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LIFE AFTER ZOUK:
EMERGING POPULAR MUSIC OF THE FRENCH ANTILLES

presented by

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LIFE AFTER ZOUK:
EMERGING POPULAR MUSIC OF THE FRENCH ANTILLES

By

Laura Caroline Donnelly

A THESIS

Submitted to
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in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

LIFE AFTER ZOUK: EMERGING POPULAR MUSIC OF THE FRENCH ANTILLES

By

Laura Caroline Donnelly

For the past thirty years, zouk has been the predominant popular music in the French Antilles. Since 2000, however, there have been an increasing number of performers expanding the sonic palate of Guadeloupean popular music. This thesis focuses on the music of three post-zouk trends, and how their work is redefining what it means to make Guadeloupean music. The first group, K'Koustik, takes traditional gwo ka and updates it to appeal to a wider audience. Admiral T performs music in the Jamaican dancehall style, but infuses his music with representations of Guadeloupean identity. Lastly, Soft blends different genres to create a cosmopolitan pan-Caribbean sound. Although the three styles are sonically distinct, they all emphasize the continued importance of social critique and commentary in music of the French Antilles and incorporate Guadeloupean traditional music into their sound, drawing upon these traditions to invoke issues of authenticity. In addition, these artists blend different musics together to provide a Creolized sound that can revivify Guadeloupe's musical identity.

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INTRODUCTION

La Nuit Créole & Kréyol Factory

LA NUIT CRÉOLE

The sun was setting and the energy of 66,000 people was building around me. Some of us had been on our feet, outside in the late-spring Parisian rain, for more than seven hours. I was one of many tightly-packed spectators on the grass of Stade de France, waiting for Kassav' to take the stage. The concert, "Nuit Créole: Kassav' Fête ses 30 Ans," (Creole Night: Kassav' 30th Anniversary Party) was one of epic proportions, celebrating the group's thirtieth anniversary, the zouk genre, and Antillean culture in general. As we waited for the main event to begin there were many performances going on around the stadium: 100 Antillean dancers and musicians were performing short programs, there were kiosks with food and drink, and sponsor *Dark and Lovely* had a booth for hair-care tips. Shortly before the opening act took the stage, the jumbo-tron encouraged the audience to break the world record for the largest number of people dancing zouk at the same time.

After the opening acts performed, the waiting continued. Suddenly, in the distance, the spectators and I could see a float emerging from behind the stage on the far side of the stadium; it was built on the back of a small flatbed truck, and had four metal pillars with mounted speakers, additional audio equipment, and flashing lights. The float was playing music and shooting confetti into the air. It slowly made its way along a designated path around the parameter of the grass, blocked off to the spectators by metal

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railings. It was difficult to see what was happening from where I was; the portion of the stage that I was standing next to was a long way from the parameter of the grass.

However, once the float arrived at the edge of the stage near me, a small group of people ran from the platform to the stage and the night came alive; it was clear that Kassav' had arrived.

La Nuit Créole was a spectacle; I arrived at 1:15 p.m. for the 8:15 p.m. headliner, not sure what to expect. As I approached Stade de France, I could see that people were already congregating at their assigned entry gates. Waiting was an unpleasant experience; between fashioning a rain hat out of my lunch sack and repeatedly being asked why I was alone and being smirked at by a group of young men wearing "I heart Gwada" T-shirts, I was uncomfortable.

Of the ticket-holders at the concert, the majority was connected in some way to the French DOM-TOMs;¹ there was a family near me with a Guadeloupean mother, a French father, and two teenage daughters, next to a young Reunionese man with his French girlfriend. There were all ages present from pre-teen to middle-aged, and it was clear that they were all losing patience as the time for the doors to open drew nearer.

By 5:00 p.m, when the doors were scheduled to open, people were restless and becoming increasingly frustrated. The camaraderie we had previously established by singing Kassav's "Pa Bizwen Pale" together had been forgotten, and people became fixated on entering the stadium and cementing their participation in Antillean music history. The outward-opening gates exacerbated the situation by requiring the impatient crowd to backup, which they did rather unwillingly, causing me to become pinned against the gate. People were pushing me from behind while the gate pushed me from the

¹ DOM-TOM refers to overseas departments and territories of France.

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front. Once they started letting people in, all hell broke loose. People were pushing each other and running at full speed into the stadium; it was reminiscent of black Friday shopping videos. My bag got caught on the gate and a security guard yelled at the people around me to give me enough space to free myself. After I cleared security, I could see people running at full speed down to the field, accumulating around the stage. I picked up my pace and managed to stake out a spot a few feet from the portion of the stage that was jutting out into the crowd.

Three hours and fifteen minutes later, when Kassav' took the stage, the night continued to celebrate the group's thirty years together, along with the subsequent success of zouk. Popular artists, such as Jocelyne Labyille, Fanny, Princess Lover, Ralph Thamar, and Tanya St. Val, joined Kassav' on stage to pay tribute to them through song. Akiyo, a Carnival drumming group, gave an electric performance during which the members of Kassav' exited the stage for a costume change. However, the energy was at its highest when Kassav' performed their hits. The roaring sound of 66,000 people singing along, in Kwéyòl, is just more evidence of how Nuit Créole was a spectacular display of Kassav's success and their thirty year zouk dynasty.

KRÉYOL FACTORY

The next afternoon I walked up the stairs in the Porte de Patin metro stop, ticket in hand for the 6:30 p.m. concert of K'Koustik, a Guadeloupean group that combines traditional drumming with acoustic guitar and bass. The hall looked like a large converted warehouse with neon letters saying, "LA GRANDE HALLE- KRÉYOL

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FACTORY- 7 AVRIL – 5 JULIET, VILLETTE SONIQUE 27-28 MAI.” From this marquee and the surrounding posters, I found that the concert was part of a series called “Mizik Factory,” that consisted of twenty performers from Guadeloupe, Martinique, Jamaica, Réunion, Haiti, and France who all incorporate some semblance of their cultural roots into their music. Mizik Factory was part of a larger exhibition called “Kréyol Factory,” or, “Kréyol Factory: Exposition des artistes interrogent les identités créoles” (Kreyol Factory: Exposition of artists examining the Creole identity).

Kréyol Factory was an examination and celebration of Creole art, music, and culture. The exhibition included works by artists from Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Reunion, Mauritius, as well as major western cities such as Paris, New York, London, and Miami. The area surrounding the hall was decorated with posters advertising the different concerts of Mizik Factory. These posters also listed the event’s sponsors, which were primarily governmental institutions, including the French Minister of Culture and Communication, the Minister of the Interior of the Outer seas, Region Guadeloupe, Region Réunion, Ile de France, and the General Counsel of Guadeloupe.

In addition to the art exhibition and Mizik Factory, Kréyol Factory, as part of La Villette’s (the Park in which the Grande Halle resides) “Saison Créole 2009” (Creole Season), also included theatrical performances of works by Guadeloupean and Reunionese playwrights, showings of films pertaining to the Creole identity, and a reading of Martinician writer Aimé Césaire’s poem, “Cahier d'un retour au pays natal”(Notebook of a return to my native land) on the one-year anniversary of his death

on 17 April 2008.

The poster for Kréyol Factory, which was plastered in metro stations around the city, featured the photo print, “Plátano Pride,” by Miguel Luciano. It displayed the image of a 12 or 13 year old Puerto Rican boy wearing a baggy white tee shirt, pulling on a large platinum chain around his neck with an actual size platinum plantain hanging from it. The child has his head tilted sideways with a stern look on his face; it is clear that he is trying to look tough.

The concert was much more laid-back than the night before. The doors were supposed to open at 6:30pm but we asked a man working there and he said they probably wouldn’t open until 7:00. Wandering around the lobby of La Grande Halle, I picked up a guide to the exposition. It is divided into seven sections, each dealing with a different issue involving Creole identity: “Crossing”(pertaining to the slave trade and crossing the Atlantic Ocean), “The trouble with Gender,” “Africa: imagined community”(dealing with themes brought up by the Négritude movement of the 1930s), “Black how?”(which deals with issues of xenophobia and racism), “Islands under influence”(which focuses on the departmentalization of Martinique and Guadeloupe, but also looks at Jamaica and Puerto Rico), “The New World”(Looks at Réunion, French Guiana, and Mauritius), “At home-far”(examines the experience of Creole people living in Western cities). In addition, the exhibition was structured and framed by quotes from important black culture critics, writers, and philosophers, including Aimé Césaire, Stuart Hall, Edouard Glissant, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Jean Bernabé.

I wandered back to the concert hall and a few minutes past seven, they opened the

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doors. I descended down a staircase that led to the performance area where there was a large stage, an open area in front of the stage with a dozen café tables, and bleacher-like stands with several levels of seating hugging the back wall of the room. There was a refreshment cart selling beer and ti ponch (the “official” drink of Guadeloupe consisting of rum, a little sugar, and a piece of lime). People were very relaxed and calm as they entered the hall, a stark contrast from the night before. The atmosphere was very friendly and there were people of all ages and races there, including a few infants. I sat with two Guadeloupean men, but at the table next to me I saw a group of French high school students; there was also a tall, blond, white man wearing a polo shirt who my friend dubbed “Mr. Raleigh, U.S.A.” Despite the seemingly disparate backgrounds of the audience members (in terms of race, class, and age), people still danced together and thoroughly enjoyed the performance. The crowd’s energy and participation complimented the lively performance of K’Koustik well.

The above ethnographic excerpts show how within a period of thirty hours I experienced examples of Guadeloupean popular music’s past, present, and future. The Kassav’ concert was an iconic display and celebration of authentic Creole identity whereas, Kréyol Factory was an intellectual exploration of new kinds of Creole identity in the wake of Kassav. For the past thirty years, zouk has been the predominant popular music in Guadeloupe, with Kassav’ greatly facilitating the genre’s success. Because of this success, Kassav’ has transcended the music they created and become a symbol of Guadeloupean musical identity. As a result, spectators at La Nuit Créole were there as much for the history as for the music. La Nuit Créole was meant to celebrate Kassav’s

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success and in turn became an icon of how far Antillean music has come.

La Nuit Créole was more than a concert, it was a historical event and spectacle; prior to the event, concerts of Antillean music were unheard of on this scale, with even Kassav' struggling to book large venues in France until the late-1980s. The sheer immensity of La Nuit Créole, along with the excitement surrounding it support its importance. The spectators were not at Stade de France to listen to zouk, but instead to be part of their cultural history.

Since the early 2000s, an increasing number of groups outside of the zouk genre have achieved popularity in Guadeloupe. These post-zouk trends all embrace, examine, and attempt to redefine Guadeloupean identity. Kréyol Factory, too, is involved in the discourse surrounding Guadeloupean identity; this is illustrated by the exhibits subtitle: "artists redefining Creole identity." By examining Creole identity through the artistic and scholarly lenses of artists and philosophers, Kréyol Factory parallels new trends in Guadeloupean music. Kréyol Factory embodies the new notions of identity, authenticity, and Créolité that Guadeloupean popular musicians are embracing and promoting.

The sponsors for both events offer insight into their intended purposes: La Nuit Créole was a commercial event, meant to make money whereas, Kréyol Factory was state funded and meant for educational purposes. La Nuit Créole received corporate sponsorship, whereas Kréyol Factory was primarily sponsored by the government. In turn, while La Nuit Créole was meant to be celebratory, Kréyol Factory was meant to educate, enlighten, and increase the observer's understanding of what it means to be Creole. Although La Nuit Créole did offer a large number of Caribbean performers,

Kréyol Factory was a more diverse event artistically; it was a long-term installation that included art, music, and theatre.

La Nuit Créole is an examination of Creole identity through a scholarly lens; its curators used cultural critics' theories and quotes to frame the exhibition. By presenting Creole art and music as entities capable of cerebral discourse, Kréyol Factory is legitimizing Creole culture and by extension identity. It is this elevated identity that coincides with a new trend in Guadeloupean popular music: a cosmopolitan Creole music that is being produced and consumed by a Parisian and Guadeloupean middle class intelligentsia.

This thesis focuses on the music of three post-zouk trends, and how their work is redefining what it means to make Guadeloupean music. The first group, K'Koustik, bases their style off of the traditional drumming genre, gwo ka. However, the group adds guitar and bass to the musical texture, and uses topical lyrics to appeal to a modern audience. Creole dancehall artist Admiral T may have created his music with the Jamaican dancehall genre in mind, but he infuses his sound with representations of Guadeloupean identity. The result is a blend of music that promotes his identity as a Guadeloupean and Caribbean artist. Lastly, Soft combines genres from the Caribbean, Africa, and the Americas to create a cosmopolitan pan-Caribbean sound. Soft emphasizes the use of social commentary in their lyrics and traditional Guadeloupean elements in their music. Although the three styles are sonically distinct, they all emphasize the continued importance of social critique and commentary in music of the French Antilles and incorporate Guadeloupean traditional music into their sound,

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² Thomas T.
James Lea,
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drawing upon these traditions to invoke issues of authenticity. In addition, these artists blend different musics together to provide a Creolized sound that can revivify Guadeloupe's musical identity. Ultimately, I argue that since 2004, Guadeloupean popular music has moved away from zouk, embraced its roots, and allowed sonically different music to flourish in an attempt to redefine what it means to make music that is distinctly Guadeloupean, while returning to orality and bursting into modernity, in response to the Creoleness movement.

Identity, authenticity, and creoleness are three theoretical concepts that are central to my thesis. The following pages consist of a literature review of these concepts in which I examine existing definitions of identity, authenticity, and creoleness, and explain their relevance to popular music in Guadeloupe.

IDENTITY

Identity, in its most general sense, is how we define who we are, or, the condition of being oneself. An individual's identity consists of the defining characteristics or attributes that differentiate that person from another. Thomas Turino has defined identity as, "the representation of selected habits foregrounded in given contexts to define self to oneself and to others by oneself and by others."² Identity is the result of how a person perceives him or herself as an individual.

However, identity is not to be confused with the concept of "self." Turino describes self as, "the composite of the total number of habits that determine the

² Thomas Turino, "Introduction: Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities" In Thomas Turino and James Lea, *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities* (New York: Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2004), 8.

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³ Thomas T
Press, 2008

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

tendencies for everything we think, feel, experience, and do.”³ Self is every attribute of a person, whereas identity involves a selective process. Turino explains, “identity involves the partial and variable selection of habits and attributes that we use to represent ourselves and to others, as well as those aspects that are perceived by ourselves and by others as salient.”⁴ Identity is the way in which a person or group chooses to be defined; their most salient characteristics make up the identity, as opposed to all of their characteristics which make up the self.

Individual identity can differentiate or separate a person from others; however, identity can also connect them to a group. Turino explains, “Social identities are based on recognized similarities within groups, and differences from others, which in turn serve as the basis of collective feeling and action. *Group identities are the foundation of all social and political life.*”(emphasis in the original)⁵ For example, despite the personal differences between two people, if they both practice the same religion, they are connected on some level in ways that others are not.

In addition to individual identity, there are many levels in which identity is applicable, such as local, regional, national, and transnational. Commonly, different regions have several pervasive qualities that help characterize its identity. For example, the food culture in the southern part of the United States differs greatly from that of New England; the food culture of each respective region contributes to that region’s identity.

³ Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 101.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

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On a larger level, national identity has been a popular topic among scholars of anthropology and ethnomusicology.⁶

The concept of national identity relies on the idea of “national being,” or, that a large group of people can share common values and attributes. Richard Handler explains national being when he says, “In principle national being is defined by a homogeneity which encompasses diversity; however individual members of the nation may differ, they share essential attributes that constitute their national identity; sameness overrides difference.”⁷ It is these shared attributes and the formation of a national identity that allow a nation to become individuated and autonomous culturally, despite the diversity of its people. For my thesis, I will be examining issues surrounding national identity in Guadeloupe.

A country’s national being is comprised of several nodes of identity, or defining attributes. Turino has stated that, “certain nodes of identity, however, may be more salient than others within given societies,” and this holds true in Guadeloupe;⁸ the most prominent nodes of Guadeloupean identity are its history, artistic traditions, ethnicity, and language. Guadeloupean identity is enmeshed with the history of slavery on the island; the other salient nodes of identity are all related to this history. Artistic traditions, like

⁶ See Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); Ellen M. Schnepel, *In Search of a National Identity: Creole and Politics in Guadeloupe* (Hamburg: Helmut Buske, 2004); Peter Manuel, “Puerto Rican Music and Cultural Identity: Creative Appropriation of Cuban Sources from Danza to Salsa,” *Ethnomusicology* 38, no. 2 (1994): 249-80; Julian Gerstin, “Reputation in a Musical Scene: The Everyday Context of Connections between Music, Identity and Politics,” *Ethnomusicology* 42, no. 3 (1998): 385-414; Chris Goertzen, “Powwows and Identity on the Piedmont and Coastal Plains of North Carolina,” *Ethnomusicology* 45, no. 1 (2001): 58-88; Christopher A. Waterman, “‘Our Tradition Is a Very Modern Tradition’: Popular Music and the Construction of Pan-Yoruba Identity,” *Ethnomusicology* 34, no. 3 (1990): 367-79; Michael Largey, *Vodou Nation: Haitian Art Music and Cultural Nationalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁷ Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 6.

⁸ Turino, “Introduction: Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities” In Thomas Turino and James Lea, *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities* (New York: Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2004), 8.

gwo ka drumming, originated among slaves, and the Creole ethnicity of Guadeloupeans is the result of the cultural blending that took place during that time. The Kwéyòl language began as a lingua franca between African slaves and their white overlords before it developed into the principal language of Creole people. According to Turino, “people tend to emphasize nodes of identity that are most embattled (e.g., race in racist societies) or influential (abilities, occupation, beauty) in relation to influencing life’s chances.”⁹ In the case of Guadeloupe, nodes of identity all point to the island’s colonial experience with slavery.

Guadeloupeans associate their identity so closely with the era of slavery in an attempt to emphasize their otherness from their colonial oppressor, France. In this effort, they attempt to remain culturally autonomous from a country to which they are politically assimilated. It is common for nations to use their identity to make powerful statements; according to Turino, “People typically shape their self-presentation to fit their goals in particular situations and rarely reveal all the habits that constitute the self.”¹⁰ In the case of Guadeloupe, their goal is to exist as a culturally distinct entity from France.

This cultural autonomy is so critical to Guadeloupe because as a department of France, it remains under the country’s political control. Guadeloupeans are French citizens, and despite its Caribbean location, the national currency is the Euro. It is in part due to their political connection with France that Guadeloupeans distance themselves culturally from the metropole. Handler argues that this cultural autonomy is imperative for a nation’s survival, saying, “the nation and its members ‘have’ a culture, the existence of which both follows from and proves the existence of the nation itself. To lose one’s

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 102.

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¹¹ Handler, 1988), 51.

¹² Turino, A. 94.

¹³ See Paul Thompson (1988), *Cultural politics*, Miller, Carr Conn.: West, *National identity*, North Caroli

culture, or to abdicate responsibility for cultural creation and autonomous choice, is to renounce life itself.”¹¹

Art forms, like music, can be a powerful vehicle of national identity. According to Turino, “ethnomusicologists have emphasized the importance of music for expressing and creating social identities in many societies around the world.”¹² In the case of several post-colonial countries, music has become an emblem of the identity of the country from which it originates.¹³

In Guadeloupe, popular music is a powerful venue for promoting national identity. Artists achieve this in many different ways. Zouk’s international popularity in the 1980s made a powerful statement in its use of Kwéyòl lyrics. By incorporating a central node of identity and finding acceptance among non-Antillean audiences, zouk legitimized the language and Creole identity. Additionally, when France chose Antillean singer, Joëlle Ursell to represent them in the 1990 Eurovision song competition, it furthered the idea that Antilleans had a legitimate culture that was worth showcasing.

Traditional music in Guadeloupe has also been used as a vehicle for national identity. Independence movements in the 1970s used gwo ka to bolster moral among the working class. Gwo ka is particularly powerful because it connects people to several nodes of identity: the history of gwo ka dates back to slavery, the lyrics are sung in

¹¹ Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 51.

¹² Turino, *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 94.

¹³ See Paul Austerlitz, *Merengue : Dominican music and Dominican identity* foreword by Robert Farris Thompson (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997); Jocelyne Guilbault, *Governing sound : the cultural politics of Trinidad's Carnival Musics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Rebecca S. Miller, *Carriacou string band serenade : performing identity in the eastern Caribbean* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2007); Hermano Vianna, *The mystery of samba : popular music and national identity in Brazil*, edited and translated by John Charles Chasteen (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

Kwéyòl, it was developed by Creole people, and it is a time-honored artistic tradition. All of these attributes allow Guadeloupeans to emphasize their otherness and contribute to the genres perception as authentically Guadeloupean.

AUTHENTICITY AND TRADITION

Authenticity is a way in which people can assign meaning to aspects of their culture. By designating something as “authentic,” a group is showing that the “authentic” object or activity is important to them and supports their values. In *Creating Country Music*, Richard A. Peterson gives six possible definitions for the word “authentic” in the context of country music: authenticated, original, relic, authentic reproduction, credible in current context, and real, not imitative.¹⁴ In Guadeloupe, authenticity is most commonly employed in its “relic” meaning; to be authentic in Guadeloupe is to be associated with the distant past, in particular the era of slavery on the island.

One of the most authentic aspects of Guadeloupean culture is the Kwéyòl language. Kwéyòl originated during the time of slavery as a means of communication between the French plantation owners and the African slaves. It is a syncretic language consisting of a French-based vocabulary and elements of other African languages. Guadeloupeans see Kwéyòl as an authentic vestige of their culture, having been passed down by their direct descendents.

Current scholarly discourse on authenticity says that it is itself a discourse and an expression of values and that perception of authenticity changes over time. According to Peterson, “authenticity is not inherent in the object or event that is designated authentic but is a socially agreed-upon construct in which the past is to a degree

¹⁴ Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 206-9.

misremembered.”¹⁵ In addition, Benjamin Filene argues that, “the cult of authenticity is not a fixed and static entity. Rather, it takes on different configurations according to when, by whom, and to whom it is applied.”¹⁶ In turn, Filene explains that the way in which people assign authenticity to events or objects can show what is important to them. He says, “examining people’s efforts to create meaning of this sort can offer insight into their values and their worldview.”¹⁷

The concepts of authenticity and tradition are inherently connected; like authenticity, tradition allows people to demonstrate their values. In *Marxism and Literature*, Raymond Williams describes tradition as “the surviving past.”¹⁸ However, Williams argues that the aspects of the past that survive as traditions are chosen according to the wants and needs of a culture. He says that what we see is a “selective tradition,” or, “an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification.”¹⁹

Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin agree that tradition is not an innate entity and is constantly changing according to its contemporary interpretations. They argue that, “tradition is a model of the past and is inseparable from the interpretation of tradition in the present.”²⁰ According to Handler and Linnekin traditions cannot function outside of their contemporary interpretations.²¹

¹⁵ Peterson, *Creating Country Music* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 5.

¹⁶ Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 77.

¹⁷ Ibid, 3.

¹⁸ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1977), 115.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin, “Tradition, Genuine or Spurious,” *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 97, no. 385 (Jul. – Sep., 1984): 276.

²¹ Ibid, 288.

