, then, Creole had become a legitimate language, acknowledged throughout France as worthy of study and perpetuation, but was still surrounded by competing agendas.

Today, there is residual tension between the status of French and Creole and within variegated understandings of Creole itself. Creole is both regional language and language of national resistance or identity, it both does and does not hold cultural capital, etc. Schnepel mentions that “even as Creole is accepted as a regional language, [it] is still a bone of political and cultural contention. The controversy pits Antilleans *in situ* against French encroachment, whether real or symbolic, but also creates friction and fissions among the diverse Creole organizations, activists, and sponsoring agencies of diverse political orientations” (240). In spite of its elevated status, Managan argues “that negative associations of Kréyòl remain in the minds of many Guadeloupeans [even as] the traditional dichotomizing discourses which link Kréyòl with backwardness, lack of education, and low social status are contested” (155). Additionally, Managan notes that for whites, and especially white French more recently arrived from the Hexagon, a “key to integration into Guadeloupean society and to acceptance is the ability to understand and speak Kréyòl” (154). Creole still has negative connotations, but whites are also contradictorily scorned for not knowing it. And Colombo explains that Creole today can be associated with relaxed, intimate situations, with serious ones, or, even, “en Martinique, aujourd’hui, parler créole est devenu une marque d’authenticité, voire de snobisme” (*Des Contes* 20; 18). The role of Creole, then, is dependent upon user and context.

That said, regardless of valence, Creole is always associated with identity; it is used as a boundary marker. It is a key tool in the crystallization and maintenance of insider/outsider boundaries. For those for whom Creole is a distinct language and a site of remembering the atrocities of slavery, Creole is a symbol of being outsiders to France (non-French, and certainly

not beneficiary of French Republican ideals) and insiders to a pan-Caribbean (e.g., GEREC) or island-specific (e.g., Poulet) identity. In contrast, for assimilationists who view Creole as regional language and site of forgetting it is a symbol of national pride in the rich French *patrimoine*. Colombo aptly explains that “[l]e créole est plus qu’une langue secondaire, c’est la langue de ralliement pour les Antillais vivant à l’extérieur et c’est un signe identitaire très fort aux Antilles” (*Des Contes* 21). Whether a symbol of resistance to France or of its cultural wealth, of informal or academic affiliations, of intimacy or serious thoughts or snobbery, the balance struck between Creole and French is both a conscious and a visceral one that has strong implications and deep associations. And these associations relate to its role as site of remembrance or forgetting (especially of shared origins in slavery), and thus complicating questions of belonging and insider/outsider status.

However, whether Creole is functioning as subversive marker of resistance to French hegemony or symbol of the wealth of France’s culture, language is still being used as a tool of (Balibar) ethnicization and creation of insider and outsider boundaries.¹⁰³ This, of course, is a very French way of thinking. As we have seen, France has a long history of relying on language as a primary boundary separating insider from outsider, and the use of Creole to do so, regardless of affiliation with France, is very much in keeping with French worldviews.¹⁰⁴ In using Creole as

¹⁰³ The ongoing tension between Creole and French renders visible the ways in which France still uses language as a boundary marker and enforcer. Cécile Van den Avenne argues that, “[e]ven though the French language may no longer claim an exclusive link with the French nation, this idea remains, as illustrated by the distinction established between French literature and Francophone literature in publishing as well as academic institutions in France” (331). That Antillean literature is often grouped as Francophone, and not French, is extremely telling.

¹⁰⁴ Several scholars have identified alliance with France as a primary barrier to for Franco-Antilleans to achieve true pan-Caribbean identity. For example, Schnepel argues that “the persistence of a vertical relationship of the French Antilles with mainland France has prevented the development of horizontal ties with neighbors in the Caribbean” (219). Similarly, Stella Vincenot has argued that “Créoliste writers lack pan-Caribbean perspective because they lack the knowledge and the network to fully understand other societies in the region. They are also trapped in a trans-atlantic [sic] relationship with France that feeds their anxiety at losing what Richard Burton calls the ‘margin of otherness’ vital to their identity politics. Consequently, they invest a lot of energy in asserting Martinique’s difference from the dominant French culture, which produces an ‘inner-directed discourse’” (73). It is their very

a marker of ethnicity and national boundaries, Antilleans are betraying a very French mindset. This may align them more with France than it distinguishes them, or it may reflect the necessity (as Beriss describes it) of minority groups needing to use the frameworks and discourses of the majority in order to be understood.¹⁰⁵ In short, in that the associations, affiliations, and status of Creole is under constant (re)negotiation, varying from individual to individual and context to context, the language ultimately serves to reify the regions' French-ish status.

Of course, beyond creating this French-ish ambiguity, language is a problematic boundary. Balibar argues that it is fluid and too easy to cross: “the linguistic construction of identity is by definition *open*...The linguistic community...is one which nonetheless possesses a strange plasticity: it immediately naturalizes new acquisitions. It does so *too quickly* in a sense” (italics in original, 352). He argues that a second-generation immigrant “inhabits the national language (and through it the nation itself) in a manner as spontaneous, as ‘hereditary,’ and as imperious so far as affectivity and the imaginary are concerned, as the son of those native hearths which we think of as so very French” (352). Language, when considered as the only boundary-enforcer, “‘assimilates’ anyone, but holds no one” and is a “a community *in the present* which produces the feeling that it has always existed, but which lays down no destiny for the successive

insistence on not being French that leads separationist Antilleans to be unable to escape French ways of thinking, and thus to reify them.

¹⁰⁵ The need to manipulate existing, majority frameworks is due to the fact that these are the terms that the French (against whom nationalists are resisting) can understand. Beriss argues that “It is the cultural construction of French national identity, and the understanding of the relationship between that identity and Antillean identity, that provide the terms and concepts Antilleans in the metropole must draw upon if they are to assert an ethnic counter-discourse that will be comprehensible to both metropolitan French people, as well as other Antilleans” (“High Folklore” 117). He further elaborates that “French national identity, for example, is produced and reproduced through the use of a variety of discourses. These discourses also provide the terms in which immigrant assertions of difference must be constructed, if they are to make sense as cultural difference. These ethnic identities can, thus, be seen as counter-discourses, drawing on the very same terms used to define French identity in order to define difference” (“High Folklore” 123). In other words, this use of French methods for delineation of identity may not so much represent an inability to reject French ways of thinking as a need to use discourses and tools the French will understand. Of course, this begs the question (with Which Audre Lorde might agree) of whether one can truly promote minority discourses within the majority’s framework.

generations” (italics in original 352). Anderson, too, describes this tension, noting that the nation, “[s]een as both a *historical* fatality and as a community imagined through language, [it] presents itself as simultaneously open and closed” (italics in original, 146). Lastly, Balibar notes that the same language can serve different nations.

It is for all of these reasons that Balibar concludes that language alone cannot define “the frontiers of a particular people, it therefore needs an extra degree (*un supplément*) of particularity, or a principle of closure, of exclusion” (353). With this acknowledgement of the need for a more particular way of delineating nationhood, Balibar is leading us to a discussion of a frontier that—like republican ideals and language—strengthens nationhood in the Hexagon, but creates a liminal space in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana: race.

Race and Nation Reification

To begin this discussion, it is helpful to conceptualize the French as conceiving of themselves as a race distinct from, say, the Germans or the English. To better understand this concept, and to lay the groundwork for understanding how it plays out in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana, one must turn to Balibar’s analysis of race, which he identifies as not about phenotype but rather “the symbolic kernel which makes it possible to equate race and ethnicity ideally, and to represent unity of race to oneself as the origin or cause of the historical unity of a people” (353). Specifically, he argues that “[*t*]he idea of racial community makes its appearance when the frontiers of kinship dissolve at the level of the clan, the neighborhood community, and theoretically at least, the social class, to be imaginarily transferred to the threshold of nationality” (italics in original, 354). For Balibar, national communities are racialized “when nothing prevents alliance with any one’s ‘fellow citizens’ whatever, and when, on the contrary, such an alliance seems the only one ‘normal’ or ‘natural’” (354). In that sense

race is not necessarily phenotypical so much as conceptual; a racial community is not one that necessarily looks the same but rather one where any intermixing of blood is allowed.¹⁰⁶

Balibar makes several points about this conceptual definition of race that deserve mention. First is that, unlike language, it is as imaginary as the national community: “unlike what applied in the case of the linguistic community, it cannot be a question here of a practice which is really common to *all* the individuals who form a political unit. We are not dealing with anything equivalent to communication. What we are speaking of is therefore a second-degree fiction” (353). Second, this fiction only works performatively, if citizens believe and practice it: “this fiction also derives its effectiveness from everyday practices, relations which immediately structure the ‘life’ of individuals” (353). Finally, it relies on the creation of an insider/outsider dichotomy: “the race community dissolves social inequalities in an even more ambivalent ‘similarity’; it ethnicizes the social difference which is an expression of irreconcilable antagonisms by lending it the form of a division between the ‘genuinely’ and the ‘falsely national’” (353). In short, for Balibar, race is an imaginary concept that relies on everyday practices and understandings of “us” and “them” which is, more than anything, defined by conceptions of who is “allowed” to marry *and procreate* with whom. This can work instead of or in conjunction with language to create and maintain the ethnic communities that make up modern nation-states. Of course, as we all know, all too often phenotype becomes a key marker for conceptualizations of who is part of or “allowed” to perpetuate a society.

In the case of France, while language has a centuries-old, undeniable role in the definition and maintenance of who is and is not French, the role of phenotypical race is much more fraught.

¹⁰⁶ Balibar argues that this type of national community is based on “a symbolic kinship circumscribed by rules of pseudo-endogamy and with a tendency less to project itself into a sense of having common antecedents as a feeling of having *common descendants*” (italics in original, 356).

Certainly, as we know, the acknowledgement of race goes directly against the national narrative and its foundational moment. The republican universalism which is one of the key unifying ideologies of France today and an essential part of the French state is framed as being entirely colorblind. Indeed, the Fifth Republic's constitution, inspired by the Declaration of the Rights of Man (which it also includes) has a prohibition of all distinctions based on race. Beyond this, a 1978 French law (78-17) made it illegal to collect or process "personal data that reveals [sic], directly or indirectly, the racial and ethnic origins, or religion, of any persons" except under specific circumstances (Damberg). In other words, even today, "it is all but taboo to target policies or to undertake research based on markers of race or ethnicity" (Bleich 165). Officially and legally, race is not part of the national conceptualization of insiders and outsiders. But in everyday life it continues to function and to impact populations that are "racisés" (racialized), discriminated against, or racially profiled.

Race as such is also downplayed in social discourses in significant ways. For example, in contrast to the United States which "tends to view and address issues commonly associated with ethnic pluralism through the prism of race, France frequently employs an alternative lens. The problem of immigrant integration in France dictates that more attention be paid to social divides associated with culture, class, geography, and citizenship rather than race" (Bleich 166). At the interpersonal level, then, and as a direct result of the national narrative and its Republican values of universalist colorblindness, race remains a controversial subject and divisive issue, albeit one that occupies a central role in public debates pertaining to colonial history, social justice, as an integral component of global conversations relating to the Black Lives Matter movement, and in discussions about belonging and exclusion in France today. In the twenty-first century, discourses about belonging that pertain to race (e.g., the Black Lives Matter movement and

related activism surrounding the death of Adama Traoré while in police custody, discussion of “Islamist-Leftists,” etc.) frame the discourses and questions as being about “Frenchness.” Race is thus implicitly but not explicitly linked with boundary maintenance.

In fact, in modern France, phenotype is routinely denied as a supplement to language in the maintenance of insider-outsider boundaries. When a supplement is needed, the emphasis is generally placed instead on citizenship (without a critical engagement of what it means to be a “citizen”). Since neither race nor ethnic groups can function as “the salient out-group, [so] the French state emphasizes the acquisition of French citizenship as the crucial step to attaining equality within the nation” (Bleich 166). While “[f]ormal policies...count only foreign residents—subdivided by country of origin—rather than racial or ethnic minorities...when calculating social mobility and acculturation[,...]nce a citizen, all categorization by the previous nationality ceases; citizens are regarded as equal, irrespective of origin, race, ethnicity, or religion” (Bleich 166). At least on the surface, then, the national narrative (and actual lived policies), inspired by the unifying concepts of Republican universalism, defines France’s insider groups simply as those who have citizenship, no more and no less. In theory, it is citizenship and language and in no way race that create the French ethnicity, the imagined French community.

The lived reality is, however, more complicated than the Republican universalist, colorblind ideals might lead one to believe. Slavery is inherently racist; it is not a coincidence that citizens of the Hexagon were not enslaved or that the vast majority who were were African. The very origins of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana’s European-ness were, then, inherently based on race. There is also a long history of race-based law in French colonies, including “proscriptions against sexual union between French men and black and Indian women in Canada and Louisiana [which] appeared as early as the late seventeenth century” or the “decree that

forbade marriage between blacks and whites in Guadeloupe beginning in 1711” (Heuer 520). In fact, in the Antilles, as early as 1680 the very first articles of the “fameux ‘Code Noir’ ...interdisent non seulement les mariages entre Blancs et Noirs, mais aussi les relations sexuelles entre eux (les planteurs qui procréaient des petits mulâtres devaient payer de Lourdes amendes)” (Confiant 10).¹⁰⁷ These laws turned a blind eye to issues of rape and illegitimate children, especially in the case of white enslavers raping their enslaved women (Vergès and Thomas). Similarly, Napoleon’s *Code Civil*, “when it was instituted in 1805 in Guadeloupe and Martinique, [included] article three [which] specified that its measures applied only to whites” (Heuer 537). In short, the famous, touted laws that are an essential part of what it means to be French were explicitly modified to draw racial lines in this region. Race has thus always been an important tool of insider/outsider demarcation in the Franco-Caribbean.

Even in the Hexagon race played a larger role in the definition of who is and is not French than one might think. The *Déclaration des droits de l’homme* excluded (or at least did not include) enslaved peoples (Schor 47). In other words, at this defining moment of Frenchness and who belongs to the group of “French,” the category of enslaved peoples, which was inherently linked to race, was categorized as outsider. In 1778 and 1803 there were an edict and decree (respectively) banning marriage between Blacks and whites; these were closely related to laws passed shortly before each banning non-whites from entering France at all (Heuer). Jennifer Heuer has even definitively illustrated that in the early nineteenth century, at least as far as questions of marriage were concerned, race “trumped citizenship—even within metropolitan

¹⁰⁷ Significantly, these laws were often focused around questions of legitimating (or not) mixed race children, and in 1818 the Prefect of the Allier even “complained that ‘the bastardization of the race is an inevitable consequence’ of mixed marriages” (Heuer 522). This only highlights the degree to which, as Balibar argues, questions of race relations and interracial relationships were conceptualized around common descendants and who could and could not be part of the continuing French society.

France” and that at this time “a seemingly arbitrary definition of race in France could, at least briefly, trump concerns about gender, religion, and national identity” (535; 548). Certainly, in the era of slavery, then, race was a significant tool of ethnicization in the French colonies and even in the Hexagon.¹⁰⁸

Even after the definitive end of slavery, race continued to play a significant albeit too-often invisible role as a tool for demarcating French ethnicity in France and its colonies. Certainly, some of the most influential thinkers of scientific racism and social Darwinism were French (e.g., Julien-Joseph Virey or Arthur Gobineau). The pseudo-scientific, racist rhetoric of these “thinkers” was essential in the justification of the expansion of France’s second colonial empire. Indeed, the entire *mission civilisatrice* is, like slavery, an inherently racist institution.¹⁰⁹ The line between colonizer and colonized, i.e., French insider and foreign outsider, was explicitly linked to race and throughout the Second Colonial Empire the French Republic was “a democracy resting on two pillars: the emancipation of white male citizens in the hexagon and the domination of the indigenous populations in the colonies” (Bancel and Blanchard 274).¹¹⁰ Even after the abolition of explicit laws policing interracial relations, there persisted throughout the nineteenth century systems of racial policing. For example, in French port cities “prostitution became a backdoor to racial regulation in imperial France, despite claims of racial-blindness [in

¹⁰⁸ Heuer’s point that contemporary popular culture, plays, books, etc. “overlooked the recent history of legal restrictions on mixed marriage” and of the existence of a general “invisibility of the ban in early nineteenth-century French popular culture” only serves to emphasize the ways in which the lived reality of race as a tool of French ethnicization was invisible and counter to the national discourse (546). Heuer’s article “The One-Drop Rule in Reverse? Interracial Marriages in Napoleonic and Restoration France” is an excellent illustration of the way that tensions between colorblind Republican ideals and the need to use race as a boundary marker played out at the time.

¹⁰⁹ In fact, Philip Dine implies that France explicitly turned to racist ideologies in order to avoid seeming simply greedy or exploitative: The *mission civilisatrice* “offers an implicit justification of the colonial project. This Gallic inflection of Kipling’s ‘white man’s burden’ . . . stress[es] France’s freedom from anything resembling a colonial profit motive” (Dine 345).

¹¹⁰ Bancel and Blanchard take this argument further, contending that “[t]o address 1931 and the exhibition is to understand that the colonial is not on the periphery of the nation, but rather at its heart, key to the idea of the nation, and thus a site of memory of the ‘national story’” (Bancel and Blanchard 287). Of course, today this fact and the centrality of racist, colonial imperialism to France, is often forgotten, marking it rather a site of forgetting.

ways that highlight] the role of sex in producing and perpetuating the politics of racial difference in imperial France” (Sequin). Even beyond official laws and the abolition of slavery, then, relationships between races were still at least partially policed as a way of controlling which shared descendants could be called French.

This trend did not end with the nineteenth century. Balibar notes that even if “[n]ativism’ has always been implicit in the history of French national ideology[,]at the end of the nineteenth century, colonization on the one hand, and an intensification of the importation of labor and the segregation of manual workers by means of their ethnic origin on the other, led to the constitution of the phantasm of the ‘French race’” (Balibar 359). Of course, this constitution exists in tension with the complex realities of interracial marriage in France, especially in the mid-twentieth century (Vergès and Thomas).¹¹¹ In other words, the twentieth century influx of immigrants to France and the rise of the far right have only increased tensions between use of race as a boundary enforcer and the reality that it does not always function as such as well as the need to “forget” this act in order to maintain the national narrative that unifies all insiders.

There is, then, a push and pull between colorblindness and race consciousness in France. This push and pull is even evident in the forty years that comprise my corpus. We need to better understand how these tensions have ebbed and flowed, both to shine a light on how race functions as a boundary marker in France even today and to understand the context of my study. In the early 1980s, the time that the earliest texts in my corpus were published, there was an opening to multiculturalism in France which implicitly “saw” race in an effort to neutralize it as a form of boundary enforcer and assimilate all into French nationhood. French president François Mitterrand began a discourse of “un droit à la difference.” Thompson reads this as “the

¹¹¹ This tension may be due, in part, to the different ways that white male/Black female and Black male/white female unions were viewed (Vergès and Thomas).

culmination of a gradual move toward a tentative cultural plurality in which Antilleans played a formative role” (37). Beyond this, “a series of measures was taken by the Socialists during the first Mitterrand *septennat* suggesting that French cultural policy would be more supportive of regional and ethnic diversity than previously had been the case. During the second Mitterrand term, with 1992 in the offing, one might have imagined that the call for ethnic pluralism would be strengthened” (Vichniac 40). As Bleich argues, “[b]y the early to mid 1980s, therefore, the direction of anti-racism was in question. No longer as marked by the legacy of Vichy and more focused on issues of immigration, the pendulum of anti-racism appeared poised to swing toward an ‘American’ model of ethnic identification and race or ethnicity-conscious politics” (174). The early texts of my corpus, then, are situated in part in a broader culture of a burgeoning French openness to a plurality of identities and recognition of the role that race plays in its ethnicization.

However, this opening to a multicultural approach did not fulfill its promise. The cultural shift implied in the early and mid-1980s “was not to be” (Bleich 174). As immigration to the Hexagon increased and these questions of race and Frenchness became part of mainstream discourse, the French far-right grew in power (Bleich 174). By Mitterrand’s second term, due in large part to this increased influence of the right, “the language of the *droit à la différence* [was] clearly out of favor” (Vichniac 40). The national discourse of Republican universalism was at odds with a multicultural reality where race plays a role. Politically and in the French psyche, the colorblind national narrative won out.

Jacques Chirac succeeded Mitterrand and (re)introduced a greater opening (relative to his predecessor at least) to multiculturalism and awareness of racial difference (and to be measured against a range of repressive measures and a litany of offensive and racialized remarks). In 1995 he acknowledged to French-Antillean newspaper *France-Antilles* that “French West Indians are

more sensitive to the risk of seeing their personality sacrificed in the name of assimilation” (qtd. in Schnepel 231). In other words, he publicly recognized the tension between the lived reality of cultural difference and the French expectation of total assimilation of its citizens. He continued by proposing a rather multiculturalist view in order to resolve this apparent conflict: “In my eyes there is no contradiction between French citizenship and belonging to a culture, a history, a civilization with their particularities” (qtd. In Schnepel 231). In this moment, then, the French president explicitly countered the ideas Clermont Tonnerre first articulated in 1789 by giving French citizens “permission” to be both French and something else.¹¹² The next year, 1996, saw the rather infamous *sans-papiers* March of the Women on May 11, a march to call attention to the plight of the undocumented in France (Thomas, “Les Sans-papiers” 261). The 1998 French World Cup win, and the celebrated “black, blanc, beur” multicultural team that realized the win seemed to further a national acceptance of a multicultural outlook. Earlier in the year there was also a silent march of some 40,000 people through Paris with the goal of paying “homage to the victims of the transatlantic slave trade and slavery, and [to] demand that slavery be recognized as a crime against humanity” (Curtius 168-169). This opening reached a pivotal moment in 2001 when Christiana Taubira introduced legislation officially recognizing France’s participation in the slave trade and its devastation as a crime against humanity.¹¹³ The turn of the century, then, was a moment in France where political discourse was actively acknowledging race as a way to undermine its power as a boundary enforcer.

¹¹² It is germane to note that Chirac specifically shared these views in an Antillean newspaper in the context of a discussion of Antillean identity. In fact, the quote ends: “French West Indians are rich from their triple culture imparted by their African roots, their presence in the Caribbean creole world, and finally their belonging to France and to francophonie” (qtd. in Schnepel 231). This particularity evokes Thompson’s argument of the Antillean’s role as model outsider-insiders and inspiration for France’s opening to cultural difference. Perhaps, for Chirac, due to their long history with France they are French enough to have the right to also be a little not French.

¹¹³ Again, it is not incidental that Taubira is a Black French woman from Guiana.

However, the 2000s then saw significant backlash to this adoption of multicultural perspectives. Nicolas Sarkozy, nominated to Minister of the Interior in 2002, instituted various laws limiting immigration and deporting undocumented immigrants. In 2004 *la loi du 15 mars 2004* banned wearing conspicuous religious symbols in public, sparking international debate about whether or not it was unfairly targeting Muslims and the headscarf. French law N°2005-158, which included an article that tells French schools to recognize the positive aspects of French colonization, was passed in February 2005, implicitly reifying the racist ideology of colonialism and the *mission civilisatrice*.¹¹⁴ At the end of 2005 there were uprisings in France's *banlieues* after two boys were accidentally electrocuted to death while running away from police officers. This violent outburst brought (inter)national attention to the inequalities that exist between France's urban areas and their encircling *banlieues* housing projects, and reinforced France's image of the residents of the mostly-minority neighborhoods as violent thugs not truly assimilated into French culture, while denying, for the most part, that this coding was based predominantly on race.¹¹⁵ In their book, *La Fracture coloniale*, Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, and Sandrine Lemaire argued that these riots and the discourses surrounding them represented a "retour du refoulé" and a return to colonial, essentially racist power dynamics, again reifying race as a definer of insider and outsider groups (10). In November 2007, the French high court struck down an article that would have instituted ethnic statistics, thereby

¹¹⁴ In that the intention of this law was to counter Taubira's 2001 law, it raises the question of whether part of the resistance was to the lawmaker, and not just the law itself. As Anderson argues, in colonial settings, colonial officials were useful in the colonies but never admitted to governing the centers. The reason for this, he argues, was not simple racist but "also "the fact that at the core of the empires nations too were emerging – Hungarian, English, and Japanese. And these nations were also instinctively resistant to 'foreign' rule" (111). Was resistance to Taubira as a lawmaker, then, a hint that Guiana is still not seen as truly French, and Taubira, then, as a "foreign" ruler?

¹¹⁵ Of course, in keeping with the national narrative, rather than focusing on race most French discourse around these riots emphasized the protestors' immigrant status, class, and cultural backgrounds.

making it impossible to track the role of race in delineating insider/outsider boundaries, culminating in the 2018 removal of the word “race” from Article 1 of the French Constitution.

This back and forth in the first decade of the new millennium existed not only in public discourse but also in the academic world. For example, these vectors created a “conflicted and paradoxical context of curiosity, tentative openings, centralizing interventions by the French state and renewed hostility to non-European cultural difference” (Louviot 4). It was in this atmosphere that, in March 2007 and the midst of Sarkozy’s presidential campaign, forty-four authors of diverse origin, including many from France’s former colonies—but initiated by two white, male authors, Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud—published a manifesto entitled “Pour une ‘littérature-monde’ en français” in the newspaper *Le Monde*. This manifesto called for a movement away from the “francophonie” designation, which they labeled exoticizing and representing a kind of ghettoization when compared to white, metropolitan French writing, and towards a world literature in French that decentralizes the Hexagon.¹¹⁶ This manifesto was followed shortly after by a published collection. In short, it was an intellectual call to an end of the use of race as insider/outsider delineator.

This academic debate continued. While it represents an apparent opening in the literary world, and did in fact spark many important conversations, this concept of a world literature in French is not as open as it seems. For one thing, the definition of this “new” literary appellation ignores important populations such as *Beur* (franco-arab) or *banlieue* authors (Thomas, “La Littérature-monde”). For another, the notion and its foundations exhibit latent Gallocentrism and “the manifesto possesses blind spots relating to cognate concepts in other language traditions, and fails to register the oxymoronic contradictions of a phenomenon that claims a global reach

¹¹⁶ The problematic nature of this designation becomes especially apparent when one considers that many Black authors born and raised in the Hexagon are labeled “francophone” authors. Geography is manifestly not the issue.

but persists with a monolingual definition of ‘en français’” (Forsdick, “On the Abolition” 91). Finally, it has sparked dialogue but not true change. While “some authors such as N’Sondé or Mabanckou manage to be published in the general collection of their respective publishers (Actes Sud and Gallimard), collections still exist that emphasize [or focus exclusively on] the (im)migrant or postcolonial origins of authors” (Louviot 6). While in theory there might not be any problem with organizing book series in this manner, the bigger issue is that such series often exist *alongside* others in commercial publishing houses that publish predominantly “white” authors (Gallimard, for example, has a series called “La Blanche” and another called “Continents noirs”). In 2009 Anne Chalard-Fillaudeau took a broader academic view in her “From Cultural Studies to *Études Culturelles*, *Études de la culture*, and *Sciences de la Culture in France*,” which unpacks the role of France’s pervasive and persistent universalist, colorblind sentiments as the reason American- or British-style cultural studies have not been able to break into academic institutions. Articles such as hers and the 2007 manifesto with its strengths and weaknesses highlight the ongoing tension, even in academia, between France’s national narrative of Republican values, its racist colonial past, and its multicultural present.

If anything, this ambivalence in academia and beyond has become more apparent in the last few years.¹¹⁷ 2012 saw the erection of first ever memorial to the abolition of slavery in the Hexagon (Khadraoui-Fortune 201). On July 15, 2018, France won the World Cup for the first time since the 1998 win, again with a celebrated multicultural team. Once again, the euphoria of winning this international title united French of all races, ethnicities, and backgrounds, albeit with a distinctly universalist tone.¹¹⁸ At the same time, on July 12, 2018, France’s National

¹¹⁷ This constant tension and shifting reflects Balibar’s argument that the “hereditary substance of ethnicity constantly has to be redefined” (357).

¹¹⁸ Of course, while the anglophone world celebrated the win as a multicultural triumph, the French viewed it from a universalist viewpoint. Trevor Noah, the South-African host of US TV show *The Daily Show* joked about Africa

Assembly voted to erase the word “race” from its constitution. The term was added in 1946 in response to the horrors of the Vichy regime and the Nazis, so that the constitution used to read “France is an indivisible, secular, democratic and social Republic. It ensures equality before the law for all citizens, without distinction of sex, origin, race or religion” (“Assembly Removes”). The decision to remove the word “race” from the constitution was inspired by the growing evidence that it has no biological foundation and that including the term in legal language only opens the door for discrimination.¹¹⁹ In short, 2018 saw several triumphs of French Republican ideals on the national stage even as lived reality continued to put pressure on these ideals.

Small and large events in the following two years display increasing tensions. For example, in 2019 students at the Sorbonne planned to stage the ancient Greek play *The Suppliants* with blackface. Other students, distressed by this, reached out to the antiracism group *le Conseil représentatif des associations noires de France* (CRAN) who called for a boycott. This, in turn, sparked national debates, with some groups condemning the staging and others (including other antiracism groups such as LICRA) coming out in support of it. This seemingly innocuous “incident highlighted enduring fissures even within the world of antiracism groups” (Piser). Another, more striking example, is the impact of the murder of George Floyd and the resulting impact of the Black Lives Matter movement on discourses in France. Not only did these events in the US spark “heated debates over racism” and police brutality in France, they also “underscored the emergence of a new way of thinking about race in the public discourse in

winning the world cup instead of France (due to the high percentage of players on the French team with African origins). This joke so outraged French officials that the French ambassador sent Noah a letter (which he then read on air) stating that since all but 2 of the players were born in France, *educated in France*, and learned to play soccer in France they were French, not African. Of course, Noah then rebuts with a distinctly multicultural, pan-African viewpoint, asking why the players cannot be both French and African, praising them for being African and “of Africa” *and* being French before concluding that if “French people are saying that they cannot be both, then I think they have a problem and not me” (The Daily Show with Trevor Noah).

¹¹⁹ Multiculturalist critics argue that while biological race might not exist, significant social racism does.

France” (Onishi). On one side of the debate are those who feel that emphasizing race creates insurmountable divisions while on the other side are those who note that universalism is not working, especially for those forced into this recognition by their own skin color. Indeed, “[m]ost of France’s new thinkers on race are the children of immigrants from the former colonial empire” (Onishi). And their work, such as the color-aware work of French historian Pap Ndiaye (son of a Senegalese father and white French mother), are “a radical challenge to the French state” and its colorblind universalist ideals (Onishi). While this is only a small selection of examples, they nonetheless show a marked, ongoing tension in France between the recognition (i.e., remembering) or acceptance of racial and cultural difference and its challenge to the Republican, universalist, colorblind ideals of the national narrative (i.e., the need to forget).¹²⁰ They also represent an ongoing discourse among non-whites in France today where many affirm that they experience their race as markers of their outsider status even as national discourse denies them this claim.

While this tension is true for all of France’s non-white citizens, it is particularly complex in France’s Caribbean DOMs, who, even more than other (descendants of) immigrants, are at the heart of these dynamics. It is helpful to reiterate here that Citizens of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana are not only politically French, but according to the colorblind, universalist narrative, they are also culturally French with an identity that “in the eyes of French society, is that of a French person first and a Black person or Black French or Afro-French person second” (Alzouma 65). Martinicans, Guadeloupeans, and Guineans have been full French citizens for

¹²⁰ Beiner describes this dynamic: “Social forgetting can be regenerated and transmitted over several generations. Rather than leading to amnesia, it is a way of preserving under the radar sensitive memories, which cannot be openly remembered. When these memories emerge to be celebrated in public, commemoration is often met with a violent response of decommemorating, which drives them back into the private sphere, but in turn may trigger initiatives for re-commemorating” (41). It is exactly this cycle of forgetting and remembering the important role of race (historically and today) in France that this micro-/macro-history unveils.

generations, longer than other non-white French citizens and even many white French citizens. These regions were already part of France when the Revolution took place. French Republican schools implemented there predate departmentalization and citizenship. These regions were the “pilot” territories for French assimilation policies. In fact, as Thompson notes, by the time of the Third Republic, due to their successful integration (including the “emergence of an educated and assimilated black elite that was loyal to France”), these regions became success stories of the colonizing mission (11). They were “colonial officials’ models for politically and culturally uniting France’s new empire and the newly colonized to metropolitan France” (Thompson 11).¹²¹ In other words, they have historically been held up as an example of the success of the Republican values; their successful integration is an essential part of the national narrative and France’s creation of a unified-but-multicultural, global identity. As such, their race should be irrelevant. They are French.

This is not the case. Historically, as we have seen, race classified them as outsiders. (Of course, for a long time they were not legally French, even when the white citizens of these islands were). Race still marks them as “outsiders” even though, legally, they are not. The story—by Martinican author and theorist Franz Fanon in his essay “The Fact of Blackness” and originally published in his 1952 text *Black Skin, White Masks*—is emblematic of this phenomenon. The essay begins with the famous line “Look, a Negro!” (quoting a child’s cry on first seeing Fanon in Paris), underscoring from the beginning the impact of race: Othering him and marking him as an outsider. Another striking moment happens on a train: “one of those good Frenchmen said in a train where I [Fanon] was sitting: ‘Just let the real French virtues keep going

¹²¹ The fact that they were rarely included in Colonial Exhibitions—and if so, were never central—seems to support this status (Bancel and Blanchard). They were “too civilized” to be showcased alongside more “savage” indigenous peoples.

and the race is safe. Now more than ever, national union must be made a reality. Let's have an end of internal strife! Let's face up to the foreigners (here he turned toward my corner) no matter who they are'" ("Fact" 135). Ironically, if not surprisingly, this nameless, white, French passenger repeatedly emphasizes the need for national unity, coming together, and French virtues (theoretically including universalist colorblindness) in the same breath as his direct reference to race as a boundary marker of Frenchness. His identification of Fanon as an outsider is based purely on race and particularly ironic when one remembers that at the time his birthplace of Martinique had just been added to the French union as an official department. Clearly, for this republican, the color of Fanon's skin—his race—was enough to mark him as an Outsider, a non-member of the French ethnicity and nation, without need to consider his possible citizenship.

Indeed, at the time that Fanon was writing from the Hexagon, even in the Antilles themselves Black citizens were striving to minimize their Blackness. Colombo describes how in Guadeloupe in the mid to late twentieth century, there was "un rejet de tout ce qui rappelait trop vivement nos origines africaines, en particulier la couleur de la peau" and parents would do whatever they could to lighten their kids' skin "afin de leur donner les meilleures chances de réussite" (*Des Contes* 19). Skin color was such a marker of non-Frenchness, racist tendencies so prevalent, and the fervor for full inclusion in this new *department*, that individuals would do whatever they could to resemble the white insiders.

Still today race is an important if little-acknowledged marker of insider/outsider status in the Antilles. Managan discusses how currently "terms of place are often used to indirectly index race and point not simply to Guadeloupe's subordination within the French Republic, but also to the racism that underlies its history as a French colony and the current obstacles that

Guadeloupeans face in fully exercising their citizenship within France” (148).¹²² In this way, the unspeakable role race plays in separating insiders from outsiders is indexed through language. Overall, in Guadeloupe, “a tension exists between identity based on race and identity based on culture” (Guadeloupean vs French) and “[w]hile inter-island racial and ethnic divisions seem to be waning, divisions between mainlanders and islanders have become more salient” (Managan 156). In short, there is today in Guadeloupe, from both Guadeloupeans and metropolitan French “a racialization of Guadeloupean identity;” race separates insiders and outsiders (Managan 155). Similarly, on the other side of the Atlantic, even today, “the tyranny of the phenotype takes precedence over nationality, with the result that the color of a French person’s skin often makes a foreigner out of him. This status provides no protection against racial prejudice” (Alzouma 65). Much like Fanon experienced in the 1950s, Black Antilleans in France are marked as outsiders by the color of their skin, even if they have legally been insiders for generations.¹²³

In short, Martinicans, Guadeloupeans, and Guineans render the role of race as a boundary enforcer particularly visible. Legally they are French. According to universalist principles they

¹²² For example, “*Antillais* most often refers to someone of African descent and thus indexes race” (Managan 150). As Managan argues, the thing that “is noteworthy is that the terms that categorize social identity (like *métropolitain* and *antillais*) use reference to places to index cultural, racist, and linguistic differences” (151). In other words, because officially race cannot act as a boundary marker in France but in reality it does so, it must be coded and indexed through geographical terms instead. This fits with Balibar’s assertion that often “[t]he production of ethnicity is also the racialization of language and the verbalization of race” (358). Indeed, ideological differences between the distinct groups are common (Alzouma; Onishi; Piser). For fictionalized (albeit sometimes subtle) accounts of this tension, please see Mabanckou’s *Black Bazaar* or the film *Il a déjà tes yeux* (*He Even Has Your Eyes*).

¹²³ Murdoch affirms that this is still many Antilleans’ experience today: “the experience of many *Antillais* confirmed Edouard Glissant’s dictum that it is in metropolitan France that many Antilleans confront their *antillanité* for the first time. Thus their recognition of racialized exclusion emerges here in response to metropolitan challenges of acceptance and integration that are unique in a number of ways... These acts of contestation highlight one of the key paradoxes of this French Caribbean nexus of departmentalism and citizenship, which is their subjection to an ironic and reductionist pattern of stereotyping as outsiders; it is this perception of marginalization that their valorization of their language and culture is meant to overturn” (“BUMIDOM” 247-248). Similarly, Managan describes how her “consultants and friends regularly comment on the discrimination they have experienced in the metropole... This discrimination is based not on their cultural differences or lack of assimilation but on the color of their skin, since *Antillais* are told by random strangers on the street, for instance, to go back to Africa” (158). Fanon’s experience is neither unique nor outdated.

are French. Their long assimilation into French culture, and buy into the national narrative, and their adoption of the native language mark them as French. However, their skin color does not. If the achievement of “French identity requires as the wages of assimilation the renunciation of public cultural particularism in the name of France’s vaunted particularity, its ‘singularity,’ in short, its universalism,” then Martinicans, Guadeloupeans and Guineans are burdened with the fact that color cannot be renounced; they are marked as outsiders (Schor 50). The very fact that Antilleans are viewed—both by themselves and by the French—as not-quite-French, and often treated the same as less-assimilated African immigrants, betrays the important role that race plays in distinguishing French insiders from outsiders.¹²⁴

The reality is, then, that “there is a wide gap between the utopian ideals of republican universalism and its translation into reality and that differences...continue to make their presence felt under the equalizing, homogenizing discourse of universalism,” and that race plays an often invisibilized role in the demarcation of boundaries and ethnicization of France (Schor 62). Bhabha’s argument that everyday time co-exists in ever-present tension with epochal time can help explain this. In this case, the lived reality of racism that is part of everyday time is in direct tension with the universalist ideals that are so essential to the epochal time of the national narrative. One could even argue that this tension between racism and universalism renders the usually-invisible tension between times visible.

Of course, this reality highlights the implicit racialization of folklore. In that folklore serves as a site of memory for descendants of enslaved peoples in the Caribbean DOMs of explicitly racialized institutions of oppression and that the archetype of the Creole storyteller is a

¹²⁴ Again, the fact that this is often coded or indexed linguistically in geographical terms, as well as the vehement trend in France against “communautarisme” (see Gado Alzouma) merely reflects the degree to which this reality is taboo in France. This, in turn, illustrates how deep-rooted France’s national narrative and definition of self as unique in their universalist ideologies are, and thus how thoroughly the lived reality of racism challenges France’s identity.

Black, enslaved man, it is inherently bound up with questions of race.¹²⁵ As such, the claim to Creole folklore representing Creole identity means that it uses race as another tool in its function as a demarcator of insider/outsider status. That many Creoles conceptualize Creoleness as non-white is further supported in both practice and language (Colombo, *Des Contes* 124; Managan). Race then, despite pretenses to the contrary, is used by both French and Creoles to create and reinforce the boundary between (white) French and (non-white) Creoles. The ambivalent status of Martinicans, Guadeloupeans, and Guineans reveals the tensions that exist around race as a boundary, even as the ambivalent marker-that-is-race contributes to their French-ish status.¹²⁶

In conclusion, the creation of a unified nation, as Bhabha and Balibar both tell us, relies on the creation of an imagined community, or, more precisely of two communities which are diametrically opposed: insiders (those of the nation and national ethnicity) and outsiders (those who are not). By definition, then, in order to exist it must exclude certain groups and peoples. This is doubly true in France, which has based its national peculiarity on universalist principles which are arguably inherently exclusionary: “universalism requires, or entails exclusion as though by definition[.] To what extent does universalism function precisely by that which it claims to eliminate—discrimination based on differences? To what extent does universalism rely on exclusion in order to function?” (Schor 64). The very ideal that requires exclusion, and pushes some to outsider status, also renders this exclusion taboo and thus difficult to identify.

¹²⁵ Please see Chapter 4 for a description of this archetype, its connections to racialized institutions, and a discussion of how, in order for France to embrace this folklore as part of their *patrimoine*, they must overlook its origins; this transforms sites of memory into sites of forgetting.

¹²⁶ This long history of “successful assimilation” in the Antilles has, in some ways, rendered Antilleans double outsiders. While their skin color renders them not-quite-French, their long history with France and full assimilation of French ideals often Other them from other Black French populations: “France’s black population can be divided into two distinct groups: a) West Indians, who, although the average French person can’t [sic] tell them apart from other Blacks, were forcefully brought in France before the latter group, and in some cases even before so-called persons of French ‘stock’ [and] b) First, second and third generation immigrants” (Alzouma 65)

The creation of the insider community begins with a shared national narrative that features (a) foundational moment(s) and gives the impression of natural and inevitable national progression from there. The maintenance of that community relies on ethnicizing it which is most often achieved by some combination of creation of linguistic and/or racial communities. While France's national narrative would have it that only those who fail to fully assimilate are excluded, the reality is that linguistic and racial difference can Other citizens and force them into a liminal status between insider and outsider. An understanding of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana's unique history and present with France makes it evident that citizens in these DOMs inhabit this liminal space between outsider and insider, that they are French-ish.

To be sure, all three elements of nation creation are problematic for France's Caribbean DOMs. In terms of national narrative, because the French self-conceptualization relies on universalist principles of equality, Antilleans are forced to choose between forgetting the origins of their membership in the nation and narrative in order to belong or forgetting fundamental French ideals in order to remember their roots. Similarly, Creole functions as a site of remembering that Others its speakers from the nation delineated by French as the mother or primary tongue. Race is simultaneously the most and least visible site of tension. Most visible in the sense that it cannot be hidden or changed but treated as invisible in that French discourses refuse to acknowledge, and deny the possibility of tracking, the key role it plays. Nonetheless, it does play a role in maintaining Blacks' status as only French-ish, regardless of their citizen status or that of their ancestors or ancestors' ancestors. In short, for citizens of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana, the three pillars of French identity (national narrative, language, and race) all function simultaneously as sites of remembering and sites of forgetting the particularities that French ideology says must be forgotten. They render these citizens liminal.

In these regions there is a ubiquitous and inescapable tension between remembering to forget, forgetting to remember, and simply remembering.¹²⁷ Members of these DOM communities are forced to constantly negotiate and navigate which aspects of their history and identity to forget—their race, the violence done against them, their history, France’s history, the French language, the Creole language, African cultural practices, French cultural practices, universalism, individualism, etc.—in order to align themselves with either community in any given moment. They are constantly negotiating their identity through acts of forgetting and remembering that are far more complicated and fraught than in other national structures and situations. In the DOMs, then, the question becomes: “To forget, or not to forget? To remember, or not to remember?” And folklore, both traditional and modern, is inextricably intertwined with this liminality and used as a tool in the negotiation of these tensions.

¹²⁷ This fact is not unique to this region. In their Introduction, Achille, Forsdick, and Moudileno explain that “multilayered and often entangled narratives reflect the fragmentation of memorial landscape along community lines, revealing tensions that have been characterized as a *guerre des mémoires* [memory war]. The unresolved legacies of this conflict continue to impact on the fraught relationships between multiple groups often involving their inter-generational complexity” (brackets in original, Introduction 15-16). A memory war is taking place in the Caribbean; what is remarkable is the number of groups, layers, complexities, and valences.

CHAPTER TWO

Storytelling Then and Now

Puisse ce recueil de contes de Marie-Galante contribuer utilement à la nécessaire reconnaissance d'un héritage culturel sans lequel l'avenir n'aurait qu'un visage de désolation. (Rutil 305)

My corpus consists of a range of modern folklore and folklore performances in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana. Their form and context must be understood in detail in order to understand any analysis of their function or role as site of memory and forgetting. These texts contain a range of works that have been underexplored. To this extent, the framework of this study represents a departure from, or at least a broad expansion of, existing academic exegesis and criticism. This can also be explained by the focus on an expanded corpus in which folklore storytelling performances and meta-data about these performances and performers (paratext from printed collections, newspaper articles, storytellers' websites, festival announcements and promotions, etc.) are included. Traditionally, research has focused almost exclusively on print productions, and has not given alternative modes of production the critical attention they deserve. My goal is to highlight the degree to which these texts offer new and original perspectives on folklore as site of remembering and forgetting. Specifically, I have compiled a corpus of eleven published folktale collections, ten Spotify tracks of storytellers recounting folktales, fourteen videos posted on the internet, 140 transcriptions of tales from a variety of webpages, and a wide range of meta-data, all recorded between 1980 and the present.

Historically, folklore and folktales, particularly from this region, have been primarily—if not exclusively—transmitted orally. Misconceptions are prevalent when it comes to assessing and validating the history of folktales and the multiple performance practices that are outgrowths thereof. Indeed, much of the French cultural studies discussion of folklore is inadequate, all too often limited to mischaracterizations and defined by a failure to access and understand what

defines such cultural practices. Stereotypes abound pertaining to gatherings of often illiterate people, rather than more in-depth analysis of folklore's intrinsic availability to interpretation and how it is defined by codes, precedent, training, and how in turn it has evolved in a dynamic context and survived across generations. To this end, my corpus may at first sight appear somewhat oxymoronic in that it is not centered on fieldwork and "authentic" performances coaxed from "traditional" storytellers. Rather, it is comprised of texts representing how folktales travel and are perpetuated in today's world.¹²⁸ I initially describe how texts have been created, and then provide a detailed description of each artifact in my collection. This is a crucial step precisely because the corpus features such a wide range of media and forms and because it is therefore so intrinsically distinct from more ubiquitous forms such as novels or films. One can only begin to investigate the questions and issues at stake and their relation to memory once a more comprehensive understanding of the history and structure of these performances is reached.

The Power and Legacy of Folktale Performance Records

Why do storytellers make the choice to record (or allow others to record) their performances when such recordings will be fundamentally different from the experience of a live performance?¹²⁹ A simple response is the same answer that has ever accompanied the telling of stories: to entertain and instruct community insiders. However, the famous dictum, attributed to Malian author Amadou Hampâté Bâ, that "In Africa, when an old man dies, a library burns down," hints at further possible answers to this question (Waberi).¹³⁰

¹²⁸ For a discussion of methodology and study parameters please see my Introduction.

¹²⁹ For an in-depth discussion of the affective variations of different media and their implications for both storyteller and audience, please see my next chapter.

¹³⁰ This version of the dictum is provided by Djiboutian author and Bâ admirer, Abdourahman Waberi. It is alternatively known as "In Africa, when an old man dies, it is the same thing as a library burning down." Waberi also clarifies that, in fact, what Bâ said during a December 1, 1960 speech to UNESCO was, "I consider the death of each of these traditionalists as the burning of an unexploited cultural fund" before pleading "for the 'gigantic oral

Libraries (or archives) are repositories of information for contemporary and future generations. As such, they provide invaluable records; they are a way to share and preserve knowledge, traditionally through writing and today through a slightly wider range of curated texts (e.g., CDs and DVDs, computer access, etc.). They also curate that knowledge, creating important systems of knowing and privilege. Libraries and archives are thus another form of gatekeeper, deciding both through their inclusion/exclusion of certain texts as well as through their categorizations of the texts included in their repositories which texts have what value and which texts do not. Finally, in their very reliance on written texts, they represent the West's long history of privileging certain kinds of knowledge over others. Of course, in many ways, the internet has taken over Western culture as a digital library. But the ranking and visibility of both site domains and pages within sites (e.g., YouTube vs. a personal blog or a YouTube video with millions of views vs. one with a dozen) have the same results of knowledge curation, creation, and legitimization. Bâ's equation between old people (implicitly those who know and share cultural knowledge orally, i.e., storytellers) and libraries, then, draws a parallel between the stories they tell and the texts stored in a library.¹³¹ The reason to record performances is to make this parallel concrete and to take control of the power of the library. In other words, the reason to record these performances, even if essential elements are lost in the process, is the same as the creation of a library: for (control over) posterity and cultural capital.

A commonly discussed reason to create performance-objects, then, is to record these stories and traditions for others. Many (if not all?) of the published texts in my corpus represent

monument to be saved from destruction by the deaths of traditionalists who are its only repositories and who are, alas, in the decline of their days” (Waberi).

¹³¹ Alain Rutil also implies this, both in his discussion of all the stories and knowledge his storytellers possess and by saying that storytelling “reste indéniablement une occasion où l’on peut encore apprécier les dépositaires des archives de nos traditions” (27; 25).

themselves as writing down performances that will otherwise disappear (e.g., Confiant, Pouillet, etc.), as do most of the printed online tales (e.g., Antanlontan, Potomitan, Conte-moi), and even some of the videos (e.g., Faroux).¹³² In fact, some of the writers draw their own parallels between Western record-keepers and traditional storytellers. In his introduction to his folktale collection *Les maîtres de la parole créole*, for example, Raphaël Confiant notes that the “conteur créole est donc le ressasseur d’une mémoire forcément fragile, sans cesse menacée mais dont tout un chacun, conteurs et assistance, sait au plus profond de lui qu’elle est l’indispensable lien avec les origines de la communauté” (14). He also notes that the tradition was in the process of dying off until his group recorded it. If the traditional storyteller is a library unto himself, then recording his words in writing is a way of creating a physical library that can outlast him. In his introduction to Alain Rutil’s collection, Guy Tirolien explains this even more clearly:

Comment justifier l’entreprise de transcrire des contes, quand on sait que la parole vivante ne saurait être remplacée par le moule figé de l’écriture ? La seule raison de fixer par l’écrit le verbe inspiré du conteur, c’est de nous permettre, par un retour systématique au matériel du vocabulaire, de traquer la pensée fuyante d’un peuple, peu habitué à détacher les produits de son esprit de l’acte de vie par lequel il les crée en les mimant. Notre espoir est que la parole peinte serve de support à des combinaisons stylistiques qui sont le fondement de toute vraie littérature. Et n’oublions pas que le petit Athénien ne disposait pour tout bagage, à l’époque classique, que de quelques bribes de récits transmis de bouche en bouche par Homère et les générations de conteurs qui l’ont précédé. (11)

¹³² In his Preface to Michel Lohier’s collection, Ulrich Sophie begins (thus beginning the entire collection) with this idea: “[n]ul ne conteste sérieusement le fait à savoir que, sous ses différentes manifestations (chants, danses, récits), notre folklore disparaît lentement mais sûrement” (9). This construction is in keeping with other “salvage folklore” practices and traditions.

The logic here is evident: writing down these stories and these performances creates records that will last after the storyteller-cum-library has “burned down.”

An essential element of libraries and archives, one at which the above citation hints, is their (theoretical) immortality. This, in turn, raises the question of temporality. In his Preface to Sylviane Telchid’s *Grand-Père Chabri raconte*, Robert Fontes implies that these records are for the storyteller’s contemporaries: “ce livre se réfère bien à la tradition...Sylviane TELCHID reste ici au cœur de la tradition orale et de notre identité culturelle. C’est une invitation à la redécouverte de nos soirées populaires, nos fameuses veillées, au cours desquelles l’oral prévalait” (6). The record-making, then, can benefit communities right away. This alone is perhaps reason enough to make them. It is not, however, the only reason.

Record-making also benefits generations to come. Rutil’s collection makes this explicit. At the end of the book is an inset explaining its series’s goals: “SÉ NOU MENM, l’Association des Amis de l’Écomusée de Marie-Galante, prend aujourd’hui le relai de l’Inventaire des Traditions et Arts Populaires pour mettre à disposition de tous les résultats de recherches et d’études menées sur la culture de cette île” (305). The inset also talks about the importance of the series beginning specifically with a collection of oral literature, because this genre is simultaneously the most original and most threatened form of cultural expression, and that these stories be collected by someone from Marie-Galante. The inset further explains that “par ce recueil, Alain RUTIL a voulu restituer à tous ce que les détenteurs de cette tradition orale lui avaient confié mais il a aussi voulu faire œuvre de création, car il était urgent que de tels pans de la culture ne tombent pas dans l’oubli, mais soient au contraire connus et compris pour leur survie et leur progrès” (305). It concludes almost prayerfully with the epigraph of this chapter: “Puisse ce recueil de contes de Marie-Galante contribuer utilement à la nécessaire

reconnaissance d'un héritage culturel sans lequel l'avenir n'aurait qu'un visage de désolation" (305). This entire explanation evokes questions of audience and temporality, but the final exhortation brings it fully into perspective: the text is a record not only for contemporaries, but also for future generations. Rutil, who is keenly aware of what is lost in creating written records of oral performances, has made this sacrifice so that his contemporaries and, more importantly, his *descendants* have access to some (albeit, in his eyes, lesser) version of this tradition. Records are created not just for now but also, and perhaps more importantly, for the future as a legacy.

Another way of describing this practice is to create sites of memory. Indeed, this need to create records for archives or libraries is consistent with Pierre Nora's description of memory:

Modern memory is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image. What began as writing ends as high fidelity and tape recording. The less memory is experienced from the inside the more it exists only through its exterior scaffolding and outward signs—hence the obsession with the archive that marks our age, attempting at once the complete conservation of the present as well as the total preservation of the past. Fear of a rapid and final disappearance combines with anxiety about the meaning of the present and uncertainty about the future to give even the most humble testimony, the most modest vestige, the potential dignity of the memorable. Have we not sufficiently regretted and deplored the loss or destruction, by our predecessors, of potentially informative sources to avoid opening ourselves to the same reproach from our successors? Memory has been wholly absorbed by its meticulous reconstitution. Its new vocation is to record; delegating to the archive the responsibility of remembering, it sheds its signs upon depositing them there, as a snake sheds its skin. ("Between Memory" 13)

In creating performance-records for Western archives, then, storytellers are performing in modern memory practices. They are creating sites of memory.

There is, however, another, arguably less romantic reason to create records of performances: the need for cultural capital in the West.¹³³ As Nora argues, “memory has never known more than two forms of legitimacy: historical and literary” (“Between Memory” 24). Storytellers are legitimizing their traditions and memories. The creators of published print collections seem particularly aware of this. Certainly, Rutil’s collection hints at it when the inset says that Rutil recorded both others’ stories and his own so that the tradition may be known and understood for its survival and progress (305). Fontes also hints at the influence of modernity in writing down tales: “Sylviane TELCHID contribue, à sa façon, au mouvement de renaissance de la culture régionale. Rendre au public les trésors enfouis dans la mémoire collective, les faire revivre en adaptant le texte aux nécessités de la modernité, tels pourraient être des objectifs de tous ceux qui, comme Sylviane, ont une conscience aiguë de favoriser l’émergence de nouveaux Guadeloupéens” (*Grand-Père* 6). Plainly, modernity and the need to be known are vectors in the choice to write down tales. This, in turn, hints at the needs and pressures of Western hegemony.

