

RESISTING ACCULTURATION: ORAL LITERATURE FROM AFRICA TO THE
CARIBBEAN IN THE WORKS OF SUZANNE COMHAIRE-SYLVAIN, LEOPOLD
SÉDAR SENGHOR, ABDOULAYE SADJI AND EXCILIA SALDAÑA

by

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(Under the Direction of Lesley Feracho)

ABSTRACT

My thesis studies strategies of resistance to acculturation in Francophone and Hispanophone Caribbean oral literature. By using Edouard Glissant's notion of *contre-poétique*, I will compare *Le Roman de Bouqui* by Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, a collection of Haitian tales, with a collection of Senegalese tales: *La Belle Histoire de Leuk-le-Lièvre* by Léopold Sédar Senghor and Abdoulaye Sadjí. I will also analyze the dynamics between ethnography and literature in the process of resistance to acculturation by using Jossiana Arroyo's theory of *Travestismos Culturales* in studying *Kele Kele*: an adaptation of Afro-Cuban myths by Excilia Saldaña. My goal is to show how African oral tradition provides strategies for resistance to acculturation in the Caribbean through the development of oral literature and how these authors have reworked oral material to address distinct social and political issues relevant to their countries and historical context.

INDEX WORDS: resistance, acculturation, oral literature, Spanish Caribbean,
ethnography, literature, French Caribbean, Excilia Saldaña,
Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Abdoulaye
Sadji.

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INTRODUCTION

This study will look at Caribbean oral literature as a tool for resistance to acculturation through the analysis of three written adaptations of oral texts. In order to understand the process of adaptation of oral texts from Africa to the Caribbean, as well as the role of social sciences in the preservation of oral tradition and literature, I will conduct a comparative analysis of *Le Roman de Bouqui* (1940) a collection of Haitian tales by Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain and *La Belle Histoire de Leuk-le-Lièvre* (1953) collection of Senegalese tales by Leopold Sédar Senghor and Abdoulaye Sadji. I will also analyze the relationship between ethnography and literature in the process of resistance to acculturation in *Kele Kele* (1987) a collection of five Afro-Cuban myths. My purpose in analyzing these collections of stories is to show how African oral tradition was used to resist acculturation in the Caribbean through oral literature and how these authors have reworked oral material while putting it into writing in order to address distinct social and political issues relevant to their countries and historical context.

The word acculturation however has many definitions. I will use that of Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski in his introduction to Fernando Ortiz's *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azucar*. Malinowski condemns the use of the word acculturation since according to him, it has an ethnocentric connotation:

The word *acculturation* contains a number of definite and undesirable etymological implications. It is an ethnocentric word with a moral connotation. [...]. The word *acculturation* implies, because of the

preposition *ad* with which it starts, the idea of a *terminus ad quem*.¹ The “uncultured” is to receive the benefits of “our culture”; it is he who must change and become converted into “one of us” (lviii).

Malinowski argues that the contact between two or more cultures, and more precisely between western and non-western cultures, results in a loss of the non-western cultures (often seen as “uncultured” by the dominant discourse) who absorb the dominant western cultural identity. My argument, however, tries to prove how oral tradition enabled resisting this absorption of western culture, thus creating in the Caribbean a new cultural expression. Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, who was Malinowski’s student at Yale University, elaborated on this definition of acculturation. Ortiz argues that the word *transculturation* expresses better the dynamics of cultural encounters:

Acculturation is used to describe the process of transition from one culture to another, and its manifold social repercussion. But *tranculturation* is a more fitting term. I have chosen the word *tranculturation* to express the highly varied phenomena that have come about in Cuba as a result of the extremely complex transmutations of culture that have taken place here, and without a knowledge of which it is impossible to understand the evolution of the Cuban folk...(98).

Consequently, the word *acculturation*, in contrast with Ortiz’s *transculturation*, will be understood in this study as the process of the formation of a new culture along that carries with it a loss of the original culture. Ortiz’s *transculturation* focuses on the result of the cultural mixing rather than the process of loss which precedes the formation of a hybrid culture. And yet, my main argument seeks to prove that oral tradition was used as a tool

¹ *Terminus ad quem*: Latin expression meaning a finishing point

to counter this process of acculturation. The slaves fostered the survival of their culture even though it was ultimately transformed.