Gwo ka, traditional drumming music, is a time-honored artistic tradition and is considered to be authentically Guadeloupean, having originated in the seventeenth century from the gwotambou rural drumming music of the slaves.²² Like Kwéyòl, gwo ka is deeply rooted in the legacy of slavery on the island. In this sense, it is an artistic tradition that is connected to the past.

In Guadeloupe, musicians can infuse contemporary musical trends with authentic aspects of their culture to make a seemingly new music connect to their relic perception of authenticity. For example, many popular musicians have included gwo ka drums in their musical texture; also popular is the use of the lambi, a conch shell, which is traditionally used during Carnival to help move crowds forward. Guadeloupean musicians performing Jamaican dancehall music sing in Kwéyòl and use the traditional ti bwa rhythm to give their music a Guadeloupean feel. Some musicians display their knowledge of Guadeloupe's musical legacy through their lyrics, making sure to mention gwo ka and other traditional genres. These are just a few ways in which Guadeloupean musicians present their new music as authentic.

Of Peterson's six possible definitions of authenticity, "relic" is the most commonly used in defining what is authentic in Guadeloupe. If something can be traced to the distant past, particularly to the time of slavery, it is considered authentic. The importance of the past and preserving cultural elements are evident in the use of gwo ka and Kwéyòl, which are considered to be valued aspects of Guadeloupean cultural patrimony. It is important to note, however, that Guadeloupean's perception of the distant past rarely extends earlier than the time of slavery. Rather than embracing their

²² Julian Gerstin, "Martinique and Guadeloupe," *Oxford Music Online*, (Accessed 1 February 2010) <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>>

African heritage, they look to the products of creolization as their markers of authenticity. Guadeloupean traditions are determined not by Africanness or blackness, but by Creoleness or the aggregation of different cultures. Guadeloupean's preference of Creoleness over Africaness can be examined through the promotion of the Créolité philosophical and literary movement.

CREOLENESS

The Créolité (Creoleness) movement emerged in the late 1980s and was pioneered by Martinican writers Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant. Créolité aimed to redefine Antillean identity by embracing the mixed heritage of the islands. According to Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant, "Creoleness is the *interactional or transactional aggregate* of Caribbean, European, African, Asian, and Levantine cultural elements, united on the same soil by the yoke of history." (emphasis in the original)²³ Creoleness is the product of the blending of different cultures into one. As a result, Créolité does not claim one single history. According to Bernabé, "Our history is a braid of histories."²⁴

Notably, Créolité opposed the thinking of the Négritude (Blackness) movement from the 1930s, led by Martinican writer and politician Aimé Césaire. Négritude was a powerful literary and political movement that promoted blackness and fueled the political independence of French colonies in Africa. However, to the writers of Créolité, Négritude failed to acknowledge their mixed heritage, looking only to Africa for their identity. Bernabé et al. posit that solely accepting their African heritage is just as

²³ Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, *Eloge de la Créolité*, édition bilingue français / anglais texte traduit par M.B. Taleb-Khyar (Paris : Gallimard, 1993), 87.

²⁴ Ibid, 88.

disillusioned as ignoring it entirely: “Negritude replaced the illusion of Europe by an African illusion.”²⁵

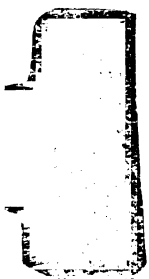
However, Créolité is not completely critical of Négritude. Bernabé et al. acknowledge that Négritude was a valuable forerunner for other discussions on Antillean identity. They pay homage to Césaire, saying that without his work, they would not be in the position to negotiate Creole identity, “It was Césaire’s Négritude that opened to us the path for the actuality of a Caribbeanness which from then on could be postulated, and which itself is leading to another yet unlabelled degree of authenticity. Césairean Négritude is a baptism, the primal act of our restored dignity. We are forever Césaire’s sons.”²⁶

In Créolité’s seminal work, *Eloge de la Créolité* (In Praise of Creoleness), Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant promoted the Kwéyòl language, a new identity for Creole people, and a revival of practices that were once central to Creole culture, like the use of oral traditions. They saw orality as a tie from the present to the past. The writers of Créolité argued that reviving oral tradition is a way of preserving their Creole heritage; they say, “tradition takes shape everyday and that culture is also the link we ought to keep alive between past and present.”²⁷ To Creolists, this tie to the past is particularly important, because their doctrine encourages people to update their history through orality. By minimizing France’s version of history and promoting their own oral version, Creolists aim to promote the truth of their struggles in the past.

²⁵ Ibid, 82.

²⁶ Ibid, 80.

²⁷ Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, *Eloge de la Créolité*, édition bilingue français / anglais texte traduit par M.B. Taleb-Khyar (Paris : Gallimard, 1993), 97.



It is important to distinguish the difference between Caribbeanness and Creoleness. Creolists are not celebrating Caribbeanness, which they call a geopolitical term. The condition of being Creole is not confined to the Caribbean, and all Caribbean people are not Creole. They argue that some places in the Caribbean have not experienced Creolization. According to Bernabé, “(in) certain sugar cane areas of Trinidad, Hindu culture adapted itself to the new environment without getting involved in a process of Creolization as opposed to the *bondyékouli* of the small Caribbean islands, which is a Creole cult based in Hinduism.”²⁸ Adapting ones culture after being displaced isn’t the same as Creolization; the aggregation of cultures must take place.

However, Bernabé et al. acknowledge the importance of Caribbeanness to the experience of the Caribbean Creole. They say, “We, the Caribbean Creoles, enjoy, therefore, a double solidarity: -a *Caribbean solidarity (geopolitical) with all the people of our Archipelago regardless of our cultural differences- our Caribbeanness; and –a Creole solidarity with all African, Mascarin, Asian, and Polynesian peoples who share the same anthropological affinities as we do – our Creoleness.*”(emphasis in the original)²⁹

Caribbean-Creole solidarity has been used by Guadeloupean popular musicians. In the song “Move Together,” Guadeloupean dancehall artist Admiral T joins forces with the Barbadian soca group Square One to promote a collective Caribbean Creole identity. In the song they compare the importance of music in Jamaica, Guadeloupe, and Trinidad on Creole peoples lives. They implore the listener to join forces with other Creole people saying that “there’s strength in unity” and that Creole people will “fight together till we

²⁸ Ibid, 94.

²⁹ Ibid.

die.” The message of the song is that Caribbean Creole people are stronger when they come together to collectively overcome oppression.

HYBRIDITY IN CREOLENESS

Some scholars have equated the cultural blending in Creoleness to hybridity. When discussing Créolité, Shireen K. Lewis says, “they do not base their identity on being black but on being Creole-a hybridity of races.”³⁰ She then compares the Creoleness movement to the work of scholars elsewhere, saying, “this theorization of creolization is not exclusive to the Francophone Caribbean. Black cultural critics, Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy have presented the same theory by using the word ‘hybridization.’”³¹ It is this aspect of Creoleness that most closely lends itself to my work. Throughout this thesis, when I refer to Créolité, I will be focusing on the concept of hybridity: the idea of embracing the blend of cultures and heritage that makes up the Caribbean and the importance of cross Caribbean relations coming together.

Deborah Pacini Hernandez has discussed the impact of hybridity in Latino Caribbean music, saying, “If quintessentially hybrid musics originating in Latin America, such as Cuban son, Dominican merengue, and Colombian cumbia, have become such celebrated symbols of national identity precisely because they are perceived as expressing the (literally and figuratively) harmonious outcome of racial and cultural blending (notwithstanding persistent racially organized social hierarchies), musics of unambiguously African and native origins have never had the same access to and success

³⁰ Shireen Lewis, *Race, Culture, and Identity* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006), 90.

³¹ Ibid, 123.

within the popular music marketplace as their more audibly hybrid counterparts.”³² The writers of the Creoleness movement promoted this idea as well explaining it as the, “conscious harmonization of preserved diversities: DIVERSALITY.”(emphasis in the original)³³

This hybridity (or diversality) is evident in Guadeloupean popular music. Popular artists like Admiral T and Soft are blending genres from Guadeloupe and elsewhere to create a creolized sound. Rather than affixing to their roots of African-derived music, artists are instead affirming their Creole identity through the hybridity of their culture.

METHODOLOGY

The origins of this thesis can be traced back to the summer of 2007, but the bulk of my research took place between May 2008 and February 2010. I collected my ethnographic data on two fieldwork trips: the first to Sainte Anne, Guadeloupe in the summer of 2008, and then to Paris, France in the summer of 2009.

I traveled to Guadeloupe in May 2008 for one month to do preliminary fieldwork, learn French, and be immersed in Creole culture. I faced many challenges in Guadeloupe; doing fieldwork in the Caribbean in a limited time frame is difficult, especially without fluency in the language. However, I quickly learned to make the most of my language skills and I was able to collect a great deal of data from many different perspectives, including that of a tourist, a Creole person, a scholar, and a record store employee.

³² Deborah Pacini Hernandez, *Oye Como Va! Hybridity and Identity in Latino Popular Music* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009)

³³ Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, *Eloge de la Créolité*, édition bilingue français / anglais texte traduit par M.B. Taleb-Khyar (Paris : Gallimard, 1993), 114.

Staying in Sainte-Anne, a popular tourist destination known for its gorgeous Caravelle Beach, allowed me to observe the tourism industry's presentation of Guadeloupean music. I saw that zouk had become a valuable commodity for the tourism board; the genre was blasting continuously from loudspeakers in the Craft Village, and local restaurants touted their live music in order to attract business. However, my experience in Guadeloupe was not solely as tourist; I lived and dined with a Creole family, so I was able to sample many traditional dishes and talk to them about music and culture. Because of my relationship with my host family, I was able to attend a worker's union-sponsored lunch with a traditional gwo ka performance. I also frequently approached people in the town center and library of Sainte-Anne, where I could ask teenagers and other music enthusiasts about the current state of popular music.

With the help of Sainte-Anne's local librarian, I traveled to Basse-Terre to visit Lameca, a Caribbean culture library. There I was able to listen to their extensive Caribbean popular music collection, as well as interview ethnomusicologist Gustav Michaux-Vignes. Mr. Michaux-Vignes was immensely helpful, and provided me with a current scholarly perspective on Guadeloupean popular music. I also went to Pointe-à-Pitre to visit Moradisc, an Antillean record store, where I purchased CDs and interviewed the store manager.

Through the immense hospitality and cooperation of the people I met in Guadeloupe, I was able to focus my research and determine the state of popular music in the Antilles. After returning to the United States and reviewing my data, I became increasingly interested in popular artists like Soft and K'Koustik, who use elements of

traditional music in their songs. I had planned on returning to Guadeloupe for three months the following summer to finish my research, but ran into complications. When it came time to submit grant proposals for my second trip in February 2009, Guadeloupe was experiencing a contentious moment in its history. Due to the extensive strikes and riots that were taking place at the time, and with no way of knowing how long they would last, I decided it was in my best interest to re-route my fieldwork trip to Paris, where the Antillean music industry first took shape in the 1980s. However, due to the economic crisis, I was only able to receive funding for one month of research, so I had to act quickly when I was there.

Going to Paris ended up being an excellent opportunity to get a transnational perspective on a music industry that is active in the Antilles, as well as among Antilleans in metropolitan France. Once I arrived in Paris, it was clear that there was no shortage of Antillean musical events; the combination of the number of events and the reliable transportation system allowed me to see as much if not more Guadeloupean music in Paris than I was able to see in Guadeloupe. Within a week of arriving, I had attended Kassav's 30th anniversary concert, a concert of "roots" music, and I had interviewed the owner of Moradisc and visited Debs Music, two Caribbean record stores. At every event I attended there were always people passing out flyers for Caribbean dance parties, jazz concerts, and other cultural events.

Moradisc became my second home when I was in Paris; the store served as a hangout for Caribbean and African music enthusiasts living in the city, and every time I visited the store, no matter what else I had to do that day, I would end up staying for

hours. Moradisc became a hub of information on Antillean music for me; whether I was chatting with the owner about the most recent Guadeloupean musical trends or being invited to a gwo ka rehearsal by a friendly customer, there was never a dull moment. The owner, Jocelyn, also used his connections with people in the industry to help me make contacts and get concert tickets. My interview with Jocelyn was the first of my trip, and helped guide the remainder of my research in Paris.

In addition to Jocelyn, I interviewed a music journalist for *Le Monde*, Patrick Labesse. Labesse had written about groups that I was interested in researching, and he had a large music collection. Through talking to Labesse, I learned about concerts, relevant CDs, and was able to interview the lead singer of Soft, one of the group that I focus on in my research.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This thesis will examine three post-zouk musical trends and how they promote a musical identity that differs from zouk through an increased emphasis on roots, but with a modern pan-Caribbean sound. Each chapter covers a different genre while using a different methodology and theoretical paradigm.

In order to see the significance of the post-zouk trends that I will discuss, it is necessary to have an understanding of Guadeloupe and its history of popular music. Chapter 1, “Guadeloupe: Département d’Outre Mer,” explains Guadeloupe’s geographic, political, and social situation as well as providing a timeline of zouk’s conception and the implications of its decline. Chapter 2, “Les valeurs du Patrimoine,” first examines the

use of traditional drumming music in Guadeloupe before, during, and after zouk, and then illustrates how this cumulative past has allowed artists like K'Koustik to update the genre for mass audiences. This chapter uses musicological analysis and engages ideas about tradition and authentic identity as connected to musical revivals and traditional music.

Chapter 3, “Dancehall X-Plosion to Fos a Péyi la: From adoption to adaptation,” focuses on the music of Admiral T, a Guadeloupean dancehall artist who took a foreign genre and made it relevant to Guadeloupeans. This chapter uses lyrical analysis and engages ideas about the hybrid nature of Guadeloupean identity. In Chapter 4, “La Nouvelle Scène Créole,” I will discuss a new genre that has emerged in Guadeloupe in the past five years that was pioneered by the group Soft and show how artists like Soft are using their music to revive the musical identity of Guadeloupe by blending the foundations of traditional music with a pan-Caribbean sound. In this chapter I mix musicological and lyrical analysis with an examination of the discourse surrounding the group as produced by both the popular media as well as the band themselves. Chapter 5, “Life After Zouk: Créolité through Music,” concludes the thesis by explaining the implications of post-zouk music, investigating what research should come next, and revisiting the connections between La nouvelle scène and Créolité.

CHAPTER 1

Guadeloupe: Département d'Outre Mer

In the non-western world popular music can play a vital role in negotiating social identity; in countries riddled by class struggles and social inequality, popular music can serve as a mouthpiece for the lower class by transmitting powerful statements to the bourgeoisie. Peter Manuel visits this idea when he says, “popular music may serve as a powerful and meaningful symbol of identity, functioning as an avenue of expression and mediation of conflict.”³⁴ In this chapter, I will examine this phenomenon in Guadeloupe in the French Antilles.

Guadeloupe, as a neo-colonial state, has a constantly shifting identity, torn between the local culture and the French political power. Because popular music acts as a crucial symbol of Guadeloupean identity, it is possible to observe shifting notions of identity historically through music in Guadeloupe from zouk in the 1980s to the present.

In this chapter I will first provide a brief history of Guadeloupe and the discourse surrounding its identity. I will then provide a history of the prevailing popular music, zouk, discuss the significance of the group Kassav', and demonstrate how zouk has helped in the formation of a Guadeloupean national identity. The information I will cover will show zouk's transition from an emblem of national identity to an overly-processed popular music, leaving Guadeloupeans in need of a new culturally relevant music.

³⁴ Peter Manuel, *Popular Musics of the Non-Western World: An Introductory Survey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 16.

Guadeloupe is located on the eastern border of the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean in the archipelago known as the Lesser Antilles. Wedged between Antigua to the North and Dominica to the South, Guadeloupe is itself a small archipelago consisting of two main islands, Basse-Terre and Grand-Terre, connected by a bridge, and the three smaller surrounding islands of Les Saints, Marie Galante, and La Désirade. For the remainder of this thesis, I will focus on the two main islands of Basse-Terre and Grand-Terre. Guadeloupe and Martinique, an island just south of Dominica with which Guadeloupe has close cultural ties, make up the French Antilles.

Since the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1493, Guadeloupe has found itself under the eclectic rule of Spain, England, and France; France permanently took power in 1814.³⁵ Guadeloupe was viewed by European powers as a lucrative commodity with its potential to support banana and sugar plantations. The land, however, was not the only commodity that was valuable to France; the plantations were supported by slave labor until 1848 when France abolished slavery in the Antilles. Despite the abolition of slavery, many non-white workers continued to work agricultural labor after 1848.

France furthered its influence in 1946 when Guadeloupe and Martinique were assimilated as départements d'outre mer (overseas departments). As departments of France, Guadeloupe and Martinique remain under French governmental control, unlike other colonial states that became independent in the twentieth century; under this department status, Antilleans are legally French citizens and French is the official language.

³⁵ Ellen Schnepel, *In Search of a National Identity* (Hamburg: Helmut Buske, 2004), 40.

The departmentalization of Guadeloupe was seen by some as a significant move forward for Guadeloupeans; before this, Guadeloupe was a mere colony and thus considered inferior to regions in hexagonal France. Afterwards, however, Guadeloupe was a legitimate region of France, elevating Guadeloupeans to French citizenship. However, Guadeloupe's neo-colonial status has created significant cultural debates. The first of these debates affirmed a separation from the French identity in the time leading up to departmentalization. In the 1930s, many French colonies in Africa and the Americas were gaining independence. Up until this point, the French had encouraged cultural assimilation in their colonies. Unlike other European imperialist powers, the French agreed to accept Africans and Antilleans into their society, as long as they fully adopted the French language and culture, although it should be noted that prevalent racist views prohibited people of color from being fully accepted into society.

When faced with the prospect of independence, however, several Antillean writers decided that it was time to reject French culture, and promote a collective black identity. These writers, Aimé Césaire, Léon Damas, and Léopold Sédar Senghor (from Martinique, French Guiana, and Senegal, respectively), began the Négritude movement as an affirmation of blackness through literature.³⁶ These men sought to promote their and all blacks' distinct identity as the "other" that they felt everyday while living in Paris. Rather than follow assimilation protocol, these men promoted the idea of embracing black culture through their writings; later, their cultural manifesto flowered into an ideological movement that empowered the black identity.

³⁶ Richard Burton, "The idea of difference in contemporary French West Indian thought: Négritude, Antillanité, Créolité," in *French and West Indian*, Ed. Richard Burton and Fred Reno (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 141.

Although these men never saw cultural assimilation as a viable option, Aime Cesaire had different thoughts on political assimilation; in the 1940s, Aimé Cesaire strongly supported the political assimilation of the Antilles. According to Ellen Schnepel, Cesaire, “envisioned political assimilation as the final stage in the long struggle for recognition of Antillean social and economic equality.”³⁷ To Cesaire, and many Antilleans, political assimilation was a way of decolonizing by elevating their political status to that of regions in hexagonal France. Because of this stance, Cesaire received harsh censures from supporters of the Négritude ideology. He claimed, however, that as departments of France, Guadeloupe and Martinique could focus on promoting their cultural difference. Cesaire’s hope was that, “The pursuit of political assimilation would, ideally, go hand in hand with cultural and spiritual dissimilation from the metropolitan model.”³⁸

Although Négritude made a powerful statement for blacks everywhere, some dissenters felt that it was not applicable to the Antilles. Brenda Berrian explains this point: “the history of colonialism and the notion of a monolithic black culture advocated by négritude writers was not sufficient, since they denied the diversity of those who were transplanted to the Caribbean region.”³⁹ Because Négritude focuses on the difference of blackness, and on the exclusion of anything other than black, it ignores the mixed heritage of the Caribbean, and therefore a large part of its cultural identity. By grouping the entire black experience into one ideology, négritude essentially ignores the profound

³⁷ Ellen Schnepel, *In Search of a National Identity: Creole and Politics in Guadeloupe*. (Hamburg: Helmut Buske, 2004), 1.

³⁸ Richard Burton, “The idea of difference in contemporary French West Indian thought: Négritude, Antillanité, Créolité,” in *French and West Indian*, Ed. Richard Burton and Fred Reno (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 143.

³⁹ Brenda Berrian, *Awakening Spaces: French Caribbean Popular Songs, Music, and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 14.

experience of those transplanted to the Caribbean. Michael Dash furthers this point when he says, “Négritude denies the evidence of the diversity of material conditions of social development and considers the creative sensibility of Blacks as a universal and homogenous cultural bloc.”⁴⁰

Taking this into account, it is not surprising that a Caribbean response to Négritude emerged in the 1960s, called Antillanité. Led by Martinican writer Edouard Glissant, Antillanité advocated the cultural hybridity that encompasses the French Antilles.⁴¹ Unlike Négritude, which focuses on the stark contrast of black vs. white, Antillanité embraces the cultural and racial blend in the Antilles.

Although Antillanité catered more closely to the needs of the French Antilles, some felt that efforts could be stronger to embrace the East Indian population in the Antilles. The result of this was another literary movement in the 1980s called Créolité. Créolité furthered the inclusive character of Antillanité and was led by writers Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphael Confiant. According to Jocelyne Guilbault, Créolité was an, “effort to demarginalize the East Indian experience in the French West Indies and to stress the contribution of ‘indianité’ to the Creole mosaic.”⁴² With Créolite, people of mixed, black, East Indian, and white heritage were all embraced as one Creole group.⁴³ By embracing all races, including white, Créolité shows that cultural acceptance

⁴⁰ Michael Dash, *Jacques Stéphen Alexis* (Toronto: Black Images, 1975) 45. Quoted in Berrian, *Awakening Spaces: French Caribbean Popular Songs, Music, and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 14.

⁴¹ Berrian, *Awakening Spaces: French Caribbean Popular Songs, Music, and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 14.

⁴² Jocelyne Guilbault, “Créolité and the New Cultural Politics of Difference in Popular Music of the French West Indies,” *Black Music Research Journal* 14, no. 2 (Autumn 1994): 163.

⁴³ Burton, “The idea of difference in contemporary French West Indian thought: Négritude, Antillanité, Créolité,” in *French and West Indian*, Ed. Richard Burton and Fred Reno (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 152.

has come a long way since Négritude of the 1930s. Créolité emphasizes a sense of hybridity that often emerges in Guadeloupean music.

For some Guadeloupeans, Creole culture is more of a testament to the island's blackness than its composite history. There has been, however, a lesser-known debate in Guadeloupe pertaining to Créolité and whether its strong connection with the different ethnicities of the island is valid. Guadeloupéanité focuses on the African-ness of the island and how its cultural customs, like gwo ka (gros ka or "big drum"), bridge the gap between the Caribbean and Africa more intimately than those in Martinique, like the dance genre, biguine.⁴⁴ Richard Burton elaborates on this when he says, "For Guadeloupean nationalists, the African-ness that is believed to constitute the core of Guadeloupéanité is expressed most fully through Creole and through the gros-ka, the African-derived style of drumming which is systematically opposed in much nationalist discourse to the allegedly 'French', 'assimilated' or 'doudouiste' music of the biguine."⁴⁵

These cultural debates are also inherent in the expansion and promotion of popular music in Guadeloupe. Zouk, a rhythmic dance-music genre that began in the late 1970s and earned international popularity in the 1980s is especially relevant. With zouk, for the first time in Guadeloupe, music was produced locally for local consumption, reflecting Creole culture by rejecting French lyrics evocative of the colonial power.⁴⁶ The use of Kwéyòl lyrics highlights the Antilleans otherness from France, and the cultural métissage of their heritage.