In his introduction to Telchid’s other collection, Hector Pouillet makes this motivation explicit. After talking about how important it is to have this written record of Creole tales, he tempers that assertion: “Et pourtant, aujourd’hui encore je ne suis pas absolument certain qu’il soit bon pour le créole de quitter notre ‘oraliture’ pour passer à la ‘littérature’” (*Ti-Chika* 8). In this he is merely expressing anxiety about what is lost in moving from oral performance to written, an anxiety most of the other collections also express. But his next sentence gives explicit reason why it is necessary: “Bien sûr, je sais que le siècle l’exige, afin que nous allions du même

¹³³ Even though what texts have cultural capital in the West is beginning to expand beyond print culture and include new forms (such as podcasts), it is still all curated and controlled by privileged gatekeepers.

pas que tous les autres hommes” (8). Pouillet says here that the shift to written performance is necessary in today’s world in order to be like other men. In other words, in order to be taken seriously by the West, to get Creole tradition and culture and history and language the same respect that Western cultural products have, the tales must be recorded.

A traditional storyteller may very well be an oral library, but if this cultural tradition wants to be taken seriously as a part of world culture, which is curated and defined by cultural gatekeepers, then the culture and stories must also be able to enter into the privileged, Western, curated knowledge that actual libraries (physical and digital) represent and harbor. In order to participate in Western dialogues and discourses, oral knowledge and traditions must be objectified. The creation of performance records, then, and perhaps especially of written texts, entails a loss of many features but is necessary for both record-creation for contemporaries and future generations and for Western cultural capital.

However, it is important to note that the choice to create these performance objects, despite their limitations, is not simply so that such objects exist, but also to take back control of these objects and the discourses they create and participate in. In his chapter “Literature and Folklore in the Francophone Caribbean,” Maximilien Laroche argues that one can see in Franco-Caribbean literature an evolution from a rejection of the colonial view of folklore—an imposed caricaturization or stereotypification—to an embracing of a self-defined, internal, national folklore. He draws out the distinction between “the Other’s folklore [and] one’s own” and the shift “from what they claim to know about us to what we know about ourselves” (341). In telling and recording their folklore in ways accessible to the West, storytellers are (re)claiming, (re)appropriating, and (re)creating their identity and folklore separate from what colonizers

imposed on cultures.¹³⁴ Community members telling stories and sharing them with insider audiences creates a shared identity that is different from the one colonial collectors imposed.

The storytellers themselves refer to these power dynamics. Rutil notes that the DOMs' storytelling tradition is so rich that storytellers "ont été d'abord sollicités par des chercheurs venus d'horizons étrangers et divers : États-Unis, Angleterre, Canada, France... etc. Ceux-ci viennent exploiter (dans l'acception péjorative du terme), l'une des dernières matières premières de notre patrimoine culturel" (ellipses in original, 25). In other words, Antillean folktales have long been recorded by community outsiders, "experts" from the West so that their stories are objectified and commodified and decontextualized with or without them. Certainly, when Western "experts" record the tales, they control the records and capital. In creating their own records and objects, then, storytellers are rejecting this exploitation and taking back control of how, when, and where they participate in Western discourses and knowledge creation and curation. The fact that inset in Rutil's collection emphasizes how important it was that it be someone from the region who wrote down the folktales ("Il était aussi important que ce soit l'œuvre d'un marie-galantais, et donc, à travers lui, celle de toutes les femmes et de tous les hommes de cette île") only highlights this. In creating these records themselves, Antillean storytellers are writing their own scripts. The shift in media, while it necessitates some sacrifices, is "worth" it because it is a necessary step for Antilleans to retain (or regain) agency.¹³⁵ Through the recording of folktales Antillean storytellers are (re)claiming control of their voices.

¹³⁴ Similarly, in that folktales function, like other sites of memory, both as record of something that might otherwise be lost *and* as pedagogical tool, reclaiming folktale performances is a way of reclaiming instruction of future generations (Nora, "Between Memory 22-23). Under French colonialism, "The appearance of colonial narratives aimed at a juvenile audience underlined the importance of reading as a primary recreation of the young in an age of rapidly expanding literacy, and thus as a formative influence on children's imaginations (Glénisson, 1990)" (Dine 343). In writing down folktales (or telling them on YouTube or Spotify), then, storytellers are reclaiming what and how children learn about their pasts and presents.

¹³⁵ That said, some performances in my collection are *not* curated by Antilleans, and rather represent modern iterations of the examples Rutil discusses. Beyond this, the line between community insider and outsider is not as

The Forms of Folktales Today

What, then, are these performance-objects, these records, which are created? How does one record the dynamism and relation of a traditional folklore performance? Storytellers from the Caribbean DOMs have turned to a variety of media and forms within those media to achieve this. Due to both the variety within the corpus and the atypical nature of the works that comprise it, a detailed description of each text is necessary before one can understand any analysis of them. Again, the corpus as a whole is comprised of folklore performances from 1980 or later that represent a range of media.

Texts Published by Traditional Gatekeepers

This section will initially explore printed collections. The print media in my corpus are all compiled collections of individual folktales for adults. Folklore collections, as opposed to other “folkloristic” texts, include tales of roughly the same length and, more importantly, feature the same tension between storyteller and tradition that is visible in the stories recounted via other media. They are also less engineered than children’s versions or collections. Due to their perception as cultural collections rather than “literature” they may also be subject to less influence from gatekeepers than novels or other texts, and therefore, at least in theory, more representative of an individual and cultural zeitgeist.¹³⁶ Of the roughly sixty collections of folktales published in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana since 1980, I have chosen eleven constituting particularly rich or complex examples. They are a representative sample by men and women that includes foundational collections and more modern reimaginings. Three are from

clear as it may seem. Please see my fourth and fifth chapters for more discussion of these issues and an analysis of the complicated power dynamics at play.

¹³⁶ For a discussion of what I mean by gatekeeper please see my Introduction. In short, gatekeepers are those who have power to decide or influence which texts have cultural capital and which do not (e.g., publishers, filmmakers, critics, etc.).

Guiana, three are from Guadeloupe, three are from Martinique, and two span the regions. Each has its own, distinct combination of formatting, paratext, and linguistic choices.

The oldest and perhaps most traditional collection in my corpus is from Guiana, *Légendes et contes folkloriques de Guyane*. The stories in this text were collected by Michel Lohier and it was originally self-published in 1960. While this fact should in theory preclude it from inclusion in my corpus, Édition Caribéennes re-released it in 1980 with new paratexts, including a note next to the copyright page: “Cette réédition entre dans le cadre des manifestations organisées par le Service Culturel Départemental de la Guyane, pour ‘L’Année du Patrimoine’ (année 1980)” (5). This reedition, including a new introduction and paratext explaining Michel Lohier himself, all render it a fascinating inclusion in my study, especially as it is a direct representation of the rebirth and revalorization of folklore in the 1980s.¹³⁷ The text itself consists of a “Préface” written by Ulrich Sophie, a “Présentation” by Robert Vignon, an “Introduction” by Lohier himself, six legends, and thirty-five tales. They are all printed in French, but one legend and two tales are accompanied by a transcription of the tale in Creole. There are black and white, sketch-like illustrations scattered sparsely throughout the text. Significantly, immediately after the title page for the legends and the tales follows the same illustration of a middle-aged Black man, dressed in shabby, warm-weather clothes and a wide-brimmed hat, tilting back a rickety chair and visibly in the middle of telling a tale (complete with open mouth and hand gestures). This illustration evokes the traditional context of folktales shared orally. A final aspect of note, also evoking the oral tradition, is that at the start of each story, and then scattered throughout the stories, are the now-printed words “Cric...” and

¹³⁷ A footnote at the end of his Introduction clarifies that M. Lohier was “Instituteur. Conservateur du Musée de la Bibliothèque A. Franconie. Commissaire préfectoral des peuplades primitives de la Guyane française. Décédé en Nov. 1973” (18).

“Crac...” These words share a line but are separated from the rest of the text by a line above and below, as well as being bold while the rest of the text is not. This, of course, is a direct reference to the traditional call and response of folktales in the region.¹³⁸

The next Guianese collection, *Contes et récits métissés de Guyane : L’Homme mélangé* was published by Harmattan in 1998. It is part of Maguy Albet, Alain Mabanckou, and Denis Rolland’s series *La Légendes des Mondes*. The stories themselves were collected by Didier Lemaire, a “métro qui a subi un double envoûtement, celui de la Guadeloupe et de la Guyane au point de se métisser” and a “professeur de Lettres qui a enseigné à la Guadeloupe et en Guyane, [et] a ressenti le besoin de transmettre par ses récits ce que lui ont appris ses élèves” (back cover).¹³⁹ Additionally, the back cover characterizes this collection, explaining that “[d]errière ce tissage de contes et de récits, de français et de créole, de morceaux de passé et de présent, on entend battre le Cœur de la Guyane d’aujourd’hui. Et aussi celui du monde antillo-guyanais, car dans la Guyane de ces textes se croisent et se mêlent Guyanais de toutes origines, Guadeloupéens, Martiniquais, Sainte-Luciens, Haïtiens, etc.” The collection, then, is a collection of tales from all across Guiana told by a man from metropolitan France who adopted Guadeloupe and Guiana as his own and recorded their tales. Interestingly, the front cover consists of an illustration entitled “Man Dilo” by Jean-Michel Lemaire showing a medium long shot of a three-quarters view of a naked African woman against a luscious green leafy background.

¹³⁸ This tradition consists of a call and response between storyteller and audience to ensure audience engagement. Generally, at the start of a tale and at various points throughout the tale, storytellers will call out some combination of “*cric/krik*,” “*Et cric/Yé krik*,” or “*Et/Yé mistikrik*,” and the audience must respond “*krak*,” “*Et/Yé krac*,” or “*Et/Yé mistikrak*” accordingly. The storyteller may then follow up with “est-ce que la Court dort?” to which the audience must respond “non” or “non, la Court ne dort pas” before the tale can continue.

¹³⁹ “Métro” is short for “métropolitain,” or someone from the Hexagon. For a discussion of why this origin is significant, we must consider the valences of this term. For example, as Etienne Achille, Charles Forsdick, and Lydie Moudileno note, “the polysemy of the term metropole, ... underscores the city’s dual status as both urban geopolitical and imperial/colonial center where national, transnational and postcolonial cultures coalesce[;] it is indeed possible to conceive of the capital as the archetypal French postcolonial site of memory” (10). For more on the history and relationship between French from the Hexagon and Antilleans, please see Chapter 1.

The text itself consists of two short citations about “métissage,” a “Préface” by Yves Leborgne, nineteen tales in French, and a “Petit lexique créole” broken into words “pour rêver,” “pour conjurer,” “pour raconter,” and “pour aider le lecteur.”¹⁴⁰ The stories are all (only) in French, with some Creole mixed in as dialogue or punctuation, and unabashedly modern (with references to cars and modern appliances). There is no reference to traditional storytelling call and response (such as *krik/krak*) except as dialogue in stories about storytelling. Many of the stories have epigraphs (including some quotations from famous French authors from mainland France such as Albert Camus, Charles Baudelaire, or Alfred Musset). A few are also dedicated to other storytellers, including two famous Antillean folktale authors, Martinique’s Patrick Chamoiseau and Guadeloupe’s Simone Schwarz-Bart. The stories themselves represent a wide range of approaches and formats. Some feature first person, some third person, and some formal or plural second person narration. Evoking the varied rhythms of spoken tales, some are simple unbroken prose, some are in numbered sections, some are divided by varying numbers of tildes in varying designs.

The final collection from Guiana in my corpus is *Les Neuf chamanes et le maître de la pluie : Récits palikur de Guyane*, also published by Harmattan, this time in 2007. This collection is part of the collection *La Légende Des Mondes* run by Isabelle Cadoré, Denis Roland, Joëlle Chassin, and Marcelle Chassin. The back cover of the book characterizes the storyteller: “Mauricienne FORTINO, originaire de Saint-Georges de l’Oyapok, de mère paykwene (Palikur) et de père créole, est conteuse.” It also credentializes her work, including this text: “Depuis 1993 elle collecte des récits palikur auprès des anciens des différents villages de Saint-Georges, Régina, Roura et Macouria. Présidente de l’association Kamawyeneh, elle est aussi responsable

¹⁴⁰ For a discussion of the role of (French) literacy in the region, please see my next chapter. For a discussion of the role of the reader/auditor in these performances, please see my final chapter.

du groupe culturel avec lequel elle voyage en France, en Martinique, en Guadeloupe et au Surinam depuis plus de 20 ans pour faire connaître la culture et les traditions du peuple palikur.” This collection, then, represents stories of Palikur origins collected and told by a storyteller of mixed background who works professionally to spread this culture abroad.

The text itself consists of an Introduction by “enseignante de Lettres” Nicole Launey, five stories, and a Bibliography of texts about the Palikur language. The introduction and tales are all in French—there is no Creole. There are no illustrations. There is no attempt at call and response or oral tradition. There are occasional footnotes to explain certain cultural things, such as the Palikur’s name for themselves or a description of cassava. There are simple, undecorated page breaks separating different parts of the stories. The emphasis of the text as a whole is on the tales’ ability to help the reader “voyager très loin et aborder l’imaginaire foisonnant du peuple palikur” (back cover). The three Guianese tale collections, then, represent the region’s diverse background and peoples as well as diverse approaches to publishing folktales.

My corpus also includes three collections from Guadeloupe. The oldest of these, *Contes marie-galantais de Guadeloupe: Krak ! kouté pou konpwann*, was collected by Alain Rutil and published in 1981, also by Éditions Caribéennes. It begins with a dedication which highlights the collections’ goals and role: “Ce recueil de contes est la mémoire de notre people. Il est dédié à celle de Raphaël BASTARAUD, dit : Pè Fafa, qui nous a largement aide dans notre entreprise,” followed by the same dedication in Creole in italics. After this, the text itself consists of a “Préface” by Guy Tirolien, an “Avant-propos,” an “Introduction,” a “Tableau des lettres utilisées dans l’écriture du créole,” a series of twenty-nine tales in both Creole and French and an “Annexe” which features a detailed structural analysis of Creole tales following the methodology laid out by Vladimir Propp, and finally, a “Bibliographie consultée.” Interestingly, despite the

Western exegesis using Propp’s methodology, there is no reference to other traditional tale-type classificatory systems (e.g., the Aarne-Thompson-Uther or ATU Index or the Motif-Index). All of the paratext is in French. However, each of the tales is told in Creole first with the French following in italics. In addition, some tales, such as “Tig, Lapen epe Zanba” or “Tigre, Lapin et Zamba,” have an introduction in the Creole version (“—Tim tim! / Bwa sèk / — On madanm ka kaka si talon a’y ? / Bouji”) that does not appear in the French translation (155).

The tales are grouped by the storyteller and before each grouping one finds title pages that explain when the tales were collected, which stories were told, who told them, and where. Finally, there are black and white line drawings scattered throughout the text depicting characters that are clearly not white. Some images even exaggerate and racialize features in ways that feel caricature-esque and even racist. For example, the illustration before the tale “Janmfìn, Grangel e Grovant” features three figures that look like they walked straight out of an advertisement for a minstrel show, with sly eyes, large noses, big lips and mouths, bare feet, ill-fitting clothes, etc. (54). The text, then, seems to represent a tension between stated intent and execution.

The publisher Éditions Caribéennes published *Ti-Chika... et d’autres contes antillais* by Sylviane Telchid in 1985. While the title only specifies “Antillean” tales, the collector, Sylviane Telchid, is a Guadeloupean author and teacher of French and Creole. In fact, she, along with the writer of one of the collection’s paratexts, Hector Pouillet, was instrumental in the introduction of Creole in public schools in the region and in 1984 (just before the publication of this text) they, along with Danielle Montbrand, published the first Guadeloupean Creole-French dictionary. Beyond this, in her preface, Telchid describes an “[a]utrefois, du temps où il n’y avait *en Guadeloupe...*” and then explains that “[c]es contes que vous allez lire, je les tiens d’une de mes tantes, qui les a entendu raconter par son père, mon grand-père” (italics added, 15-16).

Assuredly, these tales are from Guadeloupe. The collection itself consists of a foreword entitled simply “Mes grands” or “Dabo pu yonn,” written by Pouillet, a preface entitled “Chers enfants” or “Sé timoun-la” by Telchid, and then sixteen tales, each in both French and Creole.

Interestingly, while the paratexts are translated page by page, with the French translation on the verso page and the Creole on the recto page, the tales are told first in Creole (in their entirety) followed by the French translations (in their entirety).¹⁴¹ That said, the French throughout the text is italicized, while the Creole is not, suggesting that the French words are foreign and merely an accompanying translation. Finally, most of the French versions of the tales in this story have one or two sketch-like, black and white illustrations, much like those in Lohier’s collection.

The final folktale collection in my sample from Guadeloupe is also by Telchid: *Grand-père Chabri raconte : Légendes et Mystères du pays-Guadeloupe*. This collection was published by *Editions Jator* in 1998. It begins with a Préface by Robert Fontes and then a title page of “Récits” which introduces twenty-six tales. The stories are all (only) primarily in French and even have footnotes to explain Creole words and concepts to an outsider audience. The title of the tale is at the top of each recto page. Interestingly, at the top of each page is the short title of the book, “Grand-père Chabri raconte...,” reminding the reader of “who” is telling the story and that this is a tale (ellipses in original). Finally, once again, there are sketch-like black and white illustrations scattered throughout the text. The Guadeloupean collections are, then, somewhat more uniform than those from Guiana.

¹⁴¹ It seems significant that the French is on the verso page, i.e., the first page read in Western left-to-right tradition. This seems in contradiction to the layout of the rest of the book where the Creole comes first.

Of the collections from Martinique, the oldest of the three, but also the most ambiguous of the print collections in my corpus, is Patrick Chamoiseau's.¹⁴² His collection of tales (for adults) is most commonly known as *Au temps de l'antan : contes du pays Martinique* and was published by Hatier in 1988.¹⁴³ However, this collection was also reworked and republished by Le Square éditeur in 2014 and then by Éditions du Seuil in 2018 as *Contes des sages créoles*. The 1988 edition, in its complete and original form, was also translated into English by Linda Coverdale under the titles of *Creole Folktales* (published in 1994 by The New Press) and *Strange Words* (1998 by Granta). This is the only folktale collection published in the DOM-TOM since 1980 that has been translated into English. It is also the most self-consciously written, featuring a narrator protagonist who remains constant throughout the tales and (in typical Chamoiseau fashion) is self-aware and self-referential, playing with the boundaries and overlap between oral and written.¹⁴⁴ However, taken in its entirety, the book both reads and is marketed as a collection of tales more than a novel. By virtue of its authorship, it is the most important modern folktale collection from this region, but also one of the least studied of Chamoiseau's texts. It was therefore essential that I include it in my corpus.

The formatting and organization differ across the different editions. The first, *Au temps de l'antan*, measures twenty by twenty-five centimeters, which makes it feel more like a children's book. It begins with an Introduction signed by Chamoiseau, "Les contes de la survie," which provides context for the history and role of folklore in the region and introduces us to the

¹⁴² Significantly, Chamoiseau is, to an even greater degree than the author performers of written tales in my corpus, both a storyteller and a theorist. Here I focus on his storytelling. For more on his ideas and theories, and specifically how they relate to folktales, please see the Introduction and my analysis of this text in Chapter 5.

¹⁴³ Chamoiseau does have one other folktale collection, *Émerveilles*, published 1998. This collection, however, is specifically marketed to children, complete with having been published by Gallimard Jeunesse, and thus (for the reasons outlined above) is not part of my study.

¹⁴⁴ This blend of oral and written is no doubt due in part to Chamoiseau's professional background as theorist, novelist, etc. His interest in folktales stems in part from his political interests in national identity. Please see Chapters 4 and 5 for a discussion of the role of folklore in Antillean national identity.

narrator of the stories, an old enslaved man and “maître de la parole.” This is followed by a reprint of Aimé Césaire’s poem *Beau sang giclé*, originally published in his collection *Ferrements*. There are then twelve stories, all only in French with occasional, untranslated Creole words or expressions scattered throughout, with both full-page, stylized, color illustrations and small, black and white insert illustrations also scattered throughout. At the very end of the collection is a list of “Sources bibliographiques” incorporating tale collections (including Lohier’s and Rutil’s) and theory such as Edouard Glissant’s *Le Discours antillais*.

In contrast, Seuil’s *Contes des sages créoles* is small (not quite ten by eighteen centimeters), only slightly larger than a modern smart phone. The cover and binding are purple and yellow, there is a yellow built-in bookmark in the form of a yellow ribbon, and the edges of all the pages are bordered in colorful prints (each story has its own) much as antique books’ pages were bordered with gold. It is part of a Seuil series that includes other tale collections such as *Contes des sages gardiens de la terre* by Patrick Fischmann, *Contes des sages bouddhistes* by Pascal Fauliot, *Contes des sages qui guérissent* by Marie Faucher and many more. All the texts in the series have the same kind of colorful bindings and layouts. Like *Au temps de l’antan*, *Contes des sages créoles*, begins with “Les contes de la survie” (here explicitly labeled as a “Préface” and still signed by Chamoiseau) and features ten of the same (identical) stories as *Au temps de l’antan*, but Césaire’s poem, the first story (“Le commandeur d’une pluie”) and the sixth story (“La personne qui asséchait les cœurs”) of *Au temps de l’antan* are all omitted. Scattered throughout the text, as insets, full-page illustrations, or even double-page spreads, are famous works of art, including multiple paintings by Paul Gauguin, André Derain’s *La Martiniquaise*, Richard Edward Miller’s *Caribéenne*, and more. There are neither reference to sources nor bibliographic references in this version.

It is the text of *Au temps de l'antan*, including Césaire's poem, and the two stories deleted from *Contes des sages* (here called the "The Rainmaker," and "The Person Who Bled Hearts Dry,") that Linda Coverdale translated into English. Coverdale's translation was published and marketed by The New Press as *Creole Folktales* (fourteen by twenty-two centimeters) in the United States and by Granta as *Strange Words* (thirteen by nineteen) in the United Kingdom, but they feature the same stories and layouts. The English-language versions begin with Césaire's poem, French on the verso and English translation on the recto, then "Introduction: Tales of Survival" (in English only and still signed by Chamoiseau) and then English translations of the twelve tales from *Au temps de l'antan*. This version, too, does not include any reference to Bibliography, nor any illustrations. Indeed, the only visual variation in the text is a playful mise-en-page. Each story has a title page (recto) with a blank verso and the story beginning on the next recto. Each story begins with a distinct, playful layout. For example, "The Rainmaker" begins with very large font that decreases slightly in size line by line for the first seven lines until the eighth is the same as the rest of the book. "The Most Beautiful One is Under the Tub" features oversized font for the first eight lines that form the shape of a cross. The first twenty lines of "A Little Matter of Marriage" feature the type of oral introduction or contextualization an in-person storyteller might use, laid out in a curvy form evoking smoke or a bending river. Perhaps most significantly, "Lil' Fellow Musician" begins with three pages of large font only on the recto: "Are you all asleep? / No? / Then so far, so good!" and then the story starting with a large "Well" on the fourth recto before continuing in the regular font (37-43).¹⁴⁵ The English edition of this text emphasizes the ways in which Chamoiseau's work blends oral and written.

¹⁴⁵ This question and implied (but nonetheless omitted) response evoke the traditional call and response of oral storytelling, "est-ce que la court dort ?" It is important to note that these oral interruptions exist in the French editions as well. What is significant here is the ways the mise-en-page highlights them.

The other collections in my corpus from Martinique are both by Christine Colombo: *Ti-Jean et Monsieur le Roi, é Misié Liwa : Contes de la Martinique bilingue créole-français* and *Des contes de Ti Jean...Aux réalités de la Martinique*. The first was published by Harmattan in 2006. The back cover introduces us to the book's "auteure," Colombo, as "née à Saint-Joseph (Martinique) en 1947," a doctor of medico-social sciences in Mayotte, "Titulaire d'un DEA 'Traditions et changements', obtenu à l'université March Bloch," and researcher of "la culture antillaise ; le conte et la langue créole sont deux de ses sujets favoris." In keeping with this, the cover image is a photo of Martinique taken by Colombo herself. The back cover also makes the goal of the book clear: "De Ti Jean à Ti Toto, le conte créole avec ses rebondissements, ses contradictions et ses enseignements met en scène un des aspects de la culture martiniquaise. Le passage à l'écrit de ce patrimoine oral est l'occasion d'expérimenter la nouvelle graphie de la langue créole proposée par Jean Bernabé, fondateur du G.E.R.E.C." The first sentence of the book's Introduction further cements this: "La réalisation de ce recueil de contes en créole martiniquais est l'occasion d'essayer le passage à l'écrit d'une langue essentiellement orale qui a survécu à bien des menaces depuis sa naissance" (9). The book, then, explicitly represents a (re)valorization of Creole, contemporary with the official recognition of Creole in schools.

The collection itself consists of an Introduction written by Colombo herself (broken down into "Conditions de recueil," "La transcription," "La traduction," "La diglossie," "Les conteurs," and "Le créole,"), eleven tales, a conclusion, and a Bibliography. In the Sommaire at the start of the book the stories are listed by their Creole title with the French title and name of the storyteller in parentheses. The section of the introduction labeled "Les conteurs" is a list of the four storytellers featured in the collection and their biographies.¹⁴⁶ The section "Le créole"

¹⁴⁶ The last of them, Dédé Duguet, also features in one of the videos of my corpus.

includes the alphabet, a chart of the phonology, a note on grammar, a chart of personal pronouns, a little on conjugation, a note about Creole's evolution, a note about the intermixing of Creole and French forms, a note about regional differences, and a list of the storytellers' individual linguistic variability. It ends with an explanation that the list is far from exhaustive and that the Creole described in this text "est la langue orale pratiquée par la plupart des Martiniquais actuellement, n'est en rien comparable au créole universitaire tel qu'on le trouve, par exemple, dans le dictionnaire français-créole de Raphael Confiant" and that "ce recueil est simplement une occasion de partager un élément essentiel de la culture traditionnelle martiniquaise : le conte, et d'utiliser la langue créole pratiquée à la Martinique" (36). Interestingly, the reference to Confiant includes a footnoted reference to his website for the then-newly-formed *CAPES créole*, which would become the website Potomitan, also part of my corpus (see below).

In the introduction, Colombo explains that she recorded the tales in April 1999, "au domicile des conteurs, c'est-à-dire dans des conditions inhabituelles, dans la mesure où le conteur intervient généralement devant un public et, le plus souvent, avec un ou plusieurs de ses confrères qui lui renvoient la réplique" (9). She also explains that she chose "de noter tous les textes intégralement, tels qu'ils ont été recueillis, avec les exclamations du conteur, car cela met en évidence les différences existant d'un narrateur à l'autre. Cette différence est essentiellement liée au milieu de vie du conteur, à son niveau socio-culturel, aux sources dans lesquelles il puise ses histoires et également à sa personnalité" (11). As for the transcriptions themselves, while the storyteller is listed in the Sommaire, there is no mention of them in the body of the text.

Similarly, while there is a brief mention of Western classification systems (including ATU and the work of French folktlorist Paul Delarue) in the conclusion as part of a broader discussion of European influence, none of the tales themselves are explicitly classified and no tale-types are

given. There is simply the title and then the story begins. The Creole is on the verso page and the French is on the recto, page by page. In the transcriptions of the Creole, if the storyteller interjected French it is printed in French. The French translation is exclusively French. In other words, the Creole side is a literal transcription while the French is a translation, augmented with translation footnotes. The tales themselves are punctuated with “*Krik !*” and “*Krak !*” and some onomatopoeia. There are neither photographs nor illustrations in the text.

The last collection from Martinique is also by Colombo, also published by L’Harmattan (albeit six years later in 2012), and also focuses on the character of Ti Jean: *Des Contes de Ti Jean...Aux réalités de la Martinique*. Interestingly, the back cover presents a slightly different view of Colombo, perhaps as a result of the fact that this text is the author’s monograph version of her doctoral dissertation: “Docteur en Ethnologie de l’Université de Strasbourg, née à Saint-Joseph (Martinique) en 1947, après une carrière d’enseignement des Sciences Médico-Sociales à Strasbourg et Mayotte, a choisi de poursuivre ses recherches sur la culture de son île natale.” It also introduces some of the (very different) goals of the collection itself: “Européens, Africains, Indiens, Chinois, Libano-Syriens, traces d’Amérindiens sont les composantes de la population de la Martinique dont ce livre nous retrace l’histoire de la formation jalonnée de conflits” and “Dans cette aventure, l’auteure nous invite à partager un agréable moment avec les conteurs traditionnels et modernes, et nous fait découvrir les réalités de l’île de la Martinique depuis Christophe Colomb jusqu’à ce siècle, en passant par la colonisation, l’esclavage et son abolition, la départementalisation...” (ellipses in original). The cover is again a photograph of Martinique taken by Colombo. If the first collection was an experiment in language and culture and how they tie together, this one is an exploration of folklore as record, marker, and communicator of history and identity.

Because the text is based off of Colombo's dissertation, it features a wealth of paratext along with the tales themselves. It begins with a "Préface," here by Eric Navet, followed by an Introduction and then the first section, "Naissance et Evolution d'un peuple, d'une nouvelle culture," which she breaks down into a presentation of the island, a discussion of the origins of the Martinican people, the birth of a "new" (read Creole) culture, and then a discussion of recent cultural shifts. The next section is about the tales themselves. It begins with a broad discussion of Martinican folklore and a discussion of the storytellers and the tales, featuring the most reference of any of the texts in my corpus to traditional folklore analysis and classificatory systems, including, like Rutil, a Proppian analysis of Creole tales. It then turns to the specific tales themselves. In total the collection presents ten different Ti Jean tales, each featuring the "central" tale, a traditional folkloric analysis of it (including references to classification systems and motifs, Bruno Bettelheim and other seminal scholars of folklore studies, etc.), and other versions against which one can compare it. In keeping with the academic, analytical tone of this collection, the tales are in French with no nod to orality or performance and labeled as "summaries" rather than transcriptions. The next section is a detailed discussion and analysis of Ti Jean across Martinican culture (including in tales, theater, written literature, etc.) and of the evolution of tales and the language of tales in the Antilles.¹⁴⁷ The book ends with a Conclusion, Bibliography, and "Annexe" of Richard Ferraty's version of "La bête à sept têtes" in (uniquely) both Creole and French. There are no illustrations, but there are tables and charts, six photographs (of the making of a "gommier," the cooking of manioc, rock engravings in Sainte Luce, the statue of "Joséphine décapitée," the "case de Ti Jean à la maison du conte" in Sainte-

¹⁴⁷ Much like Brer Rabbit in the US South, Ti Jean is a recurring (human) trickster character in Caribbean folklore. As an analysis of his role in this tradition is outside the scope of this paper, please see Colombo's text for a discussion of his contribution to thematic unity and symbolic significance.

Marie, and the “Habitation Fonds Saint-Jacques”), and three maps of the Antilles today, Martinique in 1640, and the Atlantic triangle. All non-written paratext is therefore didactic, and not provided as multimodal entertainment. The Martinican collections, then, represent a range of approaches to published folklore performances.

The last two tale collections included in my sample of print collections is Raphaël Confiant’s seminal work *Les maîtres de la parole créole* and Diana Ramassamy’s “sequel” *Les nouveaux maîtres de la parole créole*. Both feature stories from all around the Franco-Caribbean. Confiant’s collection was published in 1995 by Gallimard.¹⁴⁸ It is large and the cover features a muted, grayscale photograph of an old, Black man holding a hat, sitting on a chair, and staring pensively past the camera. The back cover tells us that David Damoisson took this photograph of the storyteller Césaire Surbon. It also explains that Confiant translated and collated folktales told by a range of storytellers and collected by Marcel Lebielle, arranging them, along with photographs by David Damoisson, into this collection.¹⁴⁹ The back cover also gives a true taste of the flavor and goals of the collection:

Les Maîtres de la parole créole sont ces conteurs de Martinique, Guyane, Guadeloupe, Sainte-Lucie, Dominique et Haïti dont les contes sont à l’origine de la littérature créole. Dans cette anthologie, vingt-six conteurs de douze à quatre-vingt-douze ans ont été réunis grâce aux enregistrements effectués par Marcel Lebielle. Raphaël Confiant est leur passeur. Il les présente dans de savoureux portraits et a transcrit au plus près de leur débit, du rythme du récit, des jeux de langue entre conteurs et spectateurs, les histoires

¹⁴⁸ Again, Confiant is another essential figure in the theoretical conceptualization of Creoleness. For example, in 1989 he and Chamoiseau, along with Jean Bernabé, published their Creole manifesto, *In Praise of Creoleness*. See my discussion in the Introduction for more on their theoretical ideas.

¹⁴⁹ The inclusion of photographs at all is significant. Please see my third chapter for a discussion of this.

originales comme les contes traditionnels. David Damoison a photographié les conteurs en action, et traduit à son tour, en images, la vigueur et la poésie de la parole créole.

This collection, too, then, is distinctly aware of the tensions between written and oral storytelling and takes a multimodal, cross-cultural approach to its performance.

The collection itself includes two paratexts, “A la nuit close, paroles que voici” by Confiant and “Les conteurs de Kontè Sanblé” by Lebielle, followed by twenty-six stories. Each storyteller (most “tell” only one tale, three tell two) is introduced by a grayscale photographed portrait featuring similar staging and visual rhetoric: most are at rest (presumably) in or near their houses, usually dilapidated, wearing simple if not ragged clothing and frequently looking directly at the camera. Accompanying the portrait is a large-font heading of the storyteller’s real name and performance name (e.g., “Médarius Cabit, dit Méda”), a bold label of their island of origin in the margin, and a one-to-two-page biography of the storyteller (in italics). It is only after this detailed contextualization that the story begins, headed by a slightly enlarged and bolded title. The tales are all primarily in French with explanations for Creole words or cultural peculiarities included in the wide margins. Also in the margins, by the introductions to many of the storytellers, are short Creole sayings in bold followed by the French translation in italics. For example, under the portrait of Eugène Homand, dit Géno are the words: “**Avèg mandé matjé / Soudo mandé kouté / É wou ? / Ou ka gadé wè ! // L’aveugle demande à écrire. / Le sourd demande à écouter. / Et vous ? / Vous vous contentez d’observer !**” (bold in original, 75). In contrast, at certain moments throughout the tales there are, in bold in the margins, short Creole proverbs and sayings, which are not translated. Finally, in the margin at the end of each tale is a bold heading “Ses plus beaux contes” and then a list of the storytellers’ best stories in (only) Creole. This text, then, represents a blend of languages, cultures, and modes.

Diana Ramassamy's "sequel," *Les nouveaux maîtres de la parole créole* published by Éditions Hervé Chopin in 2016, in picking up where Confiant left off, represents the same. Indeed, the book's dust jacket explains that this text and its transcriptions of performances "font écho à l'ouvrage de Raphaël Confiant" and that it is a "projet dont Raphaël Confiant est à nouveau l'initiateur." Unsurprisingly, then, this collection is the same size as Confiant's and also features a grayscale photograph on the cover. However, this image has much more contrast than Confiant's, and features two storytellers, a seated man with a woman standing just over his shoulder, both looking directly at the camera and smiling. The paratext does not explain who is in the photo, but one can recognize them from other photos in the book as the Guianese storytellers Rémy Aubert and Malou. In this work, Diana Ramassamy both collected the tales and collated and translated them while Anne Chopin took the photographs.

The format differs from Confiant's. It begins with its only Introduction, "Les magnifieurs de conte : entre traces photographiques et traces biographiques," written by Ramassamy herself. After this is the "Sommaire," embodying the bifurcated nature of the book. It features "Yé krik ! Yé krak !" as a title page, followed by a list of storytellers' names, their region of origin (all Martinique, Guadeloupe, or Guiana) and page numbers for each story. On turning to the page listed, one finds information about the storyteller in French and then their story transcribed in Creole. The *Sommaire* ends with the page number for the second title page "Yé krik ! Yé krak ! Traductions" (found halfway through the book) with nothing following.¹⁵⁰ In other words, the *Sommaire*, in omitting the tales' titles and page numbers for their French

¹⁵⁰ Interestingly, while I did not use this text as a jumping off point for other research, many of the storytellers included in this collection also feature in other parts of my corpus (e.g., Raphaël Anna-Rose, Dédé Duguet, Valère Égouy, etc.). This simply reflects the reality of the small world of Antillean storytelling.

translations, noticeably indicates that the storytellers themselves and their Creole versions are the focus of the collection.

After the *Sommaire* is the first title page, which features a grayscale photograph of a storytellers' gesturing hands (verso) and a black page with white writing: "Yé krik ! Yé krak ! Yé mistikrik ! Yé mistikrak !" (10-11). Immediately following this is the first *kont*. The storyteller's (presumably stage) name is in large, black font at the top of the page. Directly below it in only slightly smaller but gray font is their country of origin. Spaced below that in smaller, black font is the title of the story in Creole. The story begins immediately under that, opening with the traditional call and response (which are then repeated throughout the transcription). On the facing page is a photo of the storyteller in the midst of telling their story, below which is their name, their city of origin, their island of origin, and a biography. The tales (all exclusively in Creole) continue for another four or so pages. All tales have at least one such photograph, most have two, some have a series.

After all twelve tales is the second title page, a grayscale photograph of a drummer's hands with, as noted, the words "Yé krik ! Yé krak ! Yé mistikrik ! Yé mistikrak ! // Traductions" (77-76). Following this title page is, again, in descending font size, the first storyteller's name, his island of origin, and the tale's title, this time in French, and the tale itself also now in French. The transcriptions of call and response are omitted, the formatting is much simpler and denser (evoking prose more than performance), and there are no photographs. This is typical for each tale, as though the entire French portion were a glossary. After the last tale, the book simply ends. Plainly, then, while this book works to create an immersive experience and to bring elements of live storytelling to the medium of print, this effort is primarily for Creole

speakers; the French is almost an after-thought or only of interest as literary object.¹⁵¹ The juxtaposition provides a stark example of the changes that occur when stories travel across media and how those changes can impact the storytelling/story-receiving process. These changes, of course, comprise one of the driving forces to expand my corpus beyond books.

My corpus, then, also includes a range of media sourced from the internet. Among them, the only ones that pass through a traditional production gatekeeper (specifically record producers) are the stories on Spotify. The ten tales represent the entirety of recordings of tales as opposed to songs for adults or mixed audiences as opposed to exclusively for children available on Spotify. They come from two albums, *Les contes de ma case créole* (2011) and *Contes du Diable des gourmandises (Les Antilles)* (2012), both by the same performer, Magguy Faraux, and from the same studio, ARB Music.¹⁵² According to her website, Faraux is a professional, Guadeloupean storyteller living and performing in France, but this information is not directly available on Spotify. The first album is explicitly labeled as being Guadeloupean tales while the second is listed more generally as “Antillean.” As is typical of Spotify, one can listen to the tracks in their entirety, and with each is a picture of the album cover, the performer’s name, and the length of the track. Faraux does not feature on the album artwork, nor is there any kind of artist biography; if one only listens to her Spotify tales one knows very little about her.

The tracks themselves, as is typical with Antillean storytelling, intermix singing and talking, along with traditional instruments (including drums and guitar) and verbal play such as onomatopoeia or sound effects. The first track of the first album, “Compère Lapin et Compère

¹⁵¹ For more of a discussion of these choices and their impact, please see my third and fourth chapters.

¹⁵² Faraux has other albums on Spotify, but they are explicitly labeled as for children, so they are not part of my study. That said, while ARB music specializes in making albums for children, because these two are not labeled as children’s music (neither on the album itself nor via Spotify’s own categorizations), and because in listening to them there is no suggestion of sanitation for a children’s-only audience, I feel they warrant inclusion in my study. The question of how Spotify classifies these albums and the discussion surrounding that alone merits inclusion of these performances.

Tigre” begins with Faraux (as herself) describing how her mother used to tell her stories, including singing the song her mother used to sing before beginning a story. She then explains that her mother would cry out “yé krik !” at which point on the track a chorus responds “yé krak!” Faraux and the chorus then continue through the rest of the ritual call and response, including some traditional wordplay at the end. She then explains that this is the point at which her mother would begin her tales; Faraux herself then begins hers. This is the only track of the ten to include this kind of explanation. The other nine begin with the story itself, and all of them include various kinds of traditional call and response with a nameless chorus of young and old voices answering.¹⁵³ Some of the tracks end simply with the end of the story, others end with traditional storytelling endings such as the simple “le conte est fini.” Interestingly, many of the tracks also, in addition to the instrumental and vocal effects, have inserted sound effects as well (e.g., the sounds of birds tweeting).

Texts Published Directly Online

When one moves beyond Spotify, online transcriptions and performances may have collators but bypass traditional cultural gatekeepers. This distinguishes videos, for example, which are otherwise similar to soundtracks. In total, my corpus includes seven videos of entire folklore performances; six are posted on YouTube and one is from France TV. There are also seven videos of partial-tale recountings or excerpts (four from YouTube, one from Facebook, two from Faraux’s own website) that contribute to this discussion. Of these videos, two are from Guiana, five are from Guadeloupe, six are from Martinique, and one is from a cross-Franco-Caribbean group, Zil’oKa.

¹⁵³ As is the nature with music albums, and especially those on Spotify, the audience has no indication of the identity of these voices. The sterility of the call and response, and lack of background noise, imply that it is not a recording of a live performance but rather that the call and response have been added for affect.

The first Guianese video, entitled simply “Contes et légendes de Guyane,” was uploaded to YouTube by Guyane la 1ère on September 18, 2019.¹⁵⁴ It has only 764 views.¹⁵⁵ It is a 6:17 videorecording clearly cut from a longer interview, all in French. One sees the performer and his hosts in a studio as a chyron provides news and weather updates. The video begins abruptly with the storyteller’s performance so that there is no contextualization and we do not even know his name. He begins with what can only be described as a verbal dance, interrupting to orient his hosts to the rules of call and response (“et quand je dit ‘histoire’ vous me répondez ‘raconte !’” or “et quand je dis ‘conte’ vous me répondez ‘dis-le !’”) and then having them practice it. He then begins beating out a rhythm on his body as he characterizes his *parole*, before (finally) launching into the story itself. Much like the beginning, the video ends somewhat abruptly with the end of the recounting so that we do not get to see the hosts’ wrap-up.

The other video from Guiana features storyteller David Mérour. The video does not provide any information about him. A Google search reveals his short bio on Guianese book editor’s page, plumeverte.fr: “Conteur. David Mérour appartient à la compagne Zoukouyanyan. L’univers de David Mérour est multiple et s’exprime tant à travers ses racines bretonnes que par la parole créole ou la légende amérindienne. Il affectionne tout particulièrement les contes en relation avec la nature” (“David Mérour”). The video is entitled “l’origine de la mangrove Haut debit” and was posted to YouTube on November 22, 2014 by user Cie Zoukouyanyan. The video’s description explains that the performance is from the “spectacle des contes du Pripri, filmé Durant le festival de Bande Dessinée ‘Carbet des bulles’ à Cayenne, en Guyane, en avril 2014” and gives the names of the storyteller, musician, illustrator, and lighting specialist ending

¹⁵⁴ When I refer to “titles” of YouTube videos, I am referring to the boldfaced writing below the video on the site. Similarly, a video’s “description” is the paratext printed below this title, inputted by whoever posted the video.

¹⁵⁵ Please note, the number of views for each video are reported as they appeared during the time of initial research, between January and May 2021.

with “Remerciements à Carbet des Bulles” (Zoukouyanyan). It has 616 views and runs for 6:36. It begins with a title “slide” with the name and logo of M  rour’s group, la compagnie Zoukouyanyan, and then “Les contes du Pripri : ‘Lorigine de la mangrove’” before fading in on a shot of M  rour on stage, presumably before a live audience, beginning his story. M  rour then recounts his tale in first person, in French, accompanied by a guitar. As he speaks, an illustrator next to him on stage draws the events of the story which are simultaneously projected on a large screen behind them, providing a kind of real-time animation of the tale. The video simply fades out and cuts off as soon as M  rour finishes (we do not even see the audience applaud).¹⁵⁶

There are also two principal storytellers from Guadeloupe who post videos online. The first is the aforementioned Magguy Faraux. Faraux has a significant online presence. Yet her only example of an actual, entire tale online is a video user #freddyderby uploaded to YouTube on November 18, 2016 entitled “Magguy Faraux, Conteuse des Antilles.” The video has no description and only five comments but has almost 4,000 views.¹⁵⁷ The 13:55 video itself features Faraux in traditional Antillean garb (including a madras dress and headdress) holding a microphone in what appears to be a hallway and telling the story of “Ti Chika    pied bobo” directly to the camera.¹⁵⁸ She begins the video by introducing herself and sharing her motivations for storytelling (including that tales belong to everyone, men, women, and children), her

¹⁵⁶ M  rour also has several excerpts of his tales posted on YouTube, including one entitled “Marathon du conte: DAVIDE M  ROUR” and posted on February 22, 2014 by user Festival Interculturel du conte de Montr  al. This video runs for 2:53, has 271 views, and the description tells us it comes from the 12th Festival interculturel du conte du Qu  bec, and that the excerpt itself was captured in Montreal “   la maison de la culture Frontenac lors du ‘Marathon du conte’, le 27 octobre 2013” (Festival Interculturel). However, because the video only has an excerpt of a tale (abruptly fading in and out mid-story), I have not included it in my corpus. Beyond this, it is also worth noting that like all professional storytellers, he mostly does live, not-recorded performances. A *France Antilles- Guyane* article from February 18, 2016 announces his upcoming performance of “contes   cologiques et   ducatifs,” starting “   19h    la Maison de quartier de la cit   Brutus” in Cayenne (“Cayenne”).

¹⁵⁷ Of course, while 4,000 views is a lot in the context of my corpus, it is nothing in the scope of YouTube as a whole where popular videos such as “Baby Shark” or “Despacito” have 7.05 and 7.04 billion views (respectively).

¹⁵⁸ Madras cloth, named for its Indian city of origin, is also traditional festive wear in the Antilles, in large part due to the influence of the large Indian population there.

background with storytelling, and an explanation of the call and response tradition. During the story itself Faroux will pause and say “*Yé krik*” and “*Yé mistikrik*” without receiving or providing an answer. She also pauses at certain moments to explain details of her story (e.g., that in the Antilles “we” do not say “château” but “palais” or that Penicillin was rare in her region in those days). She uses a lot of onomatopoeia and acts out the roles of the characters. A few times during the recounting of her tale the words “Maggy Conteuse Maggy Faroux” appear in blue WordArt letters across the bottom of the screen and at the end, in the same letters, “Montage video Freddy Derby.” The video itself ends with the end of the story: Faroux finishes the tale, says “*Yé krik*,” smiles and salutes the camera, and the video cuts off.

In addition to this example of a full tale, Faroux also has some interesting examples of partial tales posted online that are worth noting. First, she has her own website, complete with bio, links to her CD albums (including those on Spotify), testimonials, reasons for why one should hire her to do a live performance, a contact page, and a press dossier (*Maggy Faroux*). On this page, under the links for her albums are two video excerpts of her performances which you can watch on her site or follow to the original YouTube posts. The first, 7:36 and posted to YouTube by user directmondebusiness on February 12, 2012 has over 6,000 views and is a montage of a live performance at what appears to be a library. The video includes her singing and dancing as well as telling a story (the entire story is not included in the recording). She is wearing a traditional, madras dress and girls in the audience (both Black and white) are as well; some even perform a traditional dance under Faroux’s instruction. This video features a description: “Son album, la Guadeloupe, rondes, comptines, berceuses est sorti en février 2011 et a reçu Prix Coup de Cœur de l’Académie Charles Cros. Un deuxième CD ‘les Contes de ma Case créole’ est sorti le 19 septembre 2011 et vient de recevoir lui aussi le Prix Coup de Cœur de

l'Académie Charles Cros" ("directmondebusiness"). Because it is a montage, there is no narrative arc, just fading into and out of parts of performances.

The second video excerpt posted on her site also links to a YouTube post, uploaded on February 21, 2012 by user Méline SEYMOUR GRADEL. This video has 4,141 views and a brief description: "Extrait de son spectacle, ambiance carnaval 2012" (SEYMOUR GRADEL). This video is very similar. Faraux is wearing a blue dress, singing and telling tales to a live audience in what again appears to be a library. Children ranging from young to teenage in traditional madras outfits and some adults perform a dance with Faraux's help and encouragement. This recording does not include even the excerpt of a tale.

Finally, Faraux has another video posted on her Facebook page. This video is entitled "Ti Chika" and Faraux explains in the caption that it is "Un extrait d'un de mes contes préféré! "Ti Chika pied à bobo" (je ne suis pas la seule apparemment)" (Faraux). She posted the 5:37 video on November 4, 2016 and it has twelve reactions, one comment, and 334 views. The video itself is an excerpt of the same story she tells in full in the #freddyderby video, but in this case it is a live performance in front of an audience of children (with adults around the sides of the room) in some kind of multi-purpose room. The video-quality, cinematography, and audio all suggest it is a hand-held recording by an audience member. Faraux is wearing a traditional madras dress but no head covering. She has an apparently home-made quilted backdrop portraying a hut surrounded by tropical flora. The video begins mid-story with the children calling out an answer to a question and continues with the same onomatopoeia and explanations present in the other version. There is now, of course, interaction with an audience (she asks "right" in French multiple times), and she is even more animated. At the end of the tale Faraux transitions into a song that she apparently taught her audience previously, inviting them to sing with her, before

announcing that the tale is over. Faroux then takes a seat, fans herself while the audience applauds, and then launches into another part of her performance by calling out “*Yé krik !*” to which the audience enthusiastically responds “*Yé krak*” and then “*Yé mistikrik*” and “*Yé mistikrak,*” at which point the video cuts off. This is the only video posted on her Facebook page.

The second storyteller from Guadeloupe who posts videos of folktale performances online is Benzo. It should be noted that even though he tells tales in French and Creole, all of the videos he has shared online are in Creole, which should preclude him from this corpus.¹⁵⁹ However, he is so important in the Antillean storytelling community that he cannot be omitted. Indeed, multiple sites and sources highlight his key role in Antillean culture. For example, a “Bibliographie Caraïbe” put together by *Takam Tikou – La Revue des livres pour enfants – International*, associated with the *Bibliothèque nationale de France’s Centre national de la littérature pour la jeunesse*, notes that the list “met particulièrement à l’honneur un personnage incontournable de la vie culturelle en Guadeloupe : Benjamin Moïse dit Benzo” (“Bibliographie Caraïbe - Juillet 2012”). Similarly, a 2014 announcement for an upcoming event in the newspaper *France Antilles : Guadeloupe* explains that on December 23 “l’incontournable groupe Kasika et son leader Benzo seront une nouvelle fois aux commandes de ce rendez-vous traditionnel” (Virassamy). A news clip about him, posted to Facebook by the group *Les Témoins d’Outre-Mer* on May 5, 2020 calls him the most famous storyteller in Guadeloupe (Les Témoins d’Outre-Mer). He even says in that interview that “il y a même ce qui ôse m’appeler Monsieur Patrimoine” (Les Témoins d’Outre-Mer). Benzo therefore cannot be omitted from this study.

¹⁵⁹ There are other performances exclusively in Creole, such as Yaya’s 2003 performance at the Fête [sic] du Rire on Dailymotion or Dédé Duguet’s 2016 YouTube video “TI KAZ BEL KONT” which I have omitted from this study but which are fascinating examples of traditional Creole storytelling (Tropikprod Martinique tropikprod; André Odry).

Significantly, his videos and online presence represent an interesting and telling contrast to the French performances in my collection. A search on YouTube for “Benzo Guadeloupe” yields links to thirty-seven videos by him, ranging from musical performances, to performances of tales, to videos teaching Creole to French speakers, to fundraising collaborations for causes such as Alzheimer’s Disease. A Google search identifies additional videos, especially on his Facebook page, where he regularly posts a range of videos and photos of performances, news clips featuring him, announcements of upcoming live performances and more. While there are some months where he does not post anything (e.g., September 2020) there are others where he posts seven, eight, or even ten videos (e.g., May 2020) (“Benzo Gwada”). His YouTube videos are remarkably popular, most with over ten-thousand views.

The videos of storytelling performances range in style. Some are recordings of live storytelling events. Some are recordings of Benzo sitting outside, often by a river, and telling the tale. These versions have an off-screen response to his calls in order to maintain the traditional call and response, and feature some additional images (e.g., a story about *Compère lapin* features shots of a real rabbit munching on grass). Uniquely, in some videos, his narration becomes a voice-over to live enactments of the events of the stories. But all the videos of Benzo telling tales have several things in common: he recounts in Creole, he uses some kind of call and response, and he uses specifically Creole onomatopoeia (e.g., “nonvolume” instead of “plouffe” for something falling in the water). In fact, in his interview with *Les Témoins d’Outre-Mer* he explains that even when he tells a tale in English he will still use the Creole onomatopoeia. Faraux and Benzo, then, represent the primary Guadeloupean storytellers online.

Perhaps unsurprisingly given its history as the “mother island” of the French Antilles, Martinique has the most videos of tale performances online with three full performances and

three partial. The oldest of these is a YouTube video posted by user Jocelyn Régina on April 12, 2012 entitled “paroles de conteur.mp4” (jocelyn régina). The 4:03 video has 6,881 views. The description provides a detailed description of Martinican storytelling: “En Martinique, le conteur utilise ce qu'on appelle le jeu de mots déboulant entre rimes, onomatopées, néologismes, fantasmagorie, humour et dérision, qui lui sert à mettre son auditoire en appétit, à captiver son attention... ” (jocelyn régina). It continues, “Tout cela sur un rythme verbal qui doit sidérer d'un plaisir ancestral les tympanes de son public. D'un petit extrait, je vous fais la proposition. D'autres suivront... Et d'autres textes et d'autres paroles...” (jocelyn régina). The video itself begins with a storyteller, presumably Jocelyn Régina, dressed in black on a modern black stage calling out “*Yé krik*” to which an unseen audience (apparently only one voice—the videographer?) replies. He then launches into his story, recounted in rhythm so that it sounds almost like a rap, punctuated by the traditional call and response phrases. There are two different cameras and the video intercuts throughout. It ends with him finishing his tale, sighing and sticking his tongue out in fatigue, and chatting with (seemingly) the videographer(s).

The next oldest video features storyteller Igo Drané. It is a recording embedded in a news article about him, published October 20, 2015 in France Info’s section “Le portail des Outre-mer.” The article itself was written by Thomas-Diego Badia and the embedded video is introduced with the heading, “Retrouvez un conte d’Igo Drané dans les studios d’outre-mer 1ère” (Badia). The 11:44 video is set in a recording studio. It begins with a musician sitting among several instruments and playing drums as Drané enters blowing a conch shell. He then begins the traditional call and response to launch into his tale with his accompanist acting as audience. This tale is not in rhythm. Drané uses music (he himself plays the accordion) and onomatopoeia to

make his tale more engaging. The video ends with the two men playing a little more music, a “yé krik,” “yé krak,” and Drané blowing the conch before fading to the news site’s closing screen.

There are then two videos from 2016. The first again features Jocelyn Régina and is only 1:49. It is not exactly a complete tale but is worthy of mention in that it is an example of the traditional word play that accompanies Creole storytelling. The video was posted on February 9, 2016 by user Régina Jocelyn, is entitled “Jénifè ou jeux de mots du conteur Martiniquais Jocelyn Régina” and has 1,129 views. The description provides important context for the performance: “Le jeu de mots fait partie de la panoplie du conteur antillais. Précédant le conte, il était en quelque sorte une mise en bouche. Je le réactualise à ma sauce et m'acharne à lui redonner ses lettres de noblesse” (Régina Jocelyn). The video, which features Régina in street clothes seated alone in what appears to be his kitchen, features exactly what the paratext indicates: a short, rhythmic wordplay which often functions as a preamble to a story, and performed directly to the camera. It ends with Régina finishing the short game and nodding at the camera.

The other video from 2016, posted on March 25 by user Valeus Jimmy, is also just outside the parameters of my study but still warrants description. It is 10:39 long and entitled “Le conteur Dédé DUGUET de la Martinique au Festival KONG ANBA TONÈL de Port-au-Prince” (Valeus Jimmy). It has 3,259 views and another important contextualizing description: “Le conteur Dédé Duguet de la Martinique participant dans la 7ème édition du Festival Interculturel de Contes à Port-au-Prince (2016). Un événement planifié et organisé sous le beau patronage de ‘Foudizè Théâtre Création’ et portant le titre global de KONT ANBA TONÈL. La présentation se faisait dans la salle Polyvalente de la FOKAL (Fondation Connaissance et Liberté)” (Valeus Jimmy). It also specifies that Jimmy Valéus directed and recorded the video. The video itself begins with Duguet already recounting his tale on stage for a live (invisible in the dark) audience

who we can hear laughing during his performance. The performance itself is not a traditional folktale but rather a story told in first person about poetry—the narrator’s (Duguet himself?) and Aimé Césaire’s. It is, then, a fascinating intertextual dialogue, with perhaps the most famous Martinican thinker, taking place at a folktale festival. In this way it participates in the long Antillean tradition described in the Introduction of intermixing exegesis and performance. It does not feature call and response or onomatopoeia. Duguet ends his performance with a quote from Aimé Césaire and bows; he is met with riotous applause.

The final two Martinican videos are both from 2018. The first, posted to YouTube on August 20 by user Valer’EGOUY is entitled “Valer’EGOUY, conteur de la Martinique L’homme et la femme images de Karl DOROL” and has 554 views. The runtime is 9:24 and the description is short: “Valer’EGOUY de la Martinique conte “L’homme et la femme” – images du réalisateur Karl DOROL” (Valer’EGOUY). The video itself is a recording of a live performance with Valer’Egouy in a black shirt and traditional madras pants and headdress on a stage in front of an audience (seen in silhouette from behind). His tale does not begin with the traditional call and response, but he does encourage his audience to repeat after him. During the tale there are neither “*krik/krak*” nor onomatopoeia but Valer’Egouy does ends his tale with a “*yé krik, yé mistikrik*” and a “*merci de votre écoute*” (Valer’EGOUY). The video ends as he walks away and the stage fades to black.

The final video from Martinique is not a full performance but rather another excerpt. It is entitled “Contes à la pleine Lune,” was posted to YouTube by user Ducos TV on November 27, 2018, has only thirty-four views, runs for 3:48 minutes, and features a brief, contextualizing description: “#DUCOS #FRDURIVAGE #CONTESALAPLEINELUNE Pour vous, un extrait de la soirée ‘Contes à la pleine lune’ proposée par le Foyer rural de Durivage avec l’Association

Martinique Images (AMI). 📺 🎤” (Ducos TV). The video begins with a zoom in on the poster for the event, then an establishing shot of a female storyteller outside at night, asking if the court is asleep, and a screen title reading “Marie-George GIBOYAU, Conteur / Association “AMI”” (Ducos TV). As the storyteller tells her tale, the video switches between different views of her and the audience. She uses call and response, onomatopoeia, and gets the audience to repeat after her a few times. The video ends as the tale continues by fading to a white screen reading “Ville de Ducos / Une réalisation du Service Communication” (Ducos TV).

The last video in my collection represents the work of a group rather than an individual. The video, entitled “Conte Antillais par Zil’oKA á Londres – (en créole traduit en anglais),” was posted to YouTube on December 15, 2012 by user londresurf. It has been viewed 5,601 times and features most of a folktale performance by Zil’oKA, a professional storytelling group. Specifically, their website explains that the group “was founded in January 2008 by members of the UK based French Caribbean Association, MBMB” and that “[t]he group aims at representing the French Caribbean diaspora in the UK by promoting the diversity of our traditional rhythms, singing, and dances which include GwoKa which is from Guadeloupe, Bèlè which is from Martinique, Biguine from both islands and many more” (“1. Who We Are”). They are, then, much like Faraux, relocated professional performers of French Antillean descent, this time based in London. The description contextualizes it briefly: “Conte de Noël Antillais raconté aux enfants par Zil’oKA au Chanté Nwel à Londres” (londresurf).¹⁶⁰

The 14:44 video features a live performance in some kind of multi-purpose room and apparently begins shortly after the tale has begun. It features a male in black pants and sweater-

¹⁶⁰ While this description makes it sound like it is a kids’ tale (which should preclude it from my collection), the reality of the performance is that it is for adults and children and shows no sign of infantilization, sanitization, or pedagogical intent. It does, therefore, still fit within the selection criteria.

vest telling a tale in Creole, who pauses after each sentence for a translation into English by a woman in a skirt and madras top. The two storytellers are accompanied by three musicians. The Creole storyteller punctuates his tale with “yé krik” which the audience responds to quickly, rendering any need for translation obsolete. The storytellers intermix singing, speaking, enactment, and dance. Two young girls in traditional madras dresses are “on stage” with the storytellers, apparently intending to act out the story as it is told. They are not always successful; at one point an adult comes up to help. The video, evidently done on an audience member’s phone, ends with the end of the tale (marked by a final “krik/krak”), as the group and the young girls take their bows, and the camera swings around wildly, presumably as the filmer claps. Overall, free internet video has become a platform that far extends the reach of live performance.

Beyond this, the internet also affords performers from Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana the opportunity to share free stories online by transcribing them, and then posting them onto websites—essentially print publishing but without traditional gatekeepers. Again, this portion of my corpus represents every example of a non-literary tale explicitly marked as from these regions and posted in its entirety online for free. In total, I have identified nine sites comprising some 140 tales. Three of the sites have only one or two tales. One is a post on Facebook. That post and story are entitled “Les Contes Créoles...Compère Lapin et Compère Tigre (conte créole).” Facebook estimates that the tale is an eight-minute read and it was last edited on November 10, 2014. It is posted as a Note, not a traditional post, so it does not have information about comments or views.¹⁶¹ The account that wrote the note is entitled Martinique Vacances Annie with a subtitle “La Martinique est une île de carte postale avec une douceur créole premier séjour mai 1992” (*Martinique Vacances Annie / Facebook*). The account was

¹⁶¹ On Facebook a Note is a standalone page that any accountholder can create once logged in and which is affiliated with their account but does not appear as a post in their newsfeed.

established in October 2011 and the only information it provides is that it “lives” in Paris, France. Most of its posts are (“shared”) articles about Martinique or pictures of exotic flora and fauna and an older, white woman in tropical locales (presumably Martinique, certainly not mainland France, or the Hexagon). The tale itself has no information about storyteller, origins of tale (except the title and a reference to the Antilles), or reference to the traditional call and response. Reading the Note and its parent account together, it appears to be a traditional tale told as a note by a white, French woman who enjoys vacationing in Martinique.

Another internet tale in my corpus is posted on the website Île en île, “un site web libre d’accès et sans but lucrative destiné à offrir une riche documentation des îles francophones et à valoriser les ressources informatives et non-commerciales sur le monde insulaire” (“À propos”). The website pulls together resources of all kinds about francophone islands from around the world (“Atlantique, Caraïbes [Guadeloupe, Haïti, La Guyane, Martinique], Méditerranée, Océan indien, Pacifique”), including links related to culinary arts, fine arts, cinema, dance, language, literature, music, theater, travel and tourism, beliefs and traditions, history, flora and fauna, coin and stamp collection, museums, local editors, and local resources (phone books, government offices, etc.). Beyond this, there is a literary index, with a link for each region covered, which leads to a page listing authors from those regions. Each author’s name is a hyperlink, leading to a page dedicated to them, with a biography and lists of their different kinds of works and more hyperlinks to various resources about or from them that exist elsewhere on the internet. The entire site is in French.

Of all the resources on the site for Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana, there is only one transcription of an entire folktale. The story is entitled “Plus nu tu es, plus chien te hâle,” inspired by the Creole proverb “Pli ou touni, pli chien ralé’w,” and was told by Georges

Mauvois. According to his included biography, Mauvois was born and lived in Martinique, and was a political activist, Creole advocate, and writer, primarily involved in theater. The story itself is posted on the site as both a transcription of the tale and a recording of Mauvois telling it (both entirely in French). There is no reference to traditional call and response or onomatopoeia. The bottom of the page explains that the tale “a été publié pour la première fois dans *Contes des quatre croisées* ou *Kont lé kat kwazé*. Kourou / Schoelcher : Ibis Rouge / Presses Universitaire Créoles, GEREC, 2004” and that the audio was “Enregistré à Schoelcher le 19 octobre 2011” (Mauvois). This tale, then, which draws on oral tradition (but is seemingly more unique to the storyteller than some others in my corpus), was published in a collection but then reprinted online, making it free and accessible to all with internet.

The third site with a limited selection of tales (just two from France’s Caribbean DOMs), is a travel blog written by two French travelers, Yannick and Caroline, who toured the world using only local transportation in the early 2000s. The blog itself, entitled simply “un tour du monde avec nous” has information about the travelers/bloggers, updates on their progress, maps of their travels, places to go and things to do, information about their budget, and ways to partner with them. In addition to this, there are two other tabs, which they explain in their introduction to the site: “Et si nos carnets de route ne suffisaient pas à votre évasion, goûtez aux légendes que nous avons recueillies au cours du voyage ou alors, essayez-vous aux saveurs du monde en réalisant une des 25 recettes que nous avons ramenées dans nos bagages” (“Dernières nouvelles”). Among the tales is one from Guiana, “Comment les couleurs vinrent aux oiseaux?” and another from Martinique, “Compère Lapin et les concombres du Roi.” Both tales are entirely in French, neither has any reference to the traditional call and response or onomatopoeia. The

Guianese tale has no context, while the Martinican one has a short Introduction characterizing “Compère lapin” (Yannick and Caroline, “Conte Martiniquais”).¹⁶²

Beyond these sites, three more feature three to five stories. The first is a blog called “Les Aventures de Compère Lapin” with the subheading “Découvrir la Martinique autrement...” The blog itself is run by Clarisse who lives in Martinique and is “[p]assionée d’histoire, d’art et de culture [et] souhaite vous faire partager mes expériences et découvertes (principalement des Petites Antilles) au travers de reportages, de commentaires ou de fils d’actualité” (“A propos”). The tab for “Contes Créoles” has excerpts of three tales as teasers with the short contextualization at the top “Les aventures de Compère Lapin dans les contes créoles sont nombreuses... En voici quelques extraits...” (Clarisse, “Contes Créoles”). The first, “Compère Lapin et Compère Tigre” links to another blog, “Blogalyde: Bog et Journal de bord d’une enfant du monde” and a recounting of the exact same tale as the aforementioned Martinique Vacances Annie posted on Facebook, word for word. The story was posted by the blog’s author, who goes by Lylli Gsstn, on December 13, 2016 but no further information or contextualization is given. Nor is it clear how this exact same story came to be in two different places on the internet. The second story “Compère Lapin et Compère Zamba,” links to a tale on Potomitan.info.¹⁶³ The final excerpt on this site, from “Compère Lapin et la baleine,” links to a version on the website Fée Clochette, a French-Belgian website dedicated to tales. It includes lists of tales (one of which links to Benzo), a bibliography, a preface about folktales in general, “Théorie sur le conte” and

¹⁶² The choice to contextualize the one tale and not the other is particularly interesting when one considers the fact that in their travel updates Yannick and Caroline talk about Guiana as exotically as they do other destinations (India, China, Cambodia, Australia, etc.) but the title for their arrival in Martinique reads “Atterissage en France!...” (ellipses in original, “Atterissage”). It is striking that their travel accounts emphasize Martinique’s relation to France but not Guiana’s, yet it is Guiana’s tale that is allowed to stand on its own while the Martinican tale requires contextualization. Perhaps this choice is simply due to the fact that the Guianese tale does not feature a recurring character. Nonetheless, it is worthy of note.

¹⁶³ Potomitan.info is one of the primary sites of my corpus. Please see below for a detailed description.

more. It also offers “Contes pour lire,” which, if you follow a series of links, eventually leads to the tale Clarisse links to, a tale recorded by Sara Cone Bryant, with the full title “Comment Compère Lapin vint à bout de la Baleine et de l’Éléphant” (Bryant). Besides being labeled as a “conte créole,” no contextualization is given and there is no Creole, no call and response, no onomatopoeia. This story, too, then, is an example of a literary story that has been transcribed and is traveling around the internet, now online for free.

Another website that aggregates a handful of stories together is Tous Les Contes. This website is run by the Regroupement du conte au Québec (RCQ) which was born in 2003 “par le désir des acteurs du milieu du conte d’établir l’autonomie et la spécificité de cette pratique artistique notamment étant donné le nombre croissant d’artistes conteurs et la diversité des pratiques” (“Qu’est-ce que le RCQ ?”). RCQ claims recognition “**comme un carrefour dynamique et rassembleur, le RCQ deviendra le centre de référence à l’échelle nationale pour tout ce qui concerne le conte et la reconnaissance de l’art du conteur comme discipline artistique autonome**” (bold in original, “Qu’est-ce que le RCQ ?”). They have collected tales from all around the world, organized by region, storyteller, themes, keywords, etc. They contextualize these stories at the top of each collection: “touslescontes.com est une bibliothèque virtuelle qui contient un grand nombre d’histoires puisées dans le domaine public, ou confiées par des auteurs contemporains. Des contes merveilleux, des récits historiques, des légendes traditionnelles... Des contes de tous les continents et de toutes les cultures...” (ellipses in original, “Tous Les Contes”).

The Antilles section contains five stories. One is the story that Fée Clochette posted, a transcription of the Lapin/Baleine tale collected and recorded by Sara Cone Bryant. There is also an old, public domain tale from the folklore collection of Lafcardio Hearn, “Conte Colibri.”

These two have the collector's name next to the tale title on the Antilles stories landing pages. Then there are three tales that are labeled as being from the "Tradition Orale" rather than from an author. However, on the actual tales' pages, they all are cited as being from a printed collection. "Compère Lapin et compère Éléphant" cites "Antilles , Th. Bentzon. Yette (roman) 1880" ("Compère Lapin"); "Les Animaux Nobles - Tradition Orale" was reportedly taken from Paul Baudot's 1850-1870 collection *Oeuvres créoles* ("Les Animaux Nobles") ; and "Molocoye au Paradis" is labeled as a "Conte créole par Emmbé publié en 1936" ("Molocoye Au Paradis"). In addition to the contextualization of Tous Les Contes at the top of each page and a disclaimer at the bottom that each tale is public domain in Canada but may not be in other countries, each tale also has the label "Antilles" and an estimate of how many pages and characters the tale is. None of the tales have Creole or the traditional call and response. This site, too, then, represents a transfer of published tales in the public domain into more accessible and more mobile forms.

The final website that includes a small selection of tales is in fact a blog, Antanlontan. Antanlontan was created in 1999 with the goal "de dresser une liste des coutumes, des traditions et des 'façons de faire' qui ont existé et dont certaines subsistent encore en Guadeloupe et en Martinique" (Blameble, "Page d'accueil"). The blog itself, run by Marie-Andrée Blameble, born in Paris to Martinican parents, has links to other pages and sites, categorized as "Fêtes et traditions," "A la façon de nos aînés," "Côté cuisine," "Folklore," "Et encore," "Photographies," and "Partenaires" ("Page d'accueil").¹⁶⁴ Under the heading "Folklore" are multiple subheadings, including "Cantiques de Noel," "Chants et comptines," "Musiques traditionnelles," "Proverbes créoles" and more. The hyperlink "Contes et légendes" leads to the folktale landing page (last

¹⁶⁴ Interestingly, Blameble's name is not on the site itself. It is only possible to find out who runs the site because at the bottom of the Homepage is a link to a page promoting a book "écrit par le créateur de ce site," published in 2004, *La Martinique de mes parents* ("La Martinique de mes parents").

updated October 2005) entitled “Quelques contes tirés du folklore antillais,” and which features five tales. Three, “Ti Pocame,” “Pat’fin, Grangèl et Groboudin,” and “La pli bel en ba la baille (La plus belle est cachée sous la cuve),” are only in French. The last two, “Zagriyin tchou fè fil !” and “Crapaulade,” have links to versions of the tales both “en créole” and “en français,” in that order (Blameble, “Quelques contes”).

The tales themselves are all relatively short. The three French versions are mostly in French, with some dialogue in Creole which is immediately translated into French. Their titles on the pages with the transcriptions are in Creole with the French in parentheses just below. The two stories that are in both Creole and French have different web pages for each language. Each page is entirely in the labeled language, even dialogue and, at the top, has a link leading to that story in the other language. Interestingly, the Creole versions say at the top “Pour la version française, cliquer ici” while the French versions have at the top “Pour la version créole, cliquer ici” (Blameble, “Zagriyin”; “Araignée”). In other words, neither version uses Creole to redirect the reader to the other page. In like fashion, while the French version of the story “Zagriyin tchou fè fil !” has the French title on the French page (“Araignée, ton cul fait du fil”), the story “Crapalade” has the same Creole title on both pages. In contrast, the tile on the tab for the French version of that tale does read “Crapaud” (Blameble, “Zagriyin”; “Araignée”; “Crapaulade [Creole]”; “Crapaulade [French]”). The URLs for the French versions of the tales, however, are the Creole names with an “f” in front, indicating that they are the French version of the Creole tale. The French version of the tale “Crapaulade” also has a brief explanation at the top that an “anoli” is a “petit lézard” with a link to pictures of one (Blameble, “Crapaud [French]”). None of the stories feature written onomatopoeia. This website, then, reveals the omnipresent tension between Creole and French.

The final two websites in my corpus feature large collections of transcribed tales. The first, Potomitan, was originally devoted to helping aspiring teachers pass the Creole CAPES (*Certificat d'aptitude au professorat de l'enseignement du second degré*) exam but has since become a hub for all things Creole. The bottom of the homepage explains: “Le site Kapes Kréyol a beaucoup grandi, tant et si bien qu’il déborde le cadre du Capes de créole, tout en gardant une partie réservée à ceux qui préparent le CAPES, il a besoin de répondre à autre chose car il devient toujours plus un lieu d’échange et de promotion de tous les créoles” (“Potomitan : Annou”). It also explains that “[o]n a choisi le nom POTOMITAN, qui signifie le ‘poteau central,’ pour indiquer que notre site veut être un des piliers des langues et cultures créoles” (“Potomitan : Annou”).

Interestingly, the “About” page of Potomitan’s Facebook page used to provide a more detailed history with an explanation of the site’s origins related to the CAPES and created by Raphaël Confiant and called Kapeskréyol in 2001, and how it transformed and expanded over time until it was renamed Potomitan in 2007. According to that description, “Actuellement, la partie principale de potomitan.info est composée d’environ 12’000 fichiers repartis en 390 répertoires pour un total de presque 500 MB,” the site has many collaborators, and “Potomitan a pour objectif de favoriser la connaissance des cultures créoles et la rencontre entre créolophones de différents pays” (“Potomitan.Info”). However, that explanation has since been taken down and replaced with the much more succinct description: “Site de promotion des langues et cultures créoles” (“Potomitan.Info”).

Potomitan is wiki-esque, in that anyone can suggest content to add, but the administrator does have the final say. Anyone can add a story simply by emailing it to the webmaster’s email on the site, who then approves and posts it (Palli). The landing page, Potomitan.info, looks like a

blog from the early 2000s with red and beige backgrounds and an overwhelming list of links.

What one does notice amid the chaos is the title, the subheading, “Site de promotion des cultures et des langues créoles / Annou voyé kryòl douvan douvan,” and the list of tabs all in both French and Creole: “Enfo/Actualité,” “Ayiti/Haiti,” “Litérati/Bibliographie,” “KAPES/CAPES,” “Kont/Contes,” “Fowòm/Forum,” “Lyannaj/Liens,” “Pwèm/Poèmes,” and “Plan/Sommaire” (“Potomitan : Annou”). The links all lead to the same pages; the Creole option is on the top and the French is on the bottom. Indeed, all the text related to the site itself (as opposed to posts) are in both languages.¹⁶⁵

When one clicks on the Kont / Contes link, one is brought to a page entitled “Contes créoles” with a photograph of a Black woman speaking wearing a microphone. The caption reads “Colina Bazil (La Dominique), Nuit du conte créole, / 29.10.04, St-Rose, Guadeloupe. Photo F.P.” (“Contes Créoles”). There are then three quotes about tales and storytelling, one each from Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Solibo Magnifique*, Raphaël Confiant’s *Dictionnaire du créole martiniquais*, and Jean Bernabé’s *Fables créoles*. It is no doubt not a coincidence that these three authors are also the main advocates of *créolité* as they defined it in their 1989 text *Éloge de la créolité*. Below these quotes are some 188 links to stories or parts of stories in French and various Creoles. Some stories are originals submitted by storytellers, with or without their name, while others are transcriptions or copies of folktales published in book collections, magazines, and journals.¹⁶⁶ Finally, below the story hyperlinks is a list of further hyperlinks comprising the

¹⁶⁵ This site is a treasure-trove for those interested in the Creole language and culture. It includes incredibly detailed biographies and bibliographies of famous Creole writers. It also has famous French texts translated into Creole (e.g., Baudelaire or Gustav Flaubert’s *Un Coeur simple*), all kinds of information to help prepare for the Creole CAPES, and more. However, for the purposes of this study I am focusing on their collection of tales.

¹⁶⁶ More specifically, in response to an email inquiry the webmaster Francesca Palli informed me that “La majorité des contes a été récupéré dans des vieilles publications en papier par un Martiniquais qui travaille à la bibliothèque nationale de Paris, ils sont écrits avant que les linguistes définisse [sic] les règles actuelles d’écriture du créole” but that “[c]ertains contes ont été écrit récemment par des collaborateurs de Potomitan” (Palli).

Bibliography, including links to some familiar names such as a detailed magazine article about the life of Igo Drané or a transcription of Aimé Césaire and René Ménénil's January 1942 article "Introduction au folklore martiniquais" originally published in the journal *Tropiques*.

The stories themselves are listed in alphabetical order by title, whether in French or Creole. Each title is a hyperlink and next to each one is a label identifying the tale's country of origin: one from Dominique, twelve from Guyana, fifty-nine from Guadeloupe, one from Grenada, nine from Haiti, seven from Louisiana, one from Mauritius, forty-two from Martinique, thirty-seven from The Seychelles, two from Sainte-Lucie, two from Trinidad, one from Venezuela, and ten that are not labeled. Some have the story in both French and Creole, some feature a link to the story in the other language on another page, and some are completely monolingual. Some are accompanied by explanations, photos, or illustrations, some are completely decontextualized. All of them represent examples of Creole folktales published on a free, online forum.

Finally, the last compendium of actual tales that is part of my corpus is the website Conte-moi.net. The homepage of the website features a title banner showing a Black child speaking into the ear of a white child with the sound waves spelling out the site's title, "Conte-moi" and several rectangular graphics bringing the viewer to different parts of the site: Conte-moi la francophonie, Conte-moi la lecture, Conte-moi etc...[sic]. There is a short info blurb about the site, and a form to sign-up for their newsletter. The small info box explains: "Conte-moi est un projet **de collecte et de valorisation du patrimoine oral francophone**. Le projet s'enrichit au fil des années de nouveaux contes venant de nouveaux pays... Retrouvez aussi les contes en livres-DVD, films d'animation, albums numériques et sur votre Iphone ou Ipad !" (bold and ellipses in original, "Accueil"). There is also a navigation bar across the top with tabs

for “Accueil,” “Conte-moi la francophonie,” “Conte-moi la lecture,” “Conte-moi les ateliers,” “Conte-moi etc...,” and “Conte-moi : le projet.” Strikingly, the navigation box leading to Conte-moi la lecture features the name of the Ministère de l’éducation nationale de la jeunesse et de sports as well as the iconic French government’s logo of Marianne as the white part of the French flag. The site is clearly and immediately associated, then, with the French government.

As implied, the Conte-moi : le projet tab has more information about the project and the site as a whole, including the explanation at the top that it is “un programme aux multiples facettes” and that it is “un programme de collecte, valorisation et partage des contes issus du patrimoine oral” (“Le projet Conte-moi”). The various tabs define this multifaceted role “en fonction des objectifs de collecte ou de diffusion” (“Le projet Conte-moi”). These include the Conte-moi la francophonie tab which is “le centre de ressources en ligne qui rassemble près d’une centaine de contes en français et en langue locale,” the Conte-moi la lecture tab which is “la plateforme interactive en ligne pour travailler en classe la lecture littéraire à partir d’une sélection de 50 contes,” a list of “Ressources pédagogiques et idées pour mener des cours et ateliers,” links for “Des supports autour des contes,” and “Activités périscolaires” (“Le projet Conte-moi”). There are also brief descriptions of the organizations behind the project, *deci-dela* and *Tralalere*.

The most important tab for my study is Conte-moi la francophonie which has almost one hundred tales. The landing page for that section of the site has a brief description, a map of the world showing the countries from which tales are featured (which are links to the lists of stories from those countries or regions), navigation boxes to the other parts of the site, and a navigation box listing the countries and regions from which tales have been collected.¹⁶⁷ The description

¹⁶⁷ Interestingly, at the bottom of this list is also the option to be shown a tale at random.

explains that this “centre de ressources du patrimoine oral francophone propose près d'**une centaine de contes enregistrés dans différents pays, en français et en langue locale**. Des conteurs issus de différents pays francophones ont prêté leurs voix pour l'enregistrement de ces contes. Pour permettre une exploitation de chacun d'entre eux, **des fiches pédagogiques** ont été écrites par des enseignants du pays partenaire” (bold in original, “Conte-moi la francophonie”). The countries and regions featured are Algeria, France, Guiana, Haiti, Mali, Morocco, Mauritania, and Senegal as well as stories from the Romani people.¹⁶⁸ Interestingly, the French tales are the only ones which are classified using the ATU index. Of course, for the purposes of this study the tales from Guiana, which are *not* thus classified, are the most relevant.¹⁶⁹

When one clicks Guiana on the interactive map, one is brought to a list of tales, in alphabetical order by title, superimposed on an image of the previous map now “zoomed in” on Guiana. There are eleven Guianese tales, each featuring an illustration and short summary at the top of its page, a transcription of the tale in French (some with some non-French phrases or dialogue included) and an audio-recording of the storyteller telling the tale. Ten of the eleven feature two recordings, one in French and the other in a local language (two in Ndyuka tongo, four in Creole, two in Nenge tongo, one in Kali’na, and one in Teko). Both the audio recording and the written transcription are available for free download. Each story’s page also features other tabs for “Le pays,” “Les langues,” and “Le conteur.” The information for Le pays and Les langues is identical across all ten stories, providing an overview of Guiana and its rich culture and language. The Le conteur tab is a short biography and picture of the storyteller telling each

¹⁶⁸ Martinique and Guadeloupe do not appear to be represented on the site at all.

¹⁶⁹ Please see my analysis of this site in my fourth chapter for more on the significance of the French tales being classified while the Guianese are not. It is also worth noting that, as we have seen, few of the texts in my corpus utilize exegesis that is traditional to folklore studies (Proppian analysis, ATU Index classification, motif analysis, etc.). Again, please see my fourth chapter for more on this.

tale. There are six storytellers for the eleven tales, most tell two one only tells one. The biographies for the same storyteller are the same for each story told by them. As for the stories, many feature some reference to the traditional call and response, use of Creole, and/or onomatopoeia. This website, then, represents a rich resource for tales and how they are framed and packaged, as well as the role of storytelling today.

Meta-Texts

Finally, in addition to tales recorded in printed collections, on Spotify, as videos on the internet, and as transcriptions on the internet, the last component of my corpus is the wide range of meta-data surrounding how folklore, folktales, and storytellers are discussed and packaged in these regions. While in the interest of brevity it is not worth giving a detailed description of each source here, it is nonetheless helpful to have an understanding of the range before continuing. The type of meta-data I include comprise both hard copy and online contextualizations. There is, of course, the paratext framing all the folktale collections. There are also printed sources by storytellers about storytelling. For example, Maryse Condé's *La civilisation du Bossale : réflexions sur la littérature orale de la Guadeloupe et de la Martinique* is a 1978 academic study about stories from the region written and published by a storyteller from the region; it serves as both primary and secondary source.

There are also myriad online resources. Websites offer a different kind of paratext, on homepages or "About Us" pages or in "comment" sections. Another particularly rich resource are folktale festival descriptions of their events and storytellers (e.g., "David Mérour | Fête Mondiale Du Conte" or "Valer'Egouy"). Newspaper or magazine profiles of storytellers or storytelling traditions also contribute to my discussion (e.g., Badia, Elie, or Fleming), as do storytellers' self-descriptions on social media or their own websites (e.g., magguy-faraux.com or

“Benzo Gwada”). Storyteller biographies, such as those found on *Île en île* are also interesting (e.g., Bébel-Gisler or Bérard and Grangenais). And, in entering public domain as free texts on websites aimed at Creole or Antillean communities, scholarly texts also enter the liminal area between primary and secondary source. Examples of these include Césaire and Ménil’s article “Conte créole – Introduction au folklore” published on Potomitan or Diana Ramassamy’s article “Conter : Une tradition aveugle ?” published in *La Tribune des Antilles*. Finally, beyond these written online texts, there are also many online video resources. For example, an Antillean radio station posted a two-hour video to Facebook live of an interview with Maggy Faroux (“Plein Soleil l’Emission”). User Basile Mulciba posted a short documentary about Guadeloupean folktales to YouTube while the famous TEDx Talks series has a YouTube recording of a TED talk by Gilda Gonfier about Antillean folktales (Mulciba; “Tales”). The world of stories about stories, then, is as rich and varied—and as central to my analysis—as the stories themselves.

These texts—printed folktale collections, Spotify albums, online videos, online transcriptions, and a range of off- and online meta-data—comprise my corpus. Expanding beyond traditional literary analysis and working with such a variety of texts provides an opportunity to access a wider range of voices and therefore a more accurate and comprehensive account of the various cultural dynamics and exchanges at work. These include those with the imprimatur of gatekeepers, those of journalists and media personalities, those of professional storytellers who use the internet to create and spread their brand, and even those who post without providing any identifying information or seeking credit. These voices comprise a universe far broader than the one that limits its focus to writers operating within the confines of a cultural market that privileges print culture or is shaped by a more restricted interest in books. What all members of this broader universe have in common is the *type* of stories: folktales.

CHAPTER THREE

The Impact of Medium on Storytelling

Je me demande toujours comment ma mère aurait raconté ça, comment mon père aurait vu ça, comment nous ici nous aurions vu ça. Pourquoi ? Parce qu'insidieusement notre esprit est complètement dominé par les valeurs françaises, c'est-à-dire que spontanément lorsque j'écris, je suis français. Pour être Créole, pour être plus proche de ma vérité je dois faire un effort de vigilance sur moi-même. (Chamoiseau cited by Réjouis, 246-247)

Historically, folktales have taken many forms and as my corpus shows there is ample evidence of new forms and iterations. The proliferation of folktale performances across media is intertwined with their function and role as sites of memory or forgetting. As part of his understanding of the shifts from acts of memory to sites of memory, Pierre Nora argues that “[n]o society has ever produced archives as deliberately as our own, not only by volume, not only by new technical means of reproduction and preservation, but also by its superstitious esteem, by its veneration of the trace” (“Between Memory” 13). In fact, as he highlights, “Representation proceeds by strategic highlighting, selecting samples and multiplying examples. Ours is an intensely retinal and powerfully televisual memory. We can link the acclaimed ‘return of the narrative’ evident in recent historical writing and omnipotence of imagery and cinema in contemporary culture” (“Between Memory” 17). The choice of storytellers not only to perform live but also to record performance through writing, audio, or audio-visual recording, as well as the proliferation of written performances online, reflects this need Nora points to—namely a need to reproduce and preserve, to create traces, to select samples and multiply examples. Sites of memory are created because “there is an increasing tendency towards the externalization of public memory instead of the internalization with which previous periods have been identified” (Achille et al. 3). The shift from traditional, communal, live performance (internalized memory) to documented performances (externalized memories) defines the multiple ways in which

folktales transition from performances of memory to sites of memory as their function changes according to the medium.

As we shall see, for a number of reasons this shift in medium has significant implications. Folklore is and has always been an extremely context-specific art form. As Christine Colombo explains, “le conteur, s’il reprend des contes de ses prédécesseurs, les accommode à sa façon, les adapte aux circonstances, au public” (*Des contes* 338). One of the intriguing aspects of folktales is that they change with each performance, as the storyteller evolves and the context such as audience, location, occasion, etc. changes. This has always been true. But as we know, there are new vectors today that further influence storytelling: “De plus en plus, le conteur doit se plier aux exigences du groupe, aux exigences de l’institution, à la politique du moment” (Colombo, *Des contes* 338). The vectors and the impact of medium and context on story are keenly felt by storytellers: “Oui, oui, c’est tout-à-fait différent entre les veillées mortuaires, entre les enfants d’école, que sur la radio. Il faut choisir contes pour les veillées mortuaires, contes pour les enfants d’école et contes pour la télé” (Colombo, *Des contes* 338). Folktales and storytelling are even more fluid than ever and are especially responsive to how the story is communicated. Medium and its impact on the experiences of performer and audience must be understood before one can fully understand how these modern performances function in society.

In discussing medium there are several key concepts that come into play. First, something which has become a truism in media studies and is thus necessary to mention is Marshall McLuhan’s reflection “The medium is the message” (7). In his groundbreaking 1964 book, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, McLuhan distinguishes between the content of a medium (e.g., a particular folktale) and its character (e.g., read in a book or on a blog), arguing

that all media have unique characteristics and thus engage their audience in different ways.¹⁷⁰ It is thus important to consider how “recounting” and “telling” differ, how performance is commodified, and how various staging practices influence audience response. There has been much discussion of this, most notably in sub-Saharan Africa where Western theatrical norms imposed a *commedia dell’arte model*, defined by a strict separation between actors and audience. In Cameroon, for example, Werewere Liking established an innovative theater troupe, the Ki-Yi Mbock theatre troupe, that encouraged an experimental performance style that bridged the gap between different cultural practices, much in the same way as Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o has explored alternative theatrical staging through recourse to a range of language practices.

A second, more relevant concept to my discussion of media is that of affect. In its noun form, affect refers both to expressions of emotions (facial gestures, tone of voice, etc.) and to the emotion that occurs as a result of an experience. Of course, affect is extremely subjective in nature. Ultimately, in a performance, the feelings expressed and evoked are what makes the performance meaningful: “what matters is how something is subjectively experienced and what kind of subject those cumulative experiences produce” (Rounthwaite 73). In talking about folktale performances, then, affect refers to both the emotion expressed by the performer and the emotion elicited by the performance in the audience. Effective storytelling utilizes the former to inspire the latter; a folktale is affective when it communicates and inspires emotion.

This is interrelated with the third concept: the inherent intersubjectivity of any performance, but especially of traditional Antillean folklore performances. Every act of communication necessitates a dual participation: there are “deux poles de l’interlocution active : ‘La parole est moitié à celui qui parle, moitié à celui qui l’écoute’ (Montaigne, 1580)” (Privat

¹⁷⁰ His other main argument in this book, that the content of the medium does not matter at all, is less related to my analysis and overall less convincing.

1). Taking this a step further, all performance relies on intersubjectivity between audience and performer for meaning making. Both the performer's intention and the audience's reception give meaning to or determine the significance of any performance. One cannot ignore the importance of "the creative nature of the spectator, who, beyond the actor, the author and the director, activates and unites the components that are presented to him in order to create meaning" (Khadraoui-Fortune 201n2). The audience, then, is "central to performance" (Cruikshank 65). Many storytellers are aware of this. As Julie Cruikshank argues in her discussion of the creation of identity through storytelling in the Yukon, because "[a]udiences participate by inscribing meaning on what they see and hear[...p]erformers at this [Yukon storytelling] festival take their audiences extremely seriously as witnesses" (65). While, as we will see, Antillean storytellers have an even more complex relationship with their audience, there can be no doubt that in the French Caribbean DOMs audience plays a key.

Traditionally, in audience played a particularly central role in Creole folktale performances. The call and response of "*krik/krak*" that opens any traditional performance is emblematic of the importance of this intersubjectivity. If the "court" is sleeping, the storyteller has no reason to tell his story. It is only when they assure him that they are present and engaged that he may begin. Their importance does not wane through the performance, as the storyteller feeds off their reactions in crafting his tale, and periodically "*yé kriks*" to ensure through the audience's "*yé krak*" that they are listening. The tale can only take shape through and around these interactions. In discussing medium, then, one must look at how the form itself changes, as well as at the affective shifts for *both* performer and audience, bearing in mind that folklore in this region in its role as site of remembering and forgetting is a tool for the navigation of nationhood.

How that tool functions, and the meaning of any given performance, depends on medium and accessibility to the tale, the lived experience of telling and witnessing it, and how those two elements interact to make the performance meaningful. To unpack these vectors this chapter begins by laying a foundational understanding of the traditional forms of storytelling in the region and how these particular forms are ending or evolving. It then discusses the broad implications inherent in any shift in medium away from the traditional live performance around a fire. Finally, the third and longest section of the chapter analyzes the accessibility, lived experience of both performer and audience, and various strategies employed for (re)injecting intersubjective affect into each individual medium represented in my corpus.

Traditional Antillean Storytelling

In order to understand the implications of shifting media on folklore performance one must first understand the evolution of the performances themselves. The tradition of Creole storytelling historically existed in three main arenas, all of which are oral: as part of traditions (funeral rights or *veillées mortuaires*, festivals, etc.), in informal family settings, and as part of enslaved community life on plantations. The last being the most popular form in the zeitgeist of the Antillean storytelling community, as we have seen. As we have seen, folklore is painted as being traditionally told at night by a single person to a group. The (somewhat romanticized) “original” performances and the Creole tale itself “se contait que de nuit. La transgression de cet interdit exposait les contrevenants au risque d’être transformés ici en panier, là en bouteille, ailleurs en soldat de plomb” (Confiant 17). Additionally, traditional storytelling also required that the storyteller “se trouve en pleine nature, et au centre de sa ronde de répondeurs” and that “[l]a réplique ‘Krik ! Krak !’ ponctue son récit et demeure l’une des principales clés qui gardent ouverte l’entrée de l’écoute et de l’attention du public-répondeurs. L’arène, où seul le maître

conteur prend et distribue la parole, semble toujours s'improviser" (Confiant 17-18).

Traditionally, then, at least as maintained in the cultural zeitgeist and memory, Creole tales were told spontaneously (not as a scheduled "show") at night around a fire in nature with the necessary call and response with the audience.

Less often discussed but still significant in practice were ritual and informal domestic performances. Some print collections make reference to these ritual practices. Raphaël Confiant acknowledges that Creole tales "sont sorti de la veillée funèbre, qui fut son terrain de prédilection" (17). Similarly, Colombo describes how, "[a]utrefois, dans les fêtes patronales, le conteur intervenait la nuit, dans un cercle et disputait l'attention des spectateurs avec les danseurs de *gwo-ka* ou de *-bel-air* ou encore de *ladja*. Ils intervenaient à tour de rôle au son du tambour" (*Des contes* 343). And many authors discuss the Creole folktale as part of the *veillée mortuaire* (Condé; Colombo, *Ti-jean*; Lohier; etc.). Finally, there is also a tradition of informal intimate performances, or as Colombo calls them, "les veillées familiales." Colombo notes that, "Autrefois, les contes se disaient également au cours des veillées familiales" and at the start of her YouTube video recounting "Ti Chika à pied bobo" Magguy Faraux talks about the role that stories played as entertainment before TV and the internet distracted children (*Des contes* 340; #freddyderby). In like fashion, many of my corpus's storytellers talk about having heard and learned tales from their parents, sitting around listening to them (often at night) in informal family settings. Alain Rutil notes that "le conte était entendu, jusqu'aux années cinquante, à n'importe quelle occasion...lors des séances d'écossage des pois d'angole ou de la fabrication collective de la cassave. A la suite d'une paye de quinzaine, les travailleurs avaient coutume de rassembler chez eux leurs amis et voisins ; c'était encore et toujours une occasion pour 'tirer des contes'" (23). While it is less recognized as a part of the cultural tradition and discourse

surrounding storytelling, informal performances in intimate circles of family and friends were another important aspect of the tradition. Overall, then, traditional Antillean performances consisted of nighttime recountings, ritualized or not, by (male) storytellers.

Of course, accompanying this traditional (if romanticized) vision of Creole storytelling is the traditional (also romanticized) characterization of the storyteller. Patrick Chamoiseau describes him as a man who “seems quite ordinary. He is middle-aged, neither more nor less insignificant than the others. By day, he is merely a field hand who works, suffers, and sweats, living in fear and stifled rebellion. Perhaps he is even more quietly unobtrusive than most” but for who, “[a]t night, however, an obscure and imperative need dispels his lassitude, lifting him up, imbuing him with a nocturnal and almost clandestine force, for he will become the Master of Words. *He is the Storyteller*” (italics in original, Chamoiseau, *Creole Folktales*, xi-xii).

Similarly, Confiant describes the “porteur de cette parole populaire[...] le conteur créole, [comme] personnage doué d’une mémoire fabuleuse qui vient égayer jusqu’au devant-jour les veillées mortuaires. Le plus souvent travailleur de la terre ou petit artisan,” he waits his turn one night to take up the *parole* and tell his tale; if he does well, he takes his place as a *maître de la parole* (13).¹⁷¹ The archetypal storyteller, then, is male, unassuming, and no different from other members of the community except in his memory. Indeed, his memory is a key aspect of what makes him a *maître de la parole*: he transmits “depuis près d’un siècle, sans traces écrites systématiques, de ce que le conteur traditionnel considère lui-même comme sa bibliothèque, voire son musée de la parole” (Confiant 17). One storyteller “affirmait posséder 103 contes, [un

¹⁷¹ Diana Ramassamy echoes this, talking about the storyteller that the Créoliste writers depict: “Les écrivains de la créolité ont décrit la figure d’un conteur qui, durant la période coloniale, prend la posture d’un homme esclave auquel succède un héritier, un maître de la parole. Ce n’est qu’à la nuit venue que cet homme se transformait en délégué d’un peuple enchaîné” (5).

autre] s'enorgueillissait de pouvoir nous tenir en haleine durant deux journées entières" (Rutil 27). The (male) storyteller's knowledge and memory are his defining features.

As I have already mentioned, historically these traditional modes of storytelling were supplemented by transcriptions of tales starting in this region in the late 1800s with the work of Lafcardio Hearn. This practice was embraced by Antillean scholars in the early twentieth century and accelerated in the late twentieth century since, as we know, it became more common as memory practices shifted so that more traditional forms of storytelling evolved or disappeared. Certainly, many written texts state the goal of recording a dying almost-lost tradition. Again, published print performances can take many forms, from transcriptions of tales (alone or accompanied by illustrations or photographs) to detailed academic studies and in-depth exegesis of the stories. Although beyond the scope of this study, there are also written performances of tales in children's books, those embedded in fiction and novels, and more. The evolution of texts from oral into written (and back again) is a well-studied and well-documented phenomenon. As my corpus highlights, the tradition of publishing printed transcriptions of tales remains strong.

However, especially since the turn of the twenty-first century, some forms of media have evolved dramatically or been lost. As Confiant notes, the collapse of the sugarcane plantation "au tournant des années soixante du XXe siècle et son non-remplacement par un système économique et social cohérent provoqueront une espèce d'hébetude de la langue et de la culture créoles" (14). With the shifting of society away from sugarcane plantations came a loss of the environment in which to tell (often subversive) stories around a fire and many of my book authors mourn the loss of traditional storytelling performances, if not the loss of the conditions that supported them (Confiant; Lohier; Rutil; etc.). Beyond this, ritual forms are also disappearing. Confiant notes that the "tradition de récitation de contes au sein des veillées

mortuaires était en voie de disparation dans les années quatre-vingt lorsque l'association 'Kontè Sanblé' décida de lui donner un second souffle" (14). Similarly, Colombo explains that while some professional storytellers still perform at funeral rights, it has become difficult and the question of remuneration is controversial (*Des contes* 337-340). In addition, at the time of her research, "s'il intervenait encore dans les fêtes, la forme était bien différente ; dans les rares lieux où le conteur était encore présent, le cercle avait disparu et avait été remplacé par un podium. Le fait que le conteur soit sur un podium crée entre eux et nous un fossé. Le conte n'est plus un objet d'échange comme autrefois, mais il est devenu spectacle" (*Des contes* 343). Finally, in discourse around folktales in the Caribbean it is axiomatic that they no longer function in the family circle as entertainment in the ways they did before TV and internet. Rutil argues that he can "affirmer avec certitude que la société du conte – telle qu'elle existait au début du XXe siècle, ou même après 1945 – a perdu bien de ses caractères originels et originaux" (24). Traditional storytelling forms do not persist at the same scale as they once did.

However, while traditional forms are less persistent, storytelling has expanded through shifts in and diversification of media. I begin, then, by looking at the changes in traditional storytelling media: live performances and print media. Certainly, the form of *veillées familiales* has shifted, but they have not disappeared altogether. Colombo notes that while professional storytellers do not, in general, report telling tales to their own children, in society "on raconte encore des choses, lors de réunions familiales ou entre amis, le dimanche après un bon repas ou tout simplement, pendant les vacances, après une grillade ou même le matin autour d'un trempage ou d'un blaff de poisson" (*Des contes* 341-342). She also quotes one storyteller, Alain Légarès, telling her that he tells his children "des histoires, je leur raconte des blagues... Ils lisent de contes" (ellipses in original, *Des contes* 341). As this suggests, certain oral performances

continue in domestic spheres while folktale perpetuation has shifted to print. And, as Colombo's discussion of modern festivals implies, that type of storytelling is not gone but evolved. Even if the performance has shifted from circle to stage, it is still a form of storytelling.

In fact, live storytelling persists in numerous new configurations. Diana Ramassamy notes in her introduction to her collection that today, "l'art du conte est toujours vivant. Des festivals, des rencontres, des séminaires foisonnent dans le domaine du conte et témoignent d'un renouveau, perceptible dès le début des années 1990" (5). In *Des contes de Ti Jean*, Colombo describes the modern ways Martinican storytellers perform in person. She notes that "le contage est devenu production du spectacle," that storytellers have become performers and actors, putting on shows by themselves or, more frequently, with other storytellers and musical performers (*Des contes* 344; 345-348). These performances can take a variety of forms, including "[f]estivales de conte, nuits du conte, le conte en bibliothèque... les formes sont différentes mais ont un point commun, c'est que les conteurs sont obligés de s'organiser entre eux, pour des raisons budgétaires, pour toucher un public plus large, par commodité, mais aussi parce que le conte est devenu politique" (*Des Contes* 348). She notes that these performances come at a range of costs, that there are "conteurs de la ruralité qui interviennent dans les quartiers populaires et ceux de l'urbanité qui interviennent pour la bourgeoisie, c'est-à-dire sur des scènes pour des prestations trop coûteuses pour les habitants des quartiers populaires" (*Des Contes* 345). Live performance as a medium has also been reconfigured, Colombo notes, for educational purposes: "le conte était devenu à la fois un instrument pédagogique et un moyen de développement personnel," a phenomenon we see clearly reflected in the TEDx talks that are part of my corpus (*Des Contes* 345). She also talks about how "le conte a pris un tournant définitif : il est devenu 'folklore', car

tambour, danses folkloriques y ont été ajoutés” (*Des Contes* 345). In other words, folktales have entered this world of greater folk culture and live performances have shifted accordingly.

As my corpus shows, other media are appearing as well. As the medium of live performance has evolved, so too has the medium of the written word. Where once “written” meant professionally published, for-profit collections, storytellers are now sharing transcribed tales on websites, blogs, social media, and French-government-affiliated websites.¹⁷² Moving beyond live performance and written recounting, storytellers are turning to other hyper-contemporary media. They are posting videos of tales to YouTube and other sites, whether they are recordings of live performances, parts of TED talks or radio shows, or just performances for the camera. Antillean storytellers are also recording CDs which are distributed on Spotify. And they are even creating new, hybrid forms such as Guadeloupean storyteller Fayó’s “rando-contes” where he leads his audience on hikes through the countryside while telling them tales (Fleming). With this diversification of storytelling comes a diversification of discussions about storytelling. Promotional material for live performances (at national and international festivals, local performances at cultural centers, libraries, schools, etc.) are posted online on all kinds of sites. Snippets of performances are posted as videos around the internet. Professional storytellers have websites full of descriptions of themselves and their work. They are interviewed in newspapers and by radio and TV stations, and those interviews travel the web as commentary, sound bites, and videos. The where and how of storytelling and discussion of storytelling alike are evolving through engagement with new media.¹⁷³

¹⁷² For more of a discussion of the significance of a site like conte-moi being affiliated with the French government, please see my next chapter.

¹⁷³ This, too, reflects the function of folklore as sites of remembering in that it is a plain example of Nora’s argument that “[i]n just a few years...the materialization of memory has been tremendously dilated, multiplied, decentralized, democratized” (“Between Memory” 14).

Broad Impacts of Any Shift in Medium

The shift away from live and communal performances, regardless of the new form, has several universal implications which raise new issues. The recording of a story, whether sound recording or in print, online or a hard copy, creates an object that did not exist with traditional storytelling. With this shift in medium comes an unavoidable literal objectification. The *purpose* of storytelling in books or webpages or YouTube videos may still be to educate and entertain, to pass on tradition (even under the “master’s” nose). But the creation of any record, in sharp contrast to a live performance, is radically different. The very act of recording performances renders them objects with a physical/digital form which can circulate, travel, and exist perpetually, unlike an ephemeral live performance. With this objectification the *role* of story changes. Stories are no longer a moment of intersubjective relation within a community but rather now travel through time and place within and outside of the storyteller’s community often without relevant context and in a “fixed” form. The performance can now be repeated, and the performance exists as a record in a way a live event does not.

Objectification is linked to commodification. The commodifying process is obvious with texts for which one must pay, such as books or CD’s. The performances are encapsulated as tangible objects sold for profit. But, in fact, there is also another kind of commodification at play for all of these performances, even those that circulate freely (e.g., stories on blogs or YouTube videos). While not commodities in this pay-for-access sense they are still commodified in a more abstract sense. They are objects (again, whether tangible or intangible) that exist and circulate beyond their creators, that have worth outside the community as well as within it, and thus which

circulate within networks of exchange and value.¹⁷⁴ The shift from traditional live storytelling to any other medium, then, creates a commodified object.

This in turn raises a question: Are these new record-objects (i.e., a book, video, online transcription, etc.) still a performance? Obviously, the answer to this depends on how one defines a performance. For this I turn to media and performance studies. In “Performance Remains,” Rebecca Schneider exposes the Western myopic ethnocentrism inherent to the understanding of performance as fundamentally and unavoidably ephemeral. She also notes that “*any knowing* [i]s body-to-body transmission” (italics in original, 105). Indeed, “[w]hether that ritual repetition is the attendance to documents in the library (the acts of acquisition, the acts of reading, writing, education) or the family oral tales of lineage (think of the African American descendants of Thomas Jefferson), or the myriad traumatic re-enactments engaged in both consciously or unconsciously,” any form of knowing engages the body in important ways (Schneider 105). Because of this, Schneider ultimately argues for the reading of “the document as performative act, and as site of performance” (105).¹⁷⁵ The consumption of performance-records is thus an embodied experience and, as such, represents a distinct kind of performance.

Furthermore, in her analysis of artist VALIE EXPORT’s work (in this case, photographs of “performances”), Mechtild Widrich argues that there is a palpable awareness “in these photographs that the force of EXPORT’s work is not predicated on performance as the immediate result of bodies in contact, but on the image of performance, produced and interpreted in public by the artist and by the audience that comes to the performance through these objects”

¹⁷⁴ For more on the importance of performing for community insiders/outsideers, please see my fourth chapter. For more on the role of commodification and storytelling, please see my fifth chapter.

¹⁷⁵ It is important to note that, while I am interested in whether the material remains of a performance are also performance, Schneider’s essay is primarily focused on the (immaterial) ways in which performances remain. Nonetheless, in that Schneider’s analysis of how performances persist beyond a single moment leads her to theorize on the role of performance record, her analysis is relevant to my discussion.

(58-59). In other words, for Widrich the object itself is a performance even as it records performance, and it is in its very awareness of recording a performance that the object takes on the role of performance.

Finally, Adair Rounthwaite nuances this perspective by reminding us of the importance of the object's awareness of its connection to earlier moments. As Rounthwaite unpacks in her discussion of Diane Borsato's videotaped reenactment of earlier artists' performance pieces, creating records of performances (rather than performances themselves) "creates a shift in emphasis from the live performance as artwork...to performance documentation as artwork that acknowledges its connection to an earlier historical moment in which the live, not-yet-mediated performance was of primary importance" (80). Performance documentation is thus both art and a particular kind of performance which is powerful in part due to its relationship to earlier moments and performance. As I have already discussed, most of the stories' paratexts reference their connection to older traditions of live storytelling, and many are literal records (transcriptions or recordings) of live performances. In so doing, they are creating performance documentation artwork which highlights its connection to earlier moments, objects which mediate while referencing the primary importance of the earlier live performances. Performance records, then, are objects which refer back to previous unmediated performances and, as such, create a new kind of performance whose essence lies in its new forms of mediation and meaning-making. In short, while published folklore collections, audio tracks and video clips, and online transcriptions of folktales are inherently different from traditional in-person performances, they are nonetheless undeniably performances by virtue of the meaning they create, their interaction with an audience, and as a result of their reference to historical moments.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ It is precisely this reference to historical moments and ties, both symbolic and not, that allows them to function as sites of memory.