⁴⁴ Gwo ka is the traditional drumming music from Guadeloupe that is believed to have African ties. Conversely, biguine is a Martinican popular music from the early twentieth century that incorporates aspects of western harmony and jazz.

⁴⁵ Burton, "The idea of difference in contemporary French West Indian thought: Négritude, Antillanité, Créolité," in *French and West Indian*, Ed. Richard Burton and Fred Reno (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 151.

⁴⁶ Jocelyne Guilbault, *Zouk: World Music in the West Indies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

Kassav', the group that is often credited with the creation of zouk, earned international success that instilled a sense of nationalism in Antilleans.⁴⁷ Because the Antilles exists within France's colonial shadow, the international consumption of a distinctly Antillean entity promoted their distinct identity from France. However, since the 1980s the genre has changed its sound and ideology. I argue that despite zouk's influence, its meaning as a cultural symbol has changed, leaving Guadeloupeans to seek new ways of negotiating their cultural identity.

Since its incipient stage, one of zouk's most meaningful attributes has been its use of Kwéyòl lyrics. Kwéyòl refers to the language used by people of African descent in Guadeloupe and their corresponding ethnic group. Kwéyòl is an example of the common Caribbean practice of Creolization, or the creation of a new cultural practice through blending of several other cultures. A Creole language begins as a pidgin language, or a blend of two or more languages. Once a pidgin language is the native language of a group, it becomes a Creole language.⁴⁸ Kwéyòl originated on sugar cane plantations during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and is a mélange of French, English, Arawak (indigenous), and various African languages.

Zouk is a contraction of "mazouk," the Kwéyòl word for mazurka.⁴⁹ Slaves creolized European dance forms, such as the mazurka, quadrille, and waltz with African dance traditions; notably, the music associated with these dance forms remained popular in the French Antilles until the mid-twentieth century.⁵⁰ These creolized dances, as well

⁴⁷ Berrian, *Awakening Spaces: French Caribbean Popular Songs, Music, and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁴⁸ Peter Manuel, *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music From Rumba to Reggae (Revised and Expanded Edition)* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 14-15.

⁴⁹ Maurice Jallier, *Musique aux Antilles: Zouk à la Mazouk* (Paris : Hartman, 1999), 133.

⁵⁰ Michael Largey, "Haiti and the French Caribbean," in *Caribbean Currents*, 171.

as another popular dance, the biguine, were typically accompanied by small ensembles consisting of clarinet, trombone, banjo, and drums.⁵¹ These ensembles transformed throughout the twentieth century to incorporate syncopation from other African-derived forms, such as jazz. The evolution of these dances and the etymology of the word zouk are closely connected. In the 1950s, “zouk” was associated with a country dance, commonly accompanied by these small jazz bands; in the 1960s the term referred to a teenage party.⁵² Gradually the word “zouk” became synonymous with all parties and was used to describe the music and accompanying dance at these events.

Zouk marked a powerful shift away from French musical influence, exemplified through the work of Kassav’, the group that brought zouk into the music scene. Maurice Jallier addresses this point when he asks, “Was it Kassav’ who begat zouk, or zouk who begat Kassav?”⁵³ Brothers and bassists Pierre-Édouard and Georges Décimus, along with guitarist and vocalist Jacob Desvarieux, formed the Guadeloupean group in 1979. They intended to create a technologically sophisticated music that could compete on the international market while sounding distinctly Antillean.⁵⁴ The group grew and included members from Martinique, including influential female lead singer Jocelyne Béroard.⁵⁵ They named the group Kassav’ from the Kwéyòl word for the cassava root, a popular staple in the Caribbean diet. Cooking the cassava root is difficult because if not prepared properly, the food contains harmful toxins. Jocelyne Béroard explains Kassav’s name choice: “There is a kind of poison in it. You’ve got to know how to extract the poison

⁵¹ Gene Scaramuzzo, “The Magic Music of the French Antilles Part 3: The Roots,” *Reggae & African Beat* 6, no.1 (1987): 21.

⁵² Jallier, *Musique aux Antilles: Zouk à la Mazouk* (Paris : Hartman, 1999), 133.

⁵³ « Kassav’ a fait le zouk, ou est-ce que le zouk qui a fait Kassav? » Ibid.

⁵⁴ Andrew Jones, “Kassav’ Are Ambassadors of Zouk,” *Gazette* (Montreal), 26 May 1988, C13.

⁵⁵ Gene Scaramuzzo, “Is America Finally Ready for...Kassav’?” *The Beat* 13, no. 6 (1994): 50-53.

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⁵⁷ Guilbault.

⁵⁸ Berrian, A.

⁵⁹ Interview.

before you eat it....So because they had to extract what was poisoning Martinican and Guadeloupean music, they called it Kassav’.”⁵⁶ According to this logic, Kassav’ and zouk sucked the poison of France’s influence from Antillean popular music.

Zouk incorporates electronically produced drum and bass ostinatos, layered with horns, electronic keyboard, and electric guitar. Electronic instruments helped Kassav’ generate the technologically sophisticated music that rivaled the French sound. Jacob Desvarieux’s career as a studio musician in Paris greatly contributed to the polished use of electronic instruments; Kassav’ used these high-tech studios to produce an internationally accessible sound. Between 1979 and 1983, Kassav’ fine-tuned its sound, allowing its popularity to crescendo gradually until it peaked in 1984; Antillean audiences couldn’t help but dance to the electric beats of “zouk hard” and “zouk love,” the genre’s two main varieties. Zouk love songs are slower ballads, whereas zouk hard, the more popular of the two, consists of fast dance music.⁵⁷

However, there was more to zouk than a “hot, loud, intense tempo.”⁵⁸ Kassav’ set the standard that zouk music must be sung in Kwéyòl, the native language of Antilleans. This decision stunned audiences: lyrics in most Guadeloupean popular music forms before zouk were exclusively in French. In Paris, the owner of Moradisc, an influential Antillean record store, explained this situation saying that before the 1980s, music that used Kwéyòl lyrics was considered to be “musique de voyou”(thug’s music).⁵⁹ He explained that parents even discouraged their children from speaking Kwéyòl outside of the house, despite the fact that it was their first language. By singing in Kwéyòl, zouk

⁵⁶ Quoted in Banning Eyre, “Kassav’s Medicine Magic Multinational,” *Rhythm Music Magazine* 3, no. 6 (1994): 14-17, 52; cited in Berrian, *Awakening Spaces*, 43.

⁵⁷ Guilbault, *Zouk*, 5.

⁵⁸ Berrian, *Awakening Spaces*, 44.

⁵⁹ Interview, the author at Moradisc, Paris 20 May 2009.

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musicians opposed the colonial French power and promoted a positive regional identity. Rather than pay homage to France through the language of the empire, Kassav' promoted Antillanité and Kwéyòl culture.

Zouk is only one example of how the use of regional languages in the arts can serve as a powerful form of protest; protest language is often used as way to promote culture identity especially in post-colonial states.⁶⁰ Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o illustrates this by writing in his native Gikuyu language, rejecting the language of colonialism and using his text as a form of protest.⁶¹ By taking a medium that had exclusively been in the colonial language and putting in the language of the native people, he makes a strong statement in favor of the legitimacy and importance of his culture.

Protest through language is an effective way of promoting cultural identity. I experienced this in the field while listening to a zouk band play in Guadeloupe at a restaurant called Kouleur Kreol. The band played a song called "Ma pale Kwéyòl" or "I speak Creole, I don't speak French, I don't speak English, I don't speak Spanish, I speak Creole," effectively empowering themselves through their use of Kwéyòl.⁶² Because using Kwéyòl is a protest in itself for Antilleans, singing Kwéyòl lyrics that reject other languages is doubly significant. Musical protest in the French Antilles has historically been more subdued than in other French-influenced part of the Caribbean such as Haiti. Haitian carnival music has a history of packing a potent message; on more than one

⁶⁰ Linda Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999): 19-41.

⁶¹ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind* (Harare, Zimbabwe: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1987).

⁶² This is also the subject of the song "Se Kreyòl Nou Ye" by the Haitian group Boukman Eksperyans. Michael Largey explores this when he says, "Songs like 'Se kreyòl nou ye' (We're Creole) ridiculed the Haitian elite's disdain for the country's language, saying that 'some Haitians would rather speak French, English, or Spanish rather than Kreyòl.'" Michael Largey, "Haiti and the French Caribbean" in *Caribbean Currents*, 168.

occasion it has helped overthrow oppressive government regimes.⁶³ The example of “Ma pale Kwéyòl” is on a much smaller scale than that of its Caribbean cousin, but it still means a lot on behalf of Kwéyòl culture.

Although zouk’s Kwéyòl lyrics carry a deep meaning for Guadeloupeans by representing their culture, the content is generally *légère* (light).⁶⁴ The lyrics focus on love and dancing, and normally promote a positive outlook on life. The hit song “Elles Demandent” by Guadeloupean artist Medhy Custos exemplifies this idea in the chorus: “The ladies ask for zouk, they want the *douce* music.”⁶⁵ *Douce* means soft, light, sweet, mild, or gentle. The song futhers the ideas of zouk music as “*douce*” with its content, which discusses how women go to the clubs to hear zouk, dance to the music and eventually will find a man to love.

Patrick Saint Eloi, a member of Kassav’, claimed the titles “*chanteur de charme*” (charm singer) and “*kréyòl lover*” with the release of his first solo album “*Misik-cé lan mou*” (Music is Love).⁶⁶ Saint Eloi and other zouk singers challenged Caribbean misogynist views towards women and advocated respect for the opposite sex.⁶⁷ For example, Jean-Phillippe Marthély, another singer from Kassav’, wrote about a loving, mutual relationship in his song “*Bél kréati*” (Beautiful creature) in 1984.⁶⁸ Zouk is important beyond its musical form, enabling Antilleans to spread a positive message and encouraging positive relations between men and women.

⁶³ Gage Averill, “Anrage to Angage: Carnival Politics and Music in Haiti,” *Ethnomusicology* 38, no. 2, Music and Politics (Spring-Summer 1994): 241.

⁶⁴ Interview, author with Gustav Michaux-Vignes, 6 November 2008, East Lansing, Michigan.

⁶⁵ Elles demandent du zouk elles veulent de la musique douce. Medhy Custos, « Elles Demandent » *L’Année du Zouk 2008*. Aztec Musique 2008.

⁶⁶ Berrian, *Awakening Spaces*, 50.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 51.

With zouk serving such an important role in the improvement of Antillean social identity, it is no surprise that healing and medicine are important themes in zouk songs. In 1998, the title track from Patrick Saint Eloi's album "Zoukamine" (Zouk Vitamin) proposes music as therapy to help Guadeloupean society end recent violent disputes. Four years later, off of the album "Lovtans," Saint Eloi offers the song "Rehabilitation" which RFI describes as a, "poignant tribute to the victims of slavery."⁶⁹ Rehabilitation incorporates an African aesthetic with an introduction that features call-and-response a cappella chanting and the lambi (conch shell). After the introduction, the song introduces the standard zouk beat:

Figure 1: Zouk Beat



This zouk beat is then layered and accented by gwo ka drums playing a variation on the takouta rhythm:

Figure 2: Takouta Rhythm



The use of these drums is a deliberate allusion to Guadeloupean musical heritage. The gwo ka drums fade, leaving a guitar and drum ostinato, layered with a repetitive melody,

⁶⁹ RFI Musique, "Biography : Patrick Saint Eloi" (accessed 15 October 2009)
<http://www.rfimusique.com/siteen/biographie/biographie_7911.asp>

occasionally interrupted by horn lines. The refrain of the song repeatedly states “nou mandé rehabilitation” (we want rehabilitation). Later, Saint Eloi, incorporates the lambi rhythm from carnival into the song to tie in a Guadeloupean practice that was made popular during slavery. This rhythm was used to help move the parading crowds forward during Carnival.⁷⁰ Saint Eloi is encouraging Antilleans to proceed forward with their rehabilitation through his musical references to Afro-Caribbean culture.

Figure 3: Lambi Rhythm



The theme of healing in zouk can be traced back to Kassav’s 1984 hit “Zouk-la sé sèl mèdikaman nou ni”(Zouk is the only medicine we have), which also established the foundations of zouk style. The song embraces the idea that zouk can help people get through tough times. The lyrics ask, “How do you keep in shape?” and are answered with, “Zouk is the only medicine we have, that’s how it is.”⁷¹ Sonically, the song is sparse; it begins with a short guitar riff before an electric guitar, bass, and drum layered ostinato enters and remains steadfast throughout the song. After the ostinato has been properly established, Jacob Desvarieux enters, asking “How do you keep in shape?” with the response, “zouk is the only medicine we have (that’s how it is).” After the first statement of “zouk is the only medicine,” Desvarieux sings, “Please tell me your secret so that I will know if I get sick.” Desvarieux’s verses are always answered with “zouk is the

⁷⁰ Interview, the author at Moradisc in Paris, France.

⁷¹ George Décimus and Jacob Desvarieux, “Zouk-la sé sel mèdikaman nou ni,” *Yélélé*, G. Debs 002. Cited in Berrian, *Awakening Spaces*, 64.

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⁷² Ibid.
⁷³ Berrian, 24.
⁷⁴ Ibid, 64.
⁷⁵ Jallier, Z.
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only medicine we have.” The song consists of eight lines of text, yet extends over six minutes.⁷² This song is the epitome of the zouk style with its ostinato rhythms, repetitive lyrics, electric riffs, horn interjections, and positive message.

The release of “Zouk-la sé sèl médikaman nou ni” in 1984 marked the emergence of Kassav’ and zouk onto the international market.⁷³ The combined local and international record sales for the single totaled to over 200,000 copies.⁷⁴ The success of “Zouk-la sé sèl médikaman nou ni” also earned Kassav’ a gold record, the first for an Antillean group.⁷⁵ The song swept across the Caribbean like a musical hurricane, asserting zouk’s place on the international market and dominating radio play. With the addition of their West African fans, Kassav’ became the first French Antillean group to be well known outside of the Caribbean and France. Shortly after the release of “Zouk-la sé sèl médikaman nou ni,” Kassav’ embarked on an international tour, traveling to France, Africa and the Caribbean. Their concerts brought audiences around the world first-hand exposure to zouk. Journalist Gene Scaramuzzo jokes that, “World domination seemed to be the next inevitable development.”⁷⁶

By the mid-1980s zouk was an internationally celebrated musical genre, which contributed to a more positive image of Kwéyòl identity. In 1990 France chose an Antillean, Joëlle Ursull from Guadeloupe, to represent them in Eurovision, a singing and song writing competition. Each year European countries (up to forty-two most recently) nominate a singer and song to compete against their neighbors; although the competition may sound lighthearted, Eurovision is a cultural Olympics of sorts, inspiring fierce

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Berrian, *Awakening Spaces*, 48.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 64.

⁷⁵ Jallier, *Zouk*, 134.

⁷⁶ Scaramuzzo, “The Magic Music of the French Antilles Part 4,” 27.

rivalries between European countries since 1956 when it debuted.⁷⁷ The song contest can be a conduit for powerful messages, as said by Andrew Mueller, “Eurovision is legendary as an arena for settling diplomatic scores, venting ethnic grievance, baiting national rivals and undermining governments.”⁷⁸ Each year it is a greatly touted event, bringing in an estimated 100 million worldwide viewers each year.⁷⁹

By selecting an Antillean, France acknowledged the cultural legitimacy of the Antilles for the first time. Ursull, who was Miss Antilles 1985 and a former member of the popular group Zouk Machine, sang a song composed by Serge Gainsbourg titled “White and Black Blues.”⁸⁰ The song discusses race and despite the English title, was sung in French. The lyrics voice the singer’s frustrations with race relations, which are giving her the “blues.” In the chorus of the song, she points out that people of color feel like a minority in the French population, but should not forget their roots in Africa:

White and black
Dance, swing on the white and black blues
We, the blacks
We're a few million, a dime a dozen
Like a paradise
Africa, my love, I have you in my skin
White and black

⁷⁷ Eurovision Song Contest Online, “History” (accessed 1 November 2009) <<http://www.eurovision.tv/>>

⁷⁸ Andrew Mueller, “The Politics of Pop,” quoted in Raykoff and Tobin, *A Song for Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 3.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Jallier, *Zouk*, 94.

What does color matter? All are equal.⁸¹

Ursull placed second in the competition; despite her loss, her presence and lyrics about race were considered to be an Antillean triumph over the colonial mentality.⁸² Although it had been over eighteen years since Ursull's Eurovision debut, her name consistently came up when discussing women zouk performers when I was in Guadeloupe in 2008. The second-place finish established Ursull as a hero for Antillean musicians and a reiteration of Antillean identity.

Zouk enriched more than Antilleans' identity; it also fattened their wallets. Prior to zouk, all Antillean artists recorded in Paris through Paris-based record labels. Caribbean artists couldn't compete with France's high-tech recording equipment and its resulting sound quality. This polished Parisian sound was what Kassav' was striving for with their incorporation of electronic instruments in their music; they showed that an Antillean band was capable of producing records with the same fidelity and sophistication as the French, while evoking a message unique to the Caribbean.⁸³ Although there were Antillean record producers as early as the 1960s, it was not until zouk's popularity in the 1980s that record sales were substantial enough to support a local recording industry. Jocelyne Guilbault visits this point, saying that even the most popular Antillean artists failed to deliver decent sales: "Until the early eighties, according to Martinican music critic Alain Aumis, no producer had ever sold more than thirty

⁸¹ "White and black, danse, balance sur le white and black blues, nous, les blacks, nous sommes quelque millions, treize à la douze, paradisiaque, Africa, mon amour, j't'ai dans la peau, white and black, qu'importe la couleur? Tous égaux." Joëlle Ursull, "White and Black Blues," *Black French*. CBS, 1990.

⁸² Jallier, *Zouk*, 95.

⁸³ Scaramuzzo, "The Magic Music of the French Antilles Part 4," 28.

thousand records in France and the Antilles, even by recording the best artists.”⁸⁴ With the success of zouk, Antillean-based record companies, first with Caribbean producers working in Paris, then by opening their own studios in the Antilles, became the most popular and emblematic of Antillean music. Not only were enterprises such as Moradisc, Debs Music, and Blue Silver pioneering technological advances in the Caribbean recording industry, but they were doing so while maintaining lucrative businesses and stimulating the economy.

Tourism is the most powerful industry in Guadeloupe, bringing in more foreign funds than any other.⁸⁵ However, Guadeloupe’s dependence on France for resources is relieved only slightly through the tourism industry. Guadeloupe is a popular vacation destination not only for the French, but also other Europeans and North Americans. Travelers are promised an exotic Caribbean experience and are told to explore Creole culture while on the island; the official website of the French Government Tourist Office refers to Guadeloupe as “An exotic destination where you can feel at home.”⁸⁶ Tourism literature also touts the colorful plant life: “trees ferns, epiphytic leaves, cannas, and wild orchid do their utmost to surprise the freshly landed visitors!”⁸⁷ Guadeloupe is equated with a tropical paradise that is almost too good to be true; one source goes as far as to say, “it all seems more dreamlike than real.”⁸⁸

The commercial success of zouk led the genre to evolve into a money-making tool rather than an affirmation of identity or a venue for creative expression, its original

⁸⁴ Guilbault, *Zouk*, 36-7.

⁸⁵ A. Gerald Gravette, *The French Antilles* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1990), 67.

⁸⁶ France Guide, “Guadeloupe” (Accessed 11 November 2009) <<http://ca-en.franceguide.com>>

⁸⁷ Les Iles de Guadeloupe: Comité du Tourisme, “What to Do” (accessed 11 November 2009) <<http://www.Go2guadeloupe.com/>>

⁸⁸ Ibid.

purpose. By keeping the industry local, zouk too has become a valuable tool of the tourism industry in Guadeloupe. Tourists are encouraged to “Zoukez bien et sans modération” (dance zouk well and without moderation) and to buy zouk CDs as souvenirs.⁸⁹ In Guadeloupe and Martinique tourists are blasted by zouk playing from speakers in hotel lobbies and other hot spots; visitors leave the islands aware of zouk’s importance to Antilleans.⁹⁰

As early as 1988, zouk’s popularity declined. Although zouk artists continued to top the Caribbean music charts, a sense of monotony had set in. In *Reggae and African Beat*, C.C. Smith, a journalist, described the transformation as “slick and bland.”⁹¹ The electronic sound that enthralled early audiences had become the norm in music. By 1990, negative opinions of zouk had grown substantially.

Even the beloved Kassav’ began to receive critical reception. Censors of zouk music blamed the group for spawning the genre and in turn muzzling musical creativity. Antillean musician Michel Thimon supports this when he said, “In a way, one could consider the arrival of Kassav’ as unfortunate for Antillean music. Now everyone wants to imitate Kassav’; no one experiments.”⁹² Kassav’ has also been criticized for changing their musical style. In the early 80s, Kassav’ made an important statement through its incorporation of traditional Guadeloupean drumming into their music.⁹³ However, as the group strove for international appeal, these rhythms gradually phased out of their songs. Many Antilleans have commented on this change, and believe that Kassav’ compromised

⁸⁹ Site officiel du Comité du Tourisme des îles de Guadeloupe, “Le Zouk” (accessed 1 October 2008) <<http://www.lesilesdeguadeloupe.com/>>.

⁹⁰ Scaramuzzo, “The Magic Music of the French Antilles Part 3,” 23.

⁹¹ C.C. Smith, “Report from Martinique: Île entre Deux Mondes,” *Reggae & African Beat* 7, no.1 (1988): 23.

⁹² Scaramuzzo, “The Magic Music of the French Antilles Part 4,” 29.

⁹³ Guilbault, *Zouk*, 22.

on their original purpose: to create a distinctly Antillean popular music. Although critics accused Kassav' of selling out, the group defended themselves, saying that they were just promoting Caribbean hybridity by changing their music.

The electronic sound of the genre made recordings a more popular medium than live performances; the lower cost of using a sound system at an event lowered the demand for local bands. Thus, local musicians in other genres harbored animosity towards zouk, arguing that it led to the demise of live gigs, and subsequently their careers.⁹⁴ Interestingly, even zouk musicians suffered because of the recorded nature of the genre. Gene Scaramuzzo elaborates on this, "The zouk bands, so called because their records provide the music for zouks, are primarily studio bands, with only a handful like Kassav', Gazoline and Batako maintaining a full touring schedule."⁹⁵ Zouk's recorded medium made it extremely difficult for Antillean's to make a living from playing music and gigging. Many successful groups, like Kassav', migrated to France to live. Guilbault elaborates on this when she says, "The few groups that remain on the island rarely have the opportunity to perform, and their members must hold day jobs to survive. When they can, they play hotel gigs."⁹⁶ There was little money to be made through performances. Critics pointed out the formulaic nature of zouk, saying that it drained the creativity from the music. Music that had given Antilleans a global voice was now seen as a cultural commodity to be sold by the record industry; zouk musicians were more focused on selling records than promoting Antillean identity.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Gene Scaramuzzo, "The Magic Music of the French Antilles Part 4: The Magic Revisited," *The Beat* 9, no. 6 (1990): 28.

⁹⁵ Scaramuzzo, "The Magic Music of the French Antilles Part 3: The Roots," 22.

⁹⁶ Guilbault, *Zouk*, 39.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

As time progressed, zouk's integrity continued to diminish. New computer programs made it possible for anyone with the right software to produce a zouk song. Early advocates of zouk began to point out its contemporaneous flaws. Patrick Saint Eloi from Kassav' castigated the state of zouk in the late 90s, stating, "There is no more poetry, no heart, no soul. It is a music of computers and technology."⁹⁸ Ironically, recording technology and electronic sounds, which had been so vital in the conception of zouk, was a main factor in its decay. David Drumeaux, the director of Zouk Radio, a popular music radio station in Guadeloupe, agreed that electronic music production in the Antilles defeated the need for creativity.⁹⁹ With the help of computers, a person with minimal musical knowledge could generate a zouk song.

Early in the twenty-first century, zouk enthusiasts longed for change in popular music in the Antilles. With the exception of Kassav', the genre that audiences loved had lost its sense of purpose, leaving fans wishing for more substantial content. Patrick Saint Eloi lamented, "What I would love...is for zouk artists to be conscious of their own reality."¹⁰⁰ Guadeloupeans were forced to turn to other Caribbean music genres to listen to a more politically and culturally engaged music. However, Haitian konpa, Trinidadian calypso, and Jamaican dancehall did little to fill the void felt by Guadeloupeans after the loss of their culturally distinct musical genre. As will be seen in the next chapter, one remedy for Guadeloupe's musical malaise was a revival of traditional Guadeloupean music, *gwo ka*.

⁹⁸ Cited in Pamela Klein, "Strong Medicine: Guadeloupe's Zouk Radio gives Zouk a Home," *The Beat* 19, no. 2 (2000): 35.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 73.

CHAPTER 2

Les Valeurs du Patrimoine

Gwo ka, drumming music from Guadeloupe, has a long history on the island. Its roots can be traced back to the seventeenth and eighteenth century gwotambou music of rural slaves.¹⁰¹ Because of its strong ties to Guadeloupe's distant past, gwo ka is seen more than any other music as an important symbol of Guadeloupean identity. It has served as a marker of authentic Guadeloupean music for several generations, in addition to acting as a respected tradition.

Traditions help shape the culture of a group. They provide people with a perceived connection to the past while enabling them to demonstrate which aspects of the past are the most relevant to their needs today. Raymond Williams explains this process when he says, "What we see is not just 'a tradition' but a selective tradition: an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification."¹⁰² Each tradition that is "selected by," or successfully practiced within a group, helps make up the identity of that group by displaying its values.

Despite tradition's importance in the formation of a group's cultural identity, it is not fixed; tradition is a constantly changing entity that is molded by each generation to fit their needs. Guadeloupeans look to tradition to connect them with their distant past, and gwo ka drumming is a popular way to do so. Importantly, like any tradition, the practice of gwo ka and context in which it is performed has changed over time. Richard Handler

¹⁰¹ Julian Gerstin, "Martinique and Guadeloupe," *Oxford Music Online* (Accessed 1 February 2010) <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>>

¹⁰² Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford University Press: 1977), 115.

and Jocelyne Linnekin explain this phenomenon when they say, “there is no essential, bounded tradition; tradition is a model of the past and is inseparable from the interpretation of tradition in the present.”¹⁰³

Tradition and authenticity are tightly correlated constructs. A society’s perception of what is traditional provides the guidelines for what can be considered “authentic” to that particular culture. If something is included in their traditional values, then it is considered authentic and belonging to the identity of the group. Because authenticity and tradition essentially serve the same purpose, to display the values of a culture while tying them to their past, it is not surprising that authenticity is a flexible concept; it is a constantly changing idea that is affected by the societal dialogue surrounding it.¹⁰⁴ While traditions change to fit the needs of each generation, the discourse of authenticity surrounding the tradition changes as well.

As a valued tradition in Guadeloupe, the practice of gwo ka changes over time; each change is tied to the specific agenda of the generation that wields it. Because a generation’s use of tradition and perception of authenticity displays its values, the varied views of Guadeloupeans throughout the twentieth century have contributed to changes in gwo ka. In the early twentieth century, the island was mostly agricultural, so the drum-exclusive traditional gwo ka was in practice. In the 1960s and 1970s, worker’s unions and independence movements revived gwo ka to promote the identity of the working class. In the 1980s, zouk musicians used gwo ka in their music to show audiences that the popular genre was legitimately Guadeloupean and today gwo ka is used in the post-

¹⁰³ Richard Handler and Jocelyne Linnekin, “Tradition, Genuine or Spurious,” *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 97, No. 385 (Jul. – Sep., 1984): 276.

¹⁰⁴ Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 5.

zouk commercially driven roots revival in an attempt to popularize the traditional music and allow Guadeloupeans to reconnect with their musical heritage.

In this chapter I will examine the use of gwo ka before, during, and after zouk and how each generation has put the genre to their own uses, creating music in different ways for different purposes. I argue that gwo ka's cumulative past has led artists today, like K'Koustik, to revive the genre, updating it to appeal to the youth and gain commercial success while emphasizing their investment in Guadeloupean perceptions of authenticity.

There are many competing definitions of gwo ka, each invested with some specific cultural goal. "Gwo ka" can refer to a dance style, an instrument, a traditional drumming music, and a set of rhythms. Michel Halley of LAMECA, a Caribbean cultural library in Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe, provides an inclusive definition, saying gwo ka is, "a generic term used to describe the music, songs, and dance steps using a Guadeloupean drum bearing the same name."¹⁰⁵ Despite the broad definition, one thing is certain: gwo ka requires the use of the gwo ka drums, also known as "ka." A "ka" or "gwo ka" in its drum sense is a type of barrel drum that provides the instrumental foundation of a gwo ka ensemble.

The instrumentation of a gwo ka ensemble varies slightly from case to case but typically employs one lead ka drum called the makè,¹⁰⁶ which is played upright between the legs and improvised, and several boula (ka boula), which are slightly larger and provide the rhythmic base of the music. To play the boula, the drummers traverse the drum and sit to play. In addition to these drums, an ensemble can also include other

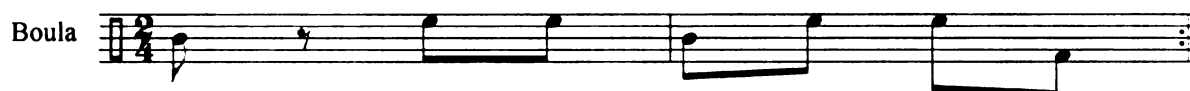
¹⁰⁵ "Le gwoka est un terme générique qui désigne les musiques, chants et danses pratiqués sur un tambour de Guadeloupe appelé lui-même gwoka." Michel Halley et al, "Le Gwoka: Un dossier multimédia de référence consacré au tambour de Guadeloupe" Dossiers & Articles (accessed 7 Feb 2009) <<http://www.lameca.org>>

¹⁰⁶ Sometimes referred to as ka make, marquer, or makyé.

percussion instruments such as the ti bwa (little sticks), a mounted piece of bamboo hit with sticks, and a cha cha, a calabash shaker.¹⁰⁷ Occasionally a flute is included in the ensemble. A lead chanter and a small chorus provide the vocals, which normally consist of call-and-response between the singers.

The most defining characteristic of gwo ka is its seven rhythms, which provide the sonic foundation of each song. Typically the boula drums repeat one of the seven rhythms throughout a song, while the makè improvises over it. Some of the rhythms consist of two beats, whereas some extend over several measures; each rhythm has a distinct sound that can be identified by Guadeloupeans and is associated with a mood or activity. For example, the *graj* rhythm in gwo ka is said to originate from the work songs that workers sang while grating cassava root to be made into cassava cakes.¹⁰⁸

Figure 4: Graj Rhythm



Because of its origin, this four beat rhythm continues to be associated with work. In addition to the *graj*, the other rhythms are the *kaladja*, the *toumblak*, the *woulé*, the *menndé*, the *padjanbèl*, and the *léwoz*.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ In addition to these instruments, Jocelyne Guilbault and Brenda Berrian mention the inclusion of the *tanbou bas* (bass drum) in their treatment of gwo ka. Jocelyne Guilbault, *Zouk: World Music in the West Indies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 34; Brenda Berrian, *Awakening Spaces* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 212.

¹⁰⁸ Michel Halley et al, "Le Gwoka: Un dossier multimédia de référence consacré au tambour de Guadeloupe" Dossiers & Articles (accessed 7 Feb 2009) <<http://www.lameca.org>>

¹⁰⁹ Julian Gerstin, "Martinique and Guadeloupe" *Oxford Music Online* (Accessed 10 September 2008) <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>>

Léwoz is a particularly significant word in the context of gwo ka. In addition to being the name of one of the rhythms, it also refers to one of the most common settings in which gwo ka is performed.¹¹⁰ The léwoz (swaré léwoz) is a party that occurs at night, traditionally every fortnight on Saturday or Friday. The schedule of the léwoz originated from the pay schedule of plantation workers after the abolition of slavery.¹¹¹ Typically, the agricultural workers celebrated their pay day with a rousing late-night party that centered around drumming and dance. Appropriately, the léwoz rhythm is associated with parties and celebratory dancing. The 1960s and 1970s saw a dramatic increase in léwoz events; recently, however, this upwards trend in popularity has declined significantly. Although it is common to see a small léwoz being put on to reap a profit from tourists, the price of holding a léwoz with a skilled gwo ka band has become too high for most Guadeloupeans to afford. Michel Halley explains:

The multiplication of léwoz events engendered a negative effect a few years ago: a drop in quality. As a result, the price of the léwoz where the maestros of the moment perform have skyrocketed... Today, [in 2002] the price of a léwoz can range between 1,200 and 1,500 euro. Thus the léwoz a kokangn, not very lucrative and of poor quality, have disappeared. Also, since the number of people who can pay these prices are few and far between, the léwoz are becoming more and more rare.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Traditionally, gwoka is also performed at funeral wakes and at the marketplace.

¹¹¹ Michel Halley et al, "Le Gwoka: Un dossier multimédia de référence consacré au tambour de Guadeloupe" Dossiers & Articles (accessed 7 Feb 2009) <<http://www.lameca.org>>

¹¹² Ibid.



Regardless of the rarity of the léwoz today, gwo ka is still associated with the dance and party atmosphere gained from this soiree.

Dance is an integral aspect of gwo ka music and performance. Typically, the dancing begins in a gwo ka performance when the call-and-response form of the song is broken, and a drum break begins. Once the singers have stopped singing, the makè player improvises a solo over the boula-ka base. Meanwhile, a dancer makes his or her way to the band, positioning him or herself in front of the makè. Gwo ka dancers can be men or women, and normally there is only one dancer dancing at a time. Julian Gerstin explains the improvised nature of the dance moves: “Dancing is largely improvised (though some defined steps exist) by successive soloists (male and female).”¹¹³ Similarly, the makè player improvises, but there are several motives and idioms that are known to work with each of the seven rhythms. According to Brenda Berrian, each rhythm in gwo ka is also associated with a separate dance style: “The names of the seven gwo ka figures and dances are also the same: the mendé (Carnival dance); woulé or roule (waltz); graj (manioc work dance); toumblak (joyful love dance); kaladja (sad love dance); kagenbel (sugarcane work dance); and léwoz (incantory dance). Each figure has a distinctive beat and is usually played separately.”¹¹⁴

Gwo ka dancing is highly mimetic, and a good performance requires the dancer and makè player to watch each other closely. According to Jocelyne Guilbault, “gwo ka drum-accompanied song-dances feature spectacular interactive playing, dancing, and singing. They are characterized by a call-and-response form, close coordination between the dancers’ steps and the rhythmic strokes of the drummer, and the obvious, intense

¹¹³ Julian Gerstin, “Martinique and Guadeloupe” *Oxford Music Online* (Accessed 10 September 2008) <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>>

¹¹⁴ Brenda Berrian, *Awakening Spaces* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 212.

involvement of the lead singer, who sings constantly at full volume with no vibrato, often exploiting the top of his or her vocal range. Active participation in the dancing and singing by everyone present is perceived as the key to a successful performance.”¹¹⁵

I had the opportunity to view many of these characteristics first-hand when I attended a performance of the gwo ka group A Tè Ti Po Ka in Moule, Guadeloupe in June 2008. The ensemble consisted of three boula, one makè, a wooden flute, several chas, a ti bwa, and a chorus. Each song began with the lead singer singing an opening line, which was then repeated by the chorus. Then the lead singer repeated the same line of text as before, this time adding to it while the drums began to play. As the drums held down a groove based on whichever of the seven rhythms had been chosen, the call-and-response form of the vocals began.¹¹⁶ In the song “Péyi Béni”(Good Country), the singers entered saying, “Guadeloupe is a good country, I will not live abroad.” The song venerated Guadeloupe with the lyrics while using the toumblak rhythm, which is associated with energy and celebration. The group was celebrating their Guadeloupean heritage, while discussing the topical issue of Guadeloupeans leaving their native island for France.

Although gwo ka is an immanent force within Kwéyòl culture, it has not always had the respect it receives today. In the first half of the twentieth century, the European-derived genres of biguine and mazurka were the most popular in the Antilles. According to Gene Scaramuzzo, the African-derived gwo ka received little recognition prior to the 1970s: “The *gwo ka*, a very important vestige of the African roots of the Antillean

¹¹⁵ Jocelyne Guilbault, *Zouk* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 18.

¹¹⁶ According to Julian Gerstin, in gwo ka, “songs are in call-and-response form, in Creole, and concern relations between the sexes and topical matters.” Julian Gerstin, “Martinique and Guadeloupe” *Oxford Music Online* (Accessed 10 September 2008) <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>>

people, had become associated by Europeans and locals alike with the undesirable elements of the islands. In addition, a prevailing European sentiment that it took no skill to play the *gwo ka* relegated the drums to non-instrument status and consequent non-musician status to players of the drum.”¹¹⁷ *Gwo ka* was not respected as a genre and was considered to be “tanbou sé bitin a viè nèg,” or, “a sub-culture practiced by non-desirable individuals in places one could not be associated with.”¹¹⁸ Regardless of the stigma surrounding *gwo ka* prior to the 1970s, Gene Scaramuzzo points out that Guadeloupeans were still practicing *gwo ka*: “The poor quality (and general unavailability) of recordings from the late ‘50s and ‘60s belies the fact that Antillean musicians were master drummers, using their native *gwo ka* and *tambours* along with hand drums of other islands. Rhythmic traditions like *gwo ka*... were strongly present, even if they went in and out of vogue.”¹¹⁹

However, the 1970s saw a revival of *gwo ka*, which took place concurrently with nationalist movements. By partnering with independence groups, *gwo ka* became a symbol of Guadeloupean’s otherness from France and was hailed as the apogee of musical authenticity. According to Jocelyne Guilbault, “In the seventies...many significant political events were taking place. Guadeloupe especially saw the creation of many separatist parties and unions- among them, the Union Populaire pour la Libération de la Guadeloupe, the Union Générale des Travailleurs de la Guadeloupe, the Union des Paysans Pauvres de la Guadeloupe, and, later, the Mouvement Populaire pour la

¹¹⁷ Gene Scaramuzzo, “The Magic of Kassav,” *Reggae and African Beat* 5, 48.

¹¹⁸ Michel Halley et al, “Le Gwoka: Un dossier multimédia de référence consacré au tambour de Guadeloupe” Dossiers & Articles (accessed 7 Feb 2009) <<http://www.lameca.org>>

¹¹⁹ Gene Scaramuzzo, “The Magic Music of the French Antilles Part 4: The Magic Revisited,” *The Beat* 9, no. 6 (1990): 29.

Guadeloupe Indépendante.”¹²⁰ The UTA (Union des Travailleurs Agricoles) worked with Gérard Lockel in the 1970s to establish a rapport between rural workers’ rights and rural music (*gwo ka*).¹²¹ Many of the unions that formed in the 1970s used and continue to use *gwo ka* to promote a strong Guadeloupean identity. For example, the Union Générale des Travailleurs de Guadeloupe (UGTG) has incorporated *gwo ka* into their mission statement which says, “Through the use of Creole, *gwoka*, by the ongoing debate, training, fights, the UGTG will raise worker’s level of awareness of their role and power in society.”¹²² As a result of its use by worker’s unions, *gwo ka* has expanded from a rural music to a music that speaks for all working-class Guadeoupeans.

The strong revival of *gwo ka* demonstrated Guadeloupeans’ rejection of French ideology that had previously been imposed upon them. According to Michel Halley, “From the 1970s onwards, people started to position themselves against the *viè nèg* or *doudouiste* values.”¹²³ The rejection of the “*viè nèg*” ideology led to the emergence of *gwo ka* in mainstream society, and its eventual use as a marker of Guadeloupean national identity.¹²⁴ According to Jocelyne Guilbault, in the 1970s, “The traditional drums, the *gwo ka* in Guadeloupe and the *ka* in Martinique, which had been abandoned for a few

¹²⁰ Guilbault, *Zouk*, 32.

¹²¹ Halley, « *Gwo ka* ».

¹²² « Par l’utilisation du créole, du *gwoka*, par le débat continu, la formation, les luttes, l’UGTG entend élever le niveau de conscience des travailleurs quant à leur rôle et leur pouvoir dans la société. » UGTG.org “Conception et Orientation” (accessed 4 February 2010) <<http://ugtg.org/>>

¹²³ Halley et. al, “*Gwo ka*.”

¹²⁴ Halley first uses *viè nèg* when he says that *gwo ka* “is no longer considered to be a sub-culture practised by non desirable individuals in places one could not be associated with (*tanbou sé bitin a viè nèg*).” Ibid. *Viè nèg* is the erroneous idea that African and black aspects of Guadeloupean culture are unsavory and those associated with them are thugs. *Doudouiste* stems from the Kwéyòl word “*doudou*” or “*darling*,” but the term “*doudouiste*” has negative connotations. *Doudouiste* or *doudouism* is associated with aspects of Guadeloupean culture that solely exist for tourism purposes and the idea that Creole people are meant to entertain the white upper class (*békés*) and tourists.

decades, were suddenly back in force, held up and played as a symbol of national identity.”¹²⁵

Gwo ka becoming a nationally recognized and venerated genre led to the standardization of its sound and values. Prior to the 1970s, there were multiple regional discrepancies in the practice of gwo ka, stemming from its origin in local drum societies. However, with the popularity of gwo ka musicians such as Guy Conquèt, the genre gained exposure and local practices were stifled by a standardized gwo ka sound and ideology. Michel Halley elaborates on this idea: “The values inherent in gwoka were forged in the 1970s - those related to history, to Africa and everything that goes to make up our Guadeloupean identity and which claimed an authentic artistic element –with emblematic figures such as Guy Conquèt and Gérard Lockel.”¹²⁶

Guy Conquèt greatly influenced the sound and ideology of gwo ka as we know it today. He standardized the use of three boula and one makè and popularized the idea that gwo ka lyrics should tell a story.¹²⁷ He also pioneered the idea that gwo ka could serve as a marker of Guadeloupean identity. According to Jocelyne Guilbault, “During the late sixties, instrumentalist and singer Guy Conquette (who now spells his name, in Creole, “Konkèt”) was one of the first local artists of his generation to embrace and promote the

¹²⁵ Jocelyne Guilbault, *Zouk* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) 32. The emergence of gwo ka in Guadeloupe is just one of many working class musical genres that emerged in the twentieth century to promote local values. Other examples include steel band music in Trinidad, Rara in Haiti, and Jonkonnu. For more information see, Shannon Dudley, *Music from Behind the Bridge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), Elizabeth McAlister, *Rara! Vodou, Power and Performance in Haiti and its Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), and Kenneth M. Bilby, *True-born Maroons* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005).

¹²⁶ Halley et. al, “Gwo ka.”

¹²⁷ Ibid.

gwo ka tradition as a symbol of the Guadeloupean heritage and national independence.”¹²⁸

Conqu t helped elevate the genre to become a respected art form that represents Guadeloupean identity. Conqu t’s working-class roots allowed him to fit comfortably in the perception of traditional *gwo ka* performers; however, his intellectual followers helped establish Conqu t’s credibility as a musician, which allowed him to appeal to a wider audience. Michel Halley explains this, saying, “Guy Conqu t comes from a modest family, but he was one of the first *gwo ka* singers to be surrounded by intellectuals who recognized and appreciated gwoka as a basis for the political, social, cultural and individual aspects of Guadeloupe.”¹²⁹ He also experimented with blending *gwo ka* with other African-derived art forms, like African American jazz and soul.

Musician G rard Lockel was another *gwo ka* visionary and promoter of Guadeloupean identity with a modern twist. According to Jocelyne Guilbault, “Jazz guitarist G rard Locquel, after several years in France, created a radio program called “Casimir L tang” (1969-70), the only one in Creole at the time, and began promoting local music traditions. He later adopted *gwo ka* music and produced three albums with his own group, *Gwo Ka Mod n* (1978).”¹³⁰ In addition to being the name of his group, *gwo ka mod n* (*gwo ka moderne/ modern gwo ka*) is also used to describe Lockel’s blend of *gwo ka* drums with electric guitar and bass. According to Julian Gerstin, *gwo ka mod n* can be considered a jazz-based genre;¹³¹ however, *gwo ka mod n* is still rooted in the use of *gwo ka* and the promotion of local Guadeloupean music and tradition. Lockel worked

¹²⁸ Guilbault, *Zouk*, 34.

¹²⁹ Halley et al. “Gwo ka.”

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Gerstin, “Martinique and Guadeloupe.”

to make gwo ka accessible to the youth by incorporating popular instruments such as the electric guitar; however, Lockel placed an emphasis on educating the youth on gwo ka's musical style. According to Guilbault, "He also devised a method for setting the phrasing and rhythms of *gwo ka* for other instruments (1981) and trained several young musicians."¹³²

During the zouk era of the 1980s and 1990s, gwo ka served as tool to allow performers to present their Guadeloupean identity. When Kassav' first introduced the zouk sound, it was completely what Antilleans were accustomed to; the produced sound and slick arrangements differed greatly from gwo ka and other traditional musics.¹³³ Essentially, zouk sounded different from Guadeloupean genres that came before it, and the performers needed a way to argue for the music's authenticity. In an effort to mediate this difference, Kassav used gwo ka rhythms in their music to remind audiences that they were committed to a Guadeloupean identity, despite their electronic sound. Kassav' incorporated gwo ka into their first two albums, *Love and Ka Dance* (1979) and *Lagué moin* (1980).¹³⁴ Their use of gwo ka contributed to their perceived authenticity as Antillean performers.

Audiences saw Kassav's use of gwo ka as an important tie to their Antillean heritage, so much so that some saw the group's abandonment of gwo ka as an abandonment of their culture. Once the zouk sound had become identifiable as Antillean, Kassav' abandoned the use of gwo ka in their music and were criticized for conforming to a more "international" sound.¹³⁵

¹³² Guilbault, *Zouk*, 34.