This shift to record, and the resulting objectification and commodification of tales, introduce new questions and decisions for the storytellers. The most material of these is the question of language. A traditional live performance was created for community insiders who theoretically all shared the same language. In the case of Antillean folktale performances, this means they were often traditionally performed in a combination of French and Creole. The transcription of a performance—its translation from oral to written—invokes new issues. First is the question of writing down an oral language such as Creole. As Rutil states in his introduction, “[l]a transcription graphique du créole nous a posé quelques problèmes” (27). The simple act of recording an oral language in writing is a problem absent in spoken performance.

Furthermore, in creating an aural or written record of a performance, it has the potential to travel outside the traditional relatively homogenous group to others who might not share the same linguistic knowledge or background. This introduction of a possible heterogeneous audience raises questions of linguistic accessibility and exoticism. By whom does the storyteller want the story to be understood?¹⁷⁷ In cases where commodified folktale creations are exchanged for money these choices are even more fraught. Because a book or CD, for example, is designed to be sold for profit, the desire to reach as wide an audience as possible is a vector not present in traditional performances. A performance in (only) French will be accessible and thus appealing to a larger audience than one in Creole.

The translation of a tale from Creole to French poses problems that expand this media discussion beyond McLuhan. The first problem is that of lost meaning: “La traduction des contes en français a révélé chez nous un malaise certain dans la maîtrise des deux langues. Que d’efforts

¹⁷⁷ Again, for more on this, and the implications of these choices, please see my fourth and fifth chapters.

pour restituer la pensée créole !” (Rutil 28).¹⁷⁸ Of course, any translation project is difficult and poses problems when it comes to communicating a particular worldview. However, the translation from Creole to French is particularly complex. Rutil himself notes the inherent paradox: “Cette remarque [sur la difficulté de traduire la pensée créole] est sans doute valable pour toute traduction, mais ne s’accentue-t-elle pas à cause de l’origine française de la majorité du vocabulaire créole ? Cette corrélation entre les deux langues, n’est-elle pas mise en évidence par le statut qui leur est conféré par la société coloniale et assimilationniste ?” (28). The second related problem is one of power, and this was addressed in my Introduction: “Notre traduction ne saurait être à l’abri de ce que l’on a coutume d’appeler créolismes et auxquels nous préférons substituer les termes de faux-amis ou interférences” (Rutil 28). In short, due to the changes inherent to creating a record of a performance rather than telling a tale directly to one’s friends and neighbors, language and its related issues of record(ing), translation, and power become key problematics affecting both performer and audience experience. This raises a number of questions, and many of these will be explored in more detail in the next chapters. They include questions of knowledge, the impact of linguistic choices on reception, and, ultimately, performer experience, connection, and trust with their audiences.

Beyond these questions of language, the creation of a performance-object also has implications in terms of lived experience and intersubjectivity. In creating a record of a performance, the storyteller loses the interaction with the broader audience and all the elements

¹⁷⁸ Rutil is not the only one to express these concerns; many of the storyteller do. For example, Confiat explains that “en traduisant en français la parole créole de ces vieux conteurs... nous avons voulu demeurer au plus près de celle-ci. Nous nous sommes efforcés de mouler le français dans la rythmique du créole, de calquer les images et les métaphores qui ornent ces contes, en évitant toute espèce de latérisation qui ne ferait qu’accentuer la trahison qui est au cœur de toute traduction. On n’a donc pas affaire, ici, à des contes arrangés, réécrits ou clarifiés, mais à un matériau brut qui se veut le reflet le plus fidèle possible d’une parole ou d’une langue encore vivante, quoique contrariées dans leur évolution. Ceci par devoir de fidélité en quelque sorte” (14).

that go with that.¹⁷⁹ The performer has neither knowledge of who is listening to their story nor the feedback loop of audience reactions. As a result, they are not able to shape their tale in response to their audience as traditional storytellers do. This is not to say that audience does not affect these performances. But in the case of a book, internet transcription, YouTube video, etc., the performer must rely on an imagined audience in choosing which tales to tell and how to do so. Indeed, the give and take between performer and audience is, as we know, so essential to Antillean folklore that it has become ritualized in the call and response I have described. When creating a record a performer may call, but they cannot receive a response. Of course, as we have seen, some storytellers try to address this by performing both sides of the call and response into the tales themselves. This, obviously, is a very different affective and embodied experience. Ultimately, their “*krik*” is “*krak*”-less.

This unanswered *krik* is emblematic of a much deeper change for the performer and their relation to the audience. Any performance is an inherently embodied experience, inextricable from “la matérialité du corps parlant (la voix) et du corps écoutant (l’oreille)” (Privat 2).¹⁸⁰ Beyond this, in much performance there is an embodied exchange between storyteller and audience. As Amelia Jones argues in her article “‘Presence’ in Absentia,” in embodied performances the “body is not self-sufficient in its meaningfulness but relies not only on authorial context of ‘signature’ but on a receptive context in which the interpreter or viewer may interact with this body” (14). Especially for live performances, “this contingency, the intersubjectivity of the interpretive exchange, [is] highly pronounced and obvious since the

¹⁷⁹ In those cases where the object is a record of a live performance (e.g., Ramassamy, Zil’oKA, etc.) the performer has access to their live audience but not to the larger audience who will read the book, watch the video, etc.

¹⁸⁰ By embodiment or embodied I mean interactions or performances where bodies (or parts of them) are present. A live performance, a video or audio recording, etc., in that the audience has access to (part of) performer’s body, are embodied performances; a book is not.

body's actions can be interfered with and realigned according to spectatorial bodies/subjects on the register of the action itself" (14). This is especially true of Antillean folktales. As Ramassamy says, there is a "relation intrinsèque qui existe entre le conteur et l'auditoire. Cette relation se nourrit de plaisir. Ce plaisir n'est pas n'importe quel plaisir du récit ou de la relation, c'est le plaisir du conte" (7). This intersubjective embodiment, as Ramassamy implies, is an essential part of meaning creation in performance and an experience unique to folklore performances. Removing this live interaction renders the embodiment unilateral, making it so that the storyteller cannot react or adapt to the audience's bodies and reactions.

In contrast, Rounthwaite notes that with the record of a performance rather than a live one, a performance-as-object, the audience is "structurally unknown [to the performer], and other bodily sites in which [their] performance has been received are unknown" to the audience (68). The embodied performance and the bodily receptions of that performance are cut off from each other, creating an essential disconnect and atemporality. In short, in switching to a performance record the performer and audience lose or potentially void the meaning that is created in their embodied interaction and the resulting intersubjectivity.

This loss of intersubjective meaning-making is even more stark for the audience. Depending on the medium, the audience may or may not have access to the performer's body and the meaning it generates.¹⁸¹ Certainly, in not being able to share their reactions with the performer audience members lose some control of the performance itself. Beyond this, however, Rounthwaite alludes to another way in which the shift from sitting in an audience watching someone tell a tale to, for example, reading a book or watching a YouTube video shifts the embodied intersubjective experience of the audience: the loss of the other audience members.

¹⁸¹ For more on this please see my discussion below.

She remarks on this change noting that “[v]iewing live performance is something usually done in a group, in a social situation in which the subject is aware of the presence of others, at least to some degree” (71). In other words, it is not only the storyteller’s embodied performance that influences an audience member’s reception but also the bodily presence of other audience members, the awareness of them and their bodies, the social markers they communicate, and the shared experience. In shifting from a live performance to a recorded performance the audience members’ experience shifts from group to individual. The performance becomes mostly, if not entirely, disembodied, stripping it of intersubjective meaning-making and shifting the affect.¹⁸²

Furthermore, once the tale shifts from intersubjective performance—where the storyteller essentially chooses the place and the content—to object, it circulates as object, beyond the storyteller’s sphere. As a result of this shift, the storyteller loses contextualization of themselves and their tales. They become decontextualized for the audience that must rely on images if there are any and paratext often not even written by the performer themselves. This is further complicated by the fact that it may no longer be up to the storyteller’s sole discretion what story gets told and how they should tell it: for books or CDs, a team of publishers and marketers must agree; for *Conte-moi* the project curators choose; for collections such as those by *Confiant*, *Ramassamy*, *Rutil*, and *Colombo*, they (the editors) decide which stories to include; etc. Even before the record is complete, commodification begins. In short, in creating a commodified record of a performance, which by its very nature can and most likely will travel beyond the storyteller’s community, a storyteller relinquishes control of where their tale travels, by whom it is consumed, and usually even over how they are presented and contextualized.

¹⁸² Many of the storytellers are aware of this and employ various strategies to supplement these lost elements. For more on that, please see the discussion of the different media below.

The shift from live storytelling event to any kind of record, then, regardless of medium results in an objectification and commodification which, in turn, raise issues of language and represents a loss of intersubjective meaning-making (and its resulting change in affective power) and even a loss of control for the storyteller. Beyond these commonalities, it is important to recognize those characteristics particular to each medium.

The Implications of Each Particular Medium Shift

Each medium, in fact, has its own implications in terms of access, lived experience of performer and audience, and effect and affect. That traditional live storytelling events were a physical collection of people is an impactful but easy-to-overlook aspect of that medium. A live storyteller performs the story with his whole body. He has a corporeal presence experienced by his audience. In like fashion, that audience is comprised of people *in a crowd*. Members are aware of their own and their collective corporeal presence. Reception of a folktale is embodied and communal, as is the sharing of it. This obviously shifts from one medium to another.

Let us begin with a consideration of in-person storytelling in the community (whether ritual, in families, or of an enslaved man around a campfire) and the transition to written, printed, published transcriptions. In terms of access, this shift impacts both performer and audience, rendering this type of performance inaccessible to many of the traditional storytellers and even traditional audience members. Certainly, with the shift in medium comes a shift in how, when, where, and thus who can perform the story and who can read this performance.

In terms of the performer, it requires privilege to have the literacy, time, and resources to write a book, and even more to gain the imprimatur of cultural gatekeepers and get a book

published.¹⁸³ Hector Pouillet's statement in his introduction to Telchid's collection *Ti-Chika...et d'autres contes antillais* that "il est difficile de faire un livre en créole" highlights this fact (8). In moving from live storytelling in traditional and/or intimate circles to printed collections, the demands on the storyteller shift. Rather than necessarily being a good listener with a good memory and engaging storytelling ability, a writer/recorder of folktales must be literate, with both time and sufficient cultural capital in not only the folktales' popular culture but also in the dominant colonial culture. Many traditional storytellers who have the institutional memory do not have the capital. Rutil highlights this in the introduction to his collection, noting that "Bien des conteurs, qui possèdent encore dans nos régions la maîtrise de la narration, n'ont pas accès à l'écriture" (22). In other words, the shift to writing, and the accessibility hurdles that accompany it make storytelling inaccessible to many traditional storytellers.

Printed collections are also arguably less accessible for audiences, or at least traditional audiences. With a live performance the audience's access depends on their ability to be a part of the group at the time of the performance. In traditional settings, this would have meant that one must be part of the community or family. But that was the only limitation.¹⁸⁴ In contrast, in order to access a book one must be literate, have the material wealth to purchase it (or access to borrowing it), and the leisure time to read it. For enslaved plantation workers, or any illiterate population, these would be insurmountable hurdles to accessing these performances. In today's Caribbean, they are less problematic than they once were but still represent more serious difficulties than they might in a different more privileged cultural context. As Rutil laments, the

¹⁸³ For more on the impact of cultural gatekeepers and cultural capital, please see my Introduction.

¹⁸⁴ One might argue that there is also a limitation of language (that the audience must be able to understand what the storyteller is saying). However, traditionally stories were told to members of one's community or family (i.e., people who would already know the language). Similarly, multimodal forms such as tone, acting, gestures, facial expressions, etc. supplemented pure linguistic communication. Both diminish this possible limitation of language.

“paradoxe de la transcription, c’est qu’elle rend le conte inaccessible à celui pour qui il est fait” (22). Books render a performance less accessible, then, to traditional audience. Conversely, once it is in book form the tale may travel far beyond the traditional community-based audience of a live performance. The shift from live performance to book, then, on the one hand expands the audience while simultaneously and paradoxically excluding much of the traditional community.

Beyond these questions of access, the lived experience of both performer and audience changes with the shift from live storytelling to published collections. The implications for the embodied experience of the performer are somewhat self-evident but nonetheless highly significant. In writing a story down the storyteller obviously loses recourse to the various modes of oral storytelling that cannot be translated to a page: tone of voice, gesture, movement, song, sound effects, musical accompaniment, etc. Indeed, in his discussion of Antillean folktales, Rutil argues that “les jeux du conteur (gestes, rythmes du discours) sont des éléments primordiaux pour le vrai conte” (292). Similarly, in her discussion of her transcription of Creole tales, Ramassamy describes how “[l]a voix, le corps, la gestualité sont constitutifs d’un art de la parole ;” how “la reproduction du rythme, des échos, des répétitions, des parallélismes, et le jeu de ces divers facteurs se projette dans l’espace propre de la performance du conteur, y engendrant une poésie jamais la même ;” and asserts that “[l]e timbre vocalique, le ton, l’éloquence qui caractérisent la maître de la parole ont accompagné ma traduction” (7). Undoubtedly, the embodied aspects of live performance are an essential element of traditional folklore performance which can only marginally be translated into print and which thus alter the storytelling experience for the performer.

In terms of the lived experience for the audience, many of the shifts that affect storytellers also affect audience. The audience no longer has receptive access to the varied modes

of oral storytelling, just as the performer no longer has creative access to them. Any change of tone, gesture, performance of action, etc., must be left up to the individual audience member to imagine, creating fundamentally distinct performances each time the text is read. Because the reader as an individual plays a larger part in a tale's performance than a watcher/listener of a live performance does, one audience member's reception of the tale is even more distinct from the other's than it would be at a live performance. In a published text there is a loss of multimodality and the meaning it communicates.

However, beyond this, the audience also loses access to both the storyteller's body and the other audience members' bodies and the meaning they carry. Jones observes that live performances "exacerbate the body's supplementarity and the role of representation in momentarily securing its meanings through visible codes," including important social markers such as gender or race (14). In a written text, if the audience has access to the performer's body it is only through one or two photographs, if any. They certainly have no access to the storyteller's voice. Of course, the inextricable interconnection between folktales and identity in this region renders this loss of embodied social markers even more complex than it would be in another context. And there is no access to other audience members' bodies at all. In short, a written performance is quite literally disembodied. The only body which performer or audience member interacts with is their own. There is no embodied intersubjectivity. The lived affective experience of performance, then, is much more isolated, individualized, and decontextualized in a print published performance than in a live one.

Interestingly, of all the storytellers in my corpus creators of published print collections are the most self-reflective about these effects of the change in medium.¹⁸⁵ Reading the paratexts

¹⁸⁵ This could be due to the fact that it is the "first" change and thus the greatest rupture. Or it could be because it is arguably the greatest shift in both storyteller and audience experience. Or it might be, in keeping with McLuhan, a

of my published collections, it is obvious that these storytellers are keenly aware of the elements of live storytelling that do not translate to a printed work. Poulet begins his introduction to Telchid's collection *Ti-Chika...et d'autres contes antillais* with an acknowledgement of this difference: "Mes grands, Voici quelques contes d'il y a longtemps, contes que Sylviane a pris le temps de transcrire pour vous. Prenez vous aussi, le temps de les lire, sans ignorer toutefois la différence entre lire et écouter" (8). Similarly, in his introduction to Confiant's collection, Marcel Lebielle (who actually collected the tales) explains that their "livre veut être l'écho de quelques-uns de ces derniers conteurs. Ces maîtres, voix différentes et styles incomparables, ont baillé la parole tout en 'haussant et en baissant' pour qu'à tout jamais la couronne du conteur ne s'en aille" (18). He goes on to lament that we will never truly know or understand everything each individual storyteller has to offer, offering a précis for each such as, "car on ne saura jamais la profondeur des connaissances que renferme la bibliothèque humainement vivante du doyen des conteurs de la Caraïbe en la personne de Néré Cincinnatus (quatre-vingt-dix ans)" (18). In so doing, Lebielle renders the reader keenly aware of what is being "lost in translation" from oral performance to written text.¹⁸⁶

In one of the earliest collections in my corpus, Rutil gives an explanation of this tension and transition in a section entitled "Point de vue: littérature orale/littérature écrite." In that it is particularly eloquent and poignant in merits full citation in his voice:

reflection and result of the medium itself: books not only have a space in which to reflect, they even have a tradition of doing so through paratexts.

¹⁸⁶ Colombo makes it clear that it is not only the transcribers who are aware of this, but also the traditional storytellers themselves. She discusses how "la sollicitation de plus en plus fréquente des conteurs pour une telle activité [crée une] méfiance grandissante [parce que les conteurs craignent] que l'on fasse un usage lucratif des contes recueillis" (*Ti-Jean* 10).

Abordant la valeur littéraire du conte, l'on est amené à se demander si, dès lors qu'il est transcrit, c'est encore un vrai conte. En effet, qui pourrait mieux rendre la perception, l'intelligence d'un conte que le conteur lui-même ?

Le conte transcrit est extrait de son milieu naturel. Il ne vit plus, il se fige, il devient factice. Tout son style ne saurait être rendu. Il n'est pas fait pour être lu, mais pour être entendu. Ainsi, les variations du timbre de la voix d'un même conteur ne peuvent évidemment pas se traduire. Les mimiques, pour leur part, même parfaitement décrites, ne peuvent en aucun cas rendre les expressions corporelles qui font partie du conte. Les allusions nominatives ne sont plus comprises. La liberté de mouvement du conteur (liberté dans le discours) est mal perçue.

Le conteur qui est un comédien en puissance a besoin d'un public actif et spontané. Le *Krik-Krak*, par exemple, qui est destiné à lancer ou relancer le conte créole, lasse bien vite quand il est écrit. Il n'a d'ailleurs dans ce cas qu'un intérêt purement conventionnel. Les redites ou répétitions condamnées par le bon usage de la langue française, semblent n'être pas permises dans le conte créole retranscrit en français. Le conte a besoin d'un contact direct avec le groupe, il lui faut un environnement humain. Nos contes créoles ont bien souvent besoin d'être élucidés sur le champ, car ils véhiculent encore bon nombre de nos traditions ancestrales qui demeurent méconnues jusqu'à présent.

L'on est bien souvent obligé d'interrompre le conteur dans ses envolées, afin qu'il porte les éclaircissements indispensables à la compréhension de son discours.

Le conte transcrit a valeur de document historique, sociologique. Retranscrire un conte, c'est faire acte de littérature. A partir de ce moment, le conte donne lieu à toutes

sortes d'interprétations, de spéculations, d'où des querelles acerbes entre les spécialistes étudiant la question. Il est analysé, décortiqué. Il subit, en somme, une véritable opération chirurgicale, et l'opérateur essaie d'en extraire un maximum de renseignements, de données. Le profane, d'ailleurs, s'y perd. Quant au conteur, il ne reconnaît plus son conte. Sans vouloir nier l'importance des différentes études faites à partir des contes transcrits, l'on peut tout de même poser la question : la littérature écrite n'imprime-t-elle pas le caractère inégalitaire de la culture ? L'oralité n'est-elle pas utilisée dans la littérature folklorique pour supprimer toute différenciation, toute dissociation ?

Le paradoxe de la transcription, c'est qu'elle rend le conte inaccessible à celui pour qui il est fait. Bien des conteurs, qui possèdent encore dans nos régions la maîtrise de la narration, n'ont pas accès à l'écriture.

La littérature orale (contes, devinettes, proverbes, chansons etc.) est donc nécessairement une littérature populaire, c'est-à-dire de masse, faite par tous et pour tous et se définissant par la réversibilité même du rapport créateur-auditeur. (Rutil 21-22)

Rutil perfectly encapsulates what I have been arguing. The one thing I would like to add is some commentary on his concluding words. According to Rutil's definition, printed collections of folktales (transcribed or not) are not truly folklore for a variety of reasons including the fact that there is no longer a possibility of storyteller becoming audience and audience becoming storyteller. Certainly, his argument highlights his awareness of the distinct experiences inherent to different media. That said, due in part to my extra forty years of data, I do not agree with this limited definition of what constitutes a folktale. As I have argued, proliferation of media shifts experience and affect but print tellings function as performance nonetheless. Significantly, many performers in my corpus are markedly aware of the shifts inherent to changing medium.

While (or perhaps because) many of the authors are aware of the elements lost for both performer and audience in translation from oral to written form, they employ a wide range of devices to attempt to change the texts' effect and affect. For example, the use of illustrations can be seen as a supplement available to print media or as a shadow of a live storyteller's gestures and (re)enactment. Similarly, many author-storytellers include some written gesture to the traditional, oral call and response, whether addressing the reader directly (e.g., Chamoiseau) or including written forms of "yé krik" and "yé krak" (e.g., Lohier, Ramassamy). Colombo, for example, notes that she chose "de noter tous les textes intégralement, tels qu'ils ont été recueillis, avec les exclamations du conteur, car cela met en évidence les différences existant d'un narrateur à l'autre" (*Ti-Jean* 11). In other words, she attempts to write out the oral particularities in order to supplement the loss of the performer's affect inherent in the translation from live to written.

In addition, in some cases, the audience is represented or embodied by the recorder. When a collector elicits a performance in order to record it, as is the case with Rutil, Colombo, Confiant/Lebielle, among others, they take the place of and represent the traditional audience. They constitute a live audience (even if only of one), functioning as proxy for the traditional audience. Rutil assures his readers that this is the case: "Ceci étant précisé, nous sommes en mesure d'affirmer que la qualité de notre production ne se trouve pas pour autant trop altérée. Les relations que nous avons eues avec nos différents conteurs, ont été suffisamment étroites pour que nous garantissons la spontanéité naturelle qui était la leur, au cours de l'enregistrement" (27). For Rutil he-as-proxy-audience successfully functions as a supplement. In contrast, Colombo does not agree. She notes that she recorded her tales "au domicile des conteurs, c'est-à-dire dans des conditions inhabituelles, dans la mesure où le conteur intervient généralement devant un public et, le plus souvent, avec un ou plusieurs de ses confrères qui lui

renvoient la réplique” (*Des contes* 9). She does not view proxy audience as successful supplement, feeling her embodied presence alone is not enough to evoke “true” storytelling.

For texts such as these, it is unclear whether the oral elements are “authentic,” i.e., a faithful transcription of the performance, or an added performance. Such questions do not exist for a live performance. Ramassamy, in turn, takes this one step further; she transcribes tales as performers perform them for large live audiences. In the case of her collection, then, there is a double audience—the live audience initially hearing the tale and the audience of the readers. It is significant, however, that in opposition to a live performance the only information pertaining to contextualization which Ramassamy provides are the photographs. Illustrations, orality, and proxy audiences, then, are all possible supplements that create effect and affect for the audience of published texts.

Ramassamy’s text also represents another device several collections use to attempt to compensate for the loss of relation and affect in live storytelling: the inclusion of photographs of the storytellers. The back cover of Confiant’s collection, *Les maîtres de la parole créole*, explicitly explains photography’s role in the text. While Confiant presented the storytellers “dans de savoureux portraits et a transcrit au plus près de leur débit, du rythme du récit, des jeux de langue entre conteurs et spectateurs, les histoires originales comme les contes traditionnels[,] David Damoison a photographié les conteurs en action, *et traduit à son tour, en images, la vigueur et la poésie de la parole créole*” (italics added). This comparison of two types of translation, and conflation of writing and photography, draws a strong parallel between the two. The idea that Damoison’s photographs are a necessary aspect of translation of the vigor and poetry of the Creole word highlights the medium’s role as supplement to writing, included to affect the audience’s experience of the performance.

The inclusion of photographs in printed media has three significant implications. First is the reintroduction of the body into the performance and all it signifies. As is the case with live performance the “body is not self-sufficient in its meaningfulness but relies not only on an authorial context of ‘signature’ but on a receptive context in which the interpreter or viewer may interact with this body” (Jones 14). These “documents of the body-in-performance are just as clearly contingent...in that the meaning that accrues to this action, and the body-in-performance, is fully dependent on the ways in which the image is contextualized and interpreted” (Jones 14). In short, while perhaps less obvious in photographs than in live performance, the presence of the performers’ bodies creates meaning.

In contrast to live performances, photographs arguably create a document of the performer’s body that is even more vulnerable to the subjective interpretation of the audience.¹⁸⁷ In a live performance, the very act of performing provides a context for the performer’s body, one over which the performer has control. In traditional performances the performer was known to the audience and thus the body required little to no contextualization. In the case of these texts, however, the bodies are represented solely by photographs (which the performers did not take) and are thus entirely dependent on the information the collector includes for their contextualization and meaning making, and on the audience’s interpretations. The photographs’ re-introduction of the performers’ bodies, then, maintains some of the embodiment present in live performances in a way other printed collections do not, but simultaneously renders the performers more dependent on others for their contextualization.

¹⁸⁷ The fact that French colonial history has instrumentalized photographs as part of the colonial cultural and propaganda machine both highlights this subjectivity and complicates the question of reception of these photos in these collections. For more on the role of photography in French colonialism, see Xavier Guégan’s chapter “Colonial Photography” in *Postcolonial Realms of Memory*.

The second issue that the inclusion of photographs raises is the question of place. In traditional live storytelling, the place in which the action occurs follows social conventions. Generally, it is a public space where the community gathers. Once the performance shifts to books, place is divorced from performance—the audience does not have knowledge about what space the performer occupied while creating the performance nor what space other audience members are occupying, and the performer has no knowledge of their audience’s space(s). Indeed, the spaces occupied are varied if simultaneous. I may be reading these tales at the exact same time as another audience member in Guiana without knowing it. With the introduction of photographs, however, space is re-introduced to the performance (if not the audience). In Ramassamy’s collection, the photographs are all taken during live performances.¹⁸⁸ Print media, then, may hint at a public place while simultaneously shifting the performance to a private one.

In contrast to Ramassamy’s collection, *Confiant*’s includes photographs as portraits of the storytellers rather than records of their performances. Most of the spaces portrayed therein are private, either inside what is presumably the performer’s home or just outside it. In these instances, then, the images change the affect of the performance, rendering it intimate in a way a live event may not. The photos also create another level of performance, simultaneous to the performance of the story: a performance of identity and intimacy. In including these photographs, and in making storytellers’ homes “a stage for a performance,” the performance’s affect and even the very nature of the performance itself shifts, becoming a performance of self as much as a performance of story (Rounthwaite 80).¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ In fact, these photographs are the only information about or contextualization of the performances that the audience has.

¹⁸⁹ In his introduction, *Confiant*’s photographer, Marcel Lebielle, states that “Par une abondante présentation de photographies de conteurs, l’ouvrage illustre en profondeur à la fois les misères et le bien-être de l’homme des campagnes ou de la ville, du temps passé comme du présent” (20).

The third issue that photographs introduce, or at least highlight, is again the question of documentation. The photographs, in that they are visceral reminders of the temporality of a performance, bring the role of a book as performance-through-documentation to the fore. The photographs of live storytellers and live performances communicate to the audience that these texts' significance lies in their role as record of the live performances. They also, however, contain an extra layer of meaning in that they refer back to not just one earlier historical moment, but two. The first, more obvious one is the moment of each particular performance. The images in Ramassamy's collection of the storytellers immersed in their art in front of a live audience are a particularly explicit reference to the moment of performance, while those in Confiant's collection are implicitly connected. Beyond this, however, the photographs in both collections also reference the historical "moment" of traditional storytelling more broadly. They evoke the time when stories were the primary form of entertainment and instruction. The inclusion of photographs, then, evoke Schneider, Widrich, and Rounthwaite's descriptions of performance-documentation-as-performance-itself in particularly salient ways.

Finally, there is one last strategy writers use to reinsert elements of relation and intersubjectivity into their published collection performances: encouragement of the oral (re)reading or live re-performance of the tales. Certainly, any printed text is designed to be (re)read. This orality, however, presents a rather basic example of a repetition of performance.¹⁹⁰ Pouillet is explicit in his introduction to Telchid's collection. The very first paragraph of his introduction encourages a performance of these tales: "Voici quelques contes d'il y a longtemps, contes que Sylviane a pris le temps de transcrire pour vous. Prenez vous aussi, le temps de les

¹⁹⁰ Chamoiseau is one of the few to refer to this. In his Introduction he exhorts his readers to "above all, read these stories only at night" (*Creole Folktales* xiv). In so doing, he is referring to the texts' role as performance to be (re)read and thus (re)performed.

lire” (*Ti-Chika* 8). He returns to this idea in his concluding paragraph: “Lisez donc ces contes, mes grands; lisez-les, puis comme Sylviane le faisait dans ses classes, allez les dire. N’ayez crainte d’y ajouter votre grain de sel, et l’épice de votre imagination, sans oublier de ‘faire votre cinéma’ avec les gestes...” (ellipses in original, *Ti-Chika* 10). In short, Poulet is calling on his audience to use this text, this performance, as the foundation and inspiration for future (oral) tellings. He is framing this performance and its lack of intersubjectivity or affect as a placeholder whose (sole?) purpose is to inspire live performances in all their relational affective glory.

This charge to use a written text to (re)create live performances has interesting implications. Rounthwaite’s discussion of what she terms “masturbatory spectatorship” helps to unpack these affective implications. She defines masturbatory spectatorship as a phenomenon where “viewers of the documentation of past performance become performers themselves, creating a constellation between document and body in which the document, originally a recording of a past event, incites the production of new, live affects” (65). If a reader of Telchid’s stories does as Poulet asks and uses the written performances as foundation to tell the stories in their own ways, they are doing exactly this. The audience of this record of performance becomes performers themselves. As Rounthwaite says, the “documents that record the original performance thus become both a means of recording performance history and vectors that enable new events that consist of a new, ontologically unique set of affects, arranged around the idea of the original performance as a structuring fantasy” (85). The document, itself a performance, hopefully elicits future performances, all distinct but linked by the precise past of Telchid’s tales, the amorphous past she describes of learning them from her family, and the archetypal past of a shared history and tradition of Creole folklore and live performances.¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ To be fair, Rounthwaite argues that some “performance art documentation [is] a record of a unique event and not as an invitation to imitate the performer’s actions” while others project “forward toward a future performance in the

When a record becomes oral (re)performance, as Rounthwaite notes, “the document will abandon its role as a trace of a past moment that preserves, communicates, or deconstructs that moment [of performance that it is recording], and will instead become an affective vector between bodies that gives rise to new connections and pleasures” (66). In other words, in inciting new affective performances, the record or printed performance is no longer simply that. It is now, also, a part of any number of asynchronous-but-perhaps-simultaneous, repeatable moments of relation, creating new intersubjective connections. Per Rounthwaite’s deconstruction, the performer and performance want the audience to make “the document live again by creating affect in your [the audience’s] body. Your body becomes an affected prosthesis of the document, a document that aims to recreate affect in multiple, temporally and spatially scattered bodily sites” (69). Performances that are designed to incite new iterative performances, whether explicitly or implicitly, do ultimately have intersubjective affective impact. In this way, this is an effective strategy for reinserting affect into a text performance.

It is essential to note, however, that while these (re)performances create affect, it is not the same as that of a live performance. The temporal and spatial scattering that Rounthwaite refers to cannot but have impact. As she notes in reference to performance artist Diane Borsato’s recreating of her own versions of others’ performances, this recreation is “a new performance created on the basis of existing performance documentation, not a present-making of the original performances. Under the current regime of technological reproducibility, images can survive through time, but bodily affects created by performances cannot, even though the original affects may have been incredibly intense” (75). Re-performances can have and create affect, but it is not

form of the new bodily pleasure it will generate” (64). Performance documentation, then, usually (always?) evokes a past moment or moments, but it can also look to elicit future performances or repetitions. Certainly, many of the books in my collection do both.

the affect of the original performance. Indeed, “[m]asturbatory spectatorship, in which looking easily slides into reenacting, may start with a fantasy of another performance occurring elsewhere or in another time, but it does not end there: it is about creating a different form of pleasure in the present instead of perfectly replicating another scene” (Rounthwaite 78). Each individual performance (even the act of silently rereading a story for the thousandth time) is unique in that it is a result of the intersubjective relationship between performer, audience, and context. As they are ever-changing, so is the affect. The encouragement to use the text to (re)create live performances represents, then, a final possible supplement collectors and performers of texts include in order to reinforce affect—in addition to the incorporation of illustrations, orality (including call and response), a proxy audience, or photographs—perhaps due to their awareness of the shifts in experience for both performer and audience and the inevitable loss or diminishment of intersubjective relation and affective meaning making that comes with this shift in medium from live performance to published collection.

In short, the shift in medium from traditional, live storytelling to published print collections of tales has many ramifications for performer and audience. Access to published collections, while allowing the freedom to circulate also requires greater levels of privilege for both performer and audience in ways which render them inaccessible to community insiders. The lived experience of the performance also becomes literally and completely disembodied, a fact of which performers of print collections are keenly aware. As a result, they employ a range of supplements in order to change the effect of the performance and re-introduce intersubjectivity—many of which are successful in creating affect—yet it is clear that the experience is unavoidably fundamentally altered in significant ways. Of course, while much of this is still true for printed tales that circulate online, there are also some key distinctions.

Obviously, the question of access is very different for online transcriptions of tales than for published books. Arguably, since tales published online generally do not need to gain the imprimatur of cultural gatekeepers and usually circulate for free, a significant barrier to access for performer and audience is removed. In this way, they are more accessible than books. That said, issues of literacy and leisure remain for both storytellers and audience members. The question of internet access has become an important one, and recent figures from January 2021 point to a discrepancy between the Caribbean DOMs and mainland France: 56.9% in Martinique, 66.4% in Guadeloupe, and 67.3% in French Guiana, as opposed with mainland France (91.0%) (Kemp et al., “Digital in Martinique”; Kemp et al., “Digital in Guadeloupe”; Kemp et al., “Digital in French Guiana”; Kemp et al., “Digital in France”).¹⁹² The dissemination of tales online is thus perhaps more accessible than traditional print media but not necessarily as democratic as Western scholars may be tempted to believe.¹⁹³

In terms of the lived experience, all the changes for performer and audience that come with the shift from live performance to published text are also present with versions written online. Obviously both performer and audience still have no access to multimodality nor each other’s bodies. Arguably, the audience’s experience of transcribed online performances is likely to be even more disembodied than a published text in that they are no longer even holding a book in their hands. Beyond this, online transcriptions are less likely to have any kind of contextualization of the storyteller, any paratext, or any other supplementation published

¹⁹² It is interesting to note, in contrast, that the *Lonely Planet* tour guide website reassures visitors to Martinique that “Wireless [internet] (often called WLAN locally) is ubiquitous in Martinique, and can be found for free at nearly all hotels and guesthouses, as well as in most cafes and restaurants” (“Internet Access in Martinique”). The disparity between the data and this travel advice presents a stark reminder of the privilege that internet access represents and requires. Privileged tourists have easy, “ubiquitous” access to the internet while only just over half of the actual Martinican population do.

¹⁹³ That said, the very fact the people feel it worth their time to type up transcriptions of tales published in books and post them online does suggest that some, at least, find the internet more accessible.

collections include. Most of the online tales in my collection are simply the story itself, with no image of the storyteller, no explanation of who they are (many are posted completely anonymously), etc.¹⁹⁴ Overall, the translation from live storytelling to online transcription is thus even less embodied and intersubjective than with published collections.

Interestingly, while published collections are very preoccupied with the affective changes that accompany the shift from live storytelling to printed, this is not the case with internet posters. Presumably because of this there are not as many supplements represented on these websites as in the books in my corpus. Most of the tales online do not include any kind of illustration, many do not have oral markers, only a few suggest any kind of proxy audience, and none emphasize it. The closest there is online is discussions like that on Antanlontan of repeating stories learned from family members, and only *Ile en île* and *Conte-moi* include photographs. None of the tales invite repetition of the performance as with Telchid's book.

Audio recordings of the storytellers actually telling the stories is one example in which the use supplementary materials functions optimally on the internet. With this supplement, as with any other storytelling object, language becomes a question (as the bilingual recordings on *Conte-moi.net* indicate), there is a loss of intersubjective meaning-making, and the tale travels outside of the storytellers' control. This last fact seems particularly salient in these cases where it is stated or implied that the storyteller is not the person who produced the recordings or posted them online.¹⁹⁵ That said, in contrast to books, vocal recordings accompanying transcriptions introduce other modes than those that exist in written text alone. With a recording, the performer

¹⁹⁴ There are some exceptions to this. Some of the tales on Potomitan have short bios of the storytellers. The *Conte-moi* website has detailed contextualization—on a separate tab. Strikingly, George Mauvois's tale on *Ile en île* and the stories on *Conte-moi.net* have as much or more contextualization than many of the books do including storytellers' names, bios, recordings of their voices, and photos.

¹⁹⁵ Again, for more on texts elicited and contextualized by non-storytellers, please see my fourth chapter.

has recourse to tone of voice, onomatopoeia, and vocal expression which the audience has access to. Finally, the fact that in all these examples it is a recording of the storytellers' themselves (i.e., their voices) telling the story means that at least part of the body is reintroduced into the performance. Voices are a result of, and therefore representation of, one's physical form. Beyond this, they carry non-visual social markers of their own since accent, pitch, intonation, vocal quality, rhythm, volume etc. all convey information, accurate or not, about the speakers themselves. However, it is only a piece of the performer's physical body, a limited access to it. And the performer still has no access at all to the audience's physical bodies, their corporeal presences. Overall, then, online print transcriptions of tales may be more accessible but rely almost entirely on the experience of reading from a screen for their creation of affect, usually thus repeating the issues raised by published transcriptions except for the possible-but-rare inclusion of recordings of the storytellers telling their stories.

These questions of online audio recordings obviously beg examination of CD tracks available on Spotify. Spotify is a free, online streaming service, providing access to content that might otherwise be accessed through CD's, iTunes, podcasts, audiobooks, etc. (i.e., access is similar to that for printed transcriptions on free websites). Spotify is more complicated because the tracks included in this study are (like most music on Spotify) pulled from CDs. This means that these tracks have passed through all the stages and gatekeepers of traditional music production, including production companies, producers, and record labels. So while the medium may be easily accessible from the audience's perspective, the performer has nonetheless had to jump through multiple hoops to access the platform. And CDs' roles as commodities exchanged for money and the fact that artists get a small payment for each time their track is played on

Spotify also reintroduce all of the vectors and issues that exist with published collections (i.e., marketability, framing, loss of contextualization, etc.).

However, realistically, even from the audience's perspective access is complicated by the digital platform and all of its implications. Spotify, like many online platforms today, has different levels of access. There is a free level where users can access the music but with the downside of interspersed advertisements. In contrast, a Spotify Premium account for which a monthly subscription fee is required, allows one an unlimited listening option and without interruption, as well as the ability to download tracks for offline listening.¹⁹⁶ Of course, both the introduction of advertisements and of paid subscription accounts introduce new layers to the question of experience and accessibility.

Finally, the role of Spotify itself as mediator complicates questions of access. Maria Eriksson, Rasmus Fleischer, Anna Johansson, Pelle Snickars, and Patrick Vonderau emphasize in their book *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music* that Spotify's "user interaction was [once] organized around tracks, search options, and community-activating features, such as self-made playlists" but today its "interaction design reorganizes music consumption around behaviors, feelings, and moods, which are channeled through curated playlists and motivational messages that change several times a day" (3). In other words, Spotify uses its platform—playlists, algorithms, genre labels, etc.—to influence which tracks are prominent. Indeed, "Spotify's business model never benefited all musicians in the same manner but rather appeared—and still appears—highly skewed toward major stars and record labels, establishing a winner-takes-all market familiar from the traditional media industries" (Eriksson et al. 3). Not only does Spotify influence the accessibility of the tracks on its platform, its own

¹⁹⁶ For more on the implications of this and what Eriksson et al. term the "shift from commodity ownership to commodified experience," please see my fifth chapter (1).

motivations and corporate strategies are increasingly tied “to US-based financial interests” (Eriksson et al. 3). Ultimately, then, Spotify is a “‘mediator’ in Latour’s sense, that is, as an actor that transforms, translates, and modifies the meaning of the elements it is supposed to carry,” influencing both accessibility and how that content is understood (Eriksson et al. 15). Its motivations are capitalistic, meaning that “one may call Spotify a producer,” not a neutral disseminator (Eriksson et al 15). Spotify thus obfuscates access even as it facilitates it.

The lived experience of the performance is at once like other audio recordings online and not. As with the tracks on *Ile en île* or *Conte-moi.net*, these tracks have all the auditory modes (including intonation, onomatopoeia, music, etc.) but none of the visual modes (e.g., facial expressions, gesture, etc.). However, unlike the tracks on *Ile en île* or *Conte-moi.net*, the Spotify tracks in my corpus (those of Magguy Faraux) have no contextualization beyond her name and country of origin. There is no picture of her, no description, no biography—nothing.¹⁹⁷ This performance, then, is even more removed from her body and thus even less intersubjective than the other audio recordings. On Spotify, Faraux is nothing more than a disembodied voice, experientially not far removed from Siri or Alexa. Compared to written versions, then, these tracks are both more and less like live performances.

In terms of affect there are therefore the same issues of language (influenced here by the levels of gatekeepers and commodification), loss of intersubjectivity (even more extreme here), and loss of control on the part of the storyteller. Beyond, that, however, there is an additional affective supplement that these tales on Spotify have that none of the other stories do: synthetic sound effects interjected throughout the stories. This addition of sound effects not made by the

¹⁹⁷ The one exception to this, is Faraux’s first track which begins with a short contextualization of Antillean storytelling and her own background. This seems to represent the storyteller’s insistence on some kind of contextualization when the gatekeepers did not deem it necessary. Which, in turn, highlights the tension that arises between self-contextualization or contextualization by another.

storyteller themselves, or by a human body at all, moves the experience outside of or beyond the body. Their inclusion means that these tracks no longer represent simply one body telling a story to other bodies, visible or imagined; it has moved beyond that, into the realm of computers, TV, etc.¹⁹⁸ This skews even further from intersubjective meaning-making as some of the sound to be interpreted is not created by a subject at all. Ultimately, then, Spotify tracks create their own unique affective experience, doubly (or even triply) commodified, and dependent entirely on vocal cues, music, and sound effects with little to no intersubjectivity. The medium imposes a dramatic shift away from live storytelling.

Of course, if Spotify is striking in its creation of an expert-but-disembodied-voice, the final medium of my corpus, video-recorded performances, reintroduce the body in highly particularized ways. In terms of access, since these videos are posted online (whether on Facebook, YouTube, or another site), the questions of audience leisure and internet accessibility apply. And certainly, the question of visibility and curation that applied to Spotify also apply here. Google's top-secret, ever-changing, extremely complex algorithms for their searches obviously render videos more or less findable.¹⁹⁹ Beyond this, the individual sites such as YouTube and Facebook have their own search algorithms affecting the visibility and accessibility of these recordings.

In fact, the relatively low number of views of most of the videos in my collection suggests the relative inaccessibility of this genre and renders a brief discussion of the vectors influencing these algorithms necessary. Facebook and YouTube, like Spotify, label themselves

¹⁹⁸ This inclusion may well be the result of the commodification of these tales and attempts to make them appealing to broader range of audiences.

¹⁹⁹ While Google carefully guards the data upon which its algorithms are based, it is known that they take into account many different data points in deciding what results to show any given user for any given search, including, the relevance based on keywords and site metadata, the reliability of the site based on how long others who clicked that link stayed on the site, the user's own search history, and more.

as platforms. They frame themselves as passive sites where others control the data inputted and shared. The reality, however, is much more complicated. Facebook has many secret algorithms that decide who is shown what content in searches, in news feeds, and more. To what degree these algorithms are influenced by economic vectors is hotly debated. Regarding my corpus, however, the primary site housing my videos is YouTube. As Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau note in their introduction to their collection *The YouTube Reader*, YouTube is peculiar in “the way the platform has been negotiating and navigating between community and commerce. If YouTube is anything, it is both industry and user driven” (11). They also note that “[m]ining the vaults of an established media archive remains subject to corporate interests as well” and ultimately conceptualize YouTube “as an industry, and archive and a cultural form” all at once (14; 18). In short, while it may not initially seem it, due to audiences’ ability to access videos for free on Facebook, YouTube, and similar sites, these sites’ corporate and fiscal concerns add layers of commodity to the videos’ accessibility in complicated ways.

This platform has its own questions of accessibility for the storyteller. There is not as much gatekeeping in the creation of the videos (even if there is, as we just saw, in the dissemination of them) as there is a CD or a book. However, like transcriptions posted online, there is a question of leisure; storytellers must still be privileged enough to have the time to make and post such videos. Beyond this, they must have the privilege of access to the necessary technology, including, at the very least, some type of videorecording device and access to the internet to upload the video. Finally, posted recordings of performances in front of live audiences add levels of accessibility and/or gatekeeping. Show and podcast hosts and producers, festival organizers, librarians, etc. all become gatekeepers in these scenarios, deciding who does and does not merit the opportunity to perform. A recording of a live performance at a storytelling

festival that is posted on YouTube, then, represents layers of accessibility. The storyteller must have been available for the festival, has to have gained the imprimatur of the festival organizers, has to have either arranged for recording themselves or given permission for it, and then the video, regardless of who controls its posting, has to make it through the various algorithms and black boxes of the internet to make it to the listener. Clearly, the question of access of videos posted online is more complicated than it seems.

The question of performer and audience's lived experience is also complex and intriguing. Of course, in the case of a recording of a "live" performance (i.e., in front of a live audience, not *simply* a camera/camera operator), regarding the performer's interaction with the live audience members all vectors of live performance apply. There is a shift, however, when one considers the relationship between storyteller and the *video's* audience. In many ways, videos of performances seem to be extremely close to the experience of telling or hearing a story live. Both performer and audience have access to all the modes of live storytelling (i.e., voice, gesture, tone, onomatopoeia, movement, facial expression, etc.). Some performers, such as Faraux or Zil'oKA even have participants and/or live audience members act out the action as the storyteller narrates it, adding affective modes for the video's audience. This may or may not be a remnant of "traditional" storytelling, but it is certainly a mode that is not available to any other medium.²⁰⁰ Due to the visual nature of videos, the audience also has access to the storyteller's body and all of the markers and information that accompany it.²⁰¹ On the surface, then, video seems a close proxy for traditional storytelling performances.

²⁰⁰ As described in the previous chapter, David Méroux actually takes this multimodality a step further. As he narrates the tale there is an illustrator on stage simultaneously illustrating his words with the images projected onto a screen on stage. This adds another visual element that would not have been part of traditional live storytelling but which is not unlike the illustrations featured in a published book or even a cartoon-ized version of a tale.

²⁰¹ That said, arguably how much access the audience has depends in part on the video quality and framing; a video that only shows a blurry, low-quality image of the storyteller from the back of the room (so that they are small and difficult to see) is very different from one that features high-resolution images and alternates between long shots and

Close analysis complicates this perception. The issues of language, intersubjectivity, and control that we have seen with the other media are still at play here. The storyteller may modify his performance to “play to” the camera. And the storyteller still does not have access to the video audience’s bodies and the meaning they convey. Discussing performances on television, Rutil summarily dismisses the idea that video is a proxy for the real thing: “[I]a difference est tout de même d’importance” (24). Certainly, many authors explicitly equate modern media with the loss of older traditions: “aujourd’hui ce temps est révolu, la fée Electricité est partout et puis il faut le reconnaître nous n’avons plus le temps de dire ‘des contes’” (Telchid, *Ti-Chika* 10). Similarly, Confiat notes that new storytellers “doivent adapter leurs contes à un univers désormais dominé par un nouveau type d’oralité, celui de la télévision, néo-oralité qui diffère de l’oralité traditionnelle” (15). As Rutil says, “Alors que le téléspectateur assiste passivement à l’émission, ceux qui écoutent les contes sont (étaient) bien souvent également acteurs. Le conteur se réfère fréquemment à son auditoire par une mimique ou une allusion quelconque. L’auditoire participe donc activement au déroulement du conte ; il en est témoin et acteur” (parentheses in original, 24).²⁰² The lack of interaction, then, the elimination of intersubjectivity between a videotaped performer and the video’s audience still render the affect unique.

This is even more true for online videos than for TV. The experience of watching a video recording online is more likely solitary, and is even more atemporal and ageographical than viewing traditional television broadcasts: “[u]nlike the network television of the 1950s through

close-ups as the storyteller recounts their tale. The videos in my collection represent these two extremes and everything in between.

²⁰² This association between television and loss of tradition is interesting; as Mark Fisher argues in his book *Ghosts of my Life*, normally it is the loss of the analogue media that evoke the nostalgia of lost traditions (29; 128; 132). He particularly mentions the nostalgia of “the fugitive evanescence that long ago used to characterize, for instance, the watching of television programmes – seen once, and then only remembered – [which] has disappeared” due to new technologies such as YouTube (132). However, in this case, it not only YouTube but also these very television programs Fisher mourns, and even more analogue media such as books, that are leading to the loss of the tradition’s “true” analogue, live storytelling.

the 1970s..., which aimed at producing a convergence of a mass audience of sufficient scale at a particular place and a particular time, YouTube produces a divergence of audience and message, temporally and territorially, fostering multiple points of view rather than the small number of viewpoints represented by broadcast television” (Grusin 66). As such, “YouTube not only functions as a 24/7, global archive of mainly user-created video content, but it also serves as an archive of affective moments of formations” (Grusin 66). This is true both for the videos themselves and for the discussions and interactions that may occur in the comments section.²⁰³ In other words, while videos in their multimodality and access to the performer are capable of a different kind of affective impact than written or recorded tales, the experience is still distinct from that of a live storytelling event. This difference is due in large part to the atemporal, ageographical, highly individualized experience of watching a video online.²⁰⁴

Of course, as with the published collections, these storytellers incorporate a range of techniques to try to supplement this affective shift. Faroux’s only full video consists of her looking directly into the camera and recounting the tale straight to the video audience. The impact of this is the feeling for the anonymous atemporal audience that she is telling the tale directly to them and for them. The affective impact of this illusion of relation is strong and engaging. It cannot, however, exactly create the affect of a live performance. Indeed, the lack of the participation Rutil describes and of intersubjective meaning-making more broadly is starkly

²⁰³ This atemporal, ageographic, disembodied, form of interacting can sometimes be keenly felt by consumers of this media. For example, in a Tumblr post, user toastpotent wrote: “uuuwuhuwuwuuhhhhhunhhh it’s so fucked up that you can go onto places on the internet and see interactions that are 5... 10... 20 years old. Maybe even older. like this is something that happened so long ago and yet you can view it and interact with it the same way you can with something happening present day. but it’s old and these people who commented [or posted] have completely different lives they are leading now than the ones they led when they first commented. this is just a real thing you can interact with history. but also it doesn’t exist it’s just pixels on a screen it isn’t tangible. but it does. what the fuck. i am going to eat so much mexican food tonight” (ilikecatsandfob).

²⁰⁴ For this and other reasons, Gunnar Iversen argues that YouTube functions as a “non-lieu, non-place” in the sense of Marc Augé: “the negation of anthropological place whose main characteristic is being transitive and asocial” (347).

felt when Faraux has to *Yé krak* to her own *Yé krik*'s; her response to her own call reminds the audience of their muteness in the creation of the tale, their passive role in the performance.

Another even more common supplement is the presence of a proxy audience—a radio host, a live audience at a festival, children and their parents at a library, or even simply a heterogeneous anonymous group—meant to evoke traditional storytelling. These live audiences function as proxy and reintroduce intersubjectivity in various ways. The video portrays intersubjective meaning-making as the live audience is able to become both witness and performer as Rutil describes.²⁰⁵ The traditional roles, the spontaneity, call and response, give and take, and more are thus in evidence in these instances. However, that said, the affective implications are complicated by the fact that the audience *of the video* (as opposed to the audience featured in the video) is removed from the exchange; their “*yé krak*” is not heard by either performer or audience members in the video and in fact the opportunity to reply is long past. Inasmuch as the live audience become participants by virtue of these traditional interactions, then they, too, are more performer than audience. This shift in label allows us to see that even with the inclusion of a proxy audience there is not actual intersubjective meaning-making between those performers and the audience of the video.

This realization returns us to the question of whether these recordings of live performances are more performance or record. Or, another way of asking this: Which is the performance—the thing that happens for a live audience or the video? And whichever one it is, what, then, is the other?²⁰⁶ In fact, the recordings are both document and performance and thus both the live event and the recording are performances, albeit of different kinds. Rounthwaite

²⁰⁵ The audience's role as actors of the events in the story that we see in Zil'oKA's video and some of Faraux's are extreme examples of this.

²⁰⁶ This is related to the question of who the performance is for. For a more detailed discussion of possible answers to this, and the implications of these answers, please see my fourth and fifth chapters.

notes that Borsato's performance art consists of a cycle of media: "Borsato performs a series of transfers from documentation image, to live performance, to a new documentation image" (82). She also argues alongside Jones, that "documentation is fundamentally intersubjective" and not simply "a transparent record that furnishes proof of the event" (70). In other words, this shift from document to performance to document results in something that (as Widrich argues) is aware of—whose meaning relies entirely upon its role as—its status as performance document. In its reference to a past moment and reliance on the audience's reception for meaning-making, a performance document is its own kind of performance. The videos may record a live performance, but in their simultaneous reference to these historical moments and their trans-national trans-temporal transmission and reception, and their possible incitation of future performances, they also become performances in and of themselves.²⁰⁷ Ultimately, then, video recordings are more complicated than they seem, in terms of access, lived experience, and affect. Ultimately, they create their own unique affective experience even while losing intersubjectivity.

Finally, while modern live performances themselves are not part of my corpus since my corpus focuses on performances that travel, discourses *about* live performances (e.g., interviews, promotional materials, etc.) are in that they represent stories about stories and these folkloric performances of identity. These discourses and the impressions they share about modern live performances do travel. Because of this, the medium of modern live storytelling merits a brief discussion. As I have discussed, modern live performances of folktales exist in varied forms. While it appears that some spontaneous, intimate, community-based storytelling continues to exist, because there is not discourse about these performances they are not part of my study

²⁰⁷ Rounthwaite actually argues that new technologies open up new affective possibilities, talking about the shift from watching pornography in theaters to watching it at home on one's laptop: "*Deep Inside*'s travel between various technologies of the moving image from 1981 to 2011 opens it to new affective potential that could not have been anticipated by [the director] at the time of its creation" (70).

(Colombo, *Des contes*). Similarly, storytellers may also still perform at *veillées mortuaires*, but these performances are rarer than they once were, are not publicized or discussed, and the performers are certainly not paid for their “services” (Colombo, *Des contes* 337-340).

This last point brings us to an important distinction: storytellers today (or at least those who tell stories in fora whose descriptions travel and thus qualify for this study) are *professionals* who train and are paid for their performances. The locations of these paid performances vary—national and international storytelling festivals, libraries, local events such as “nuits de contes,” classrooms, cultural centers, for tourists, etc.—but they all represent performances that are elicited by a group and for which the performer is usually compensated and which usually imposes a physical or implied stage/performer divide.²⁰⁸ In other words, even live storytelling has been commodified.²⁰⁹ The type of live performance that travels is one that can be packaged and is deemed worth paying for.²¹⁰ This fact necessitates further discussion.