¹³³ See Chapter 1 for more information on the significance of this sound in zouk.

¹³⁴ Guilbault, *Zouk*, 22.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 23.

Regardless of this critique, zouk performers have continued to use gwo ka in their music to exhibit an authentic Guadeloupean aesthetic.¹³⁶ This usage is frequently limited to a barely audible ka in their musical texture or a brief ka solo; zouk artists rarely make gwo ka the focal point of the song.

There are, however, artists who perform several varieties of traditional gwo ka today, but make little commercial profit. These range from the traditional gwo ka, to the revived gwo ka of Guy Conquêt, to a modified version of gwo ka for Carnival. One variety is that of the sound standardized by Guy Conquêt and others in the gwo ka revival of the 1960s and 1970s, like A Te Ti Po Ka; also, the Carnival gwo ka band Akiyo is highly popular. Their brand of gwo ka is performed specifically for Carnival; the drums are portable and they include the lambi in the ensemble. However, Akiyo's popularity ultimately centers around the Carnival season, and they have a relatively low recording output.

In recent years, there has been a revival of traditional music within the popular music business. Unlike the gwo ka revival of the 1970s, the present roots revival spans many genres and is a commercially driven movement rather than being centered around the establishment and promotion of a national music. Gwo ka is no longer considered to be a sub-par genre or too African as it was in the first half of the twentieth century; furthermore, Kassav's use of Kwéyòl lyrics have shown that artists can write in their native tongue and not have it be considered "musique de voyou" (thug's music).¹³⁷

Although many musicians perform in popular genres and then incorporate gwo ka elements in their songs, the group K'Koustik is performing in the gwo ka style, with

¹³⁶ See Chapter 1 for Patrick Saint-Eloi's use of gwo ka in "Rehabilitation."

¹³⁷ See Chapter 1 for a discussion on Kwéyòl's significance in zouk.

modifications to make the genre more relevant to audiences today. With the advancements in the public opinion surrounding Kwéyòl, combined with the need for a popular music with cultural integrity, it comes as no surprise that artists like K’Koustik are embracing gwo ka to provide their music with a traditional and distinctly Guadeloupean core.

K’Koustik’s music is a revived version of gwo ka, but they take pride in maintaining what they promote as a certain level of authenticity. Their name, which literally translates to acoustic ka, highlights the acoustic quality that separates them from the electric guitar and bass from the gwo ka modèn of Gérard Lockel. Their sound and methods are clearly rooted in and derived from the model of gwo ka revivalist Guy Conquèt, who is credited with writing some of their songs. However, instead of Conquèt’s instrumentation of one makè and three boula, K’Koustik employs one boula and one makè, in addition to an acoustic bass and guitar. They describe their sound as, “Le Son Trasé: a subtle marriage of skin and strings, an authentic sound born from the Guadeloupean tradition.”¹³⁸ They even seem to recognize their contribution to the larger roots revival in popular music with the title of their first album, *Reviviscence*, which means to revive, or to come back to life.

K’Koustik was founded in 2005 by drummers Jean-Marc Ferdinand and Joby Julienne along with guitarist Jean Tamas and bassist Arsène Noel. The fanciful manner in which they describe the formation of the group in their liner notes says a great deal about their devotion to the gwo ka tradition, which places an emphasis on the skill of story telling:

¹³⁸ « Un subtil mariage de Peaux et de Cordes, Un Son authentique né de la Tradition Guadeloupéenne. » K’Koustik, *Reviviscence*, liner notes, Debs Music, CD-JJJAKK02.

It all started
At the dawn of a new rhythmical expression
Where everything was still untimely
In the minds of four thoughtful men
The same dream in four heads
The same enthusiastic obsession
They met and therefore have been fulfilled.¹³⁹

The ambiguous language used in above is prevalent in their music as well, so much so that K’Koustik has to take extra measures to ensure that non-creolophone fans can understand their lyrics. Each of K’Koustik’s songs tells a story; in addition, they write in a deep Kwéyòl that is rich in metaphors and is difficult for outsiders to understand.

The music on K’Koustik’s album, *Reviviscence* (2005), includes songs that fit into a wide spectrum of Guadeloupean music. They display their dedication to tradition by including songs that fit nearly perfectly into the gwo ka model; they also include modern compositions that focus on issues present today in Guadeloupe. The majority of their music, however, meets half-way between gwo ka and this modern style, creating an updated version of the traditional genre that appeals to a wide audience.

The song “Man Nounoun” off of the album *Reviviscence* (2005) is an excellent example of K’Koustik’s gwo ka style with its use of call-and-response vocals, mouth

¹³⁹ « Tout a commencé, A L’aurore d’un nouvel air Cadencé, Où tout est encore intempestif, Dans l’esprit de 4 hommes pensifs, Le même rêve dans 4 têtes, La même obsession adepte, Ils se sont réunis Et dès lors, se sont accomplis. » K’Koustik *Reviviscence*, liner notes, Debs Music, CD-JJAKK02.

percussion, ka drumming, and story-like plot. The lyrics in “Man Nounoun” describe a man in need when his wife goes to visit her mother. K’Koustik explains the lyrics:

There was a time that Silla returned to the home of Madame Nounoue, her mother. Since nothing is “going” (I am a faithful man), me, I’ll catch the death. After having examined me, my doctor advised me to quickly get my wife from my mother in law, otherwise, to prevent putrefaction, he will be obliged to amputate my private part... Luckily everything is in order, and tonight I’m going to pamper my wife, Hmmmmm!¹⁴⁰

The song begins with Jean-Marc Ferdinand acting as the caller, singing, “I tell Madame Nounoun to make Sila put me in order, if Sila doesn’t put me in order, the inflammation will drop me.”¹⁴¹ The rest of the group responds, “Tell Madame Nounoun to make Sila put me in order.”¹⁴² For the remainder of the song, “I tell Nounoun, make Sila put me in order” acts as the repeated response.

This introduction perfectly mirrors the introduction of a traditional gwo ka song; the caller has introduced the subject of the song and we have learned the repeated response. The unaccompanied vocals are typical for the beginning of a gwo ka song. After Ferdinand gives another call, the others respond with their “I tell Madame

¹⁴⁰ « Cela fait un certain temps que Silla est retourné chez Madame Nounoue, sa mere. Depuis plus rien ne va, je suis un homme fidèle, moi, je vais attraper la mort, mon médecin après m’avoir examiné, me conseille d’aller au plus vite récupérer ma femme chez ma belle mère, sinon, pour prévenir une putréfaction, il se verra dans l’obligation de m’amputer de ma partie intime... Heureusement tout rentre dans l’ordre, et ce soir je vais dorloter ma femme, Hmmmmm ! » K’Koustik, “Man Nounoun” *Reviviscence*. Debs Music, 2005.

¹⁴¹ « An di Man Nounoun fè Sila ranjé ève mwen, Si Sila pa ranjé ève mwen, lenflamasyon la ké tchouyé mwen. » Ibid.

¹⁴² “An di man nounoun, Fè Sila ranjé èvè mwen.” Ibid.

Nounnoun...” but this time they begin to clap in time to the beat. This pattern of call-and-response continues for a while, until the texture suddenly changes: the singing stops and a quiet guitar riff enters, accompanied by a percussive vocal line sung by Tamas, Noel, and Julienne.

The use of percussive vocals in gwo ka is a common technique called “bouladjèl” (mouth drum).¹⁴³ This style of vocals is believed to have originated during the time of slavery when plantation owners banned drumming. Once the bouladjèl, clapping, and guitar have established a groove, Ferdinand starts the call and response vocals again, with the bouladjèl ceasing during the responses.

Finally, the ka enters, playing a variation on the kaladja rhythm. The ka enters simultaneously with the beginning of the first verse of the song; up until this point, very little text has been recited so it is in the verses that Ferdinand tells the story of when the man goes to the Doctor. Most of the focus is on Ferdinand and the lyrics, then the pronounced sound of the makè, while the light sound of acoustic bass and guitar provide a quiet backdrop; a shaker is providing a steady so that the makè can elaborate on the kaladja without compromising the time. This musical texture continues to the end of the piece.

K’Koustik does not rigidly stick to the gwo ka style in all of their songs, but even their least ka-centric songs feature the drum and uphold other gwo ka values. For example, “Anmwé”(Help), written by makè player Joby Julienne initially sounds far from gwo ka stylistically; the song begins with a guitar solo, accompanied by light jingling

¹⁴³ This is especially popular at funeral wakes. Gerstin, “Martinique and Guadeloupe.” *Oxford Music Online* (accessed 25 January 2010) <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>>

percussion and the lamentful sound of a soprano saxophone.¹⁴⁴ This ethereal sound is interrupted by an open-fifth chord in the guitar paired with the low sound of the boula in a unison rhythm. This chord sounds more akin to heavy metal than gwo ka, but the foreboding feeling that it incites in the listener is entirely appropriate to the song's topic. "Anmwé," as the name insinuates, is a cry for help and a call for action to fix the problems that plague Guadeloupe. K'Koustik gives this summary of the lyrics:

Help, all the good traditional values have been crushed under the steamroller of the system. Help! Resigned parents have more authority, why? I want you to tell me. Even God seems to want to leave us because of our foolishness. Help for the youth, who no longer have respect for others. But there is courage still for tomorrow. Education ... help!¹⁴⁵

Although the song sounds much farther from gwo ka than "Man Nounoun," it still incorporates important elements from the genre; the use of topical lyrics is a common practice in gwo ka. In addition, the ka is present throughout the song, lightly contributing to the rhythmic texture, until the end of the song where the ka provides a variation on the graj rhythm for the final verse.

Despite their inclusion of traditional songs like "Man Nounoun," and modern songs like "Anmwé," the core of K'Koustik's sound is really a compromise between

¹⁴⁴ Although saxophone is not included in their standard line up, Alain Josephine plays on "Anmwé" and "Klé a Titin" on *Reviviscence*.

¹⁴⁵ « Au secours, toutes les bonnes valeurs ancestrales sont écrasées sous le rouleau compresseur du système en place. Au secours ! Les parents démissionnaires n'ont plus d'autorité, pourquoi ? Je veux qu'on me le dise. Même Dieu semble vouloir prendre congé de nous à cause de nos bêtises. Au secours pour la Jeunesse qui n'a plus le respect des autres. Mais courage tout de même pour demain. Education... au secours ! » K'Koustik, "Anmwé," *Reviviscence*. Debs Music, 2005.

these two styles. The song “Asya” illustrates this middle ground well. While displaying many qualities of traditional gwo ka, such as the story-like lyrics, the use of vocables, bouldadjèl, and a make solo, it also incorporates new elements with the guitar and bass, as well as shying away from call-and-response vocals. The story behind the song is that the narrator and Asya have been married for a long time, but Asya is unfaithful and commits adultery. The narrator is struck with grief and says that he has no reason to live.

The song begins with a short guitar line, paired with a crescendo and diminuendo of a quickly-beaten makè. Jean Marc Ferdinand enters, singing, “Hassia, Hassia, my happiness already well lost,”¹⁴⁶ to which the guitar melodically responds, repeating the pitches of “already well lost.” He continues, “If I take love, I take it without reason on earth,”¹⁴⁷ once again followed by a light guitar melody. He concludes the introduction with, “Hassia Hassia you well know what my heart likes, the day you leave me, I will cry, until that open day, they respond...”¹⁴⁸ At this point, the rest of the singers come in with the chorus, singing the vocables, “Oulé lélé lalé lalé lala,” and the groove of the song begins. As Jean, Arsène, and Joby sing, the guitar and bass lightly accompany them, until the first verse begins.

Throughout “Asya,” K’Koustik infuses the music with traditional elements. While Jean-Marc sings the first verse, the others accompany him with bouldadjèl, light guitar, and shaker, until the second iteration of the chorus when the vocables return and the makè enters. This texture continues until the drum break in which Julienne solos on the makè, while the others accompany him on bouldadjèl and shaker. Throughout the solo,

¹⁴⁶ “Asya, Asya, Bonheur anmwèn ja byen perdu,” K’Koustik, “Asya,” *Reviviscence*. Debs Music, 2005.

¹⁴⁷ “Si mwèn pani lanmou mwèn pani pon rézon si tè,” Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ “Asya, Asya ou sav byen kè séw mwèn enmé, jou la ou kay kite mwèn mwèn kay pléré jistan jou wouvé, lé repondè...” Ibid.

Jean-Marc Ferdinand makes many comments of support to Julienne, such as, “tradisyon”(tradition), “alé liwon alé” (go king go), and “Byen tanbou, byen...tanbou,” (good drum, good...drum). After the solo, they repeat the chorus and another verse, and close out with a repeat of the chorus.

The venue in which I saw K’Koustik perform has ties to their support of the Creole identity. Their concert was part of a music series, Mizik Factory, which took place in La Villette, in Paris, in conjunction with a special art exhibition, Kréyol Factory, that was a celebration of Creole identity and culture. Kréyol Factory was located in the Grande Halle of La Villette from 7 April to 5 July and was described on its posters as an, “exposition des artistes interrogent les identités créoles,” (exposition of artists examining the Creole identity). The exhibit featured artists from Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyane (Française), Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Reunion, Mauritius, Paris, New York, London, and Miami.

The performance was a display of K’Koustik’s values and of Guadeloupean culture. My experience at Mizik Factory was a far cry from the “La Nuit Créole” mega-concert I had attended the night before; at La Nuit Créole, people began to line up outside of Stade de France at 1:00 pm to ensure that they got a good spot to celebrate Kassav’s performance at 8:15pm. At Mizik Factory, although my ticket said the show was to start at 6:30pm, I was told shortly after arriving that they would probably open the doors at 7:00pm. Once we were let in, I noticed how intimate the hall was; there were small bleacher-like seats in the back, the middle of the hall had about fifteen café-style tables, and there was a small area for dancing directly next to the stage. A vendor was selling ti

ponch, the “national” drink of Guadeloupe that consists of white rum, a little sugar, and a lime wedge.

The stage was already set for the concert when they let the audience in; on the far left side of the stage a double bass was sitting on a stand. There was a small platform in the center of the stage with a boula, suspended cymbal, and high hat next to another performance area with congas and a makè. To the right of the platform rested a chair, guitar and another high hat. A large backdrop was hanging behind the instruments that said “Mizik Factory” in a large graffiti-like font, surrounded by other Caribbean and Creole-inspired vocabulary and phrases (“Voudou,” “Jamaïque,” “Cool Johnny Cool,” “Black Gold and Green,” “Besoin Krié,” “An Ti Kou”).

The conditions surrounding the actual performance displayed K’Koustik’s Guadeloupean identity and the value that they place on tradition. For example, as I mentioned in my description of the stage, the double bass was sitting in clear view on a stand. Although the bass was there, Arsène Noel instead played what looked like an acoustic bass guitar. The double bass was there to show K’Koustik’s dedication to the more traditional instrument choice, as opposed to a bass guitar, which has more modern connotations. It was also very interesting to see how time worked with this performance in relation to the large concert, Nuit Créole. The Mizik Factory concert was a little late by French standards; we were allowed inside thirty minutes after the tickets said the show would start. While waiting outside the venue I observed the French customers looking at their watches in frustration while the Antilleans didn’t bother getting up from the surrounding benches to form a line.

Certain aspects during the performance also showed K'Koustik's investment in recreating the feel of rural gwo ka. As I mentioned earlier, according to Jocelyne Guilbault, in a gwo ka, "active participation in the dancing and singing by everyone present is perceived as the key to a successful performance."¹⁴⁹ Participation played an important role in every song that the group performed that night. Each tune was accompanied by some sort of instruction on how the audience should contribute to the performance, whether it be waving our hands, clapping out a rhythm, vocalizing rhythms, responding to Jean-Marc's calls, or even dancing in a specific way (we received an extended dance-lesson from the surprisingly nimble Jean-Marc at one point).

Aside from our choreographed dance, the audience was also expected to dance informally at the foot of the stage. After completing the first song, Jean-Marc Ferdinand beckoned the audience to get out of their seats and come up to the dancing area. Near the end of the performance, he threatened the audience, saying that they would only continue to play if every single person there got up and danced. The raised stage didn't stop them from bringing dancers into the spotlight either. Two women were selected from the audience to dance gwo ka solos with the band during the performance. Both perfectly emulated the gwo ka solo dance style and were rewarded by thundering applause.

One of the most thrilling moments of the performance was when they played a toumblak chiré. "Chiré" literally means "to tear up," but the term is used in the context of gwo ka to denote a section of a piece when the music increases gradually to the fastest tempo possible.¹⁵⁰ Joby Julienne told the audience to clap twice at the beginning of every measure, and had the guitar play along. Then the music started to speed up; the audience

¹⁴⁹ Jocelyne Guilbault, *Zouk* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 18.

¹⁵⁰ Michel Halley, "Gwo ka."

eventually reached the point where why could no longer keep up, and the guitar was playing nearly four times faster than at the beginning. Once the break-neck speed had been established, Julienne entered on the makè and “tore it up,” performing a wild and virtuosic solo.

There was a wide range of ethnicities, nationalities, and ages present at the performance; although there were many Guadeloupeans and Martinicians in attendance, there were a noticeable number of French people of all ages there. On one side of the spectrum I saw a group of French high school boys at the front of the stage who were dancing, but also a Guadeloupean man who was sitting next to me and tapping out the gwo ka rhythms on his leg.

There was a welcoming feel to the performance and a sense of community was clearly present. After the concert, most of the audience cleared out, but by hanging back, I was able to easily speak with the members of the band, albeit with frequent interruptions from babies being brought in by relatives for kisses.

K’Koustik emanates Guadeloupean identity with their music, yet is still able to appeal to a wide range of people. With their “reviviscence” of gwo ka, they aim to bring the genre to a broader audience than the revival in the 1960s. In the next chapter, however, we will see how other Guadeloupean artists are using gwo ka in a more subtle way to display their identity: by combining aspects of gwo ka with Jamaican dancehall style.

CHAPTER 3

Dancehall X-Plosion to Fos a Péyi la: From adoption to adaptation

Music frequently serves as a cultural articulation of diasporic identity; music from one part of the African Diaspora can be accepted and adopted by another. Because of the shared colonial experience of post and neo-colonial states, the music no longer represents the geographic area of its origin, but instead the collective cultural identity of the people making the music.

Hip-hop and rap have served as a powerful expression of black identity since their conception in the 1970s. Since then, these genres have permeated the world market, providing youth with a vehicle for social commentary. Although rap and hip-hop were originally conceived in African American, Caribbean, and Latino communities in the United States, people around the world have been able to harness the power of hip-hop while developing the genre to fit their culture. Tony Mitchell explores this phenomenon in *Global Noise*, saying, “hip-hop scenes have rapidly developed from an adoption to an adaptation of U.S. musical forms and idioms. This has involved an increasing syncretism and incorporation of local linguistic and musical features.”¹⁵¹ This process from adoption to adaptation can be examined through the prevalence of Jamaican dancehall music in Guadeloupe.

This chapter will examine the music of Admiral T, a popular Guadeloupean dancehall artist, and how his music transitioned from adoption to adaptation of the dancehall style. He began his career primarily focused on Kwéyòl dancehall; however,

¹⁵¹ Tony Mitchell, *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-hop Outside the USA*, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 11.

his sound gradually evolved into a hybrid style that pays homage to tradition while targeting Guadeloupean youth. Ultimately, Admiral T took a popular foreign genre and made it relevant to Guadeloupeans, affirming their collective Créole identity and respecting Guadeloupe's musical roots.

Dancehall, commonly referred to as ragga, originated during a time of musical change in Jamaica, the early 1980s. Stephen Foster discusses this change:

Bob Marley's death in 1981 from cancer signaled a broad change in reggae...DJs like Yellowman injected a misogynistic stream of boasting and invective into the music. Soon this 'slackness' style merged with the new digitized rhythms called dancehall.¹⁵²

After Marley's death, reggae and Jamaican music lost its figurehead; although reggae remained popular in international markets, young Jamaicans preferred the music they danced to in the clubs. Dancehall's club tradition can be traced to DJs and sound-system music of the 1970s; however, DJs in the 1970s primarily performed live, whereas dancehall is widely consumed through recordings.¹⁵³ The transition from live to recorded music in the dance scene began as early as the mid-1970s and progressed until the early 1980s with popular recording artists like Yellowman. The term dancehall was coined around the time that Wayne Smith's song "Under Me Sleng Teng" was released in 1985. "Sleng Teng" is famous for using a rhythm from a Casio electronic keyboard, which has been used by many DJs since and is referred to as the "Sleng Teng riddim." By the late

¹⁵² Stephen Davis, "Reggae" *Oxford Music Online* (accessed 25 October 2009) <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>>

¹⁵³ Peter Manuel, *Caribbean Currents* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 200.

1980s with artists emulating the “sleng teng” sound, dancehall had become an internationally recognized musical genre.

Ragga musically consists of repetitive vocal lines, referred to as “chunes,” that are layered over synthesized rhythmic ostinatos, or “riddims.” Riddims such as the familiar “sleng teng riddim” can be recycled and used in multiple songs. Although a deejay’s chunes are normally sung, not spoken like in rap music, dancehall deejays are known for their fast delivery of lyrics. Unlike reggae’s English lyrics, dancehall toasters rap in the local patois, insinuating that they are indifferent to the elite and non-Jamaican audiences. Dancehall’s lyrical slackness originates from when the genre was in its incipient form in the 1980s; because politically charged lyrics could have fatal consequences for the deejays, they had to look to other topics to write about. According to Peter Manuel, “In a situation where denouncing the government could be mortally dangerous the deejays retreated to the politically safe topics of sex and boasting.”¹⁵⁴

Dancehall came to Guadeloupe when listeners began to look elsewhere for musical inspiration after zouk’s initial boom in the 1980s. Beginning in the 1990s, Jamaican dancehall or ragga emerged as a popular music genre in Guadeloupe. Jamaican artists offered the youth an edgier alternative to the léger zouk beat. While Guadeloupeans have enjoyed listening to imported Jamaican music, several local artists have experimented with the dancehall style. Among the first to do this was Karukera Sound System (KSS), a collective of Guadeloupean DJs that emerged in the early 1990s. Although KSS was popular with young audiences, at the time they couldn’t compete with the ever-present zouk phenomenon or other popular styles like Haitian konpa.

¹⁵⁴ Manuel, *Caribbean Currents*, 199.

1

Ti bwa



Christy Campbell, referred to in the dancehall world as Admiral T (b. 1981), was inspired to experiment with the genre when he was growing up in the ghetto of Boissard, Guadeloupe in the 1980s and early 1990s. He said that he listened to reggae and dancehall when he was young, so that was the music that he wanted to make. His musical career began at sixteen when he joined the Karukera Sound System. However, he became a household name with the release of his first solo album, *Mozaik Kreyol* in 2003.

¹⁵⁶ Gene Scaramuzzo, "Magic Music of the French Antilles Part 3: The Roots," *The Beat* vol. 6, no. 1 (1987): 20.

¹⁵⁷ The cinquillo rhythm consists of eighth-sixteenth-eighth-sixteenth-eighth over two beats.

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At first glance, it is clear that *Mozik Kreyol* is sonically based in dancehall. However, there is more to the album than the acculturation of a Jamaican genre; it is a tribute to Guadeloupean identity and Créolité through its lyrical content, incorporation of Guadeloupean traditional music, and collaborations with Caribbean artists.

Perhaps the best example of dancehall style on *Mozaik Kreyol* is the song “Dancehall X-Plosion.” The song, a collaboration between Admiral T and the French Guiana R&B singer Pearl, begins with a short introduction that features reggae-style off-beats accented in the guitar (also known as the skank rhythm). Admiral T sets the mood by saying “Yeah man,” and his signature “Admiral T agaaaaain,” while Pearl sings short vocal lines. After this brief introduction Admiral T enters fiercely chanting in French: “All the people want dancehall,” accompanied by a booming drum beat that outlines the ti bwa rhythm with an accented bass note on the downbeat of every measure. Pearl then enters with the song’s refrain saying:

Hey yo DJ play us some dance hall
Tonight I’m dancing with my baby boy
You know this music makes me shake
Close my eyes I let the music take me away¹⁵⁹

She also says that when she listens to dancehall it lets her forget everything else. The song discusses the importance of dancehall to youth around the world, saying that it helps them forget their problems.

¹⁵⁹ Eh DJ mets nous du Dancehall, ce soir je danse avec mon Baby boy, tu sais que cette musique me fait vibrer, ferme les yeux laisse la musique Dancehall t’emporter. Admiral T, “Dancehall X-Plosion,” *Mozaik Kreyol*. Universal, 2004.

There is a stronger message in many of Admiral T's lyrics than the dancehall style he borrows from. His music lacks the slackness that is common in dancehall lyrics today. Peter Manuel and Kenneth Bilby point out this slackness when they say, "As one Jamaican student pithily wrote in a term paper, 'Dancehall artists sing about everything from politics to punanny. Mostly punanny.'"¹⁶⁰ But Admiral T seems to avoid "punanny" in his song topics altogether.

Admiral T gives a nod to the origins of the dancehall style with the song "Reggae Story." The song begins with the classic skank reggae rhythm, which was featured prominently in early dancehall; the song also uses a horn section, which is suggestive of reggae. Admiral T changes his delivery of the lyrics to a more song-like style in "Reggae Story." In the refrain Admiral T expresses his feelings about reggae music:

It is the music we love
Despite their plots
To make this ghetto flower wither
It fills our hearts with joy
Expresses our suffering, our turmoil
She will forever be number one.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Manuel, *Caribbean Currents*, 206.

¹⁶¹ « C'est cette musique qu'on aime, Malgré leurs stratagèmes, pour faire faner cette fleur du ghetto. Celle qui remplit notre cœur de joie, exprime nos souffrances, nos émois, elle restera toujours number one. » Admiral T, "Reggae Story," *Mozaik Kreyol*. Universal, 2004.

As the song's title implies, it tells the story of the birth of reggae in Jamaica in the 1960s and traces its history to present day. He says that young people love dancehall, but he remains respectful of its roots:

(The new generation) is captivated by reggae dancehall

More danceable, more hardcore

More explicit than its foundation (reggae)

Which will forever be number one.¹⁶²

Admiral T's music is extremely popular with the youth in Guadeloupe. Despite high record sales, there has been a fair amount of backlash to Guadeloupean artists who choose to perform imported musical genres. In June of 2008, I visited Moradisc, one of the largest and most famous Antillean record stores, in Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe. I was eager to ask the store manager if he had Admiral T's CDs in stock. However, I received a cold response to my inquiry; he told me that he didn't have any Admiral T CDs because they were sold out, curtly adding that I should have no interest in that music since it is not really Guadeloupean. He then proceeded to offer me a K'Koustik CD, saying that they made real Guadeloupean music.¹⁶³

This man clearly felt animosity towards Admiral T for basing his sound in dancehall; however, Admiral T differs in subject matter from dancehall musicians by frequently incorporating positive messages of Créolité into his lyrics. The song "Move Together" features the soca group Square One from Barbados and further enforces the

¹⁶² « Et tout de suite cette nouvelle generation du nouveau millennium est séduite par le reggae dancehall. Plus dansante, plus hardcore, plus explicite que sa foundation, qui sera toujours la number one. » Ibid.

¹⁶³ For more information on K'Koustik, see chapter 2.

values of Créolité in *Mozaik Kreyol*. The song uses musical elements from soca and dancehall and is performed in English and Créole. Most importantly, the lyrics promote a collective Caribbean identity, calling for the people of the Caribbean to move together to show the world the strength of their culture. The lyrics of the chorus best illustrate this idea:

Let we play it together, play it together

Let the music show the world that Caribbean people moving with power

You know them can't stop we now

No matter what they do

We are the Caribbean

French, English and Spanish too

You know them can't stop we now

No matter how they try

We are the Caribbean

Fight together until we die

We biggin' up the vibes

The charts we gonna rise

Créole music, soca music, reggae music

Touching the people lives

There's strength and unity

So listen carefully
When Guadeloupe, Barbados, Jamaica music
Take over the party¹⁶⁴

Admiral T further enforces this idea with his verses, saying that Paris and New York cannot compare to the Caribbean in musical strength. He also mentions the importance of dancehall, soca, calypso, reggae, zouk, and gwo ka.¹⁶⁵

Admiral T shows a deep reverence for Kwéyòl culture on the title track of the album, “Mozaik Kreyol.” The song consists of sparse makè gwo ka drumming with Admiral T reciting a text that venerates the Kwéyòl culture and identity. His liner notes include the Kwéyòl lyrics as well as a French translation. By including the lyrics in French, Admiral T makes a strong statement about the importance of Kwéyòl to all francophone people. The final stanza of the text reads:

Creole is me, is you, it is all of us
Creole is our identity
We eat in Creole, we think in Creole
Creole is our culture and we are proud of it
We are Creole, and Creole we will remain¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Admiral T and Square One, “Move Together,” *Mozaik Kreyol*. Universal, 2004.

¹⁶⁵ For more information on Guadeloupean gwo ka, see Chapter 2.

¹⁶⁶ « Kréyòl sé mwen, sé vou, sé nou menm. Kréyòl, sé idantité an nou. Nou ka manjé kréyòl, nou ka pansé kréyòl. Kréyòl sé kilti an nou, é dè sa nou fiè. Kréyòl sé sa nou yé, sé sa nou ké rété.» Admiral T, “Mozaik Kreyol,” *Mozaik Kreyol*. Universal, 2004.

I saw Admiral T perform “Mozaik Kreyol” on 16 May 2009 at the Antillean mega-concert “La Nuit Créole,” meant to honor both zouk and Kassav’s thirtieth anniversary. This song’s thin texture and soft volume differed greatly from the previous boisterous dancehall numbers in Admiral T’s set; however, the energy and reaction from the audience did not die down with the volume of the performance. A small gwo ka group was stationed at the base of the thrust stage and consisted of one makè and two boula drums. The drums accompanied Admiral T while he recited the meaningful text of “Mozaik Kreyol” while he walked around the thrust part of the stage, making eye contact with the near-by audience. After delivering the final words of “Kréyòl sé sa nou yé, sé sa nou ké rété” (We are Creole, and Creole we will remain), one of his male backup dancers emerged from backstage with the Guadeloupean and Martinican flags. Admiral T proudly displayed the Guadeloupean flag while the dancer brandished Martinique’s for the crowd. Between the clapping and cheering, the crowd’s reaction was deafening.

Admiral T also incorporates other elements of Guadeloupean music into his songs. Rather than drawing from the common lyrical themes of dancehall (sex, drugs, and money), Admiral T writes from a storytelling perspective. The topical nature of his lyrics voice important issues that are relevant to the Guadeloupean youth today; they tell a story or voice social concerns much like gwo ka lyrics of the past. The social situation in the ghettos of Guadeloupe is the subject of Admiral T’s song “Ghetto.” In the song, Admiral T speaks from his position as someone who grew up in the ghetto. By reminding the listener of his roots, he stakes a claim for his right to preach about these issues. He points out the abysmal state of ghettos while stating his “street cred” and offering advice:

(I know this) Because I grew up in the ghetto

No education in the ghetto

No hope in the ghetto

Be positive in the ghetto

Learn in the ghetto

Don't fire guns

Firecrackers are better¹⁶⁷

Admiral T's second album, *Toucher L'Horizon*, was released in 2006 and broke away from his dancehall-dominated sound. The first single off of the album "Les mains en l'Air" (Hands in the Air) featured the female French-Cypriot rapper Diam's in a hip-hop inflected song. "Les Mains en l'Air" was a significant song for Admiral T in its sound and its content. By working with a French rap artist, rapping entirely in French, and producing a dancehall-free song one might assume that he was forgetting his roots to appeal to a wider audience. However, Admiral T continues to focus his music on the Caribbean, alerting the public to the situation in the Guadeloupean ghettos and relating them to French *banlieues*. Banlieue literally means suburb, but the term has gained a negative connotation, implying areas of economic inequality that are heavily inhabited by minorities and immigrants in France. Admiral T compares the two living situations:

¹⁶⁷ « Paskè mwen lèvé si an ghetto, ni edikasyon a ghetto, ni espéryans a ghetto, koté pozitif a ghetto, aprann an ghetto, pa pété gun, pété péta pito, paf è byen pito. » Admiral T, "Ghetto," *Mozaik Kreyol*. Universal, 2004.

I come from Boissard, a ghetto in Guadeloupe. It does not look like the banlieues, more like wood and tin huts, but the place is also frowned upon. When you live in the ghetto, you can not be considered more of a thug. You grow up with a finger pointed at you. The people there feel like the banlieues, marginalized and discriminated against.¹⁶⁸

The introduction for the song features a light repeating melody in synthesized strings along with drum hits on beats two and four of each four-beat measure. The beat is held down by bass accents on beats one and three. Admiral T utters his usual “Admiral T agaaaaain,” before he enters with the vocal hook:

You're from the ghetto but still proud,
Let me see your hands in the air
You fight every day to get out,
Let me see your hands in the air¹⁶⁹

The song details the hardships of youth in the ghetto of Guadeloupe and their counterparts in the banlieues surrounding Paris. Admiral T touches on issues in the ghetto saying:

¹⁶⁸ « Je viens de Boissard, c'est ce qu'on appelle un ghetto en Guadeloupe. Ça ne ressemble pas à des tours, plutôt à des cases de bois et de tôle, mais l'endroit est aussi mal vu. Quand tu habites le ghetto, tu ne peux pas être considéré plus voyou. Tu grandis avec le doigt pointé sur toi. Les habitants s'y sentent, comme en banlieue, marginalisés et victimes de discriminations. » Article, Elodie Maillot, "Admiral T, un homme de valeurs : Sortir des stéréotypes," *RFI Musique* (Accessed 15 September 2009) <<http://www.rfimusique.com/>>

¹⁶⁹ « Tu viens du ghetto mais reste fier, Laissez-moi voir les mains en l'air, te bats tous les jours pour t'en sortir, Laissez-moi voir les mains en l'air. » Admiral T feat. Diam's, “Les mains en l'air,” *Toucher l'Horizon*. Universal, 2006.

Too many young gunshot victims end up in hospital

Too many young homeless, too many children who eat badly

The politicians think it's normal, they do not care¹⁷⁰

Diam's points out that the same goes for those in the poor suburbs of Paris, who are equally outcast:

We're all in the same boat: ghetto youth and suburbanites

There's no difference to them- you're a misfit¹⁷¹

The song tells the story of the oppressed in France and Guadeloupe, linking both groups through their shared legacy of deprivation and discrimination.

Because of the song topic, "Les Mains en l'Air" made for a particularly inspiring performance at the Paris concert "Nuit Créole." Despite the absence of Diam's, when the music for the song began to play over the speakers the audience went wild; it was clear that it was a fan favorite. Admiral T began performing the song alone, asking the audience to sing along and wave their hands in the air. Suddenly, Diam's ran onstage halfway through the song and the audience gave an even louder and more enthusiastic response than before. Her presence on stage was especially significant because she was the only performer of the evening who was not Caribbean or African and, sporting black

¹⁷⁰ « Trop de jeunes blessés par balle finissent à l'hôpital, trop de jeunes SDF, trop d'enfants qui mangent mal, les politiques trouvent ça normal ils s'en foutent ça leur est égal. » Ibid.

¹⁷¹ « Nous sommes tous dans la même galère ghetto youth et banlieusards, y'a pas de différence pour eux t'es un marginal. » Ibid.

track pants, a white t-shirt, leather jacket, and backwards cap, she was the only female performer who wasn't wearing a revealing or feminine outfit. The performance illustrated how Admiral T has connected social and cultural concerns in Guadeloupe with similar communities around the world. He makes Guadeloupe's situation relevant to a wider audience by associating it with issues abroad. Because the song connected all those who are considered to be social outcasts, even people of non-Antillean descent could relate.

Admiral T also includes the common theme of displaced Antilleans, longing to return to the Caribbean on his album. "Retour au Pays Natal"(Return to Your Homeland) describes his feelings of being separated from Guadeloupe, while paying homage to Aimé Césaire's poem "Cahier d'un retour au Pays Natal,"(Notebook of a Return to My Homeland) published in 1939. In the opening verse, Admiral T lists some aspects of Guadeloupe's countryside that he misses: the clear water, clean air, beautiful nature, and azure sky. He calls the island intoxicating and charming, leading up to the chorus that instructs the listener to return to their native country:

Return to your homeland

Travel non-stop

Return to your homeland

Leave everything- it's all the same to me

Return to your homeland

When I am far from my island I feel bad

Return to your homeland

Yeah...¹⁷²

The second verse of the song is mostly in Kwéyòl and includes more aggressive lyrics. Admiral T's longing for Guadeloupe has become more serious. He says that he feels like he is going crazy and that nostalgia is manhandling him. After repeating the chorus, the third verse enters, in French again, describing a common scenario for Antilleans in France: he says that he left to work and improve his finances, but now he realizes that he is just separating from his roots.

The feeling of nostalgia was especially present during Admiral T's performance at "Nuit Créole." During his set, the rainy and chilly Parisian day cleared up and the sun warmed and dried the rain-soaked audience. Having arrived in France only four days earlier, I felt alienated in the new country; however, at the concert I was surrounded by the familiarity of Kwéyòl people and music. The combined warmth from the sun, music, people, and overall vibe of the performance made me feel truly at home for the first time since arriving in France. Considering that I felt this way, the Antilleans in the audience surely felt a stronger sense of nostalgia, being surrounded by thousands of Créole people, food, music, and culture.

Admiral T's musical style can truly be considered hybrid on the song "Fos a Péyi la"(The Strength of our Country), featuring Jacob Desvarieux and Jocelyne Béroard from Antillean super-group Kassav'.¹⁷³ The song begins with Desvarieux playing a short

¹⁷² « Retour Au Pays Natal, voyager sans escales. Retour Au Pays Natal, tout quitter ça m'est égal. Retour Au Pays Natal, loin de mon île je me sens mal. Retour Au Pays Natal, yeah... » Admiral T, "Retour au Pays Natal," *Toucher l'Horizon*. Universal, 2006.

¹⁷³ For more on Kassav' and zouk, see Chapter 1.

guitar riff, followed by a steady zouk beat. Béroard, not Admiral T, gives the familiar “Admiral T agaaaain” that is common during the introduction of his tracks. Once a rock-solid zouk foundation has been established, Admiral T enters, shattering all conceptions that the song will be sticking to Kassav’s style. He chants in the dancehall DJ style about the collective Kwéyòl culture:

Look how beautiful it is when we unite
Appearances are unimportant, we have the same story
Whatever your religion, your background
We are one with the same spirit, today we are one¹⁷⁴

His rapid and confident flow is accented at the tail end of his recitation with the distinct hit of a Guadeloupean ka drum.

The lyrics of “Fos a Péyi la” are an affirmation of Kwéyòl pride; the chorus of the song repeats the words:

I say yeah yeah yeah, oh yeah
Look at how far we have come together
Nothing can stop us because we are one

Yeah yeah yeah, oh yeah

¹⁷⁴ « Gadé kijan sa bel lè nou tout la ansamm, untel sé untel, untel pa untel, me nou tout la ka sanm, pé enpot religion, pé enpot la ou soti, nou paka fann, sé an sèl lespri jod la nou tout ka fè yon. » Admiral T feat. Kassav’, “Fos a Péyi la,” *Toucher l’Horizon*. Universal, 2006.

Look at how far we have come together

Nothing can stop us because we are united¹⁷⁵

Desvarieux offers a vocal hook that admonishes naysayers and reminds the listeners that even if you disagree you are still part of this strong Kwéyòl group:

Don't tell me otherwise

I will not denigrate you

Each of us contributes to the strength of our country

We are all the strength of our country¹⁷⁶

Admiral T then enters with a rousing verse, calling upon all Creole people to join together and use their music to voice their strength:

We are moving forward, hand in hand we move

The engine is running and can not stop

We have the energy so let's go

Neighbors, cousins, brother and sisters, friends ...!

Raise your hands and move your head

All the Caribbean is there so let's show it!

It's nice to be united as one today

¹⁷⁵ « Yeah yeah yeah oh yeah, gadé jan nou ka vansé ansanm, pa davoï nou ka fè yonn, pani pon mote ki ké pran pann. Yeah yeah yeah oh yeah, gadé jan nou ka vansé ansanm, pa davoï nou ka fè yonn, pani pyes mote ki ké pran pann. » Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ « A pa vou ké di mwen non, a pa mwen ké brillé sa, an ako a lunison, nou tout nou sé fos a peyi la, nou tout nou sé fos a peyi la. » Ibid.

The pressure is mounting, let the music take us!

Let's go! People of gwo ka!

Let's go! People of the béliá!

Haiti konpa, soca, meringue or salsa

Is everyone there?¹⁷⁷

Admiral T mentions traditional music from Guadeloupe and Martinique (gwo ka and béliá, a subset of bélé), and popular music from Haiti (konpa), Trinidad (soca), the Dominican Republic (meringue), and the Latino community in the United States (salsa). It is appropriate that Admiral T mentions all of these genres, because the song is a literal synthesis of Caribbean musical styles.

The song's sound is a metaphor for the Creole experience that it promotes. Instead of trying to restrict himself to sounding uniquely Guadeloupean, Admiral T produces a truly Creole music, a hybrid that emphasizes what it means to be a part of a mosaic culture that draws from many different backgrounds. Guadeloupe is part of a larger Creolophone community that faces similar issues; he is drawing upon musical influences to appeal to the community as a whole.

Admiral T also combines elements of old and new into his performances. At the May 2009 concert "Nuit Créole" in Paris he used a variety of dancers. While he was performing his songs he commonly had hip-hop style backup dancers (all wearing

¹⁷⁷ « Sé douvan ké nou kalé men dan la men, nou ka vansé, mote la ka touné donc nou pé pa kalé, sa kalé bien donc an nou alé, vvasin, vvasine, kouzin, kouzine, frè é sè, zanmi, lévé dé main a zot et bougé tête a zot karibéan ki la lese mwen tan zot fè dézod, sé kon sa nou inmé zot, jodi sé yonn a lot, chalè la ka monté lese mizik la chayé zot. An nou alé pèp a groka la, an nou alé moun béliá, Haiti kompa ka dansé soca meringue salsa, eskè tout moun la.» Ibid.

clothing from his WOK line) performing with and around him; however, between nearly every song traditional Antillean dancers came out on stage and danced along to traditional music. There was a small gwo ka band that was stationed in the center of the proscenium. It was smaller than a traditional band, consisting of only two boula and one makè drum, along with a musician playing on a shaker. On two different occasions, Admiral T joined the traditional groups. First, he performed with a traditional dance involving canes and then with a circular partner dance. The crowd was thrilled to see Admiral T participating in the traditional dance; by joining in the dancing, Admiral T demonstrated his traditional literacy to Antilleans in the audience and emphasized the importance of tradition. However, this was not the first time Admiral T used tradition in performance.

In August 2003, Guadeloupean gwo ka and dancehall artists came together to celebrate musical innovation and tradition at the Centre des Arts in Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe with a concert called “Dub N’Ka.” The event was organized by Joby Bourguinon and Michel Halley in an effort to make traditional Guadeloupean gwo ka more accessible to Guadeloupean youth. They aimed to do this by pairing gwo ka artists with dancehall and hip-hop artists on each song, resulting in an unlikely collaboration between old and new. The liner notes of Dub N’Ka’s CD explains the motivation behind the concert:

The values of our musical patrimony and our musical traditions meet with what is popular with the masses and the young generation, thus we are giving birth to a



powerful cocktail of rhythm. A resonant, harmonious beverage and rich in colors, with an unrivaled depth. Dub'n'Ka was born of this. A symbiosis of traditions and modernity.¹⁷⁸

Admiral T was chosen as one of the dancehall artist to infuse his sound into gwo ka; however, rather than make a dancehall song that was infused with gwo ka, he stuck to the traditional genre almost exactly, showing his deep respect for gwo ka. Admiral T was paired with Jean-Pierre Coquerel, one of the lead singers of the popular gwoka carnival band Akiyo. The duo performed two songs on the concert in 2003: "Zombi," and "Lapenn"(Grief/Sorrow). "Zombi" was heavily influenced by gwo ka style. The song begins with a cappella chant, much like the beginning of a gwo ka song; however, the presence of bass and keyboard would be an aberration in gwo ka. The song heavily featured the boula gwo ka drum and call-and-response singing for the majority of the song until the texture lightened up and a solo section began for the boula. While the boula soloed, Admiral T danced along with it, in the traditional gwo ka style of small unexaggerated movements. After the solo section the theme of the call-and-response was repeated and the song concluded. The Dub N'Ka performance of "Zombi" stuck to the form of a traditional gwo ka song, only deviating from the genre with the inclusion of electric bass and keyboard.

Admiral T's music has gone from adopting the dancehall style to adapting his own musical hybrid: a synthesis of hip-hop, dancehall, and gwo ka that pays homage to

¹⁷⁸ « Lorsque les valeurs du patrimoine et de nos traditions musicales, rencontrent celles actuelles de la rue, des masses, de la jeune génération, cela donne naissance à un puissant cocktail de rythme. Un breuvage sonore harmonieux et riche de couleurs, d'une profondeur inégalée. Dub N'Ka est né de cela. Traditions et modernité en symbiose. » Michel Halley, *Dub N'Ka*, liner notes, WIC Production, CD-037.

Kwéyòl culture while appealing to the youth. Admiral T takes the familiar sounds of dancehall and makes them significant to Guadeloupeans through his message and musical métissage. However, there are other artists in Guadeloupe who value tradition and hybridity, including the popular group Soft. As I discuss in the next chapter, groups like Soft are embracing this idea of hybridity by creating a pan-Caribbean sound steeped in tradition. The result is a unique sound that promotes a revitalized Guadeloupean musical identity.

CHAPTER 4

La Nouvelle Scène Créole

Although artists commonly look to their cultural roots to express their identity in music, it is also possible to assert a strong identity by embracing the hybridity of a region, especially in diasporic communities. Stuart Hall explains the importance of hybridity and identity in a diaspora: “The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity.”¹⁷⁹ In the diverse communities of the Caribbean, several musical movements have centered around a pan-Caribbean sound that focuses on poetic, strong, or political lyrics that are meant to revive the musical identity of their respective islands.