How one views access to such performances depends on one’s lens. In some ways these live performances are the least accessible medium. They are ephemeral and geographically and temporally limited and so cannot be accessed after the fact or by audiences around the world. They usually require the audience to pay to watch, restricting access to those who have both the

²⁰⁸ Colombo summarizes this shift: “Il arrive encore que le conteur intervienne de manière isolée comme c’était le cas d’André Duguet, certainement le plus actif aujourd’hui, lors d’une séance de contes à Sainte-Marie, sa ville natale, au Marigot qui est sa deuxième ville comme il le dit lui-même. Mais le plus souvent les conteurs interviennent en groupe. Festivals de contes, nuits du conte, le conte bibliothèque... les formes sont différentes mais ont un point commun, c’est que les conteurs sont obligés de s’organiser entre eux, pour des raisons budgétaires, pour toucher un public plus large, par commodité, mais aussi parce que le conte est devenu politique. Une séance de contes aujourd’hui a un coût, puisqu’elle demeure gratuite pour le public. Il faut des locaux, il faut des déplacements, un service d’ordre... De plus, aujourd’hui il n’y a pas de séance de contes sans musique et cela aussi a un coût. Les séances sont en générale organisées par un conteur de renom : Jean-Claude Duverger que j’ai vu lors d’une séance collective en plein air, mais n’ai pas eu l’occasion de rencontrer” (ellipses in original, *Des contes* 348).

²⁰⁹ This reintroduces the question of language; which language(s) the performance will feature no doubt depends on the performer’s intended audience.

²¹⁰ Colombo alludes to this when she argues that *le conte* “est devenu ‘folklore,’ car tambour, danses folkloriques y ont été ajoutés” (*Des contes* 345). This alludes to a broader trend of folklore and “authenticity” being commodified and performed. Please see Aronsson and Gradén, Bendix, Foster and Tolbert, Hafstein, and Larsen for more.

leisure and the money. Ultimately, then, the audience for this type of performance is limited to those with privilege and availability. That said, in many ways these performances are most accessible to community members. They are most like traditional performances and are thus most relatable. Some are local, and some (such as performances at schools or libraries) are free and specifically targeting the local community. When thinking about the accessibility of live performances today, then, one must begin with the question: Accessibility for whom?

In terms of the lived experience of performing or attending such performances, in many ways it is the same as traditional storytelling. There is obviously once again access to a range of modalities and to each other's bodies. Certainly, live storytelling is the only medium that allows for the call and response, give and take, witnessing and participating that is so key in traditional storytelling. Here, the performer and audience can interact and shape the tale together and intersubjective meaning-making is possible in this medium without mediation.

That said, there are still changes that alter the affect of the performance. Rutil argues that modern iterations are not the same, saying that they have a "caractère tout à fait artificiel et contraignant de réunir des conteurs [et que] une veillée de contes doit être spontanée et non pas organisée avec tout un cérémonial" (27). For Rutil, then, even if live performances today have the intersubjective meaning-making and give-and-take that characterize traditional performances, the lack of spontaneity that is necessitated by a show shifts the affect. As we know, Colombo describes the shift in affect in more detail, describing the influence of the podium or stage as barrier, the shift from exchange to spectacle; in short, "[l]e conteur, quant à lui est devenu artiste" (*Des contes* 343). There may be more exchange than with other media, but it now exists by breaking the fourth wall, a wall which did not even exist in traditional performances and is created by the imposition of modern technology and Western conventions of performance. These

factors along with the introduction of money and creation of an economy of storytelling render the telling of a folktale a performance in the spectacle sense of the word, and render storytellers actors who study and hone their craft in order to make it more marketable.²¹¹ These shifts once again lead to an ultimate diminishment of affect and intersubjective meaning making.

The storytellers themselves are aware of this shift in their role and affect, and many bemoan it. Colombo quotes a professional storyteller acknowledging that “le conteur est devenu ‘otage’, comme le dit lui-même É. Pennont, dans la mesure où il a perdu tout liberté d’intervention et où il n’intervient que lors de manifestations organisées par des organisateurs non conteurs” (*Des Contes* 347). In fact, the same storyteller, Élie Pennont, characterizes his new role by adding that “[l]e conteur, on le transforme en guide” (Colombo, *Des Contes* 348).²¹² This has affective implications, suggesting that the storyteller is now introducing others to something only he knows rather than participating in a shared event. In the end, even if modern live storytelling has the multimodality and intersubjectivity of traditional storytelling, the shift in venue, context, role, and even layout of these events has significantly shifted their effect and affect. The storyteller is now an actor, a hostage, a teacher, a guide, a presenter of an unknown artifact. This is a far cry from enslaved people collectively sharing to maintain hope by “parlent des révoltes contre les puissants, de résistance à l’oppression, de redressement des torts et des injustices” (Colombo, *Des contes* 11).

Ultimately, whether a performance is a transcription in a book or online, an audio or video recording, or even taking place live at a festival or library, today’s folkloric performances

²¹¹ Colombo and Ramassamy both talk about the effort and study that modern professional storytellers put into learning how to be a storyteller. Colombo even quotes one of the storytellers in her study: “J’étais créateur, je suis devenu animateur et je ne crée plus rien du tout” (*Des Contes* 347). That said, in talking about themselves, the storytellers often downplay this aspect and focus instead on their “authentic” origins, a fact which is in keeping with the commodification of folklore. Please see my fifth chapter for more on this.

²¹² In the case of Fayou, who hosts “rando-contes” where he leads groups through the Guadeloupean countryside while telling traditional folktales (see Chapter 5), this label by Pennont is quite literally true (Fleming).

represent a shift in role from shared, communal tradition to commodity. This shift is particularly significant in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana because of the unique role that folklore plays in these regions. It highlights the tales' role as sites of memory, reflecting the broader shift in memory practices from acts of memory (live performances) to sites (performance records or objects). The objectification and commodification of performance, as well as the questions of performance versus record, language, and loss of interaction are all inherent in this fundamental shift away from traditional practices, regardless of the new medium. Beyond this, the various media iterations of this shift carry with them a range of specific implications in terms of access, experience, and affect. Ultimately, however, it becomes clear that with this fundamental shift from memory act to site of memory there has been a loss of intersubjective embodied meaning making. While various performers utilize supplements to compensate for the losses resulting from the very nature of the media themselves, these supplements can only be so effective.

In the end, this loss of intersubjective meaning making has profound implications. Audiences have historically always played a key role in the performance of Antillean folktales, essentially serving as co-performers. One can now identify evidence of the multiple ways in which their role has been greatly diminished. This is most notably the case in terms of their power to influence the delivery and recounting of the tale. Even though their subjective experiences still influence how they understand or receive the tale, their ability to influence the storyteller or tale directly has been eroded. As a result, in looking at *how* folktale performances function as sites of memory, the performer's intentions end up being the most significant. In the next chapter, I turn to an analysis of individual performances, focusing primarily on target audiences and the interplay between them and the performance itself.

CHAPTER FOUR

Folklore as Sites of Remembering and Forgetting

It is important to recognize that folklore is not simply a way of obtaining available data about identity for social scientists. It is actually one of the principal means by which an *individual and a group* discovers or establishes identity. (italics added, Dundes 151)

Contemporary Martinican, Guadeloupean, and Guinean folktales exist across media and consequently span time and space in complex and significant ways. This proliferation of folktales has created different types of performances, crystallizations of identity, and dynamics of representation. Each performance record by its very nature represents the storyteller and their community. The diverse range of identities are both manifest in and shaped by storytelling, and story and identity are intertwined. The stories we tell about ourselves, and about our stories and storytelling, shape the ways we both see and represent ourselves in a dynamic process.

Performance—whether the stories themselves or the discussion of storytelling—is rife with statements and implications of identity and positionality. These can be self-contradictory or overlapping from storyteller to storyteller, story to story, or even moment to moment, due to the mutable, varied, and oppositional nature of identity. There are many ways that storytellers can implicitly or explicitly position themselves. They may do so through choice of language or through the framing of a collection in paratext, whether written by others or by the storyteller themselves. They may also position themselves through the choice or labeling of story, through the way a storyteller talks about their storytelling outside of the work itself, or through the wording of the story. The logistical and narrative choices and the way others talk about a storyteller's work may also serve to position a storyteller and their story. And while these statements are complicated, they are essential presentations of identity. Each choice performatively creates and communicates individual and group understandings of selfhood which, in turn, create conceptions of nationhood. Indeed, they are a key mechanism by “which

an individual or a group discovers or establishes identity” (Dundes 151). When a storyteller identifies as Martinican and then tells a “Martinican” story, they are performing that identity, positioning themselves, and influencing how others understand what it means to be Martinican. That is to say, the self that individual storytellers are claiming and performing, how they position themselves as similar to or different from their audiences, which groups they align themselves with and against, and how these identities shift and multiply and create oppositions, are not merely about the story. This interweaving of folklore and identity in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana serves a broader function.

Specifically, folktales function as sites of memory and forgetting. Pierre Nora alludes to the importance of sites of memory to the individuals and/or communities who create them when he explains that “[t]he total psychologization of contemporary memory entails a completely new economy of the identity of self, the mechanics of memory, and the relevance of the past” (“Between Memory” 15). Although Nora speaks of memory, it is in remembering some aspects of a shared history and forgetting others that individuals are helping to define themselves and their groups. Furthermore, by performing this function, folktales help us answer Etienne Balibar’s question of “how the dominant reference points of individual identity [which make up national identity] change over time and with the changing institutional environment” (347). In their capacity as sites, folktales serve as reference points identifying the groups with which the individuals telling the tales align themselves, or what is their frame of reference. Recognizing folktales as sites of memory and forgetting therefore necessitates an understanding of who is “creating” the site, that is, of which community is constructing meaning through the object.

The question of alignment is also important and provides helpful insights into the target audience. If performance, and Antillean folktale performances specifically, are reliant on both

performer intention and audience reception for meaning making, so too are sites of memory and forgetting. Nora says as much, noting that “[t]he transformation of memory implies a decisive shift from the historical to the psychological, from the social to the individual, *from the objective message to its subjective reception*, from repetition to remembrance” (italics added, “Between Memory” 15). Similarly, Guy Beiner argues that “[h]istorical remembrance is generated by the interactions of readerships and audiences with such representations” (20). In other words, a site can only function as a site of remembering or forgetting if the community receives it as such by endowing it with that meaning and significance. In understanding folktales as sites of memory and forgetting that influence and are influenced by individuals’ understandings of themselves and their and their audiences’ communities, we must therefore investigate both the performer (and whom they purport to represent) and their envisioned audience (for whom the performer believes the performance will have meaning).

An analysis of the positionalities of performer and audience embodied in my corpus reveals several archetypal relationships. To refer to and distinguish between these, I have created the labels “by us/for us,” “by them/for us,” and “by us/for them” (to be explored in Chapter 5). Examining these allows us to understand how folktales are functioning, or even being manipulated, in the broader French-ish national context of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana.

Storytellers Performing for Members of The Community

At this juncture in the discussion, a consideration of the most traditional combination of storyteller and audience—namely that which is framed by storytelling within a given community group of what I term by us/for us—seems essential. This type of storytelling, dating back to the mythic image of the enslaved performer telling often transgressive stories for other enslaved peoples around a fire at night, is still common today. Indeed, many of my storytellers position

themselves as part of the same community as their audience. This section consists of a detailed analysis of several particularly rich and representative examples of by us/for us storytelling, of their framings and status. It begins with an analysis of how the storytellers talk about themselves and their tales which makes it plain that each story is told *by* community insiders *for* community insiders. It then analyses how the framing of each text reveals its position as a site of memory before turning to an understanding of how the alignment of storyteller and audience in one community creates a consequent oppositional understanding of an outsider “not-us” that also merits analysis. As I show, these examples illustrate a range of acknowledgement of this possible “not-us” audience even while discouraging it in various ways. Finally, this section concludes by unpacking the parts of history that these performances forget even as they primarily remember.

Before beginning this analysis, however, we must remember that this is a discussion of the tradition of telling folktales, the tradition that gives an individual story meaning. In thinking about this an analogy may prove helpful. Imagine a tangible geographical site of memory such as a war memorial. Such a memorial has meaning because both its creator and its audience endow it with significance. The community agrees that this is a place and way to remember those lost in and the overarching tragedy of said war. A gravestone may serve a similar function on a smaller scale. So, too, does the tradition of telling these tales have meaning because all members of the community, storyteller and audience, give it meaning.

How, then, do we read individual performances? When performed by and for community insiders, they are a way of building on and contributing to this (re)memory. In keeping with our metaphor, it is akin to community members leaving flowers at a war memorial or (in the Jewish tradition) piling stones atop a headstone in memory of the deceased. The individual performances discussed here are as many flowers or stones in that they are individuals’

affirmations of remembering what is important to remember and of forgetting what must be forgotten in order to belong to the greater community. Indeed, it does not seem insignificant that at the end of his seminal text on traces of memory, Chamoiseau quotes Albert Londres: “It seemed to me that I was in a strange cemetery and that I was going to place, not flowers, but a packet of tobacco on each tomb” (cited in *French Guiana* 29). This seminal text on traces of memory thus draws a similar parallel to the one I draw with folklore, correlating sites and ways of remembering and the act of leaving tobacco at *le bagne* (a postcolonial site of memory). A flower or stone or story in isolation has no meaning—they rely on context to be meaningful. It is through individuals’ work, then, and the ways in which they talk about it, that folktales as tradition are reinscribed with meaning by and for the community as sites of memory.

With this in mind, it is useful to begin this analysis of insider/outsider oppositions and the function of folktales as sites with a brief discussion of the extreme example of Guadeloupean storyteller Benzo. He has dozens of videos of himself telling stories in Creole on his YouTube page, *benzoleconteur* (Benzoleconteur). Benzo’s exclusive use of Creole and the corresponding assumption that his audience understands it plainly and consistently position him and his audience (the “I” and the “us”) as Creole.²¹³ His positioning of himself as a traditional Creole storyteller, including his exclusive use of the traditional language, suggests that his tales function as sites of memory for the Creole community. Furthermore, as a result of his language choice, the “not-I” is non-Creole, or, given the cultural context of his performances, perhaps more specifically monolingual French. His consistent and exclusive use of Creole creates a distinct border where anyone who does not speak Creole cannot access the content, thereby creating a

²¹³ There are regional differences between the Creoles of the various French overseas territories. The degree of inter-intelligibility is somewhat debated (depending on a variety of linguistic choices and nuances of each speaker). That said, it is likely that citizens of Martinique and Guiana, at least, would be able to make sense of and enjoy Benzo’s performances.

space designated entirely for the Creole-speaking insider community.²¹⁴ It is important to note that Benzo does make a gesture towards being open to incorporating outsiders into his community in that he does upload instructional videos to help a francophone audience learn Creole. Nonetheless, the exclusive use of Creole in his actual prolific storytelling creates an unmistakable example of us by us/for us performance with an extreme exclusion of possible outsider audiences. The language and storytelling choices here, then, perpetuate a non-French (even anti-French) narrative which is in keeping with the role folktales play of remembering the trauma the French inflicted.

Of course, once collections are presented in French, one has to look to other factors to understand the usually implicit ways by us/for us texts position storyteller (the “I”) and intended audience (“us”) as part of the same community. This frames the texts’ functions as sites. A relatively straightforward example of a by us/for us collection is Sylviane Telchid’s book *Ti-Chika...et d’autres contes antillais*. The title immediately situates the tales as Antillean. One must look to the introduction, written by her friend and colleague Hector Poulet, for further confirmation of the identity of the storyteller.²¹⁵ Poulet’s emphasis throughout his introduction on the Creole culture and language in relation to these tales positions Telchid as Creole. Finally, the first line of his introduction highlights her positionality as storyteller: “Voici quelques contes d’il y a longtemps, contes que Sylviane a pris le temps de transcrire pour vous” (*Ti-Chika* 8). The “I” of the performer is thus an Antillean Creole storyteller.

²¹⁴ This is the most closed a performance can be to a “not-I” audience apart from live, private recounting of tales, especially in intimate or domestic spheres. However, such domestic performances are limited in the audience they can reach, and they are, by definition, not part of this study. For a deeper discussion of the significance of Creole as a boundary-enforcer, please see my first chapter.

²¹⁵ While Telchid did not write this introduction herself, the obvious and close friendship between her and Poulet, and their work together on promoting Creole, imply they have similar if not identical positioning.

Pouillet's point that she took the time to transcribe her tales for "you" raises the question of who the intended audience is. Throughout the introduction, Pouillet addresses the reader as "mes grands" and continually uses "nous" in discussing the Creole language and culture. This situates both storyteller and audience as part of the same community. It is significant that Guadeloupeans Pouillet and Telchid had just the previous year published together the first Creole-French dictionary. Correspondingly, this folklore collection includes the texts and paratexts in French and Creole on facing pages. Finally, Pouillet concludes by exhorting the readers to tell (not just read) these stories, saying that if they do, "il se pourrait alors que nous redevenions les maîtres de ce jardin qu'est notre langue créole" (*Ti-Chika* 12). Pouillet's use of "nous" decidedly situates him and Telchid as part of the audience community which his discussion of "our Creole language" clarifies is Creole speakers. The identity, then, of both storyteller and intended audience in this case is those for whom Creole is heritage and culture.

Beyond this, Pouillet does not simply exhort the readers to read the stories. He begs the audience to "Lisez donc ces contes, mes grands ; lisez-les, puis comme Sylviane le faisait dans ses classes, allez les dire. N'ayez crainte d'y ajouter votre grain de sel, et l'épice de votre imagination, sans oublier de 'faire votre cinéma' avec les gestes..." (ellipses in original, *Ti-Chika* 14). In short, Pouillet encourages the audience to use this text, this performance, in order to become storytellers and performers themselves. In asking readers to perform these stories, to add their own touch, to include gestures, he invites the audience to become part of the storyteller community, to don the mantle of storyteller that Telchid is offering them.²¹⁶ In this text, Pouillet positions Telchid as both storyteller and inheritor and conduit of Creole language and culture—

²¹⁶ For a discussion of the implications of a text eliciting further performances, please see my third chapter.

identities that he either presumes the audience already shares or that he encourages them to adopt. The “I” and “Us,” then, are closely aligned in that they are both Creole storytellers.

Another, more complicated example (due to the multi-layered paratext) is Michel Lohier’s *Légendes et Contes Guyane* which, as we know, has three introductory pieces by three authors. There are several indications hinting at the storyteller’s positioning. First, of course, is the title itself which again provides an explicit positioning as Guianese. Beyond this, in the preface Ulrich Sophie emphasizes Guianese Creole culture and traditions, including discussing specific Guianese Creole texts (e.g., “Atipa” by Alfred Parépou), and a description of traditional life and stories of Guiana. His signature at the end of the Preface as “Ancien maire de Cayenne” further solidifies his positioning and lends him authority to present such a text (11). For him, the “I” of the storyteller is assuredly Guianese. Similarly, the very first line of the text’s Presentation (of the author) by Robert Vignon positions the text and Lohier: “Il serait bien vain de vouloir presenter M. Lohier aux Guyanais” (13). He continues, “[v]ain aussi d’évoquer ici son œuvre immense que beaucoup – sinon tous – connaissent déjà” (13). The implication that all Guianese already know Lohier and his work plainly situates him as part of that community, as Guianese. Finally, Lohier’s own Introduction is a detailed contextualization of the stories and storytelling tradition in his text. This sharing of insider knowledge of Guianese traditions positions him as an insider.²¹⁷ All three strongly imply that the “I” of the storyteller is Guianese.

Similarly, Sophie, Vignon, and Lohier all implicitly agree that the primary audience is community insiders, other Guianese. The very first sentence of Sophie’s preface indicates their

²¹⁷ Interestingly, a footnote after his signature at the end of his Introduction reads, “Instituteur. Conservateur du Musée et de la Bibliothèque A. Franconie. Commissaire préfectoral des peuplades primitives de la Guyane française. Décédé en Nov. 1973” (20). This positions him as both insider and expert. However, it also appears to not only not have been written by him, but to have been added for the reedition of this collection that happened after his death. He could not have approved it and it therefore does not necessarily reflect how he might have framed himself.

identification with the insider community: “Nul ne conteste sérieusement le fait à savoir que, sous ses différentes manifestations (chants, danses, récits), notre folklore disparaît lentement mais sûrement” (9). His use of “our” indicates that he and the reader are of the same community. The specific nature of the “we” becomes apparent in Sophie’s varied references to Guianese culture and tradition, as well as his signature demarcating himself as not only part of the community but actually a former leader. Comparably, Vignon’s emphasis on the fact that his audience already knows the Guianese tales that Lohier is sharing also patently positions the “us” of the audience as insiders, as those of the Guianese culture and traditions. Finally, Lohier ends his Introduction with a discussion of a particular story, concluding, “En racontant l’histoire à ses amis, notre danseur se signait constamment” (20). His use of the “our” positions his audience as part of the tradition of this dancer and this story. Demonstrably, then, both the “I” of the storyteller and the “us” of the audience are Guianese. In short, Lohier, too, is telling his stories for his community, by us/for us.

While the multiple storytellers in Raphaël Confiant’s collection, *Les maîtres de la parole créole*, all have multifaceted identities, all are united by the umbrella identity of Creole storyteller. Certainly, again, the title explicitly provides this grouping. Interestingly, nuancing this initial grouping is the prominent labeling of each storyteller’s island of origin on their biography pages. The formatting made it easy even for me, an outsider, to quickly conclude that of the storytellers included there are twenty-one from Martinique, one from Guadeloupe, one from Guiana, one from Saint-Lucie, one from Dominica, and one from Haiti. Of course, this obvious division by island of origin signals a division of identity within the insider community. They are not simply Creole storytellers, each is specifically a Martinican storyteller, a Guadeloupean storyteller, etc. This creates a more specific sub-identity identity within a larger

one. That said, the inclusion of a Creole saying at the start of each biography does (re)imply a broader unity of Creole storyteller.²¹⁸

Who then is the “us” of the audience? Confiant concludes his introduction stating that it is thanks to writing (and specifically this collection) that “un peu de la magie de la parole de nos vieux conteurs traditionnels” will be preserved (15). This “our,” in fact repeated throughout the introduction, implies that Confiant and the intended audience are Creole. However, it is worth noting that subtle explanations in the storyteller biographies imply that the audience may not be from the specific regions represented in the text. Often, these explanations betray an assumption that the reader is not necessarily intimately familiar with each island. For example, the biography of Saint-Louis Saint-Pierre, called Kokiyòl, begins, “À Rivière-Pilote, haut-lieu de la résistance populaire martiniquaise depuis les temps les plus reculés de l’esclavage...” (120). This identification of Rivière-Pilote and its history, which presumably would be known to an insider Martinican, implies that while the audience is Creole, they may not be specifically from Martinique. Finally, the repeated emphasis on the storytelling knowledge and expertise of both individual storytellers and of the storytellers as a whole creates an implied distinction between the audience and them. The imagined reader, the “us,” is thus a non-storyteller Creole. In the end, while the identities are shifting and varied, Creoleness is held in common between the “I” of the storytellers and the “us” of the intended audience. They are all part of the insider community of Creole and so this is a collection of Creoles telling tales for Creoles.

Diana Ramassamy’s “sequel” to Confiant’s text, *Les nouveaux maîtres de la parole créole*, largely picks up where his left off. This text has only one framing, an introduction by

²¹⁸ While details in the storytellers’ biographies do imply other divisions, e.g., modern versus traditional, expert versus novice, etc., ultimately this speaks more to their professionalization and authentication and less to their actual identities. For a further discussion of this, please see my next chapter.

Ramassamy herself, but it, the storyteller biographies, and the text's formatting all provide information on the positions of the "I" and the "us." The "I" of these storytellers is similar to those in Confiant's collection. This text, too, has a title indicating an initial, umbrella identity of Creole storyteller. This collection, too, prominently labels the storytellers by their island of origin. In fact, one could argue that Ramassamy frames these identities as even more important than Confiant does since the *Sommaire* includes the name of each storyteller and their island of origin while Confiant's *Table des matières* provides only the storytellers' names and titles of their tales. Furthermore, the addition of the city of origin adds the possibility of furthering these distinctions so that each storyteller is identified not just island but city. It is important to note, however, that this collection is more geographically even than Confiant's. There are five storytellers from Guiana, four from Guadeloupe (including one specified as being from Marie-Galante), and four from Martinique. The areas of origin are also intermixed in this collection, in contrast to Confiant's which is organized by geographical region.²¹⁹ This intermixing and more even distribution both reinforce the idea of the larger community of, in Ramassamy's words, "les sociétés creoles à tradition orale" (5).

Interestingly, while Confiant does not really position himself in relation to his storytellers (although his language makes it clear that he is at least part of the "us" of the audience), Ramassamy emphasizes her outsider status to the storytellers' "I's." In her discussion of the project of transcribing and translating these Creole folktales, Ramassamy explains that it required "une réflexion d'une vraie délicatesse, d'une grande profondeur, riche en pistes et en intuitions...Le timbre vocalique, le ton, l'éloquence qui caractérisent le maître de la parole ont

²¹⁹ While region appears to dictate how Confiant ordered his stories, in this case they appear to be listed in alphabetical order by the storytellers' last names. This minimizes the importance of regional identity even while the formatting highlights it.

accompagné *ma* traduction” (italics added, 7). This description of *her* translation, and of the delicacy, depth of understanding, and intuition that went into it positions her as part of the broader community of the Creole society with an oral tradition. She is obviously initiated enough to the secrets and understanding of this community to be able to understand and translate.

However, she explicitly indicates that she is not of the storytelling community. She talks about going “sur le terrain” with her photographer, and of how, “durant une longue période, [elle a] fait partie de l’environnement familial des conteurs” in order to collect these stories (5). This language of going out in the field and of living with the storytelling communities for long periods of time in order to truly understand and immerse herself in their culture not only plainly indicate her (at least initial) status as outsider to the geographic and storytelling communities, but also highlight her Otherness by invoking the language of the social sciences.²²⁰ Finally, at the end of her introduction, she explicitly positions herself as related to but separate from the storytellers, stating that “Ces nouveaux maîtres de la parole créole ouvrent le passage vers le monde dont ils viennent. Pour nous, ces hommes et ces femmes donnent forme à un pouvoir : celui de concilier oral et écrit et de maîtriser le temps” (7). The storytellers are from one world and “we” are from another that is blessed by a chance to see and understand their world.

This idea raises the question of who is the broader “us,” the target audience of this text. The book jacket provides the first suggestion of an answer to this by arguing that the book is indispensable to “toutes les bibliothèques des Antilles et de Guyane.” The “us,” then, is at least

²²⁰ It is important to note that Ramassamy herself is from Guadeloupe and that her talk of going out in “the field” does not refer to a land separate from her own, but rather to communities and spaces of which she was not initially a part, namely those of storytellers. She is an academic and researcher, so this language, while Othering to a storyteller, further positions her identity as scholar of story rather than teller of it (“Diana Ramassamy”). Of course, in positioning herself as scholar while simultaneously publishing a collection of tales (thus creating a performance of them) she is participating in the long, unusual tradition of Antillean storytelling blurring the lines between scholar and performer.

partly literate members of the Antilles and Guianese communities.²²¹ Furthermore, the layout of the book provides clues as to the intended audience that Ramassamy's "us" represents and its purpose. The first half of the book consists of transcriptions of the storytellers' exact words, as told in the live performance, complete with code-switching, call and response, and line breaks representing pauses. It is also accompanied by the biographies of the storytellers (in French) and pictures from these live performances. In contrast, the second half of the book, after a title page introducing the "traductions," consists of the translations of the stories in the same order in pure French, in prose, without pictures or information about the storytellers. The text thus creates an explicit and physical division between insiders who can understand the French-Creole code-switching and French monolinguals who cannot.²²² The "us" of the intended audience is members of the Creole culture and heritage who need no translation to understand these tellings.

This "us" is further reinforced by the images of the storytellers telling their stories live. Since no image includes a picture of the audience, but all images are action shots of the story unfolding, the reader of the text is put in the position of the audience of the story. The reader is, then, closely aligned with the auditor of the stories, which would have been people who understand Creole and the stories well enough to enjoy a live performance. This interpretation is yet further supported by the fact that the biographies give a city of origin in addition to an island of origin, while the French side of the book has no such detail.²²³ Only those from the islands would recognize or care about the cities where individual storytellers live. The text is therefore designated for, and Ramassamy closely aligns herself with, the ideal audience of those outside

²²¹ Of course, this reference to the book being indispensable to libraries returns to the issues of performance record, the need to create it, "fixing" living traditions, etc. and their implications discussed in previous chapters.

²²² In turn it also creates a meta-example of code-switching, creating a divide between the popular performance and the literary translation.

²²³ The existence of a "French side" does imply that the book is open to outsiders (please see the discussion below for more). The prominence of the Creole aspects, however, suggests that insiders are the *primary* intended audience.

the community of storytellers but inside the community of Creoles from the Antilles and Guiana who will get enjoyment from being initiated into the world of the storytellers.²²⁴ One could even argue that Ramassamy represents the “ideal” audience for this book: a cultural insider but storyteller outsider who understands, appreciates, and enjoys tales and their nuances without telling tales or being part of the storyteller community per se. Evidently, then, while the storytellers and audience are divided by their roles, they are nonetheless united in their membership in the insider community of Creole.

It is not only books, however, that position stories as told both by and to community insiders. The Creole website Potomitan.info is an online example. The identity of the storytellers on the site are incredibly varied. The fact that anyone can post a story suggests that anyone can become a storyteller and that this identity has relatively fluid boundaries here. However, the fact that some of the stories added are taken from other sources and thus originally told by other storytellers complicates this. For some contributors, the identity of storyteller is less rigid than for others. The submitter, then, may or may not position themselves as a storyteller. Here, too, the prominent labeling of the regional origins of the stories promotes a sense of breakdown in position and identity of the storytellers. However, some stories are not labeled at all which suggests that some contributors perhaps refused such delineation or felt their stories were more universally recognized and thus impossible to “pin down” to one region. All of them, however, are on a Creole site and thus once again unified under an umbrella identity of Creole.

The “us” of the audience is also, again, unified in this way. The homepage for the website says that it is “un lieu d’échange et de promotion de tous les créoles” and that it wants to be “un

²²⁴ One could argue that Ramassamy represents the “ideal” audience for this book: a cultural insider but storyteller outsider who understands, appreciates, and enjoys tales and their nuances without telling tales or being part of the storyteller community per se.

des piliers des langues et cultures créoles” (“Potomitan: Annou”). Taken at its broadest, then, this site positions itself as by Creoles for Creoles. Regardless of who else accesses the site, the intended “us” is decidedly Creole community insiders. In short, while the “I” of the storyteller and the “us” of the audience are here highly mutable and multi-faceted, they are even so once again united by Creoleness. This site, too, then is an example of a by us/for us performance.

Ultimately, for each of these performances, from Benzo to Potomitan to others not worth detailed discussion (e.g., Alain Rutil’s collection), the identities of both storyteller and audience align as Creole. These are performances by Creoles for Creoles.

Beyond this, each of the texts function as sites of memory for the Creole community. Often, the aspects that the performances remember are directly related to France’s colonial past which makes them specifically, per Etienne Achille, Charles Forsdick, and Lydie Moudileno’s collection, postcolonial sites of memory. In Telchid’s collection, for example, the same elements that position the communities involved in the text also highlight its role as a site of memory. In inviting readers to tell the tales themselves in their own styles, to become storytellers themselves, Pouillet invites them to become part of the tradition of memory. In saying that telling these tales in Creole is a way of cultivating their linguistic and cultural gardens, he is explicitly linking tales, the Creole language, and the region’s unique past and present. He implies that telling these tales allows the audience to reify and perpetuate the distinct Creole culture. In short, these tales foster (re)memory of a shared Creole identity.

Sophie makes this folkloric function even more explicit. He begins his Preface to Lohier’s collection lamenting the encroaching loss of folkloric traditions and Guianese culture more generally before commenting on the nature of Guianese tales. He then argues that in order to “apprécier le mérite de ces récits, il faudrait, semble-t-il, les placer dans leur cadre en ayant

soin d'avoir toujours présente à l'esprit la pénible condition sociale de nos aïeux africains uniquement guidés par leur faculté d'observation, et aussi par le vif désir d'apporter quelque adoucissement à leur vie obscure et sans issue apparente" (10). He continues, "D'autre part, les légendes rappelées ci-après, leur [les lecteurs] permettront de faire plus ample connaissance avec la vie fabuleuse des anciens possesseurs de cette terre guyanaise si riche de possibilités de toutes sortes" (10). In explicitly connecting the tales in the text to the disappearing-but-uniquely Guinean history, and specifically to African ancestors, and by saying that the tales themselves will allow readers to better know these ancestors, Sophie markedly positions the performance as functioning as a (postcolonial) site of memory.

Confiant also does this with his text. In addition to the ways in which he positions his entire text as a site of memory (discussed in previous chapters), his and Marcel Lebielle's discussions of the individual storytellers further cements its function. In both Lebielle's presentation of the storytellers as a whole and in their individual biographies there is a consistent emphasis on the storytellers' knowledge and expertise. In his "Les conteurs de Kontè Sanblé," Lebielle explains, "Nous n'avons rencontré aucun vieux conteur qui n'ait pas, après de nombreuses années de pratique dans les veillées funèbres, ressenti le besoin d'évoquer les souvenirs d'un de ses grands-parents conteurs. Dans tous les cas la lignée ancestrale exerça une influence certaine dans leur formation" (Confiant 17). This emphasis on the years that the storytellers have been practicing their craft, and on their connection to the longstanding tradition through their storyteller grandparents, highlights both their skill and their connection to a shared history.²²⁵ Multiple biographies of individual storytellers reinforce this. The biography of Jean-Claude Duverger, called Cristo, ends: "Avec une quarantaine d'années bien sonnées, sa double

²²⁵ This also hints at the issue of "authenticity." For more on this dynamic and the role it plays in these collections, please see the next chapter.

personnalité d'élus et d'artistes fait de Jean-Claude Duverger, le maître de la parole incontesté de Fort-de-France" (134). Again, there is an emphasis on the many years he has honed his skills and an explicit assertion that he is the uncontested expert in his region. This emphasis on the exceptional knowledge of the storyteller highlights their identity as "maître de la parole," keeper and transmitter of memory.

Indeed, there are many ways in which *Confiant* and *Lebielle* position the individual storytellers as expert bearers and translators of shared memory. The biography of Pierre Lavier, called both *Pyéwo* and *Monsieur Ramon*, ends: "Homme au savoir immense...Monsieur Ramon suit inlassablement son sentier en missionnaire du conte créole, parole dont il détient le secret. Il est celui qui sait" (38). *Monsieur Ramon* is he who knows who "we" are and where "we" come from, and in listening to him the community can remember. Similarly, *Lebielle* introduces one of the older storytellers by stating that "on ne saura jamais la profondeur des connaissances que renferme la bibliothèque humainement vivante du doyen des conteurs de la Caraïbe en la personne de Néré Cincinnatus" (18). In parallel with *Nora's* argument that historians themselves can become sites of memory, here we have the storyteller himself, in addition to his tales and the tradition he maintains, situated as essential to remembering Creole identity.

Furthermore, one of the explicit aims of the collection is to record and perpetuate these individual sites of memory, to both preserve them and also to bring them into the modern world, creating its own site in turn. In his introduction, *Confiant* laments that the fall of the sugar plantation "et son non-remplacement par un système économique et social cohérent provoqueront une espèce d'hébétéude de la langue et de la culture créoles, désormais aussi menacés que la société qui leur avait donné naissance" (14). He explains that "La tradition de récitation de contes au sein des veillées mortuaires était en voie de disparition" until his

storytelling series that gave rise to this collection (14). He then concludes, “grâce à l’écriture, sera préserve à travers les siècles un peu de la magie de la parole de nos vieux conteurs traditionnels” (15). Similarly, Lebielle argues that this collection “veut être l’écho de quelques-uns de ces derniers conteurs” (18). Clearly, this performance is a record, a (re)memorial of a disappearing tradition and the memories of the past that it encapsulates.

Beyond this, however, Confiant also explains that in creating this text another goal was to bring together “les derniers vieux conteurs traditionnels et encouragent les jeunes conteurs à se former à leur contact” (15). Similarly, Lebielle presents a younger storyteller in the collection as, for example, the “ambassadeur d’une nouvelle génération de conteurs” (20). But even this new generation is anchored in history, thus preserving the communal memory. For example, Alain Légarès “devint un conteur moderne à l’œuvre accomplie [qui] se souvient encore des grands maîtres de la parole d’antan” (125).²²⁶ For Confiant and Lebielle, then, even as new media and practices force an evolution of performances, they remain anchored in the tradition and thus bearers of memories essential for the survival of Creole culture. In short, Creole storytelling is a site of shared cultural memory.

Ramassamy, in turn, expands on this interest in modern evolutions of tales even while maintaining identity and function as sites of memory. She begins her introduction, and thus her whole collection, with the concept (if not the label) of sites of memory:

À l’origine, le conte s’inscrit dans la tradition orale. Dans les sociétés créoles, le conte est un genre littéraire très répandu. Il a pour singularité d’être une histoire impersonnelle et

²²⁶ This does not mean that Confiant and Lebielle do not recognize that modernity necessitates an evolution of tradition. For example, Confiant notes that while young storytellers will now carry the torch, “leur dire, leur phrasé est différent, le parlé ‘en rafales’ du conteur traditionnel n’est plus de leur apanage. Ils doivent adapter leurs contes à un univers désormais dominé par un nouveau type d’oralité, celui de la télévision, néo-oralité qui diffère de l’oralité traditionnelle autant que l’écrit sur papyrus diffère de l’écrit sur papier imprimé” (15). The tradition will modernize, but it will also stay anchored to the past, thus ensuring its survival as a site of memory.

codée qui nécessite la présence d'une personne pour en déployer les contenus cachés et lui attribuer une portée symbolique. Il permet d'entrer dans le système de représentations et le discours interne d'une société. Le conte a longtemps fait figure, pour les sociétés créoles à tradition orale, de précepte fondamental dans la transmission de certains aspects structuraux. Il a permis, depuis des temps immémoriaux, d'atteindre les métamorphoses de la sensibilité, les rêves de l'imaginaire et les visions collectives du monde. Si le conte est universel quant à sa structure et ses grands archétypes, il porte la marque du groupe social dont il émane parce qu'il est conçu à l'intérieur d'une tradition. Dans le contexte historique de l'esclavage, le conte résiste dans la mémoire de ceux qui entendent la voix d'une conteuse ou d'un conteur. (5)

There are many ideas here, all of which correlate to sites of memory. Ramassamy begins with the idea that, as we know, folktales come from the oral tradition and are widespread in Creole society. She then argues that they are special in that they require interaction for the coded meaning to be plainly understood, much like other sites of memory. She then argues that tales have long represented internal structural elements of their society. From time immemorial they have provided insights into the tellers' worldviews. Another way of stating this is that they function as a way to remember aspects essential to the society's identity. Folktales are specific to the individual communities from which they emanate, just as any site of memory both reflects and gets its meaning from its cultural context. In short, every idea here casts these tales and this tradition as sites of memory.²²⁷ She then concludes by linking this particular site of memory with

²²⁷ It is worth noting that Ramassamy in particular works to emphasize that even as performances shift with modernity they (can) maintain their function as sites of memory. For example, the book's jacket argues that the storytellers in the collection have "un pied dans la tradition et un autre dans la modernité."

resistance, thus demarcating it a postcolonial site of memory. While she does not use the term *lieu de mémoire*, that is plainly what she is describing.

Furthermore, throughout the introduction and especially at its conclusion, Ramassamy emphasizes the ability of storyteller and folktale to transcend the present moment, to reconnect, essentially to serve as a site of memory. She argues that telling a tale, “c’est suspendre le temps, autoriser celui qui l’écoute à s’échapper un temps du poids du réel,” noting that in order to do so the Creole tale needs a “formule spéciale, d’un rituel langagier, capable de détacher l’auditoire de toute entrave spatio-temporelle, c’est le *Yé krik ! Yé krak ! Yé mistikrik ! Yé mistikrak !* Formules d’introduction et de clôture que nous ne pouvons pas traduire, tant elles renvoient à un lieu hors de tout lieu” (6). Tales, then, exist in a place outside of place and a time outside of time. She then returns to this idea at the end of her introduction, providing a final reinforcement of the importance of these tales as sites. She concludes with the idea that “[d]e génération en génération, la parole ravive le conte et lui permet de perdurer au fil des ans, comme magnifiée par les conteurs et les conteuses. Ces nouveaux maîtres de la parole créole ouvrent le passage vers le monde dont ils viennent. Pour nous, ces hommes et ces femmes donnent forme à un pouvoir : celui de concilier oral et écrit et de maîtriser le temps” (7). Tales which get passed on offer access to the world from which they spring. In short, for Ramassamy, Creole tales are firmly rooted in and bearers of (postcolonial) tradition and memory.

Even Potomitan.info, despite its online nature that resembles a Wikipedia entry, positions itself as anchored in Creole storytelling tradition. The explanation that the creators chose this name “qui signifie le ‘poteau central’, pour indiquer que notre site veut être un des piliers des langues et culture créoles” highlight this (“Potomitan : Annou”). As a pillar of the Creole languages and culture the site is explicitly affiliating itself with Creole tradition and history. This

is underscored by its subheading “Site de promotion des cultures et des langues créoles / Annou voyé kreyòl douvan douvan.”

Furthermore, the tales page of the site alludes to a melding of historical and modern practices. Below the page title (“Conte créoles”) and before the links to the different stories are, in descending order, an image of a woman speaking into a microphone, two quotes, and a list of early (mostly nineteenth-century) publications of Creole tale collections. The image is captioned, explaining that it is a picture of Colina Bazil (La Dominique) performing at the Nuit du conte créole in Guadeloupe on October 29, 2004. The first quote reads “...la parole du conteur, c'est le son de sa gorge, mais aussi sa sueur, les roulades de ses yeux, son ventre, les dessins de ses mains, son odeur, celle de la compagnie, le son du ka et tous les silences. Il faut y ajouter la nuit autour, la pluie s'il pleut, les vibrations silencieuses du monde. - *Solibo Magnifique*, Patrick Chamoiseau” (“Contes Créoles”). The second quote is a short tale about the bird “appellé *gangan* ou *gògò*,” which is credited to Cofiant’s *Dictionnaire du créole martiniquais*. This superimposition of visual representation of a modern performance, linguistic description of traditional storytelling, example of a traditional tale, and then list of the earliest records of Creole folktales, all plainly imply a direct connection between tradition and modernity. That these precede the list of tales suggests that the tales presented on the site represent a melding, keeping one foot in history and one in modernity. That these tales are anchored in history (even if evolved) means they perpetuate, record, and serve as sites of memory. Tales told by Creole community insiders for community insiders function more or less explicitly as sites of postcolonial memory.²²⁸ By us/for us Creole performances are thus implicitly proclaiming along

²²⁸ For an analysis of other postcolonial sites of memory of the shared traumatic history of France’s Caribbean DOMs, and how said sites function in opposition to French national narratives, please see Anny-Dominique Curtius’s chapter “Slavery Memorials” in *Postcolonial Realms of Memory*.

with Chamoiseau, “I, a creole American, sing histories against History. / I sing memories against Memory. / I sing Memory traces against the Monument” (*French Guiana* 7).

It is significant, however, that in positioning these performances as sites of memory by us/for us, each of the performances are also, due in part to the oppositional nature of identity, creating a “not-us.” To truly understand the role of these performances as sites we must also understand this grouping and how the “not-us” affects the performances themselves. Again, each of the texts positions the insider community, one way or another, as Creoles. In so doing, they are implicitly or explicitly positioning the outsider community as non-Creoles. But both the definition of “non-Creole” and the text’s openness to being consumed and understood by “non-Creoles” is significant and worthy of discussion.

In Telchid’s text, Pouillet’s exhortation to the reader to tell stories in turn, in their own way, in order to breathe life back into and (re)cultivate the Creole language certainly implies that the community outsiders are those who have no vested interest in the richness and vitality of Creole culture and language. The “not-us,” then, is anyone for whom Creole is not a way of life. The fact that Pouillet spends two paragraphs of his short introduction bemoaning the lost way of life of telling stories in Creole to pass the time—as opposed to modern distractions like TV or modern pressures of productivity—further supports this understanding. The structure of the text itself also reinforces this idea. While the paratexts begin with the French text followed by the Creole, suggesting that they are aimed at a French audience, the tales themselves are transcribed in Creole and then translated into French. This fore-fronting of the Creole suggests an intended audience of Creole speakers over those who rely on the French translation. In addition, only the French translations have illustrations. This suggests that only the “not-us,” the non-Creole, would need help conjuring images due to lack of familiarity with the context or lack of

engagement with the tales. There is thus a sharp distinction between the potential monolingual French reader and the bilingual Creole for whom the text is intended.

The penultimate sentence to Pouillet's introduction still further emphasizes this distinction. He concludes, "Et quand bien même il vous reviendrait en mémoire ce proverbe : 'Palabre de nègres n'a pas de fin', ne vous en faites pas, c'est un secret entre nous, et croyez-moi, ce ne sera pas 'secret de chiens', si vous le voulez. Alors, allez-y!" (Telchid, *Ti-Chika* 15). For outsiders this quote requires some explanation. In it Pouillet is referring to several Creole proverbs. The first, "palabre de nègres n'a pas de fin" or "pale a nèg pa ka jen bout" roughly translates to the idea that the word or complaint of the "negro" never ends. The second, "secret de chiens" or "konplo a chyen" references the Guadeloupean Creole proverb "konplo a nèg sé konplo a chyen" or "Complot de nègres est comme complot de chiens," which conveys the idea that like dogs who fight amongst themselves Blacks are incapable of uniting in order to get what is due to them ("Kréyòl et Histoire"). In short, this quote encourages the reader not to worry about the length of their tales, that this tendency to longwindedness is a secret amongst themselves, and specifically that it is one that can bring them together rather than tear them apart if they so wish.

In addition to serving as an example of the richness of Creole that Pouillet has been lauding throughout his introduction, this one sentence also provides a wealth of clues about the text's communities and function. Pouillet is calling on very specific shared cultural knowledge with his use of a partial, de-contextualized Guadeloupean Creole proverb. He then includes the entirety of a more general Creole proverb and bundles the two as "secret" knowledge. The use of the two proverbs, with transliterated translations in the French but no explanation or contextualization, relies on a shared culture and a shared cultural memory exclusive to the

insider community and demarcating a boundary beyond which lies the non-Creole. The language, layout, and use of Creole in this collection thus creates a subtle-yet-undeniable distinction between the Creole insiders and French outsiders.

Furthermore, the first proverb's reference to "nègres" raises the issue of race which is an aspect of outsider-ness that is not explicitly discussed in any for us/by us performance but is nonetheless omnipresent under the surface. Poulet is implicitly labeling the stories in the text as "palabres de nègres." It is certainly true that both Telchid and Poulet are themselves Black Creoles.²²⁹ In light of this label, we must conclude that Poulet's exhortations are urging the reader to (re)tell and (re)perform Black stories. This implies that the insider community is, in fact, Black Creoles and that the excluded outsider community, the "not-us," is correspondingly white non-Creoles. Given the language choice and colonial history this strongly suggests that the "not us" outsiders are (white) French.

Regarding Lohier's collection, Sophie makes this "not-us" explicit: "De son lourd manteau, la départementalisation recouvre tout et bientôt n'émergeront que de quelques centres éloignés de Cayenne, les rares vestiges de l'esprit spécifiquement guyanais" (9). Sophie explicitly states that the "not-us" are the French whose cultural influence as a result of departmentalization is smothering that which is uniquely Guianese, including its tales-as-sites-of-memory. For Sophie, then, these tales and this performance are essential sites of memory that are (re)memorializing that which France would erase via departmentalization. He evidently views tales as Bhabha-ian supplements, remembering Guiana's unique subaltern history in the face of France's need to forget it.²³⁰

²²⁹ Benzo, too, is a Black Creole as are all of the actors/audience members featured in his videos.

²³⁰ It seems relevant that Sophie was mayor of Cayenne shortly before departmentalization, from 1941-1943. For an explanation of what I mean by "Bhabha-ian supplements" please see my Introduction.

Interestingly, Vignon and Lohier are less clear in their paratexts. Vignon concludes his Presentation with, “Tous ceux qui aiment la Guyane, tous ceux aussi qui aiment l’homme dans sa force et ses faiblesses, dans sa bonté et dans sa cruauté, dans sa loyauté et sa perfidie, liront avec joie ce livre, dédié à la Guyane et, par-dessus elle, à l’Humanité” (14). As we know, he addresses his Presentation to an insider audience who already knows Lohier and continues to emphasize the importance of Guiana throughout his conclusion. Yet his invitation to all of humanity to enjoy these books suggests that there is a universal appeal to these stories, that they are also for the “not-us” and/or for anyone who loves Guiana. This may be due, at least in part, to a desire to sell more copies of the book.²³¹ Finally, Lohier provides vast context for the stories and tradition he presents in the rest of the book in his Introduction. This context may be read two ways: either as trying to make these tales accessible (understandable) to a non-Creole “not-us” or, for the insider, serving to memorialize the folktales by explaining their meaning to future generations and thus cementing their import as sites of memory for those generations.²³² Sophie is thus explicitly writing against a French “non-us” while Vignon seems to be writing for them and Lohier’s opinion is unclear. While none of the authors so much as allude to race, it seems significant that anti-French Sophie was Black, universalist Vignon was white, and ambiguous Lohier was Amerindian.

Like Lohier, Confiant’s text provides much contextualization of the tales and the history of the tradition. However, in this case his emphasis is on the role of the text as a record of a dying tradition, as a site of memory, and as a way of bringing together the youth of today and

²³¹ For more on the impact of capitalism and consumer markets on this tradition, please see my next chapter.

²³² This relates to the question of why the text is written in French. Again, the reasons for this could partly be because it was more marketable, especially when the text was first published. But the fact that it was republished as part of a Creole movement means it could have easily been published then in Creole. The fact that it was not may, in part, highlight this openness to a non-Creole-speaking audience. Or, conversely, it may be an acknowledgement of the possibility of insider readers who are either no longer facile in Creole or at least not (yet) in written Creole.

future generations who are familiar with “la créolité moderne” but not with traditional *créolité* which is “directement liée à la société de plantation” (15). His reason for this contextualization is to preserve the tradition and its connection to its historical roots for future (insider) audience members. In this way, Confiant’s text is not so much focused on accessibility to a wide audience, including the French, as it is a memorial of this tradition and the past it (re)presents. His Introduction, then, is the explanatory plaque that announces a statue’s significance for one’s descendants after those who erected it are gone. In other words, Confiant’s collection exists for the geographic insiders but temporal outsiders, to record their roots for those who share the same culture but are in danger of forgetting their history. While it is apparently open and accessible to geographic outsiders, its purpose and intended audience are deeply rooted in geography and tradition to maintain insider status for those who come after.²³³ Finally, in this text, too, race is not even alluded to but not only is Confiant himself Black, so too is every single storyteller featured in the text (at least as coded by their photographs).²³⁴

In Ramassamy’s text, questions of both race and definition of and openness to the “not-us” are even more complicated. Again, at first reading, Ramassamy’s introduction with its detailed discussion of the tradition of folktales and their practice today appears to be accommodating an audience of cultural outsiders by providing them the context necessary to understand and enjoy her text. However, a close reading of the introduction shows that she is, in

²³³ Confiant acknowledges that translation of the tales into French is problematic, explaining that “Nous nous sommes efforcés de mouler le français dans la rythmique du créole, de calquer les images et les métaphores qui ornent ces contes, en évitant toute espèce de littérisation qui ne ferait qu’accentuer la trahison qui est au cœur de toute traduction” (14). In other words, he discusses the betrayal of translation (in this case both from Creole to French and from oral to written), acknowledging that something is lost in the process but that (implicitly) it is necessary in order to preserve these stories for future generations. Perhaps this is due to commodification since at the time Confiant published this text it would have been difficult to publish a monolingual Creole text. However, more likely, this reflects his fear that Creole was itself a dying tradition and that future generations would not be able to read it; this text was published before he successfully instituted the CAPES Créole.

²³⁴ This conclusion, of course, is only possible because of the reintroduction of the storytellers’ body, their corporeal presence, into the text via photography.

fact, writing for a Creole audience (who also happens to speak French). She explains how in the “Antilles et en Guyane, la langue créole fait partie intégrante de cet héritage authentique,” and that Creole exists side-by-side with French and is France’s largest regional language. The tales in the collection were told in Creole and only translated into French. She also argues that to transport “le lecteur du créole au français, c’est faire état de tous ces individus qui baignent dans un univers culturel et linguistique créolophone et qui pensent selon les schèmes de la langue française” (7). In other words, Creole is more than just the largest regional language of France—it is essential to Creole identity. It is the true language of the tales and is the essential delineator of the intended audience of those whose identity is bilingual, *both French and Creole*.

Ramassamy highlights the Creoleness of her text (even the French parts) and how it shapes the “us” community. She describes the need to play with “les sens et la sensibilité du bilinguisme” and how Creole “a ensemencé le français de ses propres projets de littérature orale. Dans les textes français luisent les étincelles des formules orale créoles, des mélodies psalmodiées et la force du verbe des maîtres de la parole créole. Cette littérature de voix, créée pour être interprétée, met en évidence *la relation intrinsèque qui existe entre le conteur et l’auditoire*” (italics added, 7). Creole has worked its way into all parts of the text, even the French translations, and it is this written orality that highlights the importance of the audience to the storyteller. For Ramassamy the audience is, or at least should be, those for whom this oral literature in Creolized French is not only understandable but is defining: French-Creole bilinguals. It is only they who can truly bring out the interplay between storyteller and audience that is essential to Creole storytelling. A monolingual French-speaking audience will never truly understand, never truly be able to access all levels of the text.

Her assertion that, in order to be “au plus près de la voix des conteurs, j’ai intégré le public, auquel il appartient toujours d’intervenir et sans lequel le conteur n’a plus de raison d’être” further supports this interpretation (6). Since, as Ramassamy is careful to note, these performances were carried out “on site” in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana, the live audiences she describes are most likely natives of the regions. In emphasizing their importance over the reader of the book due to their ability to interact with the storyteller the way that a traditional audience “should,” she is implying that they are the principal audience. This denies importance of the potential monolingual outsider reader of the text. It is also again worth remarking that due to the cultural context a monolingual French audience is most likely white.

In fact, in considering race (even though the text itself does not do so explicitly), we can arrive at a possible understanding of why Ramassamy works so hard to explain her relationship to the storytellers when our other collectors do not. Ramassamy is of southeast Asian descent. Antilleans of that background have a complex relationship to Creole culture and language. Southeast Asians emigrated forcibly or by choice to the Caribbean mostly after the 1848 definitive abolishment of slavery in France. Furthermore, Ellen Schnepel explains that the Creole nationalist movements’ emphasis on the Creole language and elements of Creole culture such as *Gwoka music* “was frequently an alienating one for the minority Indian population who had been ignored in the nationalist debate. *Gwoka* is not part of Indian ancestral music (although other genres of drum music are), nor did the Creole language necessarily have the same symbolic or ideological meanings and associations for this group” (214-215). Specifically, while “Creole was the lingua franca of the plantation in the second half of the 19th century when Indians were introduced to the Antilles as a new labor force, the language had a dual representation for them: as an agent of domination, particularly in their relations with non-Indians (*békés* as well as

Creoles of color), but also as a means of integration as they became progressively creolized and Creole became their mother tongue” (215). Indeed, “[w]hile many Indians remained monolingual Creole speakers well into the second half of the 20th century, as a result of their rural isolation and lack of schooling, they did not necessarily view the vernacular as a means of cultural and political resistance to French domination as did many Guadeloupeans of African descent” (Schnepel 215). Southeast Asians such as Ramassamy, then, are only problematically aligned—if at all—with the elements of Creole culture resultant from slavery and plantations.

Ramassamy, for her part, devotes the fourth paragraph of her introduction (immediately after her discussion of tales as sites of memory even as they evolve with modernity) to a detailed description of the fieldwork she carried out in order to create the book. She describes how she and her photographer, Anne Chopin, went out into the “field” of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana, to meet and live with the storytellers and their audiences. She emphasizes how in order to make this text she had to truly connect with them, which was only possible “grâce à la patience, au respect et à l’empathie réciproque qui ont uni sur place tous les acteurs. Ce projet a demandé du temps. Le temps de se connaître, de se parler, de se comprendre, de s’accepter” (5). She then emphasizes how Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana were each in turn her “lieux de résidence, et durant une longue période” and how she “fait partie de l’environnement familial des conteurs” (5). In other words, Ramassamy works hard in a prominent part of her introduction to explain how she became part of the storyteller community, or at least of their audience’s. This effort is striking in that none of the creators of the other texts in this section feel the need to do so. This suggests she either identifies herself or wishes to preempt others identifying her as outsider—only partially aligned with the text’s insider community of arguably *Black* Creoles—and consequently feels the need to justify her role as collector.

Again, in this text race is never explicitly engaged with but a close reading reveals its omnipresence as subtext. Among the pictures of storytellers in the text, all but two code as Black. Of the two that do not, one is Mauricienne Fortino, who is explicitly described as “conteuse amérindienne d’origine Palikur,” a status that is arguably even more Creole than Blacks (51).²³⁵ The second, Martine Palton, does not have her background specified. While she may not code as Black, she certainly codes as non-white (61). This implies that the insider community of the storytellers is non-white Creoles. Ramassamy’s legitimizing her own positioning and integration into the storytelling community suggests that the community is primarily Black. Her emphasis on the need to literally become part of the environment in order to carry out this work implies that any outsider who does not do so will never truly understand. Finally, her subtle invalidation or discounting of monolingual French audiences draws a boundary between the insider Black Creoles, or at least Creoles of color, and the “not us” of anyone else. Read in this light, it becomes evident that the detailed context she provides of folktales, especially as they function as sites of memory, is actually to reassure her insider audience that the text is still for insiders, still a part of the tradition, still playing the same function they expect, even if it is modern and collected by an “outsider.” In short, her detailed contextualization, far from making the text accessible to outsiders, is an attempt to justify and reassure her insider audience that her work is an authentic by us/for us production that can be read as a *lieu de memoire*.

Finally, the website Potomitan.info is similar to Ramassamy’s text in that it, too, appears to be designated for a broad audience but a close reading reveals a suggestion of a racialized “us” and “not-us.” It is a free website open to anyone with internet access which includes French

²³⁵ This is the same storyteller who authored the collection *Les Neuf chimanes et le maître de la pluie*, also in my corpus. For a detailed discussion of this text, please see my next chapter.

alongside Creole thus giving the impression of universality. Furthermore, because each tale represents a different performer and is, in a way, its own performance, the site has a range of openness to outsider non-Creole audiences including a wide range of contextualization of the contributed stories, of information (or lack thereof) about their authors, and of explication of the stories themselves. There is also a wide range in the willingness of the storytellers to make their texts accessible and understandable to outsiders. And, of course, accessibility to all is a fundamental property of the internet.

That said, a close reading of the site as a whole implies a potentially racialized “not-us” and general closedness to this outsider audience. Certainly, the stated goals of the site and its ubiquitous Creole (including sayings and quotes in Creole that are not translated into French) imply that the site is designated (only) for bilingual Creole-French speakers. Indeed, the use of French at all may, in fact, be a reflection of its importance as a way to communicate merely between different Creole speakers (Bernabé and Confiant 220). The few images on the site reinforce this interpretation. When one opens the page as a tab in a browser an icon appears alongside the website name in the tab itself. For Potomitan, this image is difficult to interpret (in part because it is small) but appears to be an image of African art or even an African shield. The color scheme of the site (background tan and red) then mirrors this image, reinforcing the idea that this apparently African image represents the site as a whole. Beyond this, all or almost all of the images of humans included on the site, illustrations or photographs, feature Black skin.

In addition, the only image on the homepage apart from occasional book jackets of promoted materials is that of the banner. It is a picture of an image carved in stone, apparently of a person speaking. This image has no context on the site whatsoever, but is, in fact, a prehistoric carving attributed to the Amerindian peoples, the Kalinago, or, as they are better known, the

Caribs. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Caribs are the people after whom the Caribbean is named. The fact that the image serves as a link back to the homepage of the site further reinforces its symbolic import. The use of this image, then, has many layers of meaning. In using a prehistoric image, the site firmly anchors itself in the history of the region, dating back even before written or oral records. In using an Amerindian image the site is claiming a status as linked to the land and the earliest cultures on this land. In using a specifically Carib image there is a claim to geographic and cultural specificity, to a definition of the site as somehow quintessentially “Caribbean.” All of this seems to create a distinct opposition to the white European cultures who decimated the Carib peoples. Finally, in providing no context for the image this site is subtly denying access or understanding to outsiders since only insiders will recognize the image and thus the site’s associations, and therefore only they will have full access or understanding of and to it. Of course, in reading the African and Carib iconography together (again, the only non-promotional images on the homepage), we can understand the site as claiming a non-white identity, referencing two vastly different peoples who were brought together only due to the violent interference of white Europeans. One can thus understand the “us” of the site as bilingual Creoles of color who exist because of, but in opposition to, white monolingual French. The subtleties of these affiliations ensure that only the former truly belong.

All of the by us/for us texts, then, position the insider community of Creoles in direct opposition to and even closed off from the “not us” of non-Creoles. It is, however, important to note that many of these texts appear to express an awareness of the doubleness of their audience and their text’s “work on two levels”—communicating a superficial message to community outsiders and a more profound one to community insiders (Cruikshanks 59). Pouillet’s reference to a “secret among us,” Vignon’s emphasis that any human can enjoy the tales, the superficial

openness to a white French monolingual outsider presented by Confiant, Ramassamy, and Potomitan, etc. all support this understanding of doubleness. This may reflect commercial pressures—to get published and/or survive texts need to at least appear to be interesting and marketable to the broader French audience. Or it may represent an openness to the possibility of initiation, much like Benzo’s “olive branch” of offering lessons in Creole to monolingual French speakers. The majority of outsiders, however, will merely understand the tales as tales. It is only if one can notice these subtleties that one can also understand the layers of meaning of the performances as sites of memory and thus is “allowed” to access them.

Furthermore, there is a never stated but underlying thread throughout all of these texts, implying that “Creole” is being racially coded as Black or at least non-white.²³⁶ These by us/for us performances, then, are all actually Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC, i.e., non-white) Creole stories for BIPOC audiences. Implicitly, this means that they are functioning as sites of memory primarily or exclusively for Creole BIPOC communities. While this is perhaps not surprising, given the repeated emphasis on the connection between these tales and traditions and an enslaved past, it does have significant implications. Specifically, in excluding whites and even in some cases any non-Blacks, these texts are forgetting the important role that those outsiders played in the creation of this tradition.

Of these performances, most elide non-African influences completely. Pouillet’s reference to tales as the words of Blacks certainly seems to imply that they are a tradition free of other influences. For Lohier’s collection, Sophie’s lamentation about the influence of departmentalization and the homogenizing powers of mainland France, the Hexagon, certainly imply it. Furthermore, in his detailed description of the history of Guianese folktales, Lohier says

²³⁶ Of course, as Schnepel has proven, this conflation of Creole and Black is often the case in these regions.

that “[l]es conteurs guyanais, originaires d’Afrique, avaient l’imagination très fertile” and that “[l]’histoire de la Guyane est peuplée de legends. Les noirs de l’Afrique en ont apporté la plupart” (15; 17). Confiant’s collection at least acknowledges the range of influences on Creole storytelling tradition, but even he, in his choice of storytellers to include in the collection, seems to imply that these influences are past and the tradition now only belongs to Blacks. Ramassamy similarly acknowledges Amerindian participation in her inclusion of Fortino, but her need to justify her own positionality implies that she, too, ultimately sees the tradition as being primarily by and for those of African descent only. Potomitan’s iconography carries similar implications. In short, the by us/for us texts minimize and elide all non-African influences and the myriad influences on this tradition—especially the influence of white Europeans.

In presenting these texts as by Black Creoles for Black Creoles, then, these storytellers are also positioning them, albeit inadvertently, as sites of forgetting. In framing these tales as explicitly non-French they are forgetting or eliding the French influence. In remembering the traumatic history of enforced migration and labor of (mostly) Africans, these traditions are forgetting the rest of their history. In exclusively focusing on their Blackness and/or Africanness in framing tales as sites of memory, in using folktales as sites of memory of a specifically non-French (non-white) identity, in defining themselves and their traditions in opposition to French, these storytellers and communities are forgetting the ways in which Martinicans, Guadeloupeans, and Guineans *are* French.

Indeed, this aspect of forgetting has strong political undertones. Schnepel argues Creolist nationalist movements in these regions use their Africanness as a unifying point of departure, explaining that “[i]n overlooking the contributions of other ethnic groups and singling out the *africanité* of the cultural heritage of Guadeloupeans, the nationalist metaphor of Creole culture

eclipsed a strong racial content” (214). That is, in creating a Creole community and a conceptualization of what it means to be Creole, Creole nationalist movements in the Caribbean have focused on African roots and the traumatic rupture with that past as their foundational moment. Such a Creole nation is based around a shared national narrative *beginning in Africa*. This narrative can easily incorporate the Amerindians native to the region who were also tortured, killed, and culturally decimated by the white, European settlers. It can problematically incorporate other influences, such as Southeast Asian ones, which have elements in common (rupture, forced labor, oppression) but also maintained their own cultural distinctiveness.

It cannot, however, incorporate European influences since remembering the pivotal role Europeans played and continue to play in the creation of Creole identity would create cognitive dissonance with the foundational moment of enslavement of Africans, with the national narrative of oppression, and with the nationalist movements’ goals of independence from Europe.²³⁷ This history, then, must be forgotten. In addition to the examples above, this forgetting is embodied by the unusual omission in most of the texts of my corpus of traditional folklore studies analysis or classification. That most of the texts in my corpus do not even classify their tales (which is common practice in other folkloric traditions) represents a rejection of recognizing their European influence, a rejection of similarity or mutual intelligibility. This erasure from Creole storytelling traditions thus reflects the role that said traditions play as simultaneous sites of remembering of the things that bring the insider community together and sites of forgetting of the elements that are dissonant with that narrative in service to the broader nation-creation goals and invention of a Creole national narrative. This raises the question of how the metropolitan French make sense of these tales, which are so easily accessible to them, and which forget or

²³⁷ That language and race are so intermixed as visible/invisible barriers is in keeping with Balibar’s conceptions of nationhood. Please see my first chapter for a detailed discussion of this.

deny Creole Frenchness even while remembering elements that are antithetical to Frenchness. The answer lies in (re)appropriation.

Community Outsiders Eliciting Performances

A close analysis of some of the performances in my corpus reveals that there is another much less traditional combination of audience and storyteller, that which I term by them/for us. In other words, there are instances of Creole storytelling that exist because non-Creole French audiences have elicited these performances. If the telling of by us/for us stories is akin to members of a community contributing their bouquets or stones to a physical site of memory, then this practice is more akin to photographing the bouquets or stones piled on a gravestone in order to admire a “quaint” tradition.²³⁸ This type of performance, like creating the photograph, appropriates these individual contributions to serve different ends. Ultimately, as an analysis of several examples of this type of performance reveals, by them/for us performances also function simultaneously as sites of remembering and forgetting but in very different ways as they are serving completely different national narratives. Again, I begin by identifying the communities for each example before turning to a discussion of their role and function as sites.

With performances that are elicited by community outsiders, the identity if the “us” is reversed. Rather than the performer and audience sharing the identity of “us,” the elicitors and audience are now the “us” in contrast with and separate from the “them” of the storytellers. In these cases, then, the framer’s insider community is no longer the storyteller’s and in fact the storyteller is now an outsider. An analysis of this positionality must begin with an understanding

²³⁸ Another possible extension of this metaphor is the scene at the end of the film *Schindler’s List* which shows the real-life Jewish survivors leaving stones on Oscar Schindler’s grave. The survivors are performing acts that add to and build upon a meaningful site of memory for their community. The film is commodifying the performance of this memory.

of those doing the framing, that is to say the solicitors of the tales, and only then with an understanding of the storytellers. This allows an examination of the performances' functions.

The description of Martinican storyteller Valer' Egouy's planned performance at the 2016 Festival Interculturel du Conte de Vassivière, "Parole de conteurs" in Nouvelle Aquitaine, put on by the group Conte en Creuse is an example of a by them/for us framing. The "Parole de conteurs" is an annual festival featuring stories and storytellers from around France and the world. The positionality of the group Conte en Creuse, the "I" of the solicitors of this performance, becomes clear in their descriptions of "Qui sommes-nous ?" on their website. On that page they give their address, based in Royère de Vassivière, France (in the Hexagon) and begin their self-description, "Conte en Creuse, association loi 1901, reconnue Organisme d'Intérêt Général, a pour objet de participer et de contribuer par toute action à la promotion du Conte et des Arts du Récit dans tous leurs aspects" ("Qui sommes-nous ?"). They are also registered as a benefit claimant as a training organization ("Qui sommes-nous ?"). Finally, in the literature supporting their 2020 event they also thank a long list of local governments (mayors, departments, etc.) for their help and support ("Parci-Parlà !").

Furthermore, on the same page they also list among their "actions menées" their research work, "Recherche : Collectage du patrimoine orale" ("Qui sommes-nous ?"). This emphasis on their work consisting, in part, of the research and collection of oral heritage is significant, for it implies an official role as cultural experts (i.e., gatekeepers) and therefore puts the group in a position of power. This information, in conjunction with their location, legal status, and the fact that they list support from the region of Limousin (and link to its tourism page on their site) all position the organization. The "us" of the solicitors in this case is cultural experts and

gatekeepers from the Hexagon, specifically the Limousin region and the commune of Royère-de-Vassivière, and even with ties to the French government.

In contrast, their audience is less explicitly defined but nonetheless closely aligned with them. The “Parole de Conteurs” is a live festival that takes place annually on the Ile de Vassivière. While the literature of the festival suggests an openness to anyone who wishes to attend (including having links to social media and encouraging sharing them far and wide), the nature of a live event necessitates a limited and relatively geographically-fixed audience. In theory anyone could travel to attend this festival, but the literature does not boast of a large international audience and there is no information for travelers on the website. This implies that in reality the majority of the audience is likely relatively local. In addition, the fact that the “teaser” for the 2019 festival includes the question “Mais que pensez-vous de...découvrir si **Barbe Bleue** a vécu dans le château de Vassivière... **Pierre Desvigne** nous le dira” implies a local audience (bold in original, “25 ans”). It would be those local to Vassivière that would be most interested in discovering if their castle has ties to Blue Beard. Finally, the page describing Valer’Egouy’s then-upcoming performance frequently uses “nous” or “nos” to refer to his audience (“Valer’Egouy”). Since the authors of the page, the solicitors, are metropolitan French their use of “nous” implies that their audience is as well. The “us” of the solicitors and the “us” of the audience, then, are closely aligned and presumably all French if not specifically from the Limousin region of France. It is for this “us” that stories “by them” are performed.

Who, then, is the “them” of the storyteller? What is their positionality? The description of Valer’Egouy positions his identity as different from or opposed to the solicitors’ and audience’s aligned identity. Throughout the short blurb describing him there is a repeated emphasis on his Martinican heritage. It also labels him as “un conteur Martiniquais aux sonorités créoles [qui]

nous entrain[e]nt dans ces paysage magnifiques” and who is “[a]ttentif aux problèmes de son île” and describes his upcoming performance as “une invitation à voyager dans une partie de la culture Créole de la Martinique” (“Valer’Egouy”). Valer’Egouy is thus positioned as Martinican and Creole, *not* French. This labeling creates a first level of Othering that serves to highlight how he is not part of the insider group made up French people from the region of Limousin. It is particularly Othering in that the solicitors and audience are not *explicitly* labeled in the same way which ultimately means that the “us” corresponds to the unspoken status quo.

Furthermore, the explanation that he sweeps “us” along *his* magnificent landscapes (they are therefore not our landscapes), that he is attentive to the problems of *his* island (not our island), and that his performance is an invitation to *travel* through part of Martinique’s Creole culture (implicitly helping us discover a culture we are not part of) all create an undeniable divide, a sharp opposition, between the us of the solicitors/audience and the storyteller. This is not a voyage to another part of France. There is thus a second level of opposition here in the decided contrast between the two. He is not simply not-French, he is Martinican-which-is-different-from-us-French. That Valer’Egouy is one of very few Black storytellers featured on the site in the various promotional materials seems not immaterial. In this case, Valer’Egouy is plainly solicited to tell “his” stories, from his culture, to the culturally distinct “us.”

Another by them/for us performance worthy of analysis is Lemaire’s collection, *Contes et récits métissés de Guyane: L’homme mélangé*. The collection is written by Didier Lemaire who, the back cover tells us, is a “métro qui a subi un double envoûtement, celui de la Guadeloupe et de la Guyane, au point de se métisser.” This notion of enchantment and mixing establishes a boundary, albeit one that Lemaire has crossed. Furthermore, the biography of Lemaire tells us that he is a “professeur de Lettres qui a enseigné à la Guadeloupe et en Guyane.” The storyteller

is, then, an elite professional metropolitan Frenchman. However, as the title of the collection tells us (as does the emphasis in all descriptions of Lemaire as having ties to Guadeloupe and Guiana), the stories are from Guiana. This appears to be a contradiction. How can a white metropolitan Frenchman be part of the “us” of Guianese storytelling? The answer to this lies in a subtle mention in Lemaire’s biography on the back cover of the book, which states not only that he is a teacher in Guadeloupe and Guiana but that he also “a ressenti le besoin de transmettre par ses récits ce que lui ont appris ses élèves.” These stories, then, are not actually Lemaire’s, but rather his students’. He is the solicitor (and publisher/beneficiary!) of them. In addition, a quick Google search of Didier Lemaire clarifies that he is white, a conclusion one might draw from the context of this discussion. The positionality of the solicitor is that of a white Frenchman from the Hexagon who has been bewitched by France’s Caribbean DOMs.

Lemaire is certainly part of the “us” of the intended audience as it is implied through language that is subtle but ubiquitous. The back cover tells us that behind “ce tissage de contes et de récits, de français et de créole, de morceaux de passé et de présent, on entend battre le cœur de la Guyane d’aujourd’hui.” This description, and others like it such as a reference to the “monde antillo-guyanais,” all imply that the audience is not Guianese because the Guianese do not need to hear their own hearts or be exposed to their own world since they already live it. The back cover also explains that it is “à travers ces *êtres* ‘différents, riches des leçons de la plus douloureuse des histoires...’, [qu’]on perçoit les déchirements et les espoirs engendrés par le métissage des *êtres* et de la culture” (italics added). The reference to the Guianese as “beings” markedly Others them from the reading audience, as does the suggestion that engaging with their culture (something actually an aspect of France) represents an interbreeding. The audience is not Guianese. Some final clues as the audience of the text lie in the language of Yves Leborgne’s

Preface. For example, he refers to the happiness some find in “une *créolisation* irresistible de la France, de l’abolition de notre différence” (8-9). In talking about France and then using the term “us” in the same sentence Leborgne identifies the audience of the text, the “us,” as French and presumably even French from the Hexagon like Lemaire was originally.

In identifying the “us” of solicitor and audience the “them” of the storytellers has also been illuminated as Guianese. Certainly, the concept that here Lemaire is merely “transmitting” the stories of his students clarifies that the actual storytellers are Guadeloupean and Guinean. So, too, does the title of the text which explicitly states that the tales are from Guadeloupe. Even the image on the front cover of the book, of a naked Black woman standing in front of (apparent) palm leaves positions the “them” in its implication that the collection represents the same community as the woman on the cover, presumably native Guineans. As a last note, the back cover also reports that “dans la Guyane de ces textes se croisent et se mêlent Guyanais de toutes origines, Guadeloupéens, Martiniquais, Saint-Luciens, Haïtiens, etc.” The idea that all *Guianese*, even those originally from other regions, are behind this collection reinforces that the “them” of the storyteller community is Guianese or, more broadly, those from the francophone Caribbean. Note that this list does *not* include Guineans of “French” or “metro” origin such as Lemaire. Does this betray a racial element implying that whites cannot be truly Guianese? Or a cultural one such as the idea that one must be from another Creolized region to truly “count”? In any case, it is significant that this implies that Lemaire cannot be truly part of the “them” community of the stories’ creators even as he is the one ostensibly telling the tales. A close reading of the paratext of this collection illuminates that this is a Black Caribbean performance solicited for a white French audience, or by them for us.

A final prime example of a by them/for us performance is the website conte-moi.net. Again, Conte-moi is, according to its homepage, “un projet de **collecte et de valorisation du patrimoine oral francophone**” (bold in original, “Accueil”). Also on the homepage is a prominent info box leading to one of the site’s tabs, “Conte-moi la lecture,” which asks, “Vous êtes enseignant ? Découvrez un espace dédié pour travailler la lecture avec vos élèves. Réalisé avec le soutien du Ministère de l’Éducation nationale” and featuring the Minister’s official title and seal (“Accueil”). One of the very first things a visitor to the site sees, then, is an official French government seal and endorsement by a Ministry. The Conte-moi site thus prominently displays its affiliation not with a community nor even a local government, but rather with an official French national government representative.

The site’s information page, “Le projet Conte-moi,” explains that it is a program administered by the Deci-dela association and by Tralalere. Deci-dela is, like Conte en Creuse, a non-profit organization (une association loi 1901) and Tralalere produces online educational materials. Much like the Conte en Creuse organization and its festival, then, the Conte-moi project is put on by non-profit educational organizations and is funded by the French government. The information page also clearly labels their collection, “Conte-moi la francophonie” as a place where you can “[**d**]écouvrez les contes collectés dans différents pays en français et en langue locale” (bold in original, “Le projet Conte-moi”). This preference of French as the natural language and positioning any other language as the alternative (“the local language”) indicate that the position of the site creators is French. Plainly, the story solicitors identify and align with mainland France and even the French government.

The positioning of the intended audience, the “us,” is also evident. In fact, the website is aimed at two slightly different audiences. The first audience is the more explicit of the two. As

the quote endorsed by the Minister of Education from the homepage illustrates, the “Conte-moi la lecture” page is aimed at instructors. This fact is even more explicitly stated on the “la lecture” page itself, whose subtitle reads, “Une plateforme interactive pour travailler la lecture littéraire avec vos élèves” (“Conte-moi la lecture”). It also features a link which instructors can use to connect with each other. Significantly, there is another link on this page addressed to the other intended audience. It is a link for students to connect with each other. The pedagogical nature of the site is explicit on the page promoting materials you can buy, “Conte-moi etc...” which explains that the site “est conçu comme un outil pédagogique à part entière. Au travers de la navigation sur le site, il est possible de **lire et d’écouter près d’une centaine de contes, en français et en langue locale**” (bold in original, “Conte-moi etc...”). The site, then, is designed to help teach tales either directly to children and students or by helping educators teach them.

Furthermore, the positioning of these educators and students is important. To understand this one must examine the images on the site. The banner at the top of the site on almost all pages) features the face of a child at either end. On the left is the profile of a child with dark skin and African features. This child is looking toward the child on the right, a light-skinned child with European features who is looking directly at the viewer but whose face is partially cut off by the end of the banner. The apparently European child therefore has one ear pointed toward the apparently Black child in profile. There is a red line connecting the Black child’s mouth to the European child’s ear, spelling “Conte-moi” on its way. This image is repeated in miniature (with the red line now forming the image of a globe rather than the website’s title) at the top of the “Le projet Conte-moi” page. The European child’s half-face also features in the sidebar navigation to the page which actually contains the tales themselves, the “Conte-moi la francophonie” page, and on the link for students to connect with each other. Implicitly this image is a proxy for the

intended audience of young European students. The profile of a light-skinned, European-featured man on the link for instructors to connect clarifies that the site is also designed for specifically European instructors. This point is further solidified by the only page that does not feature this banner, the “Conte-moi la lecture” page dedicated to helping instructors. On this page the profile on the left side of the banner is that of the white instructor speaking in the child’s ear and the line connecting them also includes the “la lecture” to spell the page’s name as well as “conte-moi.” This image therefore has the instructor supersede the African child as the expert, implying that when possible it is preferable to have the white adult sharing knowledge over the native informant. The intended audience is thus clearly white. Furthermore, the emphasis on French, the affiliation with the French government, and the idea that this site exists to collect and valorize the French-speaking oral heritage all make it plain that the intended audience is not simply white, but specifically whites from the Hexagon. The “us” of the audience, then, is white French children, either directly or via their white French instructors.

This imagery also points to the identity and difference of the “them” of the storytellers, or those Other than metropolitan French. The stories are coming from the mouths of African or at least non-white storytellers to the ears of the white listeners. The actual origins of the storytellers are specified on the homepage with links to lists of the stories organized by their ethnic or national group: Algerian (ten tales), “French” (i.e., from the Hexagon, ten), Guianese (eleven), Haitian (ten), Malian (twenty), Moroccan (ten), Mauritanian (nineteen), Romani (ten), and Senegalese (eighteen). Looking at the specific groups listed makes it obvious just how broadly the site is defining the “them” of the storytellers. Algeria, Haiti, Mali, Morocco, Mauritania, and Senegal are former French colonies either in Africa or featuring majority Black populations. The Romani are, however, a traveling ethnic group found throughout Europe and beyond with 20,000

individuals in France and seem completely out of place on the list (“La petite colombe”). Guiana is, of course, a Caribbean French overseas department, tellingly distinguished from France here and oddly singled out. The majority of storytellers are non-white.

Of course, “France” is included on the list. (The maps on the list of stories page indicate that when they refer to France they really mean the Hexagon.) However, the inclusion of France on this list does not negate the overall Othering of the storytellers on the site. The ten French stories out of one hundred and eighteen seem insignificant when juxtaposed with those implicitly told by the Black profile of the banner. In contrast, their distinction in being the only stories that include an explanation of tale-types and recurring motifs implies that these French stories take part in a tradition that the others do not, namely that of the not-exotic European tales. This is striking, because folktales from around the francophone world have similar motifs so one might expect such an explanation to be included for them too. The inclusion of this explanation on the “France” page and exclusion on the others implies a preference of French stories and exoticization of the others, rendering familiar and relatable and the others exotic and impossible to recognize. It also seems significant that omitted from this list are stories from the other predominantly white French speaking geographical region, Canada.²³⁹

This Othering of the storytellers is further emphasized by the formatting of the site. The page for each story includes the story’s title and “origine de la collecte” at the top with an illustration and teaser of how the story begins along with the audio recording of the storyteller recounting their tale (always in French and sometimes also in a “native” language) and a link to download the audio file or a PDF of the tale’s transcription. Below this there are several tabs: “Le texte” (the transcription of the tale, only in French), “Le pays” (a description of the country

²³⁹ While the banner suggests a method, there is no explicit explanation anywhere on the site as to how they chose which regions to include.

where the tale was collected which is the same for every tale from that country), “Les langues” (a description of the language(s) of the tale’s recording, the same for each story recorded in that language), “Le conteur” (a biography of the storyteller), and, when applicable, other tabs. For example, the story “L’hyène et l’aveugle” has a link to an animation of the story, “Le film.” (“L’hyène et l’aveugle”). The very existence of an explanation of the country where the tale was collected (even if such an explanation also exists for France) implies a certain level of Othering and exoticization. Furthermore, the description for every country except France features some kind of connection between it and France, whether it is noting how many Romani live in France, an explanation that Guiana is a French department, or an explanation of how common it is or is not to speak French in that country. This constructs France as the default and all other countries exist only in connection to it.

Finally, language further separates France from the “them” of the other storytellers. Of the countries or groups listed on the site, only France’s stories are all recorded exclusively in French with no mention of regional languages. In contrast, all of the Algerian and Moroccan stories are recorded in French or Arabic, one of the Haitian stories is in French and Creole, eighteen of the Malian stories are in French and Bambara, all of the Mauritanian stories are in French and Wolof, seven of the Romani stories are in French and Romani, and eight of the Senegalese stories are in French and Serer while another eight are in French and Wolof. For Guiana, two stories are in French and Ndyuka tongo, four in French and Creole, two in French and Nenge tongo, one in French and Kali’na, and one in French and Teko. All of the tales, then, other than the ones from the Hexagon, are characterized by a linguistic plurality. Given the existence and even revalorization of regional languages within the Hexagon, and the fact that many traditional French folktales come from these regions, it is striking that none of the French

folktales are in a regional language (e.g., Catalan, Breton, etc.). In short, the choice to highlight the linguistic pluralism of the majority of the tales and to contrast it to the singularly French tales emphasizes that most of the tales on the site come from a different community than the “us” of the audience. These stories are “really” or originally from a not-French “them.” The “them” of the storytellers is thus clearly exotic, non-French, and non-white.

Ultimately, Conte en Creuse’s storytelling festival and especially promotion of Valer’Egouy’s performance, Lemaire’s published collection, and the website Conte-moi.net, then, are examples of a non-Creole white French community soliciting the performances of outsiders, implicitly non-French Black performers. These are examples of performances by them (Black non-French) for us (white metropolitan French). How then do these types of performances function? Ultimately, while they (appear to) serve as sites of remembering in some ways, they are primarily sites of forgetting in service of the broader French national narrative.

The ways in which these performances serve as sites of forgetting is relatively straightforward. To some degree the tales themselves, and more especially the paratexts discussing and presenting the tales, performers, and performances, forget France’s problematic history as enslavers and colonizers. Despite the brevity of the description of Valer’Egouy’s upcoming performance it nonetheless seems to actively elide such difficult ideas. There is a remarkable insistence on his pedagogical use of folktales rather than their use as more traditional, socially anchored sites of remembering. We are told that “il s’engage...en s’investissant dans l’Éducation Populaire” (“Valer’Egouy”). We are also told that he “s’invite dans les écoles où les enfants émerveillés rient et participent activement à l’histoire” (“Valer’Egouy”). There is a reference to how he embodies “ces héros du patrimoine martiniquais” without any acknowledgement of who these heroes might be. And even the choice

of tale seems edited. The site advertises that Valer'Egouy will perform the tale "Ti Chat pourquoi tu souris ?," and even includes a brief excerpt of it (including the fact that "la famille Ours passait *de paisibles vacances* sur l'île de la Martinique"), before explaining that the audience will not only enjoy hearing about the clever Ti Chat "Mais il va recevoir, de cette aventure, une si bonne leçon que l'on en parle encore aujourd'hui" (italics added, "Valer'Egouy"). It seems significant that the advertised tale is one that features animals not humans, and that the potential audience is assured by the fact that the Bear family were *vacationing* in Martinique (which is the only engagement a white French audience who lives in the Hexagon would have with the region), and that it is destined for children and will teach them a valuable lesson (i.e., has been sanitized of the trauma and amorality of traditional Antillean folklore), that this tale is *not* a postcolonial site of memory. These aspects have been forgotten.

Lemaire, in turn, has so thoroughly appropriated these stories and removed any aspect of remembering these difficult truths that his text has eliminated *any* element of traditional sites of memory and rather uses the tales to essentialize the identities of the tellers. The hyper-stereotypical cover illustration is the first hint at the text's essentialization of Guianese identity. The image is a quintessential example of how, "[f]or most metropolitan French people, the Antilles represent the exotic tropics, places of magic, mystery, and sexual vitality" (Beriss, "High Folklore" 113). The narrative of taking delight in the tales, the region, and even the students replaces the narrative of how a white French professor came to be teaching African-featured students on a Caribbean Island. As we have seen, the language of the back cover also promises that one can discover an entire people and world in reading these tales. As such, this text reflects the reality that "Antilleans in France are not seen as individual French citizens, but

as representatives of a foreign culture” (Beriss, “High Folklore” 113). All this sits in sharp contrast to the role of these tales as sites of memory for Antilleans.

Furthermore, in his Preface to Lemaire’s text, Leborgne (albeit unwittingly) acknowledges the true cultural import of the tales but does so with a disturbing recourse to the “noble savage” trope: “Ces récits, quelle que soit la forme que l’écriture de l’auteur leur prête souverainement...et quel que soit le style qui les sert..., tous sont lestés d’un tel poids d’Histoire, se déploient avec une telle intensité dramatique que les personnages, les situations et les actions atteignent souvent à une sorte de dignité *emblématique*” (italics added, 9-10). The “authenticity” of these tales, Leborgne seems to suggest, renders them archetypal. In short, the paratext implies that all you need are these tales to understand these people. In that sense, Lemaire’s collection boils the Guianese he is speaking for down to an essentialized identity. He has taken Antillean and Guianese folktale tradition, with all of their weight and significance as (postcolonial) sites of memory, and appropriated and museumified them—with the unstated, “this one artefact will furnish you understanding of a whole people.” This completely elides, forgets, and/or denies the complicated history that first brought these artefacts to the museum.

Indeed, the very fact that, as the book’s back cover tells us, “[c]ertains de ses récits guyanais ont été primés par divers concours” highlights Lemaire’s thorough appropriation of these tales and forgetting of their true function. Lemaire, a white Frenchman from the Hexagon, traveled to France’s DOMs to teach—a profession which, as we know, is deeply embedded in colonialism. His students then told him tales that he enjoyed so much he felt the need to transmit them (without further credit—notice the cover refers to *his* stories) to his own community (i.e., other white French in the Hexagon), and for which he won French literary prizes. In short, there is an evident and thorough erasure—or forgetting—of the voice of the true storytellers in every

step of this performance, all the way through to reception. It is as if he collected the flowers left at a site of memory and won a prize for flower arranging.

Finally, Conte-moi makes this forgetting particularly visible in its avoidance or elision of any discussion of why the regions it includes in its collection speak French at all or are in any way francophone. The site presents these tales from around the world as part of the broader French culture and language without acknowledging how that came to be. The only mention of France's colonial past (which is the explanation for why all these groups speak French), is a passing chronological reference in the descriptions of Algeria and Senegal: "Décolonisation de la France [date]" ("L'hyène et l'aveugle"). The other former colonies list only a date of independence, without reference to France, colonization, or independence from whom. The pages for the Romani, Guiana, and France, do not (of course?) list dates of independence at all. The overt omission—the forgetting—of France's violent, oppressive past with these peoples is in direct contrast to the ways that the Guianese use folktale performances as sites of remembering this exact shared history. In short, by them/for us performances represent such a thorough forgetting of elements in tension with the French national narrative that the folktale tradition is stripped of all its usual function as site of memory and becomes quintessential site of forgetting.

That said, these, like all sites of forgetting, cannot help but simultaneously promote a kind of remembering. As Beiner argues, "The evocation of a subject in order to sanction its effacement effectively [ensures] that it will be remembered in an obscured form" (17). This seems to be the case with these appropriated tales. In engaging with Antillean tales in order to appropriate them to forget aspects of slavery and colonialism, the "us" of the solicitors and their audience are forced to grapple with the storytellers' roles and positions in French society. The Hexagon is forced to remember the fact of the inclusion of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana

in their nation as a direct result of their attempts to nullify through appropriation remembrances of *why* these regions are included.

This tension between remembering and forgetting explains the strange tension that we see in all three examples of by them/for us between the solicitors' and audience's framing of their "us" as both distant from and similar to the storytelling "them." As we know, Conte en Creuse proclaims that they research French heritage, as evidenced by their title "Recherche : Collectage du patrimoine orale" ("Qui sommes-nous ?"). So as part of their collecting of France's oral heritage they have included a Martinican storyteller, thus framing Martinique as part of France's heritage. And their promotion of his tale and its benefits implies a kind of universality to his stories and a commonality between the two groups. However, this inclusion is in stark tension with and contrast to the ways that their description of Valer'Egouy Others him so thoroughly.

Lemaire's text is also ambivalent about his and the audience's similarity to or difference from the Guianese storytellers. The contrast between the conflation of Guadeloupe and Guiana in the description of Lemaire and the back cover's description of Yves Leborgne as a "guadeloupéen amoureux de la Guyane," signifies this ambivalence—is there or is there not a distinction between Guiana and Guadeloupe? Similarly, Leborgne argues in his Preface that Lemaire "n'a jamais pactisé avec le chauvinisme culturel qui préparait au temps des guerres coloniales le retour offensif des thèses de Gobineau sur l'inégalité des races humaines," etc. (8). He emphasizes over and over that Lemaire is different, that he is not problematic because he himself has become as hybridized as Guiana today. In other words, Leborgne argues that Lemaire's text is authentic and un-problematic because it serves as a remembrance of the varied, mixed heritage of modern Guiana, which it posits as unifying. Certainly, all of the paratexts of the collection highlight this *mixité*, which, as we saw, is so often forgotten in performances "by

us for us.” This includes the literary quotes that begin most of the stories and which are taken from a range of sources—from a “dolo guyanais” to Michel Lohier to Ronsard and Rimbaud. Since there is no distinguishing between the canon and traditional departmental texts, all are apparently the same. This emphasis on intermixing seems to imply a universal identification (we are, all of us, the same in our difference) that would suggest an affiliation between the “us” and “them,” even as other aspects of the text so thoroughly distance the two groups. This collection is unusual, then, in that it remembers and acknowledges this diverse heritage, even as it forgets, ignores, or erases the problematics that made Guiana so mixed in the first place and that made it possible for a white French man to tell and publish award-winning stories taken from others.

Finally, Conte-moi.net exhibits the strongest tension between the rapprochement and distancing between the “French” and Guianese. Again, Guiana has a unique role on the site. It is the only department featured and, except for the Romani, the other groups listed are either former French colonies or the French Hexagon itself. This raises the question of where Guiana falls—part of France or equivalent to a former colony? And why are none of France’s other DOMs included? Does its inclusion in this list suggest affiliation with or distinction from France? Second, it is granted greater and more diverse linguistic representation on the site than any of the other peoples. The other groups are represented by one or two “native languages” in addition to French. Guiana is represented by five: Ndyuka tongo, Creole, Nengo tongo, Kali’na, and Teko.²⁴⁰ Is this emphasis on specifically Guiana’s linguistic diversity meant to signify how different they are from the Hexagon (whose linguistic diversity is not at all acknowledged on the site) or a way of celebrating France’s rich *patrimoine*?

²⁴⁰ This greater language variation in the stories does not necessarily represent a greater linguistic variety in the countries themselves. Mali, for example, as the Conte-moi site explains, has thirteen national languages and over thirty are spoken in the country (“L’orphelin et les méchants villageois”).

The description of “Le pays” on the stories’ pages betrays a further ambivalence. It begins by stating that Guiana is a French department, thus claiming it as French. However, it also has by far the longest country description. It goes into the most detail about the ethnic groups and languages spoken in Guiana. It has the most information about the climate. While the other regions have one or two sentences describing their climates, Guiana has six, despite the fact that it is the second smallest region in terms of square miles (after Haiti). Regardless of the reason for this, it has the effect of further exoticizing this region by presenting it as the least well known. This may also reflect an assumption by the site creators’ that their audience of French students would be particularly interested in this overseas department that still belongs to France but is Other enough to be exotic and exciting. This, too, reflects the fact that the French view Antilleans “as representatives of a foreign culture, dependent on France, but different from it” (Beriss, “High Folklore” 113). Certainly, Guiana’s status as part of France raises an interesting point. Why are the peoples and languages listed on the “Le pays” page for Guiana not also listed on the “Le pays” page for France? In other words, Guiana is claimed as French, even as it is exoticized, but France is not labeled as Guianese. Certainly, the lack of inclusion of details from Guiana’s “Le pays” narrative on France’s “Le pays” page constitutes a literal erasure of their narrative as part of the larger national French one. The complete lack of inclusion of France’s other DOMs on the site arguably represents an even more extreme erasure. There is thus a consistent tension between forgetting and remembering, between identifying the French audience with the Guianese storytellers and distinguishing them.

In short, the Conte en Creuse description of Valer’Egouy’s performance, Lemaire’s collection, and Conte-moi represent examples of white French audiences soliciting performances by Black Caribbean DOM storytellers in order to appropriate what are traditionally sites of

remembering into sites of forgetting.²⁴¹ However, in so doing, as is the nature of sites of forgetting, they cannot help but remember some things, including the very fact that these regions (which are so often forgotten by the Hexagon) are in fact part of France. Even these performances, then, represent a duality as site of forgetting and remembering.

The Stagecraft Behind These Sites

With the categorizations facilitated by understanding the positionality of both audience and storyteller in the creation of sites, it becomes visible that both stories by us/for us and stories by them/for us function simultaneously as sites of memory and forgetting. The contradictory elements remembered and forgotten by each are in keeping with the conceptualization of nation building, and sites' functions within that, outlined in my introduction. The concepts of "French" and of "Creole" are socially constructed and as such can be considered imagined communities. These constructions are based on a national narrative (a creation myth, if you will) and then maintained through buy-in of this narrative strongly demarcated along linguistic and racial lines. This analysis has sought to illuminate the ways in which Creole folktales function, for both Creole and French communities, as simultaneous sites of remembering and forgetting of different elements of a shared History in keeping with their respective national narratives.

Indeed, as Etienne Achille, Charles Forsdick and Lydie Moudileno note, an examination of postcolonial sites of memory often reveals the "close control of any potential disruption of the centralized and centralizing narratives that such inclusion entails" (12). Such analyses must therefore apply "a critical lens that acknowledges the continued practices of stage-management

²⁴¹ This is not the only way the French appropriate symbols of Creole nationalism in order to conform said symbols into French nationalist agendas. As we know, much the same process happened with Creole (please see my first chapter): "the assimilationist right [co-opted] Creole, which they viewed as a neo-Romance language, and [ensured] its place in the French fold along with its speakers. Their purpose was thus to neutralize the nationalists' re-appropriation of Creole as a political weapon and a cause" (Schnepel 213)

and control associated with [such sites'] inclusion in official narratives and memory practices” (Achille et al. 12). The performance of the folktales of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana reveals how the principal mechanism of stage management lies in the framing of the positionality of the performer and the audience. It is these very practices, designed to fit folktales into the broader national narratives of two imagined communities, that this analysis has illustrated.

Performances by us/for us serve Creole nationalist ideologies. These movements are starkly dichotomous and oppositional: “The assimilationist ideology – positing that all that was French was positive and all that was local was negative – had been turned on its head by the nationalists. Now all that was local was deemed positive, genuine, authentic, and worthy of pride, whereas all that was imported, or French, held negative connotations and was to be rejected” (Schnepel 204). Creole folktales, then, when told by Creole insiders to Creole insiders function as sites of memory that remember the shared trauma of enslavement and colonization in order to create an anti-French, pro-nationalist insider community. This, in turn, means that they must “forget” all pro-French elements, including the contribution that France has made to the very traditions they are lauding. The subtle and not-so-subtle linguistic elements (that promote Creole over French) and racial elements (that promote Blacks over others and especially over white French) highlight the degree to which these sites of remembering and forgetting function not only in national identity creation through national narratives but also in the maintenance of insider-outsider boundaries of the imagined communities.

By them/for us stories, in turn, are appropriated by the French in order to first (re)accommodate this history into a framework that does not undermine the French universalist national narrative and second—and perhaps more importantly—to counteract these Creole nationalist trends. In appropriating these traditions and transforming what for Creole

communities are primarily sites of remembering into primarily sites of forgetting that sidestep the historical origins of these tales, the French are able to elide the aspects of their history that are dissonant with their national narrative, namely their race-conscious past as oppressors, enslavers, and colonizers. Of course, as is the nature of sites of forgetting, this very act of appropriation forces remembering. The state is forced to engage with the reality of these Other exotic areas as part of their country and the history that led to this—a history that usually the national narrative aims to forget. This tension between forgetting *why* Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana are French and remembering *that* they are creates an ambivalence manifest in these performances, a push and pull between identifying the Creole storytellers as French and as Other.

That said, there is a second tactic or manipulation at play here, another way of appropriating Creole tales in order to mitigate their power as sites of memory serving Creole nationalist agendas. This second tactic is regionalization. Benedict Anderson reminds us that “official nationalism was typically a response on the part of threatened dynastic and aristocratic groups – upper *classes* – to popular vernacular nationalism” (italics in original, 150). In Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana, folktales function as a site of memory reifying a vernacular anti-French nationalism. As a result, France appropriates and regionalizes the tradition in order to incorporate it into the French nation.

The French state uses regionalization to combat nationalist discourses and movements. Anthropologist David Beriss argues that “[e]thnic identities can be seen as cultural counter discourses. Where there are conflicts over cultural identities, they help to point up the relativity of the hegemonic identity, making it appear as just another ethnic identity” (“High Folklore” 108). This poses a problem to French universalist ideologies. Therefore, the “French state operates in a wide variety of ways to mask, incorporate or limit the possibilities for the assertion

of difference within French society” (“High Folklore” 109). One such strategy is the framing of “[c]ulture, or cultural production...in France as a way of representing the nation. [Such productions] are thus incorporated into French national ideology as elements of a diverse past that contributed to the rich national cultural present” (“High Folklore” 114). This trend began in the 1930s and by “the 1960s and 70s, these [regional] cultures were often represented as more ‘authentic’ natural roots and became fashionable among the left, once again bringing them into the national culture, rather than being seen as separate national cultures” (Beriss, “High Folklore” 114). In short, for approximately the past 100 years French nationalist discourse has appropriated regional cultural practices as fascinating examples of a shared, unifying cultural past—an effective strategy to combat the potentially dividing view of these practices as reflecting and resulting from distinct cultural groups.

This tactic of regionalization relies on its own mechanisms. One of the primary reasons it is possible for France to (re)appropriate ethnic cultures into the national *patrimoine* is due to the cultures’ need to perform within the hegemony to assert their difference. As Beriss explains, minority groups’ cultural performances, in order “to be effective counter-discourses, ... must draw on terms and concepts that make sense within the very hegemonic discourse they purport to challenge” (“High Folklore” 108). This in turn opens “such discourses [to eventually] be re-assimilated to the dominant discourse (Terdiman 1985)” (Beriss, “High Folklore” 108). In other words, if minority groups want to assert their difference in a way that makes sense to the powerful majority, they must use the same ideas and frameworks. The act of operating within the dominant culture makes such acts part of that culture, a fact that the French state often exploits.

This is particularly true with folktales. The French state has a long history of using folklore to regionalize, undermining their potential to nationalize (Hopkin 21).²⁴² In using folklore as national sites of memory, then, Antilleans are, as Beriss says, drawing on the hegemonic power's systems. However, the French state also has a long used this regionalization to its own advantage. Beriss explains there is an increasing "emphasis placed on artistic production in France, which becomes a way of representing the nation and where the 'low' culture produced outside the circuits of government sponsored galleries, concert halls, theaters and museums is seen as 'folklore' that contributes to the national cultural wealth" ("High Folklore" 109). This distillation of non-state-sponsored cultural productions (e.g., folktale performances showcasing regional differences) into simply part of the national cultural wealth allows the French state to repackage these potentially-challenging performances as a difference acceptable within the national narrative. In France, the "cultural 'inside' is itself characterized by diversity, but that diversity is contained through 'organic solidarity'. It provides France's cultural patrimoine [wealth] and can be presented as part of 'who we all are'" (brackets in original, Beriss, "High Folklore" 110). In sum, another French strategy for stage managing folktales through assimilation is to "folklorize" difference into an acceptable range of sameness, to claim these disparate groups as all contributing to the universal and unique cultural heritage that makes France French, allowing the audience to remember unification and forget tensions.

This is the exact tactic of regionalization and essentialization that Conte en Creuse, Lemaire, and Conte-moi exhibit. It is no accident that Conte en Creuse and Conte-moi

²⁴² It is significant that historically, French regional movements have identified with (post)colonial national movements: "Anti-colonialism has not solely been centered on the relationship between France and its external empire, however, as French regionalist movements often 'proclaim solidarity with, and draw inspiration from' their Francophone (post)colonial counterparts (Williams, 2003: 102)" (Murphy 338-339). The enforced linguistic homogenization of the Third Republic created a common feeling of oppression between France's internal and external linguo-ethnic groups (Murphy).

specifically refer to their work as recording and sharing France’s rich cultural heritage while Lemaire creates implicit connections between the French canon and the tales he is “transmitting.”²⁴³ This repackaging of traces of trauma as *patrimoine* allows the French state to incorporate these tales as part of their national narrative, part of the rich history that makes France so strong and unique. It is significant that when storytellers are framing their own stories, they do not position themselves as part of France’s *patrimoine*. In fact, as we have seen, rather than claim Frenchness they all work hard to be not-French. This appropriation of Creole tales, then, is not only an attempt to turn sites of remembering into forgetting but it is also an attempt to rebrand and repackage the very narratives the tales are serving. Tellingly, of these three examples of solicitors, one, Lemaire, is a not part of the government (albeit a former teacher), one, Conte en Creuse, has ties to local French governments, and one, Conte-moi, has ties to national French government. Not only, then, are all three elicitors in positions of cultural and political authority and power, but this appropriation in service to the national discourse is also taking place at all levels of society. By transforming sites of memory and traces of trauma into sites of forgetting, the French people and state are able to turn this tool of Creole nationalism on its head, forgetting the ways in which tales can memorialize nationalist difference and instead using it to glorify a unified French nation.²⁴⁴

Of course, as we have seen, this assimilation is in tension with a need to forget, a tension due to Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana’s liminal status. Beriss argues that as part of these

²⁴³ The Conte-moi home page proudly announces (in relatively small but bolded letters) that it is a project “de **collecte et de valorization du patrimoine oral francophone**” (bold in original, “Accueil”). Similarly, on the “Conte-moi : le projet” page, the first words under the title and subtitle, in big and bold letters are: “**Un programme de collecte, valorization et partage des contes issus du patrimoine oral**” (bold in original, “Le projet Conte-moi”).

²⁴⁴ It seems significant that the regionalizing framework allows the storytellers to become both subjects and objects of France’s national narrative, at least to a degree, in a way that members from the DOMs usually are not (please see Chapter 1).

regions' liminality they are simultaneously contributing to this rich cultural heritage and outside it. Even as their culture is essentialized and regionalized, they are also Othered. If the French are soliciting and framing these performances in such a way as to attempt to appropriate them, to frame them as part of the broader national *patrimoine*, as part of the acceptable range of difference that makes France great, they cannot quite succeed. Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana are just a little too different to be fully regionalized.

But why? Does the answer lie in how different Valer'Egouy looks from the other storytellers featured in photographs on the festival's site, the evident Blackness of the woman on the cover of Lemaire's collection, and the drawing of the child telling the tale on Conte-moi's banner? Is this about race? As with the by us/for us performances, the subtle and not-so-subtle emphasis on race and language evident in these by them/for us performances illuminate the ways in which, as much as they may wish to deny it, France relies on these elements to delineate its national boundaries. Race may be the dominant reality that folktales help the Creoles remember, a reality that French nationalists turn to folktales to forget.

Ultimately, both by us/for us and by them/for us performances of tales function simultaneously as sites of forgetting and remembering in service to each group's respective national narratives. Both become sites where the underlying tensions of modern France bubble to the surface. An analysis of these framings and their function in society illuminates questions and tensions at the very heart what it means to be French including universalist versus colonizer, "liberté, égalité, fraternité" versus enslaver, colorblind versus racist, monolithic versus diverse, French as the ideal language versus polylingualism, ideal versus real. In recognizing and parsing this tension it becomes evident that both types of performances, two sides of the same coin, cannot but reify Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana's status as French-ish.

Of course, we cannot forget the reality that all these performances, whether monetized or not, constitute commodities. Anderson reminds us that even as print culture and nationalism are intertwined capitalism is an inescapable part of that, noting that “it is self-evident that all these lexicographers, philologists, grammarians, *folklorists*, publicists, and composers did not carry on their revolutionary activities in a vacuum. They were, after all, producers for the print-market, and they were linked, via that silent bazaar, to consuming publics” (italics added, 75). In other words, for modern nationalistic performances such as these to exist, they must be marketable and, as such, they are influenced by market factors. Simplicity sells, nuance does not. Antilleans looking for nationalist discourses apparently do not want to be reminded of their French past and French audiences do not want to be reminded of their past shortcomings. The result is a conflation of market forces and politics worthy of note on its own. It becomes even more complicated in the third and final archetype of modern storytelling, by us/for them.

CHAPTER FIVE

Commodification of Folklore

In recent decades, living history has been commodified and commercialized through a wide range of popular cultural productions that increasingly avail of new media and technologies to facilitate mass consumption of history. (Beiner 8)

Stories by us/for you, namely stories told by insiders for community outsiders, are the final and arguably most common combination of audience and performer identity. Like by us/for us stories, they also have their roots in tradition but have been dramatically reconfigured by modern society and pressures. Traditionally, this type of performance would have consisted of the *békés* and enslavers sitting in on performances by enslaved peoples. As Patrick Chamoiseau explains, in these situations “the master knows of [the Creole Storyteller’s] tales and allows him to tell them, and sometimes even listens to them himself” (*Creole Folktales* xiii). Of course, as Chamoiseau observes, the Storytellers would have worked hard to ensure that these outsiders missed the significance of the tales and their function as sites of memory, recognizing in them only the ability to entertain (*Creole Folktales* xiii). As such, the tales performed by insiders but consumed by outsiders would not necessarily have functioned as sites at all for the outsider audience. For them, these subversive tellings were merely stories.

This type of tale is still told today but due to the pressures of globalization, commodification, and new media the nature of the outsider audience has shifted and expanded. In like fashion, the pressures of these modern forces have impacted the nature and intent of the storytelling practices and how they are discussed. We must first understand the significance of the vectors of globalization, modernization, and capitalistic commodification, and the impact they have had on storytelling in general, before we can understand how by us/for you performances function today. In concluding this final chapter, the analysis of the function of

folktales in Martinican, Guadeloupean, and Guinean national narratives shifts to the particularly rich and complex performance of Chamoiseau's *Creole Folktales*, a work that provides unique insights on a multiplicity of key questions.

Impact of Globalization and Commodification on Storytelling

Capitalistic commodification has always played a key role in the creation and maintenance of nationhood. As Benedict Anderson maintains, it was only with the creation of “monoglot mass reading publics” born of mass printing technology and the rise of capitalism’s money-driven markets, that there was a reason to standardize regional languages into a national one (43). Specifically, he argues that “[t]he essential thing is the *interplay* between fatality, technology, and capitalism” (italics in original, 43). In short, the rise of a for-profit, print industry led to the standardization of language and the ability and desire to spread nationalistic ideas much more widely. The role of commodification and market forces in issues of nationhood is thus nothing new. What is new, however, are the influences of globalization and new media.