Such a movement has played a historically important role in the negotiation of cultural identity in the French Antilles. The Guadeloupean music group called Soft has transformed earlier debates about cultural identity by stimulating its audience with social commentary and deliberately employing the eclectic sounds of the pan-Caribbean with local Guadeloupean music. Furthermore, Soft’s culturally engaged lyrics point toward the continued importance of social critique and commentary in music of the French Antilles. Artists like Soft embody a cosmopolitan sound and exemplify the idea that musicians can maintain their musical integrity without sticking solely to local traditional music. Soft embraces hybridity by infusing its music with a pan-Caribbean sound in addition to employing poetic and politically-charged lyrics. Underneath this new sound, however, Soft is deeply influenced by traditional Guadeloupean music and its message.

¹⁷⁹ Stuart Hall, quoted in Stephane Dufoix, *Diasporas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 24.

Examining earlier musical movements in Haiti and the Dominican Republic can help illustrate how music can be an effective way of reviving an island's musical identity. Nouvel jenerasyon (new generation) in Haiti is one example of such a movement. Unlike a genre which could be characterized by its musical properties, nouvel jenerasyon's focus is more on the values of the music. Michael Largey explains that nouvel jenersayon, "is more of an attitude toward music than a strict genre."¹⁸⁰ Nouvel jenerasyon artists are usually middle-class Haitians who look to the countryside for musical inspiration as a way to reconnect with their cultural heritage, regardless of how distant that may be. In addition, it places an emphasis on meaningful and poetic texts.¹⁸¹

Emeline Michel of Haiti has adopted these ideals into her music, which fits into the nouvel jenerasyon model.¹⁸² In the early 1990s, however, misik rasin (roots music) was an emerging popular music in Haiti that emphasized the fusion of popular music with Vodou musical elements.¹⁸³ As a result of mizik rasin's rise, Michel felt pressured to use traditional music in her songs. She claims that, "They have this stereotype concept of how you have to do Haitian traditional Vodou music to keep your integrity, and I don't agree with this. So automatically they put you in a (musical) ghetto where you can't explore yourself as an artist."¹⁸⁴ Despite the threat of being a musical outcast, Michel's music has been well received in Haiti and elsewhere and draws from an eclectic pool of world music including jazz, konpa, soukous, and the French Ballad.¹⁸⁵ She says, "I do

¹⁸⁰ Michael Largey, "Haiti and the French Caribbean" in *Caribbean Currents* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 166.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Gage Averill, *A Day for the Hunger, A Day for the Prey: Popular Music and Power in Haiti* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 177.

¹⁸⁴ Brian Dring, "Emeline Michel: Body and Soul," *The Beat* 19, no. 2 (2000): 42.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 41.

believe in métissage, what we call mixing different cultures' influences and allowing yourself to invent new rhythms.”¹⁸⁶

Michel and other nouvel jenerasyon artists employ lyrics that focus on social and political themes and have a poetic quality to them. In her song “Sa Ki Tire?” (What is that sound?),¹⁸⁷ Michel describes the longing that many Haitians feel for ancestral Africa from which Haitians were brought to the Caribbean.¹⁸⁸ Like mizik rasin however, her songs are also meant to highlight issues in Haiti. Emeline Michel wrote “Pè Letènèl” (Eternal Father) after being carjacked during a trip to Haiti with two French Antillean singers (Tanya St. Val and Jocelyne Beroard).¹⁸⁹

The Dominican Republic's Juan Luis Guerra has championed many of the values of nouvel jenerasyon in his music, which he calls merengue dual. Guerra places an emphasis on meaningful lyrics, but layers them over a catchy dance beat.¹⁹⁰ According to Peter Manuel, this unusual combination, in addition to his musical skill, “has taken both bachata and merengue to new levels of profundity and expressiveness.”¹⁹¹ His music blends the popular bachata and merengue styles with jazz, rock, and other popular music.¹⁹² Most importantly, Guerra's eclectic style, according to Manuel, “illustrates the internationalization and growing sophistication of Dominican music.”¹⁹³ The cosmopolitan nature of Guerra and Michel's music is present in Soft's music; however,

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 42.

¹⁸⁷ It should be noted that “tire” is also the Haitian kreyol word to describe the sound of a gun going off.

¹⁸⁸ Alva James-Johnson, “Singer driven by her love for Haiti: Emeline Michel travels globe singing of homeland and hope,” *Knight Rider Tribune Business News*, 16 May 2007.

¹⁸⁹ Largey, “Haiti and the French Caribbean,” 166.

¹⁹⁰ Lise Waxer, “Juan Luis Guerra” *Oxford Music Online* (accessed 5 January 2009) <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>>

¹⁹¹ Peter Manuel, *Caribbean Currents* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 136.

¹⁹² Lise Waxer, “Juan Luis Guerra” *Oxford Music Online*.

¹⁹³ Peter Manuel, *Caribbean Currents* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 135.

Soft goes beyond embracing their hybridity by infusing their cosmopolitan sound with intimations of traditional Guadeloupean music.

In this chapter I will discuss a new genre that has emerged in Guadeloupe in the past five years that exemplifies the values of *nouvel jenerasyon* and *meringue dual*, and was pioneered by the group Soft. After giving a description of the group's core values and stylistic characteristics I will demonstrate how artists like Soft are using their music to revive the musical identity of Guadeloupe by blending the foundations of traditional music with a pan-Caribbean sound.

Soft is the brain child of the lead singer and guitarist, Fred Deshayes, who formed the group in 2000 and who has written the majority of their lyrics and music. In addition to his duties with Soft, he maintains his position as an Associate Professor of Law at the Université des Antilles-Guyane campus in Pointe-à-Pitre.¹⁹⁴ Like Juan Luis Guerra, who studied at the Berklee School of Music in Boston, and Emeline Michel who studied at the Detroit Jazz center, Deshayes traveled abroad for school; he studied public law at the Université Montpellier 1 in France.¹⁹⁵

Soft's lyrics reflect the educated background of its lead singer; the music emphasizes the lyrics as a literary text. Deshayes writes lyrics in a poetic way, embracing Kwéyòl's subtle nuances that allow for double entendres. Soft's reputation as an educated group is strengthened by their ability to analyze their lyrics and explain the message behind their music. Deshayes's facility to discuss his lyrics in an intellectual

¹⁹⁴ Michel Troadec, « Soft ou le moelleux élastique des Antilles, » *Ouest-France*. 13 January 2008. see also « Annuaire » (Directory) *Université des Antilles et de la Guyane* (accessed 11 January 2010) <<http://www.univ-ag.fr/>>

¹⁹⁵ Brian Dring, "Emeline Michel: Body and Soul," *The Beat* 19, no. 2 (2000): 41; Lise Waxer, "Juan Luis Guerra" *Oxford Music Online* (accessed 5 January 2009) <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>>; « Institut de Droit Européen des Droits de l'Homme-Thèses soutenues » (Accessed 11 January 2010) <<http://www.idedh.fr>>

manner is acknowledged here by Guadeloupean ethnomusicologist and cultural librarian, Gustav Michaux-Vignes:

Soft and Dominique Coco, for example, are more like scholars; they are intellectuals. It is still the popular tendency to open your ears to foreign music, Caribbean foreign music. Soft has these Caribbean influences but they can speak with versatility, they are scholars. They can provide a discourse about their music, why they do what they do. They make this “other” music by using older, traditional influences.¹⁹⁶

The intellectual discourse surrounding Soft’s music allows the group to be perceived as scholars as well as musicians.

As Michaux-Vignes mentioned in the quote above, Soft draws upon influences from foreign Caribbean music, meaning, non-Guadeloupean Caribbean music, in addition to other musics from the African diaspora. The music is a multifarious blend of genres including Martinican biguine, Trinidadian calypso, Brazilian bossa nova, and Guadeloupean gwo ka, which they then infuse with the underlying rhythms of African music and jazz.¹⁹⁷ The result of this musical mixture is a cosmopolitan sound that differs greatly from the prevailing popular music of the region. Unlike the mostly-electronic popular music zouk, Soft’s music is primarily acoustic, incorporating the violin, saxophone, acoustic guitar, double bass, and a variety of percussion. In addition to Deshayes, currently the other regular members of the band include Philippe Sadikalay on

¹⁹⁶ Excerpt from field notes, 12 June 2008.

¹⁹⁷ Interview, author with Fred Deshayes, 2009.

saxophone, Joël Larochelle on bass, Julie Collot on violin, and Maxence Deshayes with backup vocals.¹⁹⁸

Journalists writing about Soft's music have struggled to define its salient characteristics since it sounds so different from other Guadeloupean popular music. Often times critics resort to simply emphasizing that it does not fully belong to any of the popular genres in Guadeloupe. Patrick Labesse, journalist for *Le Monde*, highlights this in the manner that he introduces their music: "it is neither zouk nor konpa nor danchall nor R&B – the dominant musical trends in Guadeloupe."¹⁹⁹

Despite Soft's "otherness" from Guadeloupean popular music, they are still invested in Guadeloupe's musical legacy. Soft's musical motivation lies with their wish to create a new sound for popular music that has deep roots in their cultural patrimony. Fred Deshayes explains when he says:

I have a heritage and I have to use it and I have to give my part in that construction of what is Guadeloupean...I start from that, the heritage, and my motivation is to express myself, but in a modern way! To express what is a Guadeloupean in this year now"²⁰⁰

This heritage is evident in many aspects of Soft's music, most notably in their treatment of gwo ka.

¹⁹⁸ It should be noted that percussionist and original member, Didier Juste, left the group before the release of their second album in 2007.

¹⁹⁹ « Ce n'est ni du zouk, ni du compas, ni de la dancehall, ni du R & B- les tendances musicales dominantes en Guadeloupe. » Patrick Labesse, "Fred Deshayes : la Guadeloupe est « Responsable de son Naufrage,»" *Le Monde Abonnes*, (accessed 11 October 2008) <<http://www.abonnes.lemonde.fr>>

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

Soft's first album, *Kadans a péyi-la*, "Rhythm of the Country" (2005), highlights the virtuosity of Didier Juste, the percussionist for the group until 2006. Juste studied gwo ka on the streets of Pointe-à-Pitre with Vélo, the most loved and respected Guadeloupean musician. His studies with Vélo, the king of gwo ka, who died in 1984, essentially raise him to musical royalty in Guadeloupe. The song "Fouté Lapé" (Beat Peace) highlights the drummer's ability to play gwo ka well, culminating with a drum break that takes up nearly half of the song.

"Fouté Lapé" begins with a solo ka beating out 4/4 time. A barely-audible guitar line joins in as Fred Deshayes enters with vocals; the sparse texture of the song highlights the lyrics and the sound of the drumming, giving the song a distinct feel from other Soft songs. The lyrics emphasize the importance of drumming in Guadeloupeans' lives and the attempted dominance of the elite over drumming practices in the past:

Let him play

Let them strike drums Monsieur

Stop criticizing those who are not going to follow the path that was already made

Only one word I want to say

They censor it²⁰¹

The lyrics posit that they cannot even finish stating an idea before it is repressed.

²⁰¹ "Lésé li jwé, lésé'y kongné tanbou a li mésyé, arété kritiké on moun ki pa ka suiv chimen ki ja make, On sèl mo i vlé di'w Only one word I want to say, Yo sansuré'y." Fred Deshayes, "Fouté lapé," *Kadans a péyi-la*, Aztec Musique, 2005.

After another verse, Deshayes gives a roll-call of a few of the percussion instruments present, beginning with “He plays conga, he plays tanbou.” After each drum is named, Juste plays a short motive on the named instrument. Suddenly, the song shifts into a drum break, featuring Juste on a makè-ka solo. Also playing are a shaker and boula-ka to establish the basic beat. The drum break is built off of a variation on gwo ka’s menndé rhythm that was popularized by Guy Conquêt:

Figure 6: Conquêt Version of the Menndé Rhythm



The drum break in “Fouté Lapé” illustrates Juste’s proficiency with and knowledge of Guadeloupe’s traditional drumming.

However, Soft uses gwo ka in many levels of their music, not just in drum breaks as seen in “Fouté Lapé.” The song “Krim Kont la Gwadeloup” (Crime against Guadeloupe) also from, *Kadans a péyi-la* illustrates this idea well. The song begins with a repeating four-beat riff played by Deshayes on the acoustic guitar. This riff is catchy to outsiders’ ears, but to Guadeloupeans it means much more: it evokes the traditional menndé rhythm of gwo ka:

Figure 7: Menndé Rhythm



Figure 8: Guitar Riff from “Krim Kont la Gwadeloup”



Although the reference is subtle, gwo ka is so engrained into Guadeloupean culture that most would recognize the rhythm instantly. After the riff repeats twice, it is layered with a descending bass line and a timeline-like ostinato played by a high-pitched percussion instrument. A percussive guitar rhythm is then added to the mix, and almost as if to reassure the listener of the gwo ka reference, the distinct sound of the ka enters, lightly accenting the established menndé groove. The song’s strophic form allows these figures to repeat with little variation until the tail-end of the song, which closes with a ka solo.

Figure 9: Menndé Groove in “Krim Kont la Gwadeloup”

The musical score for "Krim Kont la Gwadeloup" consists of four staves. The Ostinato staff (top) features a continuous eighth-note pattern in a single melodic line. The Guitar 2 staff (second from top) shows a melodic line with several accents and a final double bar line. The Acoustic Guitar staff (third from top) displays a rhythmic pattern with accents on specific notes. The Bass staff (bottom) has a simple melodic line with a few notes and a final double bar line. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is common time (C).

“Krim Kont la Gwadeloup” has a simple melodic vocal line, consisting of only four notes and using mostly step-wise motion; despite the demure melody, the lyrics are strong. Soft frequently composes their songs around political subjects by incorporating the topical lyrical style of the traditional Caribbean genres of gwo ka and calypso. Although they are borrowing this technique from traditional genres, the lyrics become relevant to the Guadeloupean youth by addressing issues that are important today. Many of Soft’s lyrics focus on politics and culture in present-day Guadeloupe, and “Krim Kont la Gwadeloup” is no exception.²⁰² Fred Deshayes explains his lyrical inspiration: “I’m making observations and asking questions for which I have no answer. I simply want to present an image of my country and its ‘issues.’ Most obviously the economic issues, but also issues of identity and therefore cultural issues as well.”²⁰³

²⁰² Interview, author with Fred Deshayes, 2009.

²⁰³ « Je fais des constats et pose des questions pour lesquelles je n’ai pas de réponse. Je veux simplement transmettre l’image que j’ai de mon pays, de ses « difficultés ». La difficulté économique, la plus évidente, mais également la difficulté identitaire, et donc culturelle. » Fred Deshayes quoted in Patrick Labesse,

“Krim Kont la Gwadeloup” is innovative in that it asks Guadeloupeans to take responsibility for the problems on the island, rather than blaming the French political system. Fred Deshayes explains:

We can blame elsewhere, but must not discard it there. Many things depend on us. In this song, I point out our local politicians who get lost in debates dwarfed by the challenges facing Guadeloupe. If the (sugar)cane does not bring in profit, if the banana dies, that makes many children who do not eat. I mention also the passivity, the wait-and-see attitude of the youth, who did not seem to want to take their role seriously, take their legacy and mission.²⁰⁴

Deshayes’s lyrics seek to inspire the youth to take a stance in issues of local government both by addressing them in the song, and setting an example through Soft’s connection to contemporary problems facing Guadeloupeans. Deshayes believes that it is the responsibility of young Guadeloupeans to make a brighter future possible and he uses “Krim Kont la Gwadeloup” to alert his audience of Guadeloupe’s dire situation:

Each new generation builds on what comes before. I then pose the question: what liberté, what égalité, what fraternité is there in terms of wealth distribution today? The song goes on to say that our history does not advance. We are only pirates

“Fred Deshayes : la Guadeloupe est « Responsable de son Naufrage,»” *Le Monde Abonnes*, (accessed 11 October 2008) <<http://www.abonnes.lemonde.fr>>

²⁰⁴ «On peut incriminer l'ailleurs, mais il ne faut pas s'y défaire. Beaucoup de choses dépendent de nous. Dans cette chanson, je désigne nos politiques locaux qui se perdent dans des débats dérisoires au regard des enjeux auxquels la Guadeloupe est confrontée. Si la canne ne rapporte plus, si la banane meurt, cela fait beaucoup de petits Guadeloupéens qui ne mangent pas. J'évoque également la passivité, l'attentisme de la jeunesse, qui n'a pas l'air de vouloir prendre son rôle au sérieux, assumer son héritage et sa mission. » Ibid.

and buccaneers. We are responsible for our own shipwreck and the worst is that we have the capacity to analyze, but we remain passive, we watch the sinking.²⁰⁵

Deshayes uses his music to notify the youth of their abilities to change their predicament, and in turn to stop the ship from sinking.

Soft is not the first politically-conscious group to come from the French Antilles; when zouk dominated the music charts in the mid-1980s, groups like Kassav' wrote in Kwéyòl, which at the time was considered to be a statement against the French-political power.²⁰⁶ Although there were no strong movements for independence from France in the 1980s, musicians expressed their cultural independence through their art. Paulo Rosine of the Martinican group Malavoi explains, "During the seventies, there was a political struggle for independence. Today, we fight differently, we fight culturally."²⁰⁷ In addition to using kwéyòl, some zouk artists wrote about broad issues like racism and the aftermath of slavery. However, for the most part zouk music focused on lighter-fare topics like love, parties, and dancing.

Soft's debut album, *Kadans a péyi-la* (Rhythm of the Country), makes direct statements on the way of life in Guadeloupe, or the rhythm of the country. With the release of their second album, *Partout Étranger* (2007) Soft shifted the focus of their songs towards a discourse on identity. "Partout Étranger" means "Everywhere Abroad" or "Anywhere Abroad," which brings to mind the issues Guadeloupeans face with their

²⁰⁵ « Chaque nouvelle génération construit pour celle qui vient. Je pose ensuite la question : quelle liberté, quelle égalité, quelle fraternité au regard de la répartition des richesses aujourd'hui encore ? La chanson poursuit en disant que notre histoire n'avance pas. Il n'y a que des pirates et des flibustiers. Nous sommes responsables de notre naufrage et le pire, c'est que nous avons une capacité à l'analyser, mais nous restons passifs, nous regardant couler. » Patrick Labesse, "Fred Deshayes : la Guadeloupe est « Responsable de son Naufrage, »" *Le Monde Abonnes*, (accessed 11 October 2008) <<http://www.abonnes.lemonde.fr>>

²⁰⁶ For more information, see Chapter 1.

²⁰⁷ Jocelyne Guilbault, *Zouk : World Music in the West Indies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 39.

relationship to France; although they are legally French citizens, Guadeloupeans in France are viewed as foreigners. The album discusses the sense of “otherness” that Guadeloupeans feel. Deshayes explains that *Partout Étranger*, “is about otherness and actually, addresses the question of identity back to front. Who is my other self? To who am I foreign? Is this not the same question? The difficulty is what makes you foreign, what created the distance (not only in its geographical aspect), what are the consequences and how I can ‘manage’?”²⁰⁸

The title track off of *Partout Étranger* deals with the core issues of otherness that Guadeloupeans feel in both France and Guadeloupe. Deshayes encountered a young man, born in France by a Guadeloupean mother, who lives in Sarcelles, a suburb of Paris largely inhabited by immigrants and people of Antillean origin. This young man’s struggle with belonging provides the lyrical basis of the song. Deshayes explains, “The lyrics were inspired by a youth who said that in Sarcelles, it feels foreign, and in the country of his mother, Guadeloupe, it has the same feeling ...”²⁰⁹

The song begins with a repeating rhythmic guitar motive paired with a percussive vocal accent. Then the piano enters, playing a light descending series of chords that repeats for the rest of the song. “Partout Étranger” has a different feel than other Soft songs because of the prominence of the piano, which is not normally included in the instrumentation of the group. Deshayes dreamily intones the vocables “Oulélélélé, oulélélélé, oulélélélé,” allowing them to drift over the light descending piano line and

²⁰⁸ «sur l’altérité et en fait, aborde la question de l’identité à l’envers. Qui est mon autre ? De qui suis-je l’étranger ? N’est-ce pas la même question ? Toute la difficulté est de savoir ce qui te fait étranger, qu’est-ce qui créé la distance (pas seulement dans son aspect géographique), quelles sont ces conséquences et comment je peux les “gérer” ? » Fred Deshayes in Diane Da Silva, « Soft : un groupe de valeur(s), » *RFI Musique* (accessed 12 November 2009) <<http://www.rfimusique.com>>

²⁰⁹ « Les paroles sont inspirées par un jeune qui raconte qu’à Sarcelles, il se sent étranger, et au pays de sa mère, la Guadeloupe, il a le même sentiment... Ce n’est pas notre vécu. » Ibid.

slightly percussive guitar motive. He then enters with the first verse, which unlike other Soft lyrics, is sung in French:

Untie the hands, feet untie
Unchaining the language
All this is useless to you
If you're headed
Everywhere abroad, anywhere abroad²¹⁰

The piano continues to repeat its descending motive, perpetuating the calm feel of the song until Deshayes enters loudly, singing in Kwéyòl, interrupting the placid music:

Masks without Carnival
You cannot burn the Carnival King
You are masked in your own hearts
You are masked in your own eyes²¹¹

While mentioning a Guadeloupean tradition, Carnival, the discussion of masks in this context evokes Martinican writer Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), which deals with the psychological struggles that blacks faced in a period of colonial transition.²¹² Although Fanon's work dealt with issues surrounding the liberation of formerly-French colonies in the mid-twentieth century, as well as the departmentalization

²¹⁰ « Délier les poings, délier les pieds, déchaîner la langue, tout ça n'te sert à rien, si tu es pommé, Partout étranger, partout étranger. » Fred Deshayes, "Partout Étranger," *Partout Étranger*, Aztec Musique, 2007.

²¹¹ « Mas san kannaval, Ou pé pa brilé Vaval, Ou sé mas an kè a yo, Ou sé mas an zyé a vou » Ibid.

²¹² Frantz Fanon and Richard Philcox, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2008).

of the DOM, the sentiment and conflict felt at the time is similar to the lack of belonging felt by displaced Antilleans in France today.

After this outburst in Kwéyòl, Deshayes switches back to French, singing, “Everywhere abroad, anywhere abroad, Shhh, do not say it hush, hush, hush,” essentially admonishing himself against another Kwéyòl outburst. He repeats the vocables, “Oulélélélé, oulélélélé, oulélélélé,” until he changes to a defiant tone again, this time in French, asking:

Who do you look like?

Not your father!

Why?

Not your mother!

Ah!

Then who?

So what?