A clarification of these terms is necessary. “Commodification,” often a result of capitalism, is the process whereby things that normally exist outside of the market become objects of trade, i.e., commodities. By “capitalism” I am referring to the economic system that consists of private entities that sell their goods to private consumers for profit and are not controlled by the state. In speaking of “globalization” I am referring to the notion that the world at both the individual and state level is increasingly interconnected—politically, economically, and socially, via communication methods, travel, etc. This interconnection renders states increasingly mutually dependent and mutually iterative. Finally, as discussed in previous chapters, “New media” includes any medium that has been developed more recently than the printing press or perhaps radio, but refers especially to the media of the internet (e.g., blogs,

online publications, social media, Spotify, YouTube, etc.) which are of particular relevance to questions of capitalism and globalization.

These forces are increasingly influential in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana. In 2000, Maryse Condé wrote that “[w]e live in a world where, already, frontiers have ceased to exist,” in part because these regions, “for better or for worse, have entered the European Common Market and welcome on their soil thousands of men and women from all sorts of countries [and h]alf of the population of each island lives abroad” (“Order” 160). She continues by noting that those “in new environments [face] new experiences which reshape the West Indian personality. For those who stay on the islands, changes occur also” (“Order” 160). In other words, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana are increasingly interconnected in new ways with other areas of the world, through economic forces such as the European Union and the movement of individuals through emigration, immigration, and tourism. These vectors, in turn, influence their culture(s) so that ultimately the regions are increasingly globalized.

Capitalism is an equally strong force in these regions and in fact there is a longstanding history of protests because of rising regional economic disparities. Ellen Schnepel argues that “Guadeloupe, like Martinique, has become a society of hyper-consumption...Consumer goods from France, the European Union, and elsewhere have entered the island culture, not just grocery items, household products, clothing, cars, electronic and technical equipment, but also drugs” (226). She continues by noting that it is the “United States, not France, [which] has become the new model for life-styles, influencing modes of dress, TV, film, music, diet, and even political campaigning. One is witness to a growing checklist of examples of encroaching modernity” (226). In their interrelation with the world, then, these regions are also increasingly capitalistic and consumer-driven. This consumption, in turn, directly leads to the import of outsider cultures

and practices. The internet and new media have only facilitated this importation. Beyond this, this consumer culture maintains or even further exacerbates the regions' dependency on France and the European Union: "the French islands have been transformed into welfare-based consumer economies. Thus the policy of decentralization in the 1980s, amidst increasing calls for local development, has obviously not altered the logic of economic dependency that historically has characterized the French Caribbean" (Schnepel 228). In more provocative terms, globalization "n'est que l'héritière masquée de la colonisation," or what many call neocolonialism (Colombo, "Des Contes" 11). Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana, then, are particularly vulnerable to the post-modern vectors of globalization and capitalistic commodification.²⁴⁵

Folktales, in turn, exist and are evolving within all these systems. As we have seen, they are commodified by the very act of recording. An individual telling a live tale for free to other individuals is a practice that exists outside of market forces or exchange. In contrast, the record of a tale, whether it is a book, a YouTube video, or a free blog post, is an object that travels far beyond the storyteller and within markets. The moment a tale is "published" in any sense the creator loses control they may have had over their audience, the tale becomes an object of circulation, and the storyteller shifts from vehicle of passed information to tangible product. This

²⁴⁵ Significantly, this increasingly consumer-driven economy only serves to illuminate and worsen the historical inequities in these regions, a direct result of slavery and systems of oppression. A 2009 strike in Martinique illustrated that the island suffers from "une misère sociale camouflée par une politique de consommation inégalitaire" (Colombo, *Des Contes* 123). As Colombo describes, "Des Martiniquais descendus dans la rue ont crié leur misère, leur rancune, leurs peurs : 'Nous ne sommes pas des esclaves !' Cette phrase souvent entendue dans les conflits où l'un ou l'autre membre de cette population se sent exploité montre bien que ce n'est pas fini ; les comptes ne sont pas réglés et il suffit d'une étincelle pour que l'explosion se produise. Pendant cette manifestation, l'impression qui a émergé, c'est qu'il s'agissait d'un règlement de comptes entre Blancs (les possédants) et prolétaires et l'une des conséquences de ce conflit est le pourrissement des relations entre les différentes ethnies de l'île, si nous pouvons parler d'ethnie, dans la mesure où, mis à part les descendants des colons (une grande majorité du moins) l'ensemble de la population est un brassage des différentes ethnies arrivées sur l'île. L'objet de la grève était la lutte 'contre la vie chère et pour le pouvoir d'achat'" (*Des Contes* 124). Guadeloupe's sometimes-violent strikes in winter 2021-22 against COVID-19 vaccine policies and general French neglect is a more recent example of the political instability created by inequity and exacerbated by globalization (Arduengo and Chappell; Cruse).

is even more true of materials “published” online which are less protected by copyright laws than traditional published materials.²⁴⁶ Whether or not the performances are exchanged for money, then, every text in my corpus represents a kind of commodification.

That said, many of the texts in my corpus *are* monetized, taking what has already been “packaged” and subjecting it to capitalistic market forces. Books are obviously material objects that are sold and circulate within markets, as are performances at festivals where audience members pay to attend and storytellers are paid for their labor. Similarly, Spotify is a venue for commercial exchange due to its basis on the monetary exchange of subscription services and payment to artists. However, the nature of this exchange and the definition of goods being exchanged are unusual. In their book *Spotify Teardown*, Maria Eriksson, Rasmus Fleischer, Anna Johansson, Pelle Snickars, and Patrick Vonderau argue that Spotify has transformed audio files “from commodity ownership to commodified experience” (1).²⁴⁷ Regardless, Spotify is undeniably participating in capitalistic exchanges. Even performances on social media sites can be viewed as commodities existing within market systems. Ericksson et al. argue that “Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube can indeed be regarded as media companies that sell audiences to advertisers” (11). Furthermore, some professional storytellers post videos of their work to YouTube as “teasers” to tempt potential audience members to hire them to perform further tales.²⁴⁸ This practice, too, transposes folktales into the world of market forces.

Finally, globalization and new media function in tandem to reinforce interest in Creole folklore performances across a range of audiences. New media make it increasingly easy for

²⁴⁶ While a little outside the confines of my study with its focus on “original” tales told by community insiders, it is nonetheless worth mentioning that this also relates to and raises questions of plagiarism and appropriation.

²⁴⁷ Please see their book for a detailed analysis of the complex, “changing, interspersed, multidirectional character of Spotify” (15).

²⁴⁸ See, for example, Maggy Faraux discussed in detail in the next section.

individuals and cultures that are otherwise separated by geography to not only be aware of each other, but even to interact. This interaction creates a modern-day version of the very forces that Anderson describes as contributing to nationalism. The internet and other new media are the modern equivalent of the rise of money-driven print media which resulted in the creation of an imagined community requiring shared language, texts, ideas, and events. This, in turn, leads to a simultaneous, paradoxical increase in international cultural homogeneity and growing interest in cultural specificities. Cultures are progressively coming into contact with each other, especially through immigration and emigration, resulting in hybridizations. Furthermore, economies are merging and internationalizing. As a result, the need for international cultural capital increases, leading more and more individuals and groups to adopt the practices of the global hegemonic powers thus creating an increasing homogenization. However, because of this homogenization there is also a growing interest in unique cultural attributes and practices, and a realization by cultures that this is something they can export. As Vincent Cheng argues in his *Inauthentic: The Anxiety over Culture and Identity*, “The pressure to define a unique and authentic national character and identity, one that is distinct from all others (preferably having originary and premodern roots, an always already-manifest-destiny), may indeed be growing even more urgent with the globalization of our own postmodern era” (5). Similarly, Guy Beiner argues that, “[i]n recent decades, living history has been commodified and commercialized through a wide range of popular cultural productions that increasingly avail of new media and technologies to facilitate mass consumption of history” and promote cultural specificity (8). In resistance to the homogenizing influences of globalization, then, cultures are increasingly asserting, both for themselves and to others, their own heterogeneity and their own unique identity.

Folklore fits this need. It is a form of living history. In addition, Creole folklore, with its ties to “premodern roots” and its function as originary site of memory, is especially useful for creating and asserting a unique identity for the DOM’s. Globalization, then, leads Creole cultures themselves to be interested in Creole folklore and to propagate it to others as a way to “define a unique and authentic national character and identity,” and leads outsider audiences to be interested in it as an example of Other cultural specificity (Cheng 5). New media increasingly facilitate this interest and propagation, making Creole folktale performances accessible to new expanded audiences both within and outside of the original communities.

This deep imbrication of Creole folktales within these vectors has had a profound impact on the entire tradition, including on individual performances representing all the combinations of storyteller and market-cum-audience. Even the very language associated with Creole folktales was shaped by market forces: “Conscious of the new vogue of written Creole, multinational and commercial interests used the language in advertising slogans to promote their products, but they chose a French etymological spelling for the language” (Schnepel 213). In the ongoing debate about the creation of a written Creole the role of marketing is not to be ignored. This is a modern reflection of Anderson’s connection of capitalism, a reading public, national language standardization, and the rise of national movements.

Furthermore, as we know, where and when storytellers tell their stories is undergoing profound shifts due to these modern vectors. Certainly, the rise of professional storytellers and diminishment of non-staged-community-wide, free performances—as highlighted by Raphaël Confiant, Diana Ramassamy, and others—reflects and drives the increasing commodification of storytelling.²⁴⁹ In fact, it is not unusual for storytellers to draw a direct and explicit connection

²⁴⁹ Please see Christine Colombo’s *Des Contes de Ti Jean*, especially her fifth chapter, for a detailed discussion of the gradual professionalization of storytellers and commodification of folktales and folktale performances.

between modernity and the loss of traditional (non-commodified) performances: “On peut se demander si la tradition n’a survécu que parce que ces régions sont éloignées de la capitale et par conséquent...de la modernité” (Colombo, *Ti-Jean* 24). In other words, modern forces of globalization and commodification have transformed the role of storyteller from community member or even pillar to professional performer.

This shift is so profound that it has created fear and mistrust in those storytellers who resist it. At least as of 2012 there do still exist, albeit infrequently, community storytelling performances that are not commodified, such as “des veillées” or performances in the streets during *carnaval* (Colombo *Des Contes* 339). But even so, there are those who want to commodify these and all such traditions.²⁵⁰ As early as 1980 Alain Rutil describes how traditional folktales have been “sollicités par des chercheurs venus d’horizons étrangers et divers : États-Unis, Angleterre, Canada, France...etc. [qui] viennent exploiter (dans l’acception péjorative du terme), l’une des dernières matières premières de notre patrimoine culturel” (25). As a result, traditional storytellers have become increasingly wary of performing for others. Rutil explains that “[l]a méfiance, d’ailleurs, n’a pas tardé à s’installer chez les conteurs qui se rendirent compte que l’on tirait d’eux de substantiels avantages” (25). Since 1980 this mistrust only grew. In 2006 Christine Colombo found it difficult to convince storytellers to share their stories with her because of “leur méfiance grandissante, craignant que l’on fasse un usage lucratif des contes recueillis” (*Ti-Jean* 10). The increase of commodification of folklore is so insidious that storytellers who wish to maintain the tradition outside the confines of a market find it difficult to do so.

²⁵⁰ The monetization process is not always straightforward, however. In speaking of performance art, artist Marina Abramovic notes that “[n]obody actually knows how to deal with performance if someone wants to buy it, and today there is a lot of appropriation of performances and the artists are not even notified” (qtd. in Rounthwaite 74). This is also true in the world of Creole folklore.

Regardless of the professional status of the storyteller, all the performances in my corpus reflect the influence of globalized commodification in their varying but constant emphasis on “authenticity.” The concept of authenticity is broad and remarkably fluid. Its usage and nuance vary across discipline, context, user, etc. In comparing different definitions of the term, Adelaide Kuehn observes that when “[r]educed to their core, each of these definitions makes some claim to Truth” (148). Something that is “authentic,” then, is representative of or descended directly from some kind of widely understood or recognized reality.

Regarding peoples, in *Authenticity, Autonomy and Multiculturalism*, Geoffrey Levey argues for three different but interrelated types of authenticity: “authenticity of identity,” “authenticity of preferences,” and “cultural authenticity.” The first he defines as “value being bestowed directly on individual and group identity such that these command recognition by others” (3). This type of authenticity is related to the idea that every individual and group is unique and has the right to claim their own Truth and for that Truth to be recognized by others. The second is “a condition of individuals’ autonomy that bestows legitimacy on their values, beliefs and preferences as being their own” (3). This concept is tied to the belief that individuals have the right to find and express their True selves free from inculcation, intimidation, etc. Levey gives the example of Western fears of females being intimidated into wearing a headscarf as challenging their authenticity of preferences. Finally, the third “is invoked as a form of cultural pedigree that bestows legitimacy on particular beliefs and practices” (3). Levey specifies that “in many real-world cases it is not enough that individuals or groups have unique or distinctive identities to warrant their recognition” but that “their expression of these identities through beliefs and practices must also be shown to be ‘culturally authentic’” (2). This idea “is usually taken to mean conforming to historically original and traditional cultural expressions or

otherwise displaying historical continuity” (2-3). Cultural authenticity, then, is often used to justify the other two types and consists of claims to historical roots, or Truth.

In its expression of concepts and practices, folklore relates to all three types of (inter)personal authenticity. The concept has been central to the field of folklore because from the field’s very beginnings, traditional tales have been presented as a kind of cultural Truth. The concept of authenticity has thus been intertwined and even mutually iterative with the development of folklore studies as a discipline (Bendix). Certainly, in claiming that tales are “authentically” Martinican, Guadeloupean, Guinean, Creole, Antillean, etc., performers are asserting their “authenticity of identity” by calling on their “cultural authenticity.”

Modernity and commodification have magnified the interrogation of the “authenticity” of folklore. As Pierre Nora describes, with modernity came a real or perceived disappearance of “tradition” and its practices. The field of folklore studies was born of a fear of this loss. Folklorists attempted to preserve *authentic* cultural practices that would otherwise vanish with this transition (Bendix). Of course, these preservations were themselves objects and goods that could be sold. As a result of the connection between folklore and national narratives, non-academics were increasingly invested in these records, thus entangling them with capitalism and market forces (Bendix).²⁵¹ In the Twenty-First Century these trends have only accelerated: “the democratization of culture as enabled by digitization and globalization has led to a greater desire for authentic cultural products” (Cobb 3). In other words, consumers are increasingly looking to privilege primarily or exclusively “authentic” cultural artefacts, that is, commodities.

With Creole folktales this is true regardless of who the audience is. As we will see, performers of by us/for you tales highlight their authenticity in order to appeal to the market

²⁵¹ This is not limited to folklore. Modernity and its resultant obsession with “authentic” cultural commodities have “created a market of identifiable authenticities” (Bendix 3).

forces outlined above since authentic cultural productions sell in today's market. But even insider audience members prioritize authentic cultural productions. In their case, this is because only those can be true sites of memory. No outsider can (re)memorialize the trauma of Creole pasts and the uniqueness of Creole presents. Similarly, in the case of by them/for us recountings, French audiences desire authentic productions in order to most effectively (re)appropriate them. If a performance is inauthentic, not serving as site of memory, it cannot meaningfully be transformed into site of forgetting. All potential audiences or markets are thus in search of authentic cultural productions. In short, multicultural discourses, academic studies, globalization, capitalism, commodification, new media, and even memory all serve as vectors pushing storytellers to "legitimize" or promote their performances through discourses of authenticity.

The most common form of authentication displayed by the texts in my corpus is one of cultural authenticity. In fact, one could argue that all the paratexts included in this study are doing precisely that. Each reference to the tales as "Creole," "Antillean," or Martinican, Guadeloupean, or Guinean; discussion of the tales' connection to tradition and history and to the old, male, enslaved storyteller; detailed description of collection methods and biography of the tales' sources; and every reference to stories learned at (grand)parents' knees function to authenticate the performance and the storyteller as part of the cultural tradition of Creole storytelling and thus make them more marketable. The fact that Confiant emphasizes that *traditional* storytellers needed no formal training of any kind while he and other *modern* performers in my study (e.g., Ramassamy, Christine Colombo, or Maggy Faraux) all emphasize the importance of training and professionalization highlights the increasing value of claiming cultural authenticity in the market.

Beyond this general push towards claiming cultural authenticity, however, there are additional situations and vectors complicated by gender and race that seem to require further justifications or claims to authenticity. Arguably these become relevant due to the often invisible “effects that the social coding of bodies has on reperformance” (Rounthwaite 83). Let us begin with a discussion of gender. As we know, the archetypal image of the traditional, “culturally authentic” storyteller is of an old, *male*, enslaved storyteller. The result of the prominence of this image is that women are often forgotten or discounted. Women, in fact, have historically been silenced, discounted, and/or rendered invisible in Antillean social movements and practices in myriad ways. See, for example, H. Adlai Murdoch’s discussion of the often-ignored importance of women in the Antillean “emigration” to France (“BUMIDOM” 251). Similarly, Schnepel describes how women were excluded and/or ignored in the Creole movement and Antillean politics in the 1980s (216). This omission of female storytellers is thus part of a larger trend.

Writing in 2012, Colombo explains that, “l’activité du conte est largement masculine, même si le nombre de femmes conteuses a tendance à augmenter. Comme le jeu du tambour, l’activité de contage semble réservée aux hommes et une femme ne peut y accéder que difficilement ; très peu d’entre-elles sont reconnues comme bonnes conteuses par les hommes” (*Des Contes* 340-1). This discounting is evident in the fact that Confiant does not include a single *conteuse* in his entire collection. The fact that in French the very word for storyteller, *conteur* or *conteuse*, encodes gender exacerbates this divide.

By 2016, however, Ramassamy argues that this is slowly changing.²⁵² In her introduction she explains that her work “est aussi parti du principe que nous ne pouvions ignorer plus longtemps l’apport des femmes dans le domaine des traditions orales” (6). She goes on to explain

²⁵² Tellingly, it is exclusively collections featuring *female* storytellers that raise the question of gender at all.

that, while women “ont longtemps été reconnues, puis consignées comme des pièces maîtresses dans le processus de la transmission orale familiale[. n]ous pouvons désormais établir que les femmes n’étaient pas seulement consignées dans l’espace privé” (6). She explains that in compiling the collection she encountered many reports of renowned and talented female storytellers performing not only in private spheres but also public ones. She even asserts that with this text “nous pouvons dire que le conte n’est pas une pratique réservée aux seuls hommes ; l’art du conte peut être considéré comme le bien de tous : c’est un héritage commun” (6). Ramassamy is claiming cultural authenticity for her *conteuses* and asserting their role as valid representers of tradition by arguing that the *conte créole* is a shared heritage and by reporting that they have established reputations. Ramassamy illustrates this by including multiple *conteuses* in her text.²⁵³

That said, despite these claims of equality, the biographies in Ramassamy’s text work harder to claim cultural authenticity for the *conteuses* than the *conteurs*. For example, the text features a tale performed by a Guianese storytelling duo, Rémy Aubert (a man) and Malou (a woman). Since they perform together, their biographies are on the same page. Rémy’s is relatively short and straightforward, while Malou’s is longer and full of claims to cultural authenticity:

Rémy Aubert, Mana, Guyane

Né en 1967 à Mana, Rémy Aubert a été initié par son oncle, le célèbre conteur guyanais

Paul Henri Gérard. Artiste aux multiples facettes, auteur, il compose et interprète de la

²⁵³ The contrast between Confiant and Ramassamy may simply illustrate, as Ramassamy implies, the evolution of storytelling practices between the times of publications of the two texts. However, the gender of each collector, and the corresponding choices they made in compiling their texts, cannot be ignored. And I cannot help but wonder if this distinction is another contributing factor in Ramassamy’s apparent need to justify her role as compiler discussed in the previous chapter.

musique. Musicien guitariste, il a remporté de nombreux prix d'excellence dans le milieu artistique, comme celui de la meilleure chanson guyanaise en 1999. Président de l'association Zigzag Prod', il œuvre de manière active pour le développement du conte créole et de l'oralité en Guyane.

Malou, Mana, Guyane

Malou est une figure incontournable du conte guyanais. Son aura semble dépasser les limites du temps et des générations. Née en 1940, à Sinnamary, Malou a grandi dans un environnement où l'oralité créait du lien lors des longues nuits de veillées mortuaires. Petite, elle aimait passer ses nuits à écouter ses aînés, et en particulier les récits de son frère, qui travaillait dans l'or et qui savait raconter des récits transportés par les fleuves et les terres de Guyane. Elle a appris l'éloquence, l'amour de la parole chantée et de la parole contée. Agricultrice, cuisinière, la conteuse est aussi connue pour ses talents de chanteuse de *grajé*, une des musiques traditionnelles de la Guyane. Elle danse, elle chante, et aussi elle publie les contes qu'elle continue à transmettre oralement dans les festivals qu'elle parcourt inlassablement. (19)

Rémy, then, need only mention his uncle's mentorship and his activity as musician and in the Guianese storytelling community to claim his authenticity. This suggests that as a (Black) man from Guiana his authenticity is largely assumed. Malou, on the other hand, is described as a pillar of Guianese storytelling who is so important that she transcends time. She has a long, deep history with "authentic" storytelling (including having learned her tales from her *male* relative!), she is deeply embedded within multiple aspects of traditional "authentic" Guianese culture, and she contributes tirelessly to the storytelling traditions. In other words, for a woman to be an authentic storyteller she should have complete mastery, ongoing commitment, and deep

anchoring in traditions. Ramassamy does not clarify who writes these biographies and therefore leaves the reader wondering whose choice it is. Regardless, these distinctions underscore the clear inequality. It appears that *conteuses* do not benefit from a default assumption of authenticity but rather need to work harder to assert their legitimacy and in order to be marketable in today's commodified globalized world.²⁵⁴

Finally, it is not only female storytellers whose “inauthenticity” is inscribed in their bodies. This also applies to white storytellers. While Western performances are generally characterized by “the unmarked quality of the white body,” in this case it is the Black body that goes unmarked (Rounthwaite 82). As we know, Black is the default insider community, and thus the default storyteller. Others must work hard to justify their “authentic” roots or sources for their tales, as we have seen is the case with Ramassamy who is of Southeast Asian descent and devotes a significant portion of her introduction to defending her “right” to be compiler and translator of tales. It is also the case with Didier Lemaire. The back cover highlights the stories’ “authentic” roots and justifies this white, *métro* storyteller’s position as *conteur*, emphasizing how he has been bewitched by Guadeloupe and Guiana “au point de *se métisser*” as well as the *mixed* heritage that is the authentic Guiana, and finally on the fact that he is telling the stories told to him by his presumably “authentic” Guianese students (*italics added*).

Another example is the Facebook account of Martinique Vacances Annie, who tells the tale “Compère Lapin et Compère Tigre” on her page and whose photos and profile reveal her to be an older white woman from Paris. She, too, works hard to anchor her page in cultural “authenticity.” She emphasizes that she has been visiting the islands since 1992, reposts numerous “authentic” Creole accounts to her own page, and promotes the official governmental

²⁵⁴ For more examples of this greater need to authenticate *conteuses* I refer you to the biographies of the other female storytellers in Ramassamy’s text, most notably those of Mauricienne Fortino and Yaya (51; 71).

pages of Martinique and Guadeloupe. In short, the default social coding of the authentic storyteller as a Black male compels others to establish their authenticity and rootedness in history and tradition in order to be marketable. The contemporary importance of authenticity on all tales and especially those told by “marked” bodies illuminates the increasing import of marketability in telling tales that travel. The universal-if-variable emphasis on cultural authenticity of Creole folktale performances, then, is a direct result of the influences of globalization and commodification on tradition.

The final impact of globalization and commodification on Creole folktales is a redefined importance of audience on performances. As we know, the audience has traditionally played a key role and thus had much power in Creole folklore performances and the objectification of tales consequently diminished the audience’s power. However, the increasing commodification of these performance-records has created a new kind of power for the audience-cum-market. The audience no longer has simultaneous input in the creation of the performance, but the need to “sell” stories, the need for market appeal, allows an unseen and as yet unformed audience to influence that creation. Storytellers must satisfy audiences by focusing on elements and themes that please them and avoiding those that would deter audiences from consuming their performances. Colombo eloquently describes this dynamic, explaining that an important element of the life of a storyteller “qui va s’imposer de plus en plus et dont certains ne tarderont pas à se plaindre, c’est la perte de liberté du conteur. De plus en plus, le conteur doit se plier aux exigences du groupe, aux exigences de l’institution, à la politique du moment” (*Des Contes* 338). Again, this is true regardless of the audience. By us/for us tales will sell best if they focus on tales as sites of memory and forget about non-African roots while by them/for us and by us/for

you sell best when doing the reverse. This gives the potential audiences a wholly different kind of influence than they had in traditional forms of storytelling.²⁵⁵

For all combinations of performer and audience in Creole storytelling, then, globalization, capitalistic commodification, and new media have transformed the tradition. Performances are increasingly commodified in the West and in the regions of origin. The growing consumerism of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana only further drives this. Even the written version of Creole at the heart of these tales was developed in conjunction with market influences. Furthermore, the where and when and by whom of Creole folktale performances is shifting, leading those few who strive to avoid the increasing commodification to mistrust outsiders and jealously guard their knowledge. And for those performances which accept or even embrace modern commodification, the influence of globalization creates the need to establish cultural authenticity in order to sell, especially for those performers whose bodies do not code as “authentic.” All of this both reifies and reflects the audience-cum-market’s new power and influence over all Martinican, Guadeloupean, and Guinean folktale performances. One particular type of performance, however, “my stories for you,” exists in response to and is especially imbricated with these vectors of globalization and commodification.

Storytellers Performing for Community Outsiders

In addition to the traditional by us/for us storytelling form, tales by us/for you is the other combination of storyteller and audience that has existed since the beginnings of Creole folktale traditions. By us/for you performances are cultural insiders telling their tales to, for, or in front of, cultural outsiders. Historically this consisted of enslavers and *békés* “sitting in” on enslaved

²⁵⁵ Gatekeepers play a key role in this, often embodying “their intended markets” and enforcing consumers’ taste in order to “delimit and defend their occupational position against the ongoing emergence of new taste makers” (Smith Maguire 23).

storytellers' performances around a fire at night. Today this consists of Martinicans, Guadeloupeans, and Guineans creating performances for and marketed towards non-Martinicans, non-Guadeloupeans, or non-Guineans, in most cases predominantly French from the mainland.

This form of storytelling has always been relatively bereft of meaning to the outsider audience. The goal of the enslaved storyteller when performing in front of an outsider audience was to obscure all meaning from them. Chamoiseau describes how, when the enslaver listens to the storyteller's tales, "the Storyteller must take care to use language that is opaque, devious—its significance broken up into a thousand sibylline fragments" (*Creole Folktales* xiii). He does this by performing a "narrative [which] turns around long digressions that are humorous, erotic, often even esoteric. His dialogue with his audience is unceasing, punctuated with onomatopoeias and sound effects intended not only to hold his listeners' attention but also to help camouflage any dangerously subversive content" (*Creole Folktales* xiii). Stories by us/for you, then, have never functioned as either sites of remembering or forgetting for the "you."

However, these very performances were historically also by us/for us; the same tale functioned as both. The traditional Creole folktale performance would "*obscure as [it] reveals*" (italics in original, Chamoiseau, *Creole Folktales* xiii). While these performances, then, were merely entertainment to the outsider audience, they were simultaneously functioning as sites of memory for the coterminous insider community. In contrast, modern by us/for you performances are paradoxically still available to any insider audience but shaped exclusively by marketing to an unknown outsider audience. These stories are thus stripped of even this obscured co-existing meaning and are pure commodities.

As such, the primary function of modern by us/for you stories is to be as marketable as possible to the outsider you, most frequently citizens of mainland France. There are several

marketing emphases that particularly appeal to an outsider French audience. First, as we have seen, France has always exoticized these regions. Highlighting the tropical settings of the tales and difference of the cultures they represent consequently renders them more marketable. Second, as I have discussed, all obvious traces of trauma must be removed. Any memory of France's imperialist past creates a cognitive dissidence with the comfortable French national narrative of universalism and thus discomfits a French metropolitan audience.²⁵⁶ Distressing the intended market is demonstrably counterproductive if the primary goal is increased sales. Traces of memory, then, must be avoided or removed. Finally, performers must perform and market themselves in terms meaningful to their French audience (Vincenot 68). Any minority cultural discourse, whether one of cultural belonging or difference, can only be understood in the context of the construction of the hegemonic culture and nation (Beriss, "High Folklore"). Because of this, any Creole performer trying to make sense and appeal to a French audience must use French ideas and ideologies. The paratexts and framings of by us/for you performances therefore tend to highlight their exotic roots, erase all (post)colonial traces, and use the language and concepts of French nationhood in order to appeal and sell to as many French audience-consumers as possible. The result of this is the creation and promotion of an essentialized "Creole" identity that is fully accessible, non-threatening, and tantalizingly exotic.²⁵⁷

This essentializing trend has deep historical roots. Anderson describes how part of the colonial process of conquest consisted in essentializing colonial subjects into knowable

²⁵⁶ For a detailed analysis of a performance art piece intended to discomfit the French audience through reference to these dissonant memories, please see Anny-Dominique Curtius's discussion of slavery memorials in *Postcolonial Realms of Memory*.

²⁵⁷ In her chapter on literary prestige in *Postcolonial Realms of Memory*, Claire Ducournau describes the essentializing vectors in French literary markets, noting that authors may adapt "[t]he aesthetic or ethical content of their works...to the expectations of legitimizing bodies that can prove favourable to amusement or appeasement, or to *typical representations of minority groups*, in a literary field that has been depoliticized since the 1970s" (italics added, 68). Gatekeepers, tastemakers, and consumer markets buy essentialized identities.

commodities—a different kind of conquest. He discusses how map makers and census makers were two sides of the same coin, both working to survey, quantify, and render easily accessible colonial spaces and subjects themselves (173). The universal trend, as he argues, was a tapestry of ideology where “[t]he ‘warp’...was a totalizing classificatory grid...The ‘weft’ was what one could call serialization” (184). He concludes that, as a direct result of “the technologies of navigation, astronomy, horology, surveying, photography and print, to say nothing of the deep driving power of capitalism,” the colonial state attempted “to create, under its control, a human landscape of perfect visibility; the condition of this Visibility was that everyone, everything had (as it were) a serial number” (184-185). The colonial project is thus deeply intertwined with, or even perhaps dependent upon, a process of rendering the colonial subject knowable, Visible, quantifiable—in a word, essentialized. This essentialized identity is objectified and commodified through print media, and “[t]hanks to print-capitalism, a sort of pictorial census of the state’s patrimony becomes available...to the state’s subjects” (Anderson 182). The colonial project thus rendered colonial subjects not just easily Visible but used capitalistic commodification to turn this visibility into a consumable monetized commodity. Colonial subjects and their culture became a valuable symbol of the wealth and power of the colonial state and its rich heritage, one defined by the very opacity and variegation denied the colonial subjects.

This process existed in France’s Second Colonial Empire in the nineteenth century. Certainly, the infamous human zoos, especially those created at France’s Colonial Expositions, play this role. At these events, “natives” or select actors were paid (or not) to represent to a paying French audience an easily-digested stereotype of their culture.²⁵⁸ In his chapter “Colonial Photography” in *Postcolonial Realms of Memory*, Xavier Guégan discusses France’s historical

²⁵⁸ For more on this, and their roles as postcolonial sites of memory, please see Nicolas Bancel and Pascal Blanchard’s chapter on “Colonial Exhibitions” in *Postcolonial Realms of Memory*.

use of tourism and imagery to classify and control its colonial subjects. He explains that “[t]he tourism industry as a modern phenomenon appeared in the mid-nineteenth century with the modernisation [sic] of transportation and communication and the building of new empires, which connected this global economic activity to emerging tourists from different social classes” (364). Tourism is merely another form of commodifying and rendering Visible colonial subjects and land. In Algeria, for example, France created a “tourist market around souvenirs,” especially postcards which were arguably the first international mass media (364). These represent the exact kind of print-capitalism that Anderson describes in that one image is characterized as sufficient to see and know an entire people and country. The essentialized Algerian identity was a desirable commodity, sold in the form of travel, and objectified and remembered in the form of souvenir postcards.

Modern Creole by us/for you folktale performances are arguably an outgrowth of these postcards. The images included in Confiant and Ramassamy’s collections evoke the “sort of pictorial sense of the state’s patrimony” that was part of the colonial enterprise (Anderson 182). Furthermore, Colombo explains that with the renewed interest in folklore, “les Antillais ayant pris conscience de l’importance du tourisme dans l’économie des îles [et] ont entrepris de mettre l’accent sur la promotion du folklore dont le conte populaire est l’un des éléments essentiels” (*Ti-Jean* 26). That is to say the Creole folktale is a key part of the tourism industry in these regions in that it is an easily-grasped, knowable Antillean identity, rendered Visible by folklore. It is thus a valuable commodity. Of course, by definition, tales performed for tourists whether virtual or literal fall under the category of by us/for you performances.

Let us turn to an examination of examples of this type of performance. Interestingly, many of these are either in-person or designed to promote in-person performances. In-person by

us/for you stories from my corpus can be divided into two kinds: those performed on the islands and those performed in Europe. Of those performed on the islands, a particularly interesting example are the *rando-contes* created and led by Guadeloupeans Raphaël Annerose and Suzie Rosnel.²⁵⁹ In an interview Annerose explains that he and Rosnel, “nous faisons découvrir toutes les richesses de notre culture et de notre environnement, en les explorant et en les mettant en valeur” (Fleming). These performances, then, consist of guided walking tours through the natural landscapes of Guadeloupe while performing tales—for a fee, of course.²⁶⁰

Even from this initial description of their work the positioning of audience and storyteller, and thus the type of performance, is plain. This brief introduction states that Annerose and Rosnel help (others) discover all the richness of *our* culture and of *our* environment. The double use of the possessive adjective “our,” especially in reference to the uniquely-Guadeloupean countryside, emphasizes their positioning as Guadeloupean insiders. Their implied expertise in both stories and knowledge of the natural surroundings and geography further solidify this positioning. The storytellers are thus Guadeloupean.

The representation that Annerose and Rosnel are helping others *discover* their culture and geography frames their audience as not only not familiar with Guadeloupe but not part of the insider group at all. Annerose takes this idea further by explicitly commenting that “Il y a souvent des touristes dans le public des rando-contes. Il faut donc s’adapter en permanence au niveau de la langue. C’est aussi l’occasion de leur faire découvrir le créole en leur faisant répéter les répliques, car les histoires sont contées avec beaucoup d’interaction” (Fleming). The audience

²⁵⁹ “Rando-contes” is a portmanteau of the French words *randonnée* or walk and *contes* or tale. So these are walking tales or tales told while walking.

²⁶⁰ In a 2007 interview with Rosnel participation cost €10 for adults and €5 for children (Y. J. L.). Promotional material for an all-day excursion on August 1, 2020 lists a price of €12, while materials for a four-hour walk on November 7, 2021 list tickets of €10 for subscribers and €15 for non-subscribers (“Rando-conte;” “Randonnée au Saut”). These performances, then, have commodified land and culture for an affordable price for fifteen years.

consists at least partly, then, of community outsiders in the form of tourists which means that he must use different language than he would to address community insiders.²⁶¹ Furthermore, the fact that Annerose uses this as an opportunity to teach his audience about Creole storytelling language and traditions (presumably the traditional “yé krik/yé krak” call and response) makes it apparent that the outsider audience is not simply those from other islands, but is more broadly those not familiar with Creole at all. Read closely, it becomes apparent that he is compelled by his outsider audience to tell the tales primarily in French, meaning that his audience is mostly French tourists.²⁶² These by us/for you performances, then, are Guadeloupean insiders performing for French tourist outsiders presumably from mainland France, or the Hexagon.

Beyond identifying the nature of the primary performer and audience groups, these quotations also clarify the role of these performances as cultural tourism commodity. Annerose notes that their goal is to help others discover the richness of their culture and their environment. He is explicitly conflating discovering the culture and discovering a new topology, implying that exploration of the “exotic” islands is as much touring the culture as the landscape. The fact that a large proportion of the audience are tourists only reinforces this conflation. This practice is an interesting twist on the conception of Creole folktales as belonging in and to nature: “les conteurs ont besoin de cet environnement [naturel] pour travailler” (Colombo, *Ti-Jean* 25).

²⁶¹ This is a Caribbean example of the phenomenon Cruikshanks describes in the Yukon of storytellers’ awareness that their outsider “audiences have limited familiarity with indigenous narrative styles” but that they attend in order “to experience ‘authenticity,’ ‘cultural distinctiveness,’ and ‘cultural preservation’” (59). Obviously, this practice falls into a broader, international trend of folklore as a form of cultural tourism.

²⁶² It is important to note that Annerose and Rosnel do also perform for cultural insiders. Rosnel has said that she would like to share her musical knowledge (including training in jazz in Europe and the US) with her “compatriotes” and help them “s’ouvrent plus sur le monde” and a publicity announcement for a 2007 rando-contes explains that Annerose and Rosnel “raconteront des histoires drôles bien de chez nous” (Y. J. L.). It is interesting, however, that even in these cases the language positions the audience as tourists, this time as tourists in their “own” culture. Perhaps the tension between performing for cultural insiders and outsiders, partly resolved by positioning all as tourists discovering an unfamiliar culture, is a reflection of the need of cultural tourism storytellers to “work on two levels” for the two different kinds of audiences (Bendix 59).

Arguably, Annerose and Rosnel have taken this traditional association and commodified it by conflating and condensing land, culture, and even language into an object for sale.

This practice, in turn, essentializes storyteller and community and renders them commodities for sale as well. First, presumably, in order to be successful in the tourism market, the content of the tales is likely stripped of traces of trauma. It is unlikely that French tourists would continue to buy enough tickets to support this type of performance (since 2007) if the tellings were full of uncomfortable allusions to moments of dissidence with French national identity. Furthermore, in creating these guided tours of land, culture, and language Annerose and Rosnel render all three “knowable.” If you take a few hours and walk around with these experts you will “understand” the island and its people. Guadeloupe as a place and a cultural identity is distilled into a consumable, knowable entity and thus stripped of its opacity.²⁶³ In selling their expert insider knowledge as a conflation of physical and cultural tourism, Annerose and Rosnel not only subordinate their own opacity but even strip the island and its people of theirs whereby creating an essentialized and buyable Guadeloupe.

In terms of in-person by us/for you types of performances, those that travel to the “you” rather than wait for the outsiders to travel to the insiders are much more common. As we know, there is a large “migrant” population of individuals of Martinican, Guadeloupean, or Guinean descent in Paris, earning it the moniker the “third island.” A significant population has also

²⁶³ There are obvious parallels between this type of performance and the process Anderson describes where colonial powers incorporate cultural spaces into knowable sites of *patrimoine*: “The old sacred sites were to be incorporated into the map of the colony, and their ancient prestige (which, if this had disappeared, as it often had, the state would attempt to revive) draped around the mappers. This paradoxical situation is nicely illustrated by the fact that the reconstructed monuments often had smartly laid-out lawns around them, and always explanatory tablets, complete with datings, planted here and there. Moreover, they were to be kept empty of people, except for perambulatory tourists (no religious ceremonies or pilgrimages, so far as possible). Museumized this way, they were repositioned as regalia for a secular colonial state” (181-182). Annerose and Rosnel serve as museumifiers, mappers, and plaques all in one. Whether this is a reflection of internalization of French values due to their French citizenship, or of the reality that new independent states “inherited this form of political museumizing” is hard to say (Anderson 183).

emigrated to other parts of Europe as EU citizens with freedom of movement. Some of these populations make their living marketing and selling cultural exports, including folktale performances (Beriss, “High Folklore”). One of the most prominent of such performers is Magguy Faraux, a Guadeloupean-born professional storyteller who has lived and performed in the Hexagon for over twenty-five years. Again, she mostly performs at live events at cultural centers, libraries, festivals, etc. She maintains a designated website and press dossier to market herself and promote these live shows. She also has several Spotify albums (mostly for children) and even a few YouTube videos (of full or partial tale recountings) that serve as “teasers” or promotional materials highlighting her abilities.

In terms of her relationship as storyteller to her intended audience, Faraux’s various materials all make each group’s positioning visible.²⁶⁴ She positions herself explicitly as Antillean. Her press dossier refers to “son univers antillais,” her website has a tab called “Conteuse Antillaise” (with a link to a short biography), and she even begins this biography by labeling herself “Conteuse des Antilles” (“Dossier” 2; *Magguy Faraux*). More specifically, she explains that she “raconte en puissant dans la tradition orale de la Guadeloupe et de la Martinique qui est en langue créole” (“Dossier” 2). She claims an identity, then, of not just Antillean, or specifically Guadeloupean (where she was born), but as a teller of tales from and thus representative of both Martinique and Guadeloupe.²⁶⁵

The audience framing is just as apparent. Certainly, the fact that she lives and primarily performs in the Hexagon implies that her audience is mostly metropolitan French. Beyond this,

²⁶⁴ It is significant that her website is written in first person (and thus implicitly by Faraux) while her dossier is in third person. However, presumably she had control or final say over the content of both, so I am treating them all as part of her positioning of herself. For more on the impact when it is obviously not the storyteller positioning themselves, please see the previous chapter.

²⁶⁵ The one identity she absolutely does not claim, or even allude to, is that of “French.” See my discussion below for more on this dynamic.

the language of her promotional materials decidedly demarcates the intended audience as non-insiders, in other words, non-Antilleans. For example, her press dossier informs the intended audience that she “nous fait voyager dans son univers antillais” (“Dossier” 2). “We” are transported to her world, not one to which we are also awarded ownership. Similarly, she explains on her website that “[j]e vous emmène dans les bois, les ‘zenbabwa’, non sans avoir pris le soin de mettre mon jupon à l’envers pour éviter les mauvaises rencontres, car nos bois sont habités de choses qui ne sont pas de ce monde...” (ellipses in original, *Magguy Faraux*). The language of “leading” the audience through the implicitly unknown woods, the proprietary use of “our woods,” and the apparent need to explain traditions insiders would know all highlight the Othering of the audience. Faraux’s intended audience is not community insiders.

The handful of testimonials in her press dossier further attest to the positioning of her audience. Faraux includes only three testimonials. One echoes her own language, offering that the poster and their six-year-old son both enjoyed the show and then exclaiming that “Magguy FARAUX nous a fait voyager. Bravo !!!” (“Dossier” 5). The idea that Faraux successfully helped them travel implies that this audience member and her son are not Antillean (they were not “brought home again”), but that they are nevertheless French speaking. A second testimonial lists all the joys of Faraux’s performance before concluding, “Je ne suis pas antillaise et je ne connais pas le Créole, mais j’ai pu suivre sans aucun problème ce spectacle” (“Dossier” 5). This person explicitly identifies themselves as non-Creole and non-Antillean (but French-speaking). That she elected to foreground these two in her choice of only three testimonials confirms that Faraux is explicitly courting an audience of French-speaking outsiders who are not Antillean and do not speak Creole, assuring them that they will not only be able to understand her performance

but even enjoy it.²⁶⁶ Certainly, then, she intends her performance of Martinican and Guadeloupean tales to be primarily for French-speaking non-Creoles, i.e., metropolitan French.

Of course, this language of traveling and guiding does not simply indicate Faraux's audiences' outsider positioning, it also highlights the fact that she is creating a commodity for the virtual cultural tourism market. It should be noted that the testimonials are labeled as written by audience members who saw a specific event "avec BilletReduc.com" ("Dossier" 5). These were not merely community members but paying customers. The list in Faraux's press dossier of other groups who "ont choisi de [lui] faire confiance," including the Théâtre Popul'air in Paris, the Bibliothèque Amélie and the Bibliothèque Diderot in Paris, the Médiathèque L'arche Guédon in Torcy, the Festival de la Francophonie de EREVAN in Arménie, etc. serves as further testimony to the value of the commodity she is offering ("Dossier" 5).

This intentional commodification demands of Faraux that she address the market forces discussed above. For example, she obviously feels the need to acknowledge and justify her gender. Faraux begins her only YouTube video featuring a performance of a full tale, "Ti Chika à pied bobo," with discussion of her gender: "Je suis Magguy, Magguy Faraux. Je suis conteuse et chanteuse. Eh oui, il y a des femmes aussi qui se sont mises à parler aux Antilles. Et j'espère que, après moi, il y en aura d'autres et d'autres. Puisque la parole, la parole conteuse, elle appartient à tous—hommes, femmes, enfants" (#freddyderby). In labeling herself, from the very beginning, as a *conteuse* and *chanteuse*, Faraux alludes to the elephant in the room: that she does not conform to marketing expectations in that she is a woman. In asserting that women, too, are telling tales in the Antilles she is both acknowledging it and labeling herself as part of a broader

²⁶⁶ The third and final testimonial sits in contrast to the others. In it, the poster, after exalting Faraux's abilities, concludes: "J'ai fait un retour dans l'enfance. Ce fut un moment de poésie et d'émotion, un moment magique" ("Dossier" 5). This post, plainly from a community insider, represents on Faraux's part an awareness of a possible mixed audience and does promote her ability to cater to a heterogeneous insider/outsider audience.

movement. Finally, in asserting that the tradition belongs to all regardless of age and gender she is justifying her right to tell these tales “despite” her gender. All of this can be read as a necessary packaging in order to fulfill capitalistic marketing pressures.

Indeed, Faraux arguably translates this need to acknowledge and discuss her gender into more marketable discourses surrounding gender equality, shifting her gender from a liability to an asset in today’s market. Faraux positions herself as a pioneer female storyteller, one (re)claiming the right for women to perform folktales in public spaces.²⁶⁷ Certainly, her statement that she hopes that after her there will be more and more female storytellers fits this packaging strategy. So, too, does her explanation on her website that she became a storyteller “Pour donner la parole à ce qui se tait. Pour le Plaisir du dire là où on ne l’attend pas” (“Pourquoi Magguy ?”). While there is no reason to believe that she is insincere in her desire to give voice to those who are silenced, it also seems an effective marketing strategy when performing for Western and especially French audiences, where narratives of “oppressed” women from other parts of the world reclaiming their voices sell.²⁶⁸

However, even with this Faraux finds it necessary to establish her authenticity, arguably more than a man would. In her video, immediately after her assertion that tales belong to all people, she jumps into a description of her long history with Antillean folktales: “J’étais baignée dans un univers oral très riche” (#freddyderby). She then describes her mother telling not only her but also other children in the neighborhood (i.e., semi-public performances) tales at night (i.e., in keeping with tradition), and how the children listened because there was not modern

²⁶⁷ As we know, women’s role as storytellers in domestic spheres has always been accepted and acknowledged.

²⁶⁸ Again, I would like to emphasize that I do not believe this framing of her work is *merely* a marketing strategy for Faraux. I believe she is sincere in these statements. But that does not mean it cannot also serve as successful promotional packaging in Western markets. In fact, it seems possible that Faraux based her storytelling business in the Hexagon rather in Martinique or Guadeloupe *because* the Hexagon is (potentially) more open to female storytellers.

media to distract them. She then explains that she thinks “le goût du conte m’est revenue ici—là. J’étais, je dirais, plongée dedans. Mes racines sont ancrées dans la parole” (#freddyderby). In short, in the first minute of her video, Faraux emphasizes her deep connection to traditional, Antillean folktale performance four times, saying that she was bathed in it, that her taste for it developed as a young child, that she was plunged into, and even that words are her roots.²⁶⁹ Immediately after her acknowledgement and discussion of her gender, then, she engages in an extreme defense of her claims to authenticity.

This obligatory legitimization is also visible on her website and promotional materials. The very first words you see on her website’s homepage are her name, her label as a “conteuse antillaise” and then her description of herself: “Je suis née, sur l’île de Guadeloupe un matin de juillet, sitôt mon oreille ouverte, j’ai capté les paroles de mon frère Alain qui racontait Zistol Compè Lapin et Compè Zemba, il dansait, chantait, grimaçait et moi je le regardais les yeux remplis d’étoiles et les oreilles palpitantes. Assise sous un manguier ! C’est là que ma vie de conteuse a pris racine” (*Magguy Faraux*). In this very initial description she highlights her Guadeloupean background, describes her lifelong immersion in traditional storytelling, and even claims authenticity by again using the language of roots and history and referring to tales learned from a male relative. Her explanation that she tells stories “pour ne pas oublier” and that she sings the songs her mother sang to her furthers this claim to authentic heritage (“Pourquoi Magguy?”). Additionally, her press dossier presents her as guiding her audience “dans son univers antillais peuplé d’êtres imaginaires, rythmant ses récits d’onomatopées dont elle seule

²⁶⁹ Interestingly, while performances of full folktales posted to YouTube are common from other regions and cultures, Faraux’s video is one of only a few from the Antilles. This suggests that in this cultural context this type of commodity is not best suited to YouTube. Antillean folktale performances on YouTube do not “sell,” apparently. The fact that Faraux includes one may, again, reflect her greater need to authenticate herself than her male storyteller counterparts. She may need this video to point to as an illustration of her skill.

détient le secret” (“Dossier” 2). The claim, therefore, is that she is the ultimate insider because of her proprietorship of the secret. Unmistakably, market forces have shaped how Faraux presents herself both in terms of acknowledging her gender and in terms of the resultant need to over-emphasize her authenticity to boost her claim that she is an ideal source of stories by us/for you.

However, a close analysis of her performances and packaging of herself implies that even as she is claiming deeply-rooted authenticity she is also sanitizing the tales of potentially painful traces of trauma. The tale she tells in her YouTube video, which she says in several places is one of her favorites to perform, is carefully curated and there are no references to either slavery or colonialism. Whereas in many by us/for us performances the power figures are enslavers or *békés*, here the power figure in the tale is labeled a king living locally (i.e., not the French king) and presented as the only likeable character apart from the main protagonist. In fact, the king is the only one who is wise and compassionate enough to see past Ti Chika’s “bobos” to his true good self. In other words, French presence has either been completely erased from the story or is represented by one of only two likeable characters. Even Faraux’s claims to represent both Guadeloupean *and* Martinican traditions can be read as appealing to a French market. Arguably, Faraux capitalizes on the Hexagon’s tendency to conflate the two in order to expand her market and remove claims to cultural specificity. In short, she removes, or forgets, all the traditional memories from these tales.²⁷⁰ This, too, is a result of market pressures since sites of memory of French oppression will reach a more limited audience in a French market.

²⁷⁰ This is, in many ways, the opposite of what Homi K. Bhabha argues should happen. He contends that “it is to the city that the migrants, the minorities, the diasporic come to change the history of the nation” (169-170). In other words, for Bhabha, the movement of those from the periphery to the center, such as Faraux’s move from Guadeloupe to Paris, leads to a hybridization of the hegemonic culture. We do not see that here. Rather, we see the dilution of the periphery’s culture as a result of contact with the center. This is a result of capitalism. Bhabha’s discussion is of pure cultural contact, not that muddied by the vectors of marketability and commodification.

A final element relating to how Faraux markets herself—which is certainly a result of the commodification of her work—is her emphasis on her own exotic, non-French background and that of her tales. Certainly, much of the language already quoted highlights this. In emphasizing her Antillean roots, her authenticity, the fact that she listened to her brother under a mango tree, etc. she is highlighting the “exotic” dimension of her tales. Before beginning her YouTube recounting Faraux explains, “j'aurais bien aimé partager un petit conte avec vous, seulement, il faudra bien prendre la précaution, la compagnie, de répondre à ‘yé krik’ et ‘yé mistikrik.’ *Yé krik ! Yé mistikrik ! Yé mistikrak !*” (#freddyderby). She is thus packaging herself as representing a culture that is foreign to the audience, one into which they must be initiated by her.

In the very first line of the actual tale in her YouTube video, she begins by explaining, “[v]ous savez, la compagnie, aux Antilles il y avait des rois” (#freddyderby). Later she explicates that “Chez nous on ne dit pas château, palais, comme ça. On dit ‘habitation à richesse” (#freddyderby). Similarly, at the end of the tale, the king gives the hero penicillin, which Faraux explains is a “chose qui était très rare à l’époque chez nous” (#freddyderby). This language and repeated emphasis on the need to explain things for her outsider audience throughout the tale underlines how distinct she is from her audience, thoroughly Othering them from her. Furthermore, the majority of her tale is told in French, save one moment of Creole where she tells her audience that the hero, Ti Chika, picked up an eggshell “en disant en créole” (she quotes him in Creole, then continues), “ce qui veut dire, ‘Je le prends, on sait jamais, on peut toujours en avoir besoin” (#freddyderby). Her need to translate his Creole citation indicates that her audience cannot understand any Creole, and thus that its inclusion serves merely to emphasize her ability to differentiate herself by providing the translation. Finally, in every visual depiction of Faraux online she is wearing an outfit composed of a traditional Madras headpiece and dress

which further exoticize her (Zamor). In her other videos and pictures, many of which feature images of a live audience watching her performances, her clothing is strikingly distinct. In short, in both her promotional literature and her actual performances, Faraux underscores all the ways in which she is different from her presumably French metropolitan target audience.

Significantly, this emphasis on the exotic also emphasizes her “non-French” aspects. Certainly, in emphasizing all the ways in which she is distinct from her hexagonal French audience, Faraux is suggesting that she is not “French” like them, if at all in fact. Furthermore, in all of her explicit discussions of her background and identity, there is not one allusion to being French in any way. She even states on her homepage: “Conteuse des Antilles, je raconte *mon pays*” (italics added, *Magguy Faraux*). This reference to her *country* as being the Antilles and not France is a clear implication that even though she comes from a French department and is therefore a full-fledged French citizen, she refrains from marketing herself as French to her hexagonal audience.²⁷¹ This, in turn, suggests that French audiences are also inclined to view the Antilles as somehow distinct, non-French entities, and Faraux capitalizes on this.

Part of the reason for this increased marketability of being non-French, as exemplified in her promotional materials, is that it allows her to draw on the long profitable history of cultural tourism even as she performs in the Hexagon.²⁷² Writer and librarian Marie-Line Musset points to this language of cultural tourism in her testimonial on Faraux’s actual website (not in her Press Dossier). Musset exclaims that “Magguy a le pouvoir de transporter les pauvres voyageurs

²⁷¹ While the French word *pays*, much like (or even more so than) the English word *country*, can and does have metaphorical valences that are not politically based and mean more “homeland,” it seems nonetheless significant that she does not say that she sings her *île*, *peuple*, *terre*, *culture*, etc. but her *pays*.

²⁷² It is also possible that this emphasis on her non-Frenchness is due to the racism of France. Antilleans “who have been to France often mentio[n] experiencing racism there” even while saying that it is disappearing from the islands (Managan 156). In other words, while performers in the Antilles are, perhaps, less defined by their race, in France the color of their skin is inescapable. Presumably, then, Faraux is consistently and unavoidably Othered. As a result, much like with her gender, she may as well capitalize on it by embracing her alterity and commodifying it.

immobiles que nous sommes dans des contrées lointaines, et cela au seul son de sa voix mélodieuse” (“Témoignages”). Faraux has a special power: that of transporting still-in-the-Hexagon others to her Antillean world.

In short, by deliberately Othering herself, Faraux is marketing herself as the ultimate, exotic cultural guide. As her materials imply, one need not travel all the way to Martinique or Guadeloupe. All one need do is hire Magguy and she will transport you there for far less effort and expense! This, along with the acknowledgement of her gender, emphasis on her authenticity, forgetting of potentially triggering traces of memory, and presentation of her exotic non-Frenchness, all reflect and serve market pressures.

Of course, as with other examples of by us/for you, the result is an essentialization of identity. The implication behind the rhetoric of cultural tourism is that those willing to listen (here to Faraux) for a few hours will gain full access to another culture (or perhaps have their perceptions confirmed, rather than challenged). Certainly, the explications that Faraux provides in her video allows her audience this assumption and she more or less explicitly promises as much on the homepage of her website: “Vous aurez l’eau à la bouche à l’évocation des feux d’épices de nos acras, nos boudins créole [sic] et autre mangeailles, mais attention au Diable des gourmandises ! Et tout ça le temps de deux ti mots, quatre paroles et une chanson d’amour” (*Magguy Faraux*). She will render transparent for her audience the secrets of the Antilles, removing their opacity with a song and a few words, all for a small fee. In short, in marketing herself this way, in conforming to the demands of modern capitalism, in telling stories by us/for you, Faraux is transforming not only traditional folktales but even Antillean culture into an essentialized object that one can buy, stripping it of memory and opacity and transforming it into pure commodity. In many ways, the spectacle of received representations of “other” cultures

replicates the longstanding tradition of colonial expositions, human zoos, and the promise of “tour du monde en un jour.” Faraux represents, then, the quintessential by us/for you commodity.

Beyond these live performances, however, there are two more examples of by us/for you performances worth discussing, in large part because of their complex positionings. First is the video posted to YouTube by user “londresurf” of a live performance by the storytelling group Zil’oKa in London. The video shows a storyteller recounting a tale at a Creole Christmas event, Chanté Nwel, in London. The performance is designed for a live audience mostly consisting of children and in Creole but simultaneously translated into English by a Black female translator performing next to the Black (male) storyteller. The obviously amateur video begins just as the tale is beginning, thus offering no contextualization. The only description on YouTube is “Conte de Noël Antillais raconté aux enfants par Zil’oKA au Chanté Nwel à Londres” (londresurf). Furthermore, the storyteller does not necessarily offer the kinds of explanations to his audience that Faraux does. However, this limited framing and lack of explication does not mean that Zil’oKA do not position themselves. The fact that the storyteller tells his tale in Creole, that the video is labeled as being an Antillean folktale, and that his translator and some members of the audience are wearing traditional Antillean Creole clothing all serve to ascribe a very defined position. The storyteller community is Antillean Creole.

The identity of the intended audience is less apparent. This is partly due to the duality that a YouTube video of a live performance entails. There is both the live audience and the potential YouTube audience. In terms of the live audience, the fact that this is a live performance in London suggests that it is at least partly community outsiders, and the fact that it is translated into English also implies this. The live audience, then, appears to be composed of primarily anglophone speakers. However, as part of the performance, in addition to the storyteller, his

translator, and accompanying musicians, two young girls attempt to act out the actions as they are recounted (with the help of an older woman, perhaps their mother). This effort to act out the plot of the story suggests a gesture towards making it understandable to anyone regardless of language, making the “you” of the audience anyone who does not speak Creole. Many elements indicate, then, a live audience of cultural outsiders.

Other indications suggest a live audience of at least some insiders. The audience is predominantly Black and many audience members are wearing traditional madras clothing. Beyond this, the storyteller’s translator does not translate his “*yé krik’s*” and “*yé mistikrik’s*.” Rather, when he utters these words, before the translator can say anything and without further prompting, the audience responds with the appropriate “*yé krak*” and “*yé mistikrak*” thereby revealing that at least some members of the live audience are community insiders or experienced spectators. The live audience, then, is perhaps composed of both Caribbean community insiders and community outsiders, making it simultaneously a by us/for us and by us/for you performance, reflecting the tradition of an enslaved storyteller performing for both other enslaved people and for enslavers.

All of this is complicated by the fact that the video has been posted to YouTube. Certainly, a virtual audience can benefit from the layers of understandability described above, following the Creole, the English translation, or the acting of the young girls. However, in this low-quality recording, the Creole is consistently audible while the English translation fades in and out and is at times incomprehensible. This (accidentally) creates a preference for a Creole insider audience. Beyond this, the video itself is described in French, implying that while the live audience may be anglophones and creolophones, the target internet audience is perhaps bilingual francophones. The very accessibility inherent to the nature of an online video makes it available

to anyone. Ultimately, the positioning of the audience is complex and variegated, presumably consisting of some combination of insider and outsider, a fact the live performers are conscious of given their attention to communicating in multiple ways.

Regardless of the positioning of the audience, however, this performance and the broader work of Zil'oKa overall represent by us/for you performances and a kind of cultural commodification. On their website, Zil'oKa explains that the group “was founded in January 2008 by members of the UK based French Caribbean Association, MBMB” and that “[t]he group aims at representing the French Caribbean diaspora in the UK by promoting the diversity of our traditional rhythms, singing, and dances which include GwoKa which is from Guadeloupe, Bèlè which is from Martinique, Biguine from both islands and many more” (“1. Who We Are”). While there is much less to unpack here than with Faraux, there is nonetheless a similar emphasis on French Caribbean culture and traditional performances as a good to be sold, claiming that the audience needs only a performance to understand the culture. As they say, their aim is to “represent” the French Caribbean through traditional performances. This is arguably less reductive than Faraux’s language but still carries shades of cultural commodification and essentialization. Finally, it is significant that the group, like Faraux, is careful to avoid claims to French identity, emphasizing instead their ties to traditional French *Caribbean* culture. This video is thus consistent with the trend of commodification of performance and the essentialization of identity that results.

A final example of a by us/for you performance that can illustrate the overall argument is offered by Mauricienne Fortino’s folktale collection *Les Neuf chimanes et le maître de la pluie: Récits Palikur de Guyane*. As with Zil'oKa, while the positioning of Fortino is apparent, the identity of the intended audience is complex. Fortino identifies herself and is identified as

explicitly Palikur, a people indigenous to Guiana. Both the title and Nicole Launey's explanation in the Introduction that "[e]lle-même Palikur, Mauricienne consacre une grande partie de sa vie à collecter et sauvegarder la tradition de son peuple" highlight this identity (11). The biography of Fortino on the back cover of the book reinforces her positioning: "Mauricienne FORTINO, originaire de Saint-Georges de l'Oyapok, de mère paykwene (Palikur) et de père créole, est conteuse."²⁷³ Fortino herself identifies as Palikur while her mixed Palikur-Creole heritage serves to underline her authentically Guianese background and suitability as an effective "bridge" between the two cultures.

However, if Fortino's identity is explicit, the audience's is not. Of course, as with all books, the concept of audience identity is more elusive than with a live performance but the text and paratexts still communicate a desired intended audience. Looking first at the text, one might infer a cultural positioning where humankind is viewed monolithically, and the only dividing line is between "mere" men and shamans. In one story, the shaman Karumayra uses his powers to "ouvrit les yeux de son jeune frère sur l'autre monde, et lui permit de voir *ce qu'une personne comme vous et moi ne peut voir*" (italics added, 8). There are, it suggests, shamans with insider knowledge, and everyone else. This would suggest this performance is not so much by us/for you, as rather "by us/for all of us, minor differences notwithstanding."

The paratext, however, tells a different story. The back cover begins its explanation of the text by promising that "[v]ous découvrirez dans ces récits inédits des créatures étranges et mystérieuses ainsi que la vie de certains chamanes qui communiquent avec elles. Vous

²⁷³ The biography, unsurprisingly, continues by claiming her authenticity and expertise: "Depuis 1993 elle collecte des récits Palikur auprès des anciens des différents villages de Saint-Georges, Régina, Roura et Macouria. Présidente de l'association Kamawyeneh, elle est aussi responsable du groupe culturel avec lequel elle voyage en France, en Martinique, en Guadeloupe et au Surinam depuis plus de 20 ans pour faire connaître la culture et les traditions du peuple palikur."

apprendrez que la ‘Rivière sans os’ est le lieu mythique le plus important pour ce peuple.”

Referring to the Palikur as “this people” completely Others them and makes it plain that the book’s intended audience is not of the same community as the storyteller. The explanation that the book will help the audience discover strange and mysterious creatures and learn about the Boneless River only further distances audience and storyteller. There are even footnotes throughout the book explaining the Palikur culture to the audience. These explanations would not be necessary for an insider audience. The book is thus plainly framed so that the insider storyteller community is distinct from the outsider intended audience’s community.

Who, then, is the outsider community implied by the paratext? The fact that book and paratext are all in French certainly implies that the intended audience is French-speaking. Furthermore, Launey explains in her introduction that the Boneless River “est conçue comme un corps invertébré, ce qui nous montre une vision du champ spatial très différente de celle de l’Occident” (10). This reference to a worldview very different from that of the Occident further implies that the intended audience is Westerners in general, if not the French specifically. Certainly, the choice of Nicole Launey, who is a white French teacher interested in Guianese storytelling culture, to write the Introduction further implies that the intended audience is metropolitan French and that the introductory section serves to mediate between the two spaces.

On the other hand, it seems significant that the biography of Fortino makes a point of telling us that while her mother was Palikur her father was Creole. Furthermore, the choice of stories is not necessarily in keeping with a French metropolitan intended audience. For example, the tale “Le grand chamane Karumayra” features “les Tukukyene” who visit the great shaman Karumayra. These visitors are “gens très spéciaux [qui] viennent du fin fond du monde où il n’existe aucune civilisation” in a great steel boat (39). For a Western reader this may well evoke

images of European settlers. However, the story describes the Tukukyene as having no skins, no genitalia or anuses, and as horrible cannibals who are drowned by the great Karumayra out where the salt and fresh water meet (42; 44-45). This reference to the seemingly-European visitors, and especially to their violent, man-eating natures, as well as their outcome all seem potentially discomfiting to a metropolitan French audience; it is the opposite of the sanitization of the stories one expects from a by us/for you performance. A Creole audience, on the other hand, may well enjoy such descriptions and plot points, seeing a connection between such a story and other Creole tales of enslaved peoples outwitting European or *béké* enslavers. Perhaps, then, the intended audience is more Creole than French. Or perhaps the storyteller's intended audience is different from the publisher's.

Regardless of the intended audience, however, this book is decidedly a commodity and thus greatly shaped by market forces. Here, too, the authenticity of the tales is repeatedly underscored. As we know, the back cover assures the reader of the tales' authentic roots and Fortino's authority as cultural expert. So, too, does Launey's Introduction, especially her conclusion that "[c]es récits, totalement inédits, ont été recueillis par Mauricienne Fortino auprès de Antonio Felicio Inacio, chef coutumier du village amérindien de Kamuyene à Macouria en Guyane, que nous tenons à remercier. Ils ont été écrits en français par Mauricienne Fortino" (11). In this we also see the subtle reminder that Fortino collected these stories in their native Amerindian language, further authenticating them. The authenticity of the text is presented as beyond question.

And the text is once again presented as an essentialized cultural commodity. As we know, the back cover promises the outsider audience that the text will help them discover heretofore strange (to them) creatures and shamans and will explain the mythical Boneless River. It

concludes by further characterizing the book as a collection of “*récits pour voyager très loin et aborder l’imaginaire foisonnant du peuple palikur.*” In other words, by reading this collection, one can travel to Palikur lands and into the imaginary of the Palikur people. Launey’s Introduction takes this even further. Beyond her various explanations of Palikur culture that serve to render it more transparent, she promises the reader that “[v]ous découvrirez aussi dans ces recueils la vie quotidienne de ces Amérindiens” (11). The book thus promises all the necessary tools needed to access the mythical and daily life of an essentialized Palikur people. In simply confirming existing imaginaries and stereotypes of Palikur culture the text functions much like the nineteenth-century postcards of France’s colonial holdings in that it presents an essentialization of this people into a consumable good.

Ultimately, then, by us/for you tales, once removed from their simultaneous by us/for us counterparts, are transformed from site of memory or forgetting into more or less pure commodity. Part of the reason for this shift is that these performances are decontextualized, frozen, and removed from their underlying traditions in a way the other types of performances are not. In shifting the focus of the performance from trying to remember or forget in service to national narratives to the creation of a commodity to be sold, promoted, and exchanged, they are removed from the living tradition that is Antillean folklore. The result parallels Julia Waters’s description of Reunion’s *cases créoles* which are preserved by those outside the tradition, so that “the constantly evolving, adaptive and functional *milieu de vivre* that” Creole folktales can be turns instead “into a purely symbolic, functionless museum piece, frozen in time for the appreciation of foreign tourists” (157-158). The hyper-contemporary Antillean by us/for you folktale performances that travel featured in my corpus are frozen not for appreciation, but consumption. Once a folktale performance exists more to sell than to remember or forget it

becomes museumified, in service to the consumer more interested in gaining the easy, superficial understanding the commodity promises than in engaging with a living, dynamic, complex, and opaque tradition of memory.

To further extend the metaphor from the previous chapter: If by us/for us stories are akin to flowers left at sites or stones placed on a gravestone, and by them/for us tales are akin to pictures or films of this tradition, then by us/for you performances are the souvenir replicas sold near monuments to be brought home and placed on a bookshelf or desk. They are the purely objectified, meaningless goods passed off (and sold!) as meaningful.

It is significant that this museumification and commodification leads to essentialization of identity and a loss of opacity. In fact, many cultural insiders are deeply uncomfortable with this process. In “High Folklore: Challenges to the French Cultural World Order,” David Beriss describes how for Antillean artists in France, “just as they feel miscast by metropolitan cultural professionals, they are uncomfortable with the cultural representations that are current within the Antillean community” (118). For example, one artist told Beriss “that Antillean values are falsified in metropolitan France, reduced to a commercialized set of stereotypes that are too focused on what he [the artist] sees as a mythical tie to the islands. Rather than a complex way of life, Antillean culture in France, even when represented by Antilleans...is reduced to ‘*boudin, rhum et zouk*’” (“High Folklore” 118). In commodifying their culture and tradition, then, even other Antilleans feel that these performers are giving up something of themselves, are relinquishing what Chamoiseau terms their “right to opacity” (French).²⁷⁴

²⁷⁴ This is, perhaps, related to these performers’ status as double outsiders, outsiders both in France and back in their regions of origin. Those from these regions who live in France, even if they then return to their origins, “are seen as culturally very different from locals [even as] they are clearly seen as outsiders in mainland France as well” (Managan 158). This dual outsider status, this rejection from both cultures, may facilitate or motivate the shift from meaning to commodity.

In so doing, these types of performances ultimately serve to reify the regions' French-ishness. On the one hand, the presence and propagation of Caribbean folklore on French soil reinforces the interconnectedness of the Hexagon and its DOMs. Colonial sites of memory in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana are part of the French national narrative in that the "the constant reaffirmation of past and current visual sites [is] necessary to guarantee the perennial French presence" (Guégan 365). Similarly, the performance of Antillean culture for metropolitan audiences, and especially within the geographical confines of the Hexagon, creates a repeated and lasting reminder of the connection between France and these regions. In transforming Creole folktales into commodities of essentialized Creole identities, and thus giving metropolitan French a sense of ownership over, or intimate knowledge of, the peoples and cultures they objectify, this type of performance functions neo-colonially as a form of classifying, serializing, and making Visible. This renders them French subjects and part of the broader *patrimoine*. Contradictorily, the very marketability of this type of performance relies on a promotion of the performers' non-French-ness in that essentialized identity cum commodified object is not interesting to insiders, only outsiders. By us/for them performances thus affirm Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana's French-ish status, simultaneously linking and distancing these regions and the rest of France. This begs the question: Is it possible to be at once internationally marketable and opaque?

Transparency and Opacity in Chamoiseau's Performance

As a conclusion, I turn to an analysis of Patrick Chamoiseau's folktale performance, *Creole Folktales*. This recounting is noteworthy for many reasons, not least of which is the positioning and ideologies of Chamoiseau himself. As we know, and in keeping with the intellectual traditions of these regions described in my introduction, Patrick Chamoiseau is both storyteller and theorist. He is equally known for his writings on Antillean identity as for his

novels. He is a pillar of the *créolité* movement, a disciple of Glissant, a proponent of the cultural specificity of the Caribbean, and a defender of opacity for authors and peoples. He is also committed to promoting and uncovering minority voices. His “notion of the ‘trace-mémoire’ ...engages directly with the ‘lieu de mémoire’ and seeks to illustrate its limitations and to integrate more actively ‘des histoires dominées, des mémoires écrasées’ [subjugated histories, overwritten memories] (Chamoiseau and Hammadi, 1994: 16)” (brackets and citation in original, Forsdick, “Le Bagne” 225). Similarly, Chamoiseau condemns “how official documents, how official organs of state, and how state-sponsored histories control the very definition of reality,” disavowing “authoritative control and the empirical epistemology that it implies” (*French Guiana* xx). In short, he has an ongoing interest in ways of remembering and accessing the subaltern, even while maintaining their opacity. It might be surprising, then, that his only collection of Creole folktales for adults has the appearance of stories by us/for you.

Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Au temps de l’antan: contes du pays Martinique*, translated into English as *Creole Folktales*, includes twelve tales and a short “Introduction: Tales of Survival” which is written and signed by Chamoiseau.²⁷⁵ The Introduction gives some history of when and where the tales would have been told and of their content as well as painting a mythic image of a traditional enslaved Storyteller or “Master of Words,” the narrator of the book (xii).²⁷⁶ It also, as is typical of Chamoiseau, subtly reminds us of the fact that this collection is not an example of stories transcribed directly as told, but rather written down by an author who is patently aware of the changes that inevitably result. These reminders take the forms of an exhortation to “read

²⁷⁵ For a more detailed description of the collection and its various editions, please see my second chapter.

²⁷⁶ In this section I use Storyteller with a capital “S” to refer to Chamoiseau’s character and storyteller with a lowercase “s” to refer to the person who created this performance, Chamoiseau himself.

these stories only at night” and to “[r]emember, I wrote them” at night (xiv).²⁷⁷ This text exists, then, somewhere between or within literature and orality.

This ambiguity reflects and helps inspire this text’s rather infamous slipperiness. Lewis Carl Seifert, for example, in his article “Orality, History, and ‘Creoleness’ in Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Creole Folktales*,” concludes that the collection can have multiple interpretations and meanings. He draws a parallel between the text and “Creoleness, which aims to put into question the hegemonic status of the West and its writing and to create a new identity and consciousness through this questioning...[*Creole Folktales* uses] orality and history to *question* what the cultural identity of the French Antilles might become” (228). The book is thus full of contradictions and diversions, making its type of performance and function difficult to “pin down.” While to some degree I agree with Seifert that the interpretation depends on context and interpreter, I nonetheless contend that a careful analysis of the paratexts and tales themselves ultimately does reveal the positions of Chamoiseau-as-storyteller and of the audience, and thus the type of performance that this represents and its function.

Let us begin our analysis, then, with the question of whether Chamoiseau positions himself as part of or distinct from the storytelling community. Initially, the identification of Chamoiseau with the insider community seems evident. Of course, the title of the collection labels the tales and thus arguably the teller as Creole. Beyond this, Chamoiseau’s Introduction provides a contextualization of the stories and the Creole storytelling tradition. This positions Chamoiseau as an expert insider because he knows enough about the stories, the traditions, and

²⁷⁷ Throughout the text Chamoiseau reminds the reader of his text’s literariness: “But run as he might (and as fast as running can be written)” or “flogged for longer than it would take me to write it out ten thousand times,” etc. (47, 53). This is, in fact, characteristic of his writing. He explains: “Je n’essaie jamais de faire croire au lecteur que je lui raconte une histoire. Il y a toujours des moments où je le ramène en lui montrant qu’on est en littérature, qu’on est dans la réalité, qu’on n’est pas dans la réalité. Et le travail de me regarder en train de créer, de regarder mes techniques d’écriture, faire sentir mes outils de création je le fais dans tous mes textes” (qtd. in Réjouis 256).

the context, to be able to explain them to outsiders and create the character of his narrator. Additionally, at the end of the introduction Chamoiseau tells us that he “did not try to strip the tales that you are about to read of all their mystery, nor did I append a glossary” (xiv). The implication that he is capable of appending a glossary further suggests that he understands the insider language well enough to be able to explain it to outsiders. The fact that he chose to not “strip the tales...of all their mystery” suggests that he is not willing to provide exhaustive cultural explanations (although he could) and furthermore that he understands the mysteries that outsiders would (do?) not. Again, this highlights his insider knowledge. Chamoiseau seems to be positioning himself, as one would expect, as a knowledgeable community insider.

However, he also paradoxically challenges this positioning. Chamoiseau explains that “[o]nce the tale is told, our Storyteller is quick to make fun of himself, to show that he is a mere nobody, an outsider even to the people in his story: ‘They gave me a swift kick in the backside and I trotted on over here to tell you all about it...’” (ellipses in original, xiv).²⁷⁸ This description of the Storyteller as a nobody raises questions of Chamoiseau’s role as storyteller. Then, in the very next paragraph and to end the introduction he further suggests comparison between himself and his narrator by implying his own nobody and outsider status. He positions his work as inferior to traditional stories, reminding the reader to “Remember, I wrote [the stories] with the moon as my sole companion, for fear of being changed into a basket without handles—a fate described by the old Storytellers, who must have been amused even then to know that I would never, oh never, tempt such a fate as that, just to see...” (ellipses in original, xiv). Chamoiseau’s reminder that he wrote the tales for his audience at night functions similarly to his Storyteller’s

²⁷⁸ Chamoiseau provides further examples of this tactic in some of the tales themselves. For example, the story “Madame Kéléman” ends, “Everyone is so welcome in their home that even vagabonds like me stop by there after story-time to raise a glass in honor of the lovely lady of the house” (27).

testimony that he trotted on over to tell his audience his tale. His joke about the old Storytellers' amusement at his expense is a way of making fun of himself and thus functions similarly to the kick the Storyteller receives from the community characters in his tale. Finally, his discussion of the stories told by the old Storytellers, and his implication that he does not know their secrets, Others Chamoiseau from them in the same way that his Storyteller makes himself an "outsider even to the people in his story" (xiv). Like his Storyteller, then, Chamoiseau positions himself as not-quite-outsider-or-insider, but in so doing, re-affirms the authenticity of the stories he will write or transcribe for new audiences.

This mise-en-abyme of a storyteller (Chamoiseau) who talks about a Storyteller (the narrator) who is enslaved and who (implicitly) tells the stories in the collection, but who is outside the stories that he tells, creates new levels of positionality. In addition to the Storyteller's position in relation to the reader we now have the question of his relation to the stories and their characters. Chamoiseau positions his Storyteller as part of the larger community of enslaved Martinicans but, as he points out, outside the specific community of the characters in his tale. This then raises the question of Chamoiseau-as-storyteller's position in relation to the story he is telling of enslaved storytelling. Is he, like his Storyteller, outside the community of his characters? That and his reference to the "old Storytellers" who guard their secrets from him, an outsider, would imply that he is part of the larger Martinican community, but not part of the specific community of old storytellers.

In fact, this slippery positioning evokes the game Chamoiseau tells us enslaved storytellers had to play in order to hide their meaning from the enslavers. In his introduction he explains that the Creole folktale tradition is grounded in enslaved culture but embraces stories of fierce independence and selfishness. He notes that one "might conclude, as Édouard Glissant

suggests, that what we have here [in traditional Creole storytelling] is an *emblematic detour*, a system of counter-values, or a counterculture, that reveals itself as both powerless to achieve complete freedom and fiercely determined to strive for it nonetheless” (italics in original, xiii).²⁷⁹

Chamoiseau continues:

The Creole Storyteller is a fine example of this paradoxical situation: the master knows of his tales and allows him to tell them, and sometimes even listens to them himself, so the Storyteller must take care to use language that is opaque, devious—its significance broken up into a thousand sibylline fragments. His narrative turns around long digressions that are humorous, erotic, often even esoteric. His dialogue with his audience is unceasing, punctuated with onomatopoeias and sound effects intended not only to hold his listeners’ attention but also to help camouflage any dangerously subversive content. And here again, Edouard Glissant is right to emphasize that the Storyteller’s object is almost *to obscure as he reveals*. To form and inform through the hypnotic power of the voice, the mystery of the spoken word. (italics in original, xiii).

The Creole Storyteller is, then, according to Chamoiseau, not only aware of his mixed audience but has to tailor his performance to accommodate the mix by hiding the meaning from one group while revealing it to the other.

This is partly why, Chamoiseau tells us, the Storyteller makes fun of himself and distances himself from his characters—in order to distance himself from their actions in the enslaver’s eyes. In so doing, the Storyteller makes his positioning slippery and difficult to grasp,

²⁷⁹ This reference to Edouard Glissant, as well as a subsequent reference to Aimé Césaire, both complete with footnotes, are further smokescreens that make it appear Chamoiseau is a community outsider by highlighting his scholarliness (rather than a grounding in tradition) until one realizes that both Glissant and Césaire are also Martinicans who themselves grounded both their literature and theory in Creole tradition and are thus cultural insiders.

much as Chamoiseau does. One could argue, then, that Chamoiseau's slippery positioning and his purposeful undermining of and distancing himself from *his* character of the Storyteller actually represent his playing the role of the old storytellers to perfection. Indeed, Chamoiseau explains that his choice to keep mystery in the stories is "[i]n tribute to this stratagem" (xiv). So, Chamoiseau tells us that Storytellers distanced themselves from their community in order to cater to a mixed audience, then tells us that it is in tribute to this stratagem that he maintained mystery in his stories, then distances himself in an analogous way from his Storyteller. In other words, when read closely, one realizes that Chamoiseau subtly explains that he is functioning exactly like his Storyteller in tribute to him. In being so difficult to pin down, complete with evasive tactics designed to make him seem like a community outsider much like those he references, Chamoiseau actively becomes part of the tradition of the old storytellers, fully taking up their mantle. This positioning of himself as playing the role or taking on the mantle of the old storytellers makes his claim of being outside their community, of being Othered from them, even more paradoxical than the mere telling of their stories already had. He is, in turn, contradictorily pinned down as a community insider. By trying to deflect perceptions of or mask his positionality Chamoiseau effectively fixes it as part of the insider community. Of course, he is aware of this contradiction as he himself gives us the key to understand it.

But if Chamoiseau is ultimately part of the insider community, who exactly comprises that community? From the very title, in either language (in French tales from the country of *Martinique* or in English *Creole* folktales), the positionality of the stories, at least, is clear. The first line of the Introduction reinforces this: "The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In Martinique" (xi). The stories are thus from Martinique. His repeated use of "our stories" and "our Storyteller" throughout the Introduction position him as part of the community of the

stories, as Martinican. Furthermore, the introduction begins with an epigraph, five lines of verse: “O wordsmen of old, masters of the tall story, / tellers of tales around the fire late into the night, / yes, you gatherers of language plucked from the boughs / of despair, I lift up my voice where you left off, / as free and ingenious as you were yourselves” (xi). This verse reinforces Chamoiseau’s status as storyteller. He announces that he is picking up where they left off and that he has the same free and ingenious status as they.²⁸⁰ Chamoiseau is, then, part of the insider community of Martinican storytelling. Furthermore, it is important to note that his emphases on the Martinican storytelling tradition’s roots in slavery, and on the oxymoronic freedom and ingenuity of the enslaved Martinican storytellers, set up a strong if only implied opposition between Martinican and French enslaver.

This, in turn, brings us to the question of the positionality of the intended audience as either community insiders or outsiders. Again, on the surface the text appears to be destined for an outsider audience. The fact that the text is in French (not Creole) and translated into English suggests a wide outsider audience. The very existence of an introduction, and its content as explication and contextualization of the storytelling tradition, suggest that the intended audience is community outsiders in need of this extra information. Furthermore, Chamoiseau offers explanation throughout the tales themselves. For example, in the tale “Madame Kélémon,” the narrator tells us that it was a mixture of chagrin, self-pity and “gassy wrath, which made her tripple [sic]—a Creole way of saying that she tripped in a heartwarmingly spectacular fashion” (27). Such an explanation (from the Storyteller) is only necessary if the audience is comprised of outsiders who do not already know what “trippel” means. Similarly, the discussion of possibly

²⁸⁰ Its placement before the start of the Introduction, and emphasis on Chamoiseau’s role as storyteller, also illuminate the fact that the Introduction is not so much paratext as start of the tales of the collection. This clarifies that Chamoiseau is the true storyteller and that his Storyteller is but a character in this story about storytelling.

removing some mystery from the tales and adding a glossary seems, at first blush, to imply an outsider audience. The suggestion that Chamoiseau considered eliminating mystery suggests an outsider audience because insiders would understand everything. The consideration of appending a glossary is an even more overt gesture to initiating an intended outsider audience. From this one could easily conclude that the intended audience is community outsiders and that this is therefore a by us/for you performance.

However, once again, a closer look suggests a different view. The lack of glossary in reality implies an insider audience, because in the end Chamoiseau chose not to include one, deciding against outsider initiation. And, in fact, even if he had included one, glossaries are not always as illuminating as they appear. Chamoiseau admired Glissant's frequent use of "glossaires qui sont de faux glossaires. Ce sont des glossaires qui opacifient encore plus" (qtd. in Réjouis 256). Raising the question was arguably merely a "wink" to insiders. In addition, his repeated use of "our," and the almost chummy way in which he uses it, proposes an affinity with the reader that suggests the audience's insider status. Finally, within the stories themselves there are unexplained references to local flora and fauna and untranslated Creole, speaking to a level of familiarity only insiders would have. Of course, if the audience are actually insiders, this performance falls into the category of by us/for us.

That said, if the audience is really insiders, why does Chamoiseau refer to the stories maintaining some of their mystery? Because in fact the audience for this text is both insiders *and* outsiders. The tales contain mystery for outsiders, much like they would for the enslaver who does not know what he does not know. Their secrets are further obfuscated, as Chamoiseau warns they will be, by the Storyteller's "dialogue with his audience [which, again,] is unceasing, punctuated with onomatopoeias and sound effects intended not only to hold his listeners'

attention but also to help camouflage any dangerously subversive content” (*Creole Folktales* xiii). For example, at the start of the story “Lil’ Fellow the Musician,” the narrator asks “Are you all asleep? No? Then so far, so good!” (37-41).²⁸¹ Similarly, there are written onomatopoeias throughout the stories, such as Lil’ Fellow the musician’s pipe: “Péla man lou, Péla man li / Péla man li, Péla man lou / Corali belli, corali belli / Péli péla péli péla / Plam!” (46). The inclusion of the diversionary tactics Chamoiseau himself highlights, as well as his identification with the old storytellers whose language is opaque and devious in order to perform for a mixed audience of both enslaver and enslaved, illustrate that this performance, too, is for a mixed audience of both outsider and insider. Beyond this, there is a subtle tone of mocking here. The enslaved and their Storytellers, we are told, mock the enslaver without his understanding. One cannot help but question Chamoiseau’s opinion of his outsider audience. Ultimately, then, close analysis reveals that this text is an example of a single performance that functions simultaneously as by us/for us and by us/for you, emulating the traditional performances around a fire.

But then why include the introduction and its explanations at all? In order to play the role of storyteller more fully. In the Introduction, Chamoiseau-the-storyteller is obscuring as he reveals, as does the traditional Storyteller he describes. His introduction transforms from an invitation in the form of a welcoming explanation of the sociohistorical context for outsiders into a subtle warning for the audience that while anyone may read the tales, only insiders will truly understand. Ultimately, when Chamoiseau urges his readers to “[a]llow the strange words to work their secret magic,” one cannot help but wonder upon whom the magic works, and in what fashion (xiv).

²⁸¹ Interestingly, as I mentioned in the Introduction, while in the French edition these words are simply the first line of the story, in the English edition the question, the “No?”, and the response each get their own (otherwise blank) page, reinforcing with text the feel of call and response one would have in a live performance.

It is important to note, however, the implications Chamoiseau creates in his message about the mixed nature of the audience. He sets the scene of an old, enslaved man telling tales around the fire before equating himself to the old, enslaved storytellers. Continuing this metaphor, the insider audience of Martinicans are aligned with the enslaved audience members that represent the old storytellers' community. By extension, then, the outsider audience is represented by the enslaver and his community. Since enslavers were either white Frenchmen or *békés*, the outsider community is aligned with whiteness and Frenchness. The alignment between the two evokes France's history of oppression and violence. However, this alignment is obfuscated, easy for outsiders to miss. In this way, through opacification and *détournement*, the text functions, just as with traditional performances around a fire, simultaneously as a site of remembering for community insiders and a site of forgetting for community outsiders.

Finally, in its conflation of past and present white Frenchmen, the metaphor cannot but raise questions about modern French audiences. Implicitly, this conflation positions them as outsider interlopers forcing themselves on performances where they are not wanted. This in turn implies an unwelcome hierarchy and even entitlement, perhaps driven by race or economics, that Chamoiseau seeks to "reveal" to the insider community. Chamoiseau and his Storyteller are thus telling stories for the "us" of other Martinicans while acknowledging and condemning the possible presence of a white, French, outsider "you."²⁸² In other words, Chamoiseau's text participates in all aspects of the storytelling tradition he describes, including a Storyteller who belongs but pretends not to, apparent openness to a mixed audience that conceals a targeting of

²⁸² While, as we have seen, many of the storytellers are aware of a (possibly) mixed audience, Chamoiseau is the only one to play such games in framing his text for them.

insiders and rejection of outsiders, careful positioning of Martinican and French identities in opposition, and problematic power dynamics between the two.²⁸³

Beyond this, Chamoiseau's performance is slippery in other ways. It pretends to be extremely oral through its emphasis on orality in the Introduction and inclusion of oral elements such as onomatopoeia and back-and-forth with the reader. However, in reality, it is by far the most literary text in my corpus with its self-conscious play between orality, literature, and *oraliture*. It is also the only text in my corpus to be translated into English, which gestures to a wide audience even while condemning one. All of which, along with the slippery positioning and the seeming transparency that accompany the by us/for you façade hiding the more important by us/for us performance, obfuscate the text's true nature. As Seifert says, there are various interpretations of the text. But it is not so much that the text provides different understandings when viewed from different angles. Rather, what actually decides how the interpreter makes sense of the text is whether or not they recognize and deconstruct Chamoiseau's sleight of hand.

In fact, this type of resistance and obfuscation even while commodifying is characteristic of Chamoiseau. As both a theorist and an author Chamoiseau highlights the importance of the "right to opacity" and the irreducible complexity of the Creole identity (Bernabé et al.; French). Chamoiseau explained in a 1996 interview that the "idée de l'opacité c'est l'idée que la communication n'est pas nécessairement dans la clarté...Je transmets une opacité brute, que l'autre reçoit telle quelle" (Réjouis 252).²⁸⁴ This is what we see here. Furthermore, in his writing

²⁸³ Again, this is not the only of his texts to do this. In a 1996 interview, the interviewer noted that when she reads Chamoiseau's novel *Texaco*, "j'ai l'impression qu'un ami me raconte une histoire, mais qu'il y a un étranger dans la salle. Alors l'ami est obligé d'expliquer, de traduire certaines choses pour inclure l'étranger" to which Chamoiseau merely responded "Oui, c'est possible" (Réjouis 250).

²⁸⁴ It is important to note that Chamoiseau goes on to say that when he includes explanations of things, it is not necessarily for an outsider (French) audience, it can also be for community insiders (Réjouis 252). This implicitly contradicts his passive affirmation (quoted in the previous footnote) that he writes for a stranger in the room. In other words, Chamoiseau is opaque even about the nature of his opacity.

in general, Chamoiseau has “made literature a site of cultural resistance” (Vincenot 69). He positions himself as a solitary “‘guerrier de l’imaginaire,’ whose task is to preserve a Martinican cultural specificity threatened by modernization” (Vincenot 69). The slipperiness of *Creole Folktales*, and its project of revealing as it obfuscates represents, then, not only a typical example of Chamoiseau’s writing style but even of his writing project. *Creole Folktales* has apparent status of by us/for you stories coincident with and even as a smokescreen for a by us/for us performance and which functions as site of memory for those who “get it” and a mere commodity for those who do not. This reality is, in fact, maintaining Martinique’s cultural specificity. This text is a modern-traditional Creole folktale performance wearing the guise of commodity in order to obfuscate true meaning. The fact that this text has been translated into English suggests that it is the most successful commodity of all the texts in my corpus. In many ways, then, Chamoiseau seems to have found an ideal balance. This as well as others of his texts successfully walk the line between the demands of modern, globalized markets and staying true to one’s cultural identity. Chamoiseau manages the remarkable feat of being extremely marketable in a globalized economy while not yielding his opacity.

This, however, is also problematic in several ways. The outsider audience most likely does not recognize the layers of meaning in his texts. To the most outsiders, *Creole Folktales* is no different from the by us/for you performances discussed earlier, that is to say, an easy-to-read, easy-to-understand object that offers a transparent and “thorough” (i.e., essentialized and caricaturized) understanding of a culture. And while Chamoiseau may be poking fun at them for this perception, the fact remains that the average outsider audience receives from this text an essentialized understanding of Creoleness that they have no reason to question, problematize, or

investigate further. In this way, the text arguably reifies problematic behaviors and stereotypes for the many casual outsider readers.

This, in turn, raises the question of whether the storyteller or the audience controls the narrative. In evaluating a text, or discussing its opacity, does audience perception or storyteller intention carry more weight? Is misperceived transparency more or less damaging to a culture's efforts to claim and maintain their own identity and specificity than engineered transparency? As French sociologist of race Éric Fassin asks, "Who determines the meaning of art—the artist or the audience?" (Piser). In obfuscating the duality of his performance, is Chamoiseau maintaining the importance of Creole folktales as a site of memory, or facilitating its transformation into site of forgetting or mere commodity?

Fundamentally, commodification, capitalism, globalization, and new media all influence modern folklore performances in a variety of ways including their language, medium, increasing emphases on authenticity, especially for performers who are not Black males, and an increasing need to appeal to markets. Modern by us/for you performances, which is what Chamoiseau's text appears to be, are in turn particularly influenced by these vectors and distilled into mere commodities stripped of meaning and presenting essentialized identities. Chamoiseau's text plays with this role, ultimately functioning as site *or* commodity, depending on audience reception, and desire and ability to interrogate initial impressions. This fact raises the question: If the audience can receive or manipulate this performance to fit their own cultural narratives, does that make this text the quintessential example of French-ish-ness? This shiftability certainly mimics the ever-fluid French-ish cultural status. Or is it the ultimate sellout, appealing to the widest audience possible regardless of reception? *Or* is *Creole Folktales* the ultimate example of how to bring the opaque and complex Creole folktale tradition into modernity?

CONCLUSION

In practice, democratic history is by no means egalitarian—it has its own hierarchies and multilayered power structures that give an advantage to certain people who are better equipped to exploit the cultural capital that can be gained by narrating their pasts, to the neglect of others, who are either left outside of history or relegated to its margins. (Beiner 9-10)

In every possible way, we must work to stop the wearing down and to begin a conservation process of what remains. And for this, we must cast away the renovators, step aside from those hoping to reconstruct, send from these places the builders and architects, the industrialists of tourism, and the politician-developers. We must give over these fragile memories not to the keepers of monuments, but to those who since the beginning of time have known how to take care of the Memory traces of the world: the friends of silence, the brothers of solitude, the allies of the mineral, the terrifying souls who listen to what no one any longer hears – those who leave behind in their untamed passage the pastures of invisible memories.

Here, the conservator will be one with the poets.
And the conservation will be a poetics. (*French Guiana* 28)

To be Martinican, Guadeloupean, or Guinean is to be liminal. All vectors of national identity—politics, geography, ethnicity, culture, race, language, tradition, economy, history—align these geographic spaces with France while simultaneously differentiating them because of their reduced or questionable French-ness. In a word, they are what I have described as *French-ish*. This study has endeavored to unpack the mechanics of this unique status and to identify and analyze the role of folktales as one of the key tools of its propagation.

The fusion of the ideas of Benedict Anderson, Homi K. Bhabha, Etienne Balibar, Pierre Nora, Guy Beiner, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Etienne Achille, Charles Forsdick, and Lydie Moudileno provides a paradigm for examining the creation of nationhood in this liminal region. Whether speaking of a nation-state such as France or nationalized regions such as Martinique, Guadeloupe, or Guiana, a nation ultimately remains an imagined community, a group of people unknown to one another who forge a connection. This sense of national connection is created and

maintained through a variety of mechanisms, most importantly ongoing discourses and conceptualizations of national narrative (including the necessity of insiders being both subjects and objects of said narrative) and an emphasis on boundary enforcement, often through some combination of race and language. An essential part of national narratives is sites of remembering and forgetting, which serve to reify elements of the narrative or allow omission of realities that contradict it. Still, omissions leave traces of subaltern memory and create postcolonial sites even if not recognized as such in hegemonic discourses.

In the case of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana, a large part of their French-ness is due to the reality of competing national narratives. In that they are juridically French, France's national narrative is also theirs. This narrative begins with a revolution based on the universalist principle of equality embodied in the motto *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. It promotes a worldview that all Frenchmen are equal regardless of difference such as race and language. This has of course been challenged by artists, writers, theorists, activists, and individuals, because of real and perceived shortcomings with this model. But to challenge this imagined community that is France means treading very cautiously.

Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana are subjects of the French national narrative in that they learn it as their own in school and absorb it in their daily lives. This influences their own worldviews as well as the discourses they can use to assert any particularity they may wish to claim (Beriss, "High Folklore"). However, France's history of using both language and race to delineate Frenchness Others the majority-Black, Creole-speaking citizens of these departments. This renders them subjects but not objects of this national narrative. Similarly, their own national narrative, one inextricably linked with enforced emigration from Africa and French enslavement and oppression, is in tension with France's Republican ideals and notions of historic *grandeur*. In

remembering their path to inclusion in the French nation, Martinicans, Guadeloupean, and Guineans must also remember chapters of French history that contradict the French national narrative. Similarly, for citizens of the Hexagon (mainland France), the existence of these departments represents living proof of their less-than-universalist past. In the face of this cognitive dissonance, one must choose what to forget and what to remember. Each individual's and group's remembering and forgetting of different things, including forgetting to remember or remembering to forget, creates disparate identities and understandings of self. The coexistence of these shapes the French-ish status of France's Caribbean DOMs. Even though slavery and the slave trade were recognized by the French parliament in 2001 as crimes against humanity, there continue to be heated debates about the legacy of colonialism.

Folklore as a phenomenon is a key site of remembering and forgetting and is thus an essential tool in the negotiation of identity and manipulation of national discourse. In compiling my corpus, I strove to provide a clear representation of Martinican, Guadeloupean, and Guinean folklore today. The migration of a tradition of live performances around a fire to printed texts accelerated in the 1980s. This trend certainly continues today, albeit less prolifically. The print texts selected date from this accelerated period onward. Since the coming of age of the internet, live presentations and transcriptions of tales have also migrated online, whether to Spotify albums, YouTube videos, blogs, Facebook, or even French-government-affiliated websites. Together, these materials and sources represent a comprehensive survey of such performances, covering a wide range of media and affiliations. Finally, live performances do continue today, mostly in the form of curated recountings for paying audiences. Promotional materials for such shows, whether festivals, individual performances, *rando-contes*, or performances-for-hire, also provide essential information on the modern state and function of storytelling in these regions.

In the shift from traditional storytelling contexts to newer print and digital media, the experience of both storyteller and audience changes. These changes matter in terms of both the effect and affect of specific media. Most broadly, the shift from live recounting to any kind of record creates an object that circulates and is commodified either for money or within other value systems. While on the surface such records may seem to no longer qualify as performances per se, a close analysis highlights how they are, in fact, both a record of a performance and a performance in and of themselves.

This creation of a record-object raises issues that were not at play in traditional community-based recitations. Once a recitation is a circulating object there is a loss of intersubjective embodiment; performer and audience members are separated from one another and can no longer interact to create meaning in traditional ways. Similarly, once a recounting travels outside its immediate community, questions of language and accessibility also become pertinent, including issues of transcription, choice of language, and translation. Each individual medium also carries with it its own implications and affective experience. The storytellers in my corpus are aware of the ways their performance objects have less affect for both raconteur and audience and try to add or supplement affective impact in varying ways. Despite this, modern folktale performances that travel have an inherent loss of intersubjective meaning-making that erodes the audience's traditional importance and influence over teller and telling.

With this diminished importance of audience comes a heightened importance of storytellers' intentions. Ultimately, the types of modern Martinican, Guadeloupean, and Guinean tales that travel today can be divided into three categories based on how the storyteller positions themselves and their community and how they position the community of their intended audience. I have labeled those categories as by us/for us, by them/for us, and by us/for them.

By us/for us stories are arguably the most common type of performance in my corpus and consist of tales told by Creole storytellers and intended for Creole audiences. These types of tales function primarily as sites of remembering for Creole national narratives. As such, they most closely resemble the centuries-old, traditional folktale performances from which they descend. They memorialize Antillean enslavement and oppression, functioning as traces of trauma and postcolonial sites of memory. They manifest Creole national narratives, serving as supplements which embody that which must be forgotten within French national narratives. In like fashion, they are often performed by Creole nationalists and manipulated to erase or forget the extensive European influence on Creole folktales.

By them/for us tales are the inverse of the first group in that they are Creole folktales elicited by French metropolitans for French metropolitans. These performances function primarily as sites of forgetting. Indeed, they are generally contextualized by the French elicitors to ensure that the tales do not, in fact, remember the French oppression that is at odds with official French national narratives and Republican ideals. Instead, they are appropriated to function as examples of France's rich national history. In so doing they remember the European influences that Antillean stories forget. In fact, this appropriation is exemplary of French national hegemonic discourses which have long claimed and repackaged groups' particularities under the broader French folk *patrimoine*. In short, as by us/for us and by them/for us performances show, "[I]ike 'blood' or 'race', culture has come to be an element in self-conscious attempts to define communities of identity" (Beriss, "High Folklore" 123). Yet these attempts are not immune to globalized market forces.

An analysis of all three types of tales reveals that they are all subject to capitalism and the need to "sell" in today's globalized world. This modern commodification of culture applies

several vectors to Creole storytelling, perhaps first among them the need to promote a performance's "authenticity." This is especially true in cases where the body of the performer does not conform with widely held expectations that the performer be a Black male. Furthermore, with increased commodification and emphasis on marketability comes a new kind of power for audiences, that of capitalistic market forces. This is particularly true of the third type of folktale performance which is primarily a commodity designed to sell.

By us/for you performances have always been a part of the Creole storytelling dynamic, albeit traditionally against the will of the storytellers in the form of enslavers sitting in on live performances. Today, storytellers perform before an outsider "you" by choice. They are in effect commodifying their tale, their culture, and themselves perhaps partly as a declaration of identity, but certainly to engage in the market for cultural tourism. When removed from the slave plantation, by us/for you stories cease to function as sites of memory or forgetting beyond the ability of any transparent representation to gloss over the true complexity of a culture. As objects designed to be sold they incarnate exotified, essentialized, caricatured identities of the Creole storytellers and cultures they purport to represent. By us/for you tales are predominantly Visible Creole identity cum object-for-sale to a French metropolitan outsider community.

A key question concerns whether in fact one can achieve success in marketing while also reifying folklore as a site of memory. Patrick Chamoiseau's *Creole Folktales* attempts such a duality. That said, this duality appears to require a façade on the storyteller's part. To sell they must manipulate the performance so that any elements that might offend the enslaver-turned-neo-colonialist are not evident to them, even as they are visible to the insider community audience. There is irony in the fact that this at once recreates the old storyteller's magic and verbal sleight of hand *and* maintains a dynamic born of slavery. Does it not, then, simultaneously

serve to reify and reinforce problematic stereotypes and worldviews among those who do not recognize the storyteller as a magician? Ultimately, then, is it more important to maintain the duality or to avoid any possibility of reinforcing neo-colonial dynamics?

This in turn raises many more questions which this project does not have the scope to answer. Is it possible to sell folktale performances to Western audiences which do not perpetuate stereotypes, which not only maintain the storytellers right to opacity but make this opacity evident to the outsider audience? Also, this project has focused on the function of Creole folktales that travel. Are performances that happen in person, especially those that are non-curated, spontaneous, and/or intimate, functioning similarly? Are the same tales told the same ways among family and friends in these regions and in the “third island” of the Hexagon? In addition, much more remains to be done to deconstruct and understand the role of folktales as (postcolonial) sites of memory more broadly, both in these regions and outside them, within the francophone world and beyond it.

Ultimately, however, my construction of nationhood illustrates how folklore functions within and outside of it, as a site and not, to reinforce, reify, and/or subvert Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana’s French-ish-ness. These regions are held in a liminal space in a range of ways, not least of which via the role, function, and manipulation of specifically Creole folktale performances. These occupy a unique cultural position, functioning variably as sites of memory, sites of forgetting, mere commodity, or some combination thereof. Regardless of medium, teller, or function, they serve to propagate these regions’ liminal status as both of *and* not of France.

Furthermore, regardless of medium, teller, or function, each of the performances also represents some level of essentialization. By us/for us tales forget or elide most or all non-African influence, creating a somewhat essentialized Afro-Creole identity. By them/for us stories

elide the very real history of trauma in these regions, creating an essentialized, folklorized identity that allows an easy embrace of the imagined charm of the culture partly through a removal of elements that might contradict the French national narrative. Finally, by us/for you performances are the most essentialized, distilling a complex, variable, multifaceted reality into a product on a literal or virtual shelf.

In fact, if modern Creole folktale performances play an essential role in the negotiation of identity, it is as much through negation as affirmation. In *In Search of a National Identity: Creole and Politics in Guadeloupe*, Ellen Schnepel argues that Antilleans use “the vernacular...to separate [themselves] from the French through an identity based on a negation (*nou pas fwansé*, ‘we are not French’)” without having fully achieved a positive collective identity (216). As we have seen, this dynamic is also somewhat visible with folktales. By us/for us and by us/for you stories also focus on the negation “we are not French,” while the affirmation of “I am Creole/Martinican/Guadeloupean/Guinean” is much less clear and apparently primarily defined by the ways in which these communities are different from France. While the turn to folktales represents a turn to African roots, a thorough understanding of what *that* comprises is not established. Similarly, by them/for us tales deny difference without really engaging with what it means to be French. They frame the storytellers as “not *not* French” without addressing in what ways (or why) they *are* French.

As I have also endeavored to show, even these seemingly democratic texts are subject to influences that are not egalitarian. Even the internet-based, crowdsourced, ever-evolving tradition that is modern Creole folktale performance has “hierarchies and multilayered power structures” (Beiner 10). Each type of performance functions within nationalist or globalized economies, and privilege is given to certain types of narration and framings over others.

Arguably, then, the commodification of traveling folktales and even of popular history that has resulted from today's globalized world has led to a new kind of gatekeeping and cultural colonization. Which raises the question: Is it possible to share one's culture and tradition, to move outside one's sphere, while maintaining cultural uniqueness and without sacrificing at least a little opacity?

Etienne Balibar concludes his essay on nationhood by noting that in today's globalized world it is necessary to move beyond the borders of one's own imagined community. He argues that "Every 'people,' which is the product of a national process of ethnicization, is forced today to find its own means of going beyond exclusivism or identarian ideology in the world of transnational communications and planetary relations of force" (359). Later, he rewords this argument, stating that "every individual is compelled to find in the transformation of the imaginary of 'his/her' people the means to leave it, in order to communicate with the individuals of other peoples with which he/she shares the same interests and, to some extent, the same future" (Balibar 359). In short, as the world becomes "smaller" we must all find ways to cross the boundaries of our insider-outsider dichotomies and to share ourselves with others—without rendering ourselves into essentialized caricatures.

This is especially true in the case of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana, but there are additional questions due to their liminal status. In moving beyond their own communities, are citizens of these regions also moving beyond their individual departments, beyond Antilleanness or Creoleness, beyond Frenchness, or some combination thereof? And how can they move beyond their community until they know who they are rather than just who they are not? How can they discover who they truly are while they exist in the shadow of a country that forgets their

very existence, let alone their past, and the very acts that created them? Can any part of France, center or periphery, truly move into the globalized future until it has reckoned with its past?

Ultimately, it would seem, recognition of the complexity of these questions is essential in order to avoid the essentialization that we see in modern Creole folktale performances. It seems that Martinicans, Guadeloupeans, and Guineans will remain in the liminal status between different categories of Frenchness until the constitutive and mutual heritage is recognized and accorded value. Recent polarized debates on colonial memory confirm that this discussion will not be over any time soon.

In talking about the aftermath of the 2009 strike in Guadeloupe, Christine Colombo describes the tenseness of the situation between the different classes and races on the island. She quotes a *béké* who “déclarait avoir reçu trois menaces de mort,” “une Française de Métropole [qui] dénonçait les actes de racisme dont elle avait fait l’objet,” and “un autre, producteur de rhum, [qui] faisait connaître sa détermination à rester dans son île, car il était né Guadeloupéen” (*Des Contes* 125). She concludes that the only way of moving forward is to talk about these issues publicly, but asks, “comment en parler sans envenimer la situation ?” (*Des Contes* 125). She then answers her own question: “Les contes mettant en scène Ti Jean (ou son équivalent) face au Béké pourraient peut-être jouer un rôle à ce niveau, à condition d’être utilisés dans certains contextes ! Ces histoires n’ont-elles pas été pendant longtemps une alternative à la révolte ouverte ?” (*Des Contes* 125). In short, Colombo suggests that folktales offer a more palatable way to introduce discourse and foster discussion about the class and racial tensions that exist in Guadeloupe today because of its complicated past and present entanglement with France.

Could folktales not play a similar role across France? If the claims of authenticity for Creole folktales are essentially claims of truth, can they not facilitate a national truth and

reconciliation? Of course, to do so, folktales need to no longer function as sites of forgetting or traces of trauma so much as sites of memory for *everyone*. The (re)inscription of folktales, with all their ambiguity, opacity, and *métissage*, into national (rather than nationalist) discourses could enable this process. In accessing and representing the hybridity of the tales, their roots in trauma and oppression, and the indomitable spirit that gave birth to the tradition, in remembering these things across the spectrum that is French nationhood, in the center as well as the periphery, perhaps festering wounds can be exposed and drained and finally allowed to heal. Perhaps the boundaries creating liminality can be erased.

But how can this be done? Chamoiseau argues that we must begin by moving away from monuments and monument-makers. Instead, we must turn to “those who since the beginning of time have known how to take care of the Memory traces of the world: the friends of silence, the brothers of solitude, the allies of the mineral, the terrifying souls who listen to what no one any longer hears” (*French Guiana* 28). These are the people who know how to combine conservation with poetics, in other words to create a *Poetics of Relation*. Of course, it is also they who have been silenced, entombed behind walls even as they whisper through the cracks. To truly achieve this, then, we must all learn to not only hear, but to listen.

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