Everywhere abroad, anywhere abroad, anywhere abroad

Shhh, do not say it hush, hush, hush

Oulélélélé²¹³

Finally, after repeating “oulélélélé” and bringing back the fluid tone of the song, Deshayes brashly exclaims, “Uprooted, lost, badly carried, disappointed, uprooted, lost,” only to be hushed again with, “Shhh, do not say it hush, hush, hush.” He sings “Masks

²¹³ « À qui ressembler ? Pas à ton père ! Pourquoi ? Pas à ta mère ! Ah ! Alors à qui ? Alors à quoi ? Partout étranger, partout étranger, partout étranger, Chut, faut pas l’dire, chut, chut, chut, Oulélélélé » Fred Deshayes, “Partout Étranger,” *Partout Étranger*, Aztec Musique, 2007.

without Carnival” again, but it lacks the intensity from before. Once this final effort has been defeated, the song gradually lowers its volume letting out a few final murmurs of “oulélélé.” The song closes with Deshayes whispering “partout étranger,” and the piano line repeating one last time.

Fred Deshayes wrote “Partout Étranger” to be used in the documentary *L'avenir est ailleurs* (The future is elsewhere), which centers around the history of the *Bureau pour le développement des migrations dans les départements d'outre-mer*, referred to as BUMIDOM. In the 1960s, the French government organized BUMIDOM to emigrate Antilleans to the metropole to ameliorate a shortage of workers for low-paying jobs. Many Antilleans left the Caribbean and despite their citizenship were considered foreigners in France where they worked in undesirable positions and lived in meager conditions. The film, *L'avenir est ailleurs*, uncovers the painful history of BUMIDOM and its effect on Antilleans. *Le Monde*'s review of the film says, “Many testimonies, including those on account of Aimé Césaire or Lilan Thuram, evoke the pain of tearing the country, the disenchantment with living conditions, the bitter feeling of rootlessness and loss of social status.”²¹⁴ This film highlights the predicament that Deshayes is trying to evoke with the song “Partout Étranger.”

Issues of race go hand in hand with the otherness that Guadeloupeans feel. Racial hegemony is a long-standing problem in Guadeloupe and it is a common topic for protest songs. Fred Deshayes explains how this hegemony is engrained into Guadeloupean thought:

²¹⁴ « De nombreux témoignages, parmi lesquels on compte ceux d'Aimé Césaire ou de Lilan Thuram, évoquent la souffrance de l'arrachement au pays, la désillusion des conditions d'accueil, le sentiment amer du déracinement et du déclassement. » J.M. Frodon, “Cinéma Critique : *L'Avenir est ailleurs*” <<http://www.lemonde.fr>> (accessed 26 January 2009)

The paradox for us is that it is sometimes directed against ourselves. It is integrated in our Creole. For example, say a girl has "beautiful hair" (fine hair) it means that she does not have frizzy (textured) hair, or even when a White and Black are married, it is said in Creole: "You put a little light in your family."²¹⁵

Racism is deeply engrained in Guadeloupean history and culture and can be directed by black Guadeloupeans to other islands in the Caribbean, most commonly toward Haiti. The song "Wouvé la Pòt"(Open the Door) discusses issues of racism in Guadeloupe and animosity against Haitian immigrants. Deshayes explains that Haitians have a particularly difficult time in Guadeloupe saying, "Currently, in Guadeloupe, anti-Haitian racism is common. We must find a scapegoat for the economic and social failure."²¹⁶

Although the song maintains Soft's acoustic quality, there is a distinct zouk vibe to the song from the off-beat accents in the guitar and the presence of the ti bwa rhythm in the high-hat. The song is sung in a zouk-love style by Maxence Deshayes, Fred's brother, who has a deep and rich voice. The first verse poetically describes how Guadeloupeans mistreat immigrants:

²¹⁵ Le paradoxe chez nous, c'est qu'il est dirigé parfois contre nous-mêmes. Il est intégré dans notre créole. Par exemple, dire qu'une fille est « bel chivé » (beaux cheveux) signifie qu'elle n'a pas les cheveux crépus, ou bien encore lorsqu'un Blanc épouse une Noire ou l'inverse, on dit, en créole : « Tu mets un peu de lumière dans ta famille. » Fred Deshayes in Patrick Labesse, "Fred Deshayes : la Guadeloupe est « Responsable de son Naufrage,»" *Le Monde Abonnes*, (accessed 11 October 2008) <<http://www.abonnes.lemonde.fr>>

²¹⁶ « Actuellement, en Guadeloupe, la mode est au racisme anti-haïtien. Il faut trouver un bouc émissaire à l'échec économique et social. » Ibid.

I have no words that embrace
Those who attempt to deceive the misery
If you've torn your soul to escape a country
And send some food to your brothers and sisters
If I do not treat you with respect
It is because I cannot hear you scream²¹⁷

The next verse furthers the theme of mistrust and inability to give to foreigners, but it adds that these strangers are dancing konpa, alluding to the fact that they are Haitian:

They measure dignity
One kilometer to their mother
A centimeter to a stranger
Watch as they dance konpa²¹⁸

The final verse shows Deshayes's disgust with the situation:

Where have we buried our strength
Where we have buried their dreams
and I thought we were much better than that
I saw a more beautiful life

²¹⁷ "An pa ni pawòl pou vlopé, moun ka ba lanmizè masko, si ou chiré nanm a'w pou fui on pèyi, epi voyé manjé pou frè é sè, si an pé pa trété'w épi respé, sé pas an tandé ki jan ou ka hélé." Soft, "Wouvé la pòt" *Partout Etranger*, Aztec Musique, 2007.

²¹⁸ "Yo ka mizeré dinité (sou konpa), On kilomèt pou manman yo, On santimet pou étranjé, Gadé yo ki jan yo sou konpa." Fred Deshayes, "Wouvé la Pòt," *Partout Étranger*, Aztec Musique, 2007.

If I do not treat you with respect
Because I forgot that all men
Have the same dignity
Woy ... Open the door for me²¹⁹

When asked if “Wouvé la Pòt” is meant to show that Guadeloupeans have forgotten human values, Deshayes responded:

It is not the human values, but the starting point: I must admit to all men equal dignity. Otherwise, ignorance of our respective histories combined with difficult economic environment make our relations more bitter. Is there a barrier between the Antilles? Barriers ... they vary origins, languages to name a few. The barrier that separates us from Haitians is not that which separates us from Cubans or Trinidadians, to name a few.²²⁰

The song “Frenchi” addresses breaking down these barriers, albeit with a lighter tone. The musical introduction features a playful melody in the soprano saxophone and violin. The text is performed in English under the pretenses that the singer is addressing an Anglophone West Indian woman from Jamaican or Trinidad. The lyrics are light

²¹⁹ « Ola nou téré fòs an nou, ola nou téré rèv a yo, e an té konprann nou té pi wo ki sa, e an té vwè la vi pli bel, si an pé pa trété'w épi respé, sé pas an oubliyé tout nonm ni dinité. » Ibid.

²²⁰ « Il n'y a pas que des valeurs humaines, mais c'est le point de départ : je dois reconnaître à tous les hommes une égale dignité. Pour le reste, l'ignorance de nos histoires respectives, ajoutée au contexte économique difficile rendent nos relations plus âpres. Une barrière entre les Antillais ? Des barrières... elles varient selon les origines, les langues pour ne citer que cela. La barrière qui nous sépare des Haïtiens n'est pas celle qui nous sépare des Cubains ou des Trinidadiens, pour ne citer que cela. » Fred Deshayes in Diane Da Silva, « Soft : un groupe de valeur(s), » *RFI Musique* (accessed 12 November 2009) <<http://www.rfimusique.com>>

hearted and describe the singer's interest in this "island girl" who calls him Frenchi.

However, in the midst of his flattering, he mentions his Créole heritage:

That's from Jamaica to Trini
I heard that they call us Frenchi
Créole is my pride
My beauty inside
When you dance with me, island girl you
Turn me on, Turn me on oooo (x4)
I'd like to see you wining (x3)²²¹

Deshayes uses the word "wining" to denote dancing; this term is commonly used in the Anglophone Caribbean. Deshayes makes a point to show that he disapproves of the term Frenchi:

And far more than you'll ever know
West Indian girl I love you so
Yes I disagree
When you call me Frenchi²²²

As the song comes to a close it becomes clearer why he objected to the term "Frenchi": he believes that they should embrace their common Caribbean heritage rather than their

²²¹ Fred Deshayes, « Frenchi » *Partout Étranger*, Aztec Musique, 2007.

²²² Ibid.

specific linguistic differences. While the final recitation of “I’d like to see you wining” is repeating, Deshayes switches to Kwéyòl, saying, “Tout Gwadeloupéyen sé karibeyen”(All Guadeloupeans are Caribbean). He is pointing out that all Guadeloupeans also have a connection to other Caribbean people. He adds, “Tout sé fré”(All are brothers), adding to the idea of Caribbean solidarity that he is promoting.

Fred Deshayes continues to inspire youths to act for the greater good in the song “Gouté Guadeloupe” (Tasted Guadeloupe). Nostalgia is a common topic in Guadeloupean music, and after looking at the title of “Gouté Guadeloupe,” I had assumed that this would fit into that category.²²³ However, rather than describe the island flavor of Guadeloupe, the song instead discusses the acerbic aftertaste from centuries of repression. Like “Krim Kont la Gwadeloup,” “Gouté Guadeloupe” has a very narrow melodic range and is sung in a quasi-recitative style. The introduction features Deshayes repeating, “Pitak pitak péyi la ka sonné”(Pitak pitak the country will sound) over a light guitar, piano, and hand-drum accompaniment, which is later joined by a solemn violin line. The first verse describes Guadeloupeans’ struggle to overcome slavery in the 1800s:

I taste the land of Guadeloupe for it tells me
Before me there were so many people who have worked
So many people who fought for freedom
They thrashed out they have suffered repression together

²²³ See Chapter 3 and Admiral T’s “Retour au Pays Natal.”

Hold across the country that we live

Like the blessed, yes yes²²⁴

The lyrics continue, mentioning examples of rebellion in the twentieth century, among them G.O.N.G. (Groupe d'Organisation Nationale de la Guadeloupe), a Nationalist group in Guadeloupe in the 1960s:

I taste the land of Guadeloupe for it tells me

Before me there were youth who developed an idea

Before me men standing

The youth GONG

To stir the consciences

As if the consciences could ignite

What is yours is yours²²⁵

G.O.N.G. was known for being an aggressive group, particularly by inciting riots in 1967. The official website for the overseas departments recounts a bit of history on the political situation surrounding the G.O.N.G:

²²⁴ « An ka gouté tè a Gwadeloup pou'y pé rakonté, avan mwen la té ni bon moun ki poté mannèv, avan mwen la té ni moun ki goumé pou libète, avan mwen yo tann papal é réprésyon sendikal, kon tilili an péyi la pou té viv kon dé bwabwa. » Fred Deshayes, "Gouté Gwadeloup," *Partout Étranger*, Aztec Musique, 2007.

²²⁵ « An ka gouté tè a Gwadeloup pou'y pé rakonté, avan mwen té ni dé jenn té ka filé on lidé, avan mwen sé nonm doubout, jenn a GONG ki mèt anwout, pou yo té vanté konsyans, konsi konsyans pé pran difé, yo té ka filé on lidé » Ibid.

The communist federation which had begun breaking off with Aimé Césaire, a Martinican elected communist, became the Communist Party of Guadeloupe (1958). Separatist tendencies, or even pro-independence, manifested in particular with the G.O.N.G. (group organization National Guadeloupe). Riots occurred in 1967 in Basse-Terre and Pointe-à-Pitre.²²⁶

Mentioning a militant group like the G.O.N.G is a bold statement for Deshayes.

However, Deshayes explains that he did not mean to promote their riots, but rather stir up memories of the past: “the evocation of Gong refers to the memory so close and yet so misunderstood.”²²⁷ He means to emphasize the G.O.N.G’s dedication, which he sees as missing from the contemporary youth.

As seen above, after referencing the G.O.N.G in the lyrics, Deshayes brings up consciences, saying that these youths stirred them as if they could ignite. This imagery is supposed to evoke the passion and relentless qualities that Deshayes would like Guadeloupeans to emulate. By adding “What is yours is yours,” he is implying that it is not only the audience’s duty to “stir the consciences,” but also to use their own conscience to initiate activity. He closes the song by informing the listener that Guadeloupe is in a poor state to emphasize the urgency of reality:

²²⁶ « La fédération communiste qui avait entamé la rupture d’avec Aimé Césaire, élu communiste martiniquais, se transforme en parti communiste guadeloupéen (1958). Des tendances autonomistes, voire indépendantistes, se manifestent avec notamment le G.O.N.G (*Groupe des Organisations Nationalistes Guadeloupéennes*). Des émeutes se produisent en 1967 à Basse-Terre puis à Pointe-à-Pitre.» in « Présentation : Guadeloupe, » *L’Outre-Mer* (accessed 28 January 2010) <<http://www.outre-mer.gouv.fr>>

²²⁷ « L’évocation du GONG renvoie à la mémoire pourtant si proche et si méconnue. » Fred Deshayes in Diane Da Silva, « Soft : un groupe de valeur(s), » *RFI Musique* (accessed 12 November 2009) <<http://www.rfimusique.com>>

There is an evil spirit in the country

The thieves are believed to be good

Families are abandoning children²²⁸

The song closes with a wistful instrumental conclusion, highlighting a legato violin melody.

Since Kassav' changed the face of Antillean music in the 1980s, artists have continued to jump on the zouk bandwagon, hoping to produce a record on par with "Zouk-la Sé Sèl Médikaman Nou Ni," and ultimately failing. Although Soft's music deviates from the normal order in Antillean popular music, they still have a great deal of respect for Kassav' and zouk music. When asked about zouk, Fred Deshayes has said, "Kassav is great! We were almost suckled by the group at our birth! It is the essential reference for any Antillean musician. But it is those who arrived after that we dislike. The music is impoverished...The synthesizer takes the place of the bass, horns or drums, in zouk-love. It is a true retreat!"²²⁹

Rather than contribute to the collective musical retreat of zouk love, Soft aimed for an entirely different sound. Their blend of genres, use of acoustic instruments, and socially engaged lyrics revived musical output in Guadeloupe, showing that not only is it possible to achieve success outside of the zouk genre, but to do so while maintaining a scholarly regard among audiences.

²²⁸ « Ni on lèspwi a sàloptaj andan péyi la, volè ka pasé pou bonmoun, fanmi abandoné timoun.... » Fred Deshayes, "Gouté Gwadeloup," *Partout Étranger*, Aztec Musique, 2007.

²²⁹ « Kassav, c'est super ! On a presque tété au groupe à notre naissance ! C'est la référence incontournable pour tout musicien antillais. Mais ce sont ceux qui sont arrivés après qui nous déplaisent. La musique s'appauvrit. Il n'y a plus de travail ni de solo instrumental. Le synthé prend la place de la basse, des cuivres ou de la batterie, dans le zouk-love. C'est un vrai recul ! » Fred Deshayes quoted in « Interview : Soft 'On est partis de là où Kassav' nous a amenés,' » *Afrique Magazine*, no. 270 (March 2008), 27.

One of the most remarkable things about Soft is paired with their anomalous sound, they have achieved anomalous success. Just three months after its release *Kadans a péyi-la*, sold 10,000 copies.²³⁰ As of January of 2008, three years after its release, it sold 25,000 copies, a huge number for a Guadeloupean group; *Partout Étranger* sold 5,000 copies in its first two weeks.²³¹ Soft's success is so great that they have been compared to Kassav, in terms of their wide-reaching appeal, sales figures, and influence on the Antillean music scene.

Soft's success has brought on a surge of music with a similar aesthetic from Antillean artists. This music is typically made by middle class musicians for a middle class audience; it embraces a cosmopolitan ideology and transcends national borders to encompass a sense of Caribbeaness, while incorporating an acoustic sound inspired by folk traditions. Of this trend in Antillean music, RFI music critic Claudy Siar says, "This nouvelle scène créole (new Creole scene) is the largest musical event in the Antilles since the onset of zouk, twenty-five years ago."²³² Due to the popularity of this "nouvelle scène," Soft's record label, Aztec Musique, produced a compilation CD of artists who fit into the Soft aesthetic, called *La Nouvelle Scène Créole*. The compilation includes two of Soft's songs from *Partout Étranger*, two songs from K'Koustik, and music from lesser-known Guadeloupean artists and musicians from Reunion, Martinique, and Haiti.

Guadeloupean's perception of Soft as a cosmopolitan group that performs with "intelligence," coupled with their success and the resulting "nouvelle scène," shows a shift in focus in Guadeloupean music. As opposed to zouk love's party music,

²³⁰ Bouziane Daoudi, « Soft, plus dur qu'il n'y paraît, » *Libération*, 24 November 2007.

²³¹ Michel Troadec, "Soft ou le moelleux élastique des Antilles," *Dimanche Ouest-France*, 13 Janvier 2008.

²³² « Cette nouvelle scène créole est le plus grand événement musical aux Antilles depuis l'apparition du zouk, il y a vingt-cinq ans. » quoted in « Les post-zoukers » *Afrique Magazine*, no. 270, Mars 2008, 27.

Guadeloupeans wish to identify with a more cerebral music and alter their musical identity to appeal to a cosmopolitan audience. Soft's latest album, *Konfyans*(Trust), was released 15 December 2009 and the continued popularity of Soft and the nouvelle scène over time will show that this music has indeed marked a shifting identity for Guadeloupean and Créole audiences.

CHAPTER 5

Life After Zouk: Créolité through Music

Throughout this thesis, I have emphasized the concept of post-zouk musical trends, but there are two important points that must be considered when discussing this “post-zouk” era. The first is that despite all of the new music that has been produced in the Antilles over the past five to ten years, zouk is still the predominant popular genre being performed in Guadeloupe. The radio stations in Guadeloupe and Paris (RFO Radio Guadeloupe, Tropique FM, Espace FM) continue to play zouk, and if asked, any Guadeloupean will identify zouk as the most popular type of music in Guadeloupe. By referring to this music as “post-zouk,” I do not ignore the continued popularity of zouk, but rather I emphasize the fact that for the first time since zouk’s conception, other popular music styles are achieving comparable success.

It is the emergence of this new musical aesthetic, one that centers on a pan-Caribbean sound and a reverence for roots, which illustrates that zouk is not the end-all popular genre of the Antilles: There is a life after zouk in the Antillean popular music industry.

This post-zouk trend should come as no surprise; as Caribbean music is constantly evolving and performers create new genres to suit their needs. I hope to have chronicled this dynamic process in Guadeloupe in the preceding chapters. We have seen music evolve in Guadeloupe with the changing notions of tradition and authenticity of *gwo ka*: each generation redefined the genre to fit their needs, and in turn redefined authenticity in

Guadeloupean music. It seems fitting that a core value of Guadeloupean identity is Creoleness, or Créolité, the dynamic process of hybridity that helped form Creole culture; it is hybridity, paired with authenticity that artists are embracing today, and by extension they are promoting Créolité with their music.

The burgeoning careers of the members of Soft and the increase in popularity of new artists with a similar aesthetic imply that la nouvelle scène will continue to flourish in Guadeloupe. However, one question on audiences' minds, as illustrated by *Afrique* magazine is, "Will the post-zoukers manage to expand their audience, to Europe and Africa?"²³³ Already, from the diverse audience at Mizik Factory, it is clear that this style is not only being consumed by Guadeloupeans in France, but also by culturally-conscious members of the French middle class. Currently, however, it is unclear if these new groups will grow more popular among the French or become popular in Africa or the United States. Kassav's success throughout the Caribbean, Africa, and North America cemented their superstardom and legitimized Antillean popular music as an art form capable of international popularity; if new artists were able to achieve this success, it would mark a monumental moment in Antillean musical history and reinforce the idea that there is life after zouk for the Antillean music industry.

However, reaching an international audience should not be the only measure of the genre's success. The only Antillean group to achieve this level of popularity is Kassav'; saying it is a rare occurrence would be an understatement. If Soft was to follow suit, it would make them iconic in their own light, allowing them to emerge from the shadow of Kassav' that has shrouded the industry for the past thirty years.

²³³ "Les post-zoukeurs parviendront-ils à élargir leur audience, à l'Europe et l'Afrique?"

Regardless of this measure of success, these groups are successful in the sense that they speak to and for their Guadeloupean audience. They address their local audience in a way that an international audience would not pick up on, but despite this factor the music is still accessible because of its inherently appealing sound. Although they embrace locality in their lyrics and music, groups like Soft could conceivably become internationally successful because of their cosmopolitan sound. A spectator at a Soft concert interviewed by Afrique Magazine commented on this when she said, "There are things in this music that speak to us, as Antilleans, but it is still cosmopolitan."²³⁴

Most important, by speaking to a specifically Guadeloupean audience, in a sense, la nouvelle scene artists are heeding the Creolists' call for a return of orality. Jean Bernabé's *Eloge de la Créolité* (In praise of Creoleness) laments the lack of integration of oral tradition into their neocolonial culture, and claims that this loss of orality has contributed to the alienation of Creole people.²³⁵ Bernabé and supporters Créolité, Creolists, believe that some aspects of commercialized Creole culture have preserved the essence of Creoleness, but while being labeled as doudouist or folklorist.²³⁶ In *Eloge de la Créolité*, Bernabé et al. label zouk as one of these commercialized preservatives of Creole culture;²³⁷ to them, zouk retained the essence of Creoleness, but was more of a hazy reflection than a true vestige of Creole culture.

²³⁴ "On trouve dans cette musique des choses qui nous parlent à nous, Antillais, mais qui restent cosmopolites." Afrique Magazine no. 270 Mars 2008.

²³⁵ Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, *Eloge de la Créolité*, édition bilingue français / anglais texte traduit par M.B. Taleb-Khyar (Paris : Gallimard, 1993) 97.

²³⁶ Doudouist and folklorist are terms used to describe a commodified version of Creole culture. These terms commonly denote aspects of Creole culture that have been modified to suit the tourism industry and are centered on the idea of Guadeloupeans entertaining the French with their perceived exotic culture.

²³⁷ Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, *Eloge de la Créolité*, édition bilingue français / anglais texte traduit par M.B. Taleb-Khyar (Paris : Gallimard, 1993) 97.

Creolists call for a return to orality, but with a burst into modernity.²³⁸ In their eyes, Creole culture has been preserved long enough, and it is time to establish a new literature, but one that takes roots in the oral tradition. Rather than simply returning to orality, writers and artists must speak to the Creole people, but in a modern way. According to Soft frontman, Fred Deshayes, this is exactly what contemporary Guadeloupean popular musicians are striving for: “What I want is...to give something new, but I start FROM the heritage. With everything I do, I start from that, the heritage, and my motivation is to express myself, but in a modern way!”²³⁹

It is in response to this demand for a modern convention of orality that la nouvelle scène can thrive. These artists are combining the topicality of oral traditions with aspects of traditional music, but updating them through a pan-Caribbean sound in popular music; it is this medium of expression that makes their message available on a large scale and in a modern way. Essentially, la nouvelle scène embodies Créolité. Artists like Soft are promoting Creoleness through the embrace of hybridity, Kwéyòl, and orality, while embodying the necessary “burst into modernity” that the doctrine asks for.

²³⁸ Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, *Eloge de la Créolité*, édition bilingue français / anglais texte traduit par M.B. Taleb-Khyar (Paris : Gallimard, 1993) 102.

²³⁹ Interview, Author with Fred Deshayes.

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