The terms and concepts most relevant to this study of resistance to acculturation are: *oral tradition*, *oral literature*, *oral texts*, *tale*, and *myth*. In the study of societies and their literatures social sciences play an important role. There has been an academic debate in the last two decades particularly regarding the study of oral material, particularly regarding the main issue was of finding a unanimous definition of specific terms or phrases. As a result, there are multiple definitions for each term. According to Ruth Finnegan, an anthropologist who has specialized in oral traditions traditions, the lack of unanimity gives us more elements to help constitute our own understanding of the terms in question:

The proliferation of terms may be healthier than one closed system, for their mutual struggles contribute not just to self-regarding academic dispute, but towards what terms are surely ultimately for: enhance understanding of the world and open up new insight into areas which, we have to recognize are *not* already pre-defined for us. (22)

One example is the oxymoron oral literature which seems to be made up of opposites since “oral” implies what is spoken and heard and “literature” what is written and read. However, it presents words that are combined under the generic term oral literature because of the nature of the sources of the written text. According to Isidore Okpewho, the term oral literature means “literature delivered by word of mouth” (3). In regards to this definition, one can consider oral tradition as an entity that encompasses oral literature in the sense that it represents the literature, the practices, the beliefs and

cultural system in its entirety, passed on by word of mouth from generation to generation. And just like oral literature, the oral tradition is not a fixed material; it can undergo changes and/or alterations over the years. (Okpewho 4)

Oral literature can be divided in two subcategories; the sacred and the secular. These categories do not need to be mutually exclusive: a clear separation of genres serves the purposes of a western look at holistic civilizations which need to consider religion and culture as separate entities to be able to define literary genres affiliated to it. In this study, I will define the sacred oral literature as tied to traditional and religious beliefs; therefore, initiatory songs and tales as well as religious myths are types of sacred oral literature. Most of it is transmitted to people who are being initiated to a craft or to a new stage of their life, and generally, the knowledge is kept secret by the elderly until the time of initiation comes for the younger members of the community. (Hampâté Bâ 209)

The secular oral literature which is the most popular one is composed of tales, epics, proverbs, chants, riddles, puns and tongue twisters which can be delivered by professional storytellers but also anyone within the community. Its transmission is not reserved to sacred ceremonies but it is usually completed on special occasions such as evening gatherings, work in the field, familial celebrations etc.

The texts I analyze in this study correspond to two genres of oral literature: tale and myth. While there are different categories of tales their classification has always been problematic because of a disagreement about the groups into which the stories should be divided. At first, there is a distinction between animal tales, human tales and fairy tales.

However, this classification is also problematic since animals behave like humans in most of the tales, and we can find fairies in both animal and human tales. There is also a distinction according to the content of the tale, whether it is didactic or moralistic. A third method classifies the tales per characteristics; such as trickster tales, dilemma tales, historical tales, tales of origins and explanatory tales. (Okpewho 181)

Consequently, this study will not categorize tales according to their content, characters or characteristics. Given the complexity of the categorization of tales, it would be more adequate to define each tale according to its characteristics instead of separating them per category. In other words, each tale calls for a specific definition according to the elements which compose it. For instance a tale can cast animal characters and also contain historical elements of a given culture while bearing moral lessons. The presence of all these features combined in a single tale, shows its multifunctionality. They in fact introduce children to the practice of their customs and traditions while increasing the capacity of the storytellers to memorize which sharpens the intellect. Tales help the listener to understand how the world is viewed by a given culture and it also dispenses lessons of wisdom and morals to the audience.

Another genre of oral literature which is relevant to this work is the myth. It essentially fulfills the same tasks as the tales and is defined by Okpewho as: “A tale in which gods or divinities recognized by a community of people (not just fairies or ordinary spirits), are the protagonists and which is therefore thought to have a sacred, serious and authoritative character” (181). Most of the time, myths are not told to entertain; like tales, they explain the origin of a natural or cosmic phenomenon or the first

acts of humankind. They reflect the world view of the culture they belong to, as we will see in the second chapter in the case of the Yoruba myths.

From a literary point of view, tales and myths create an imaginary world full of allegories of human condition. They use animals, supernatural creatures and/or caricaturized humans as personifications of good, evil, wisdom, intelligence, courage etc. they consolidates the group and provide the members with a common identity. Most of the tales and myths that will be analyzed in the third and fourth chapters are explanatory tales which are defined by Okpewho as “A story that sets out primarily to explain the origin of or a whole range of things or ideas within a community’s environment and experience” (203). This is why a close look into the hidden meanings behind the characters and the plots of the tales will reveal a very complex world where historical, social, political, economic and also racial dynamics play a central role in the formation of a cultural identity. When dealing with resistance to acculturation, scholars such as Comhaire-Sylvain, Senghor, Sadji and Saldaña were fully aware of the fact that the culture of their people as well as their history and struggle which had been silenced by the dominant voice had to be engraved in their memories and that of the future generations to value their origins and define their cultural identity.

The last concept relevant to this analysis is the term “oral texts”, which is used to refer to a group of words forming a coherent ensemble; the message it conveys has to be transmitted orally for the text to be an oral text and not a written one. Indeed, the word “text” does not mean that it has to ultimately be written, as observed by Karin Barber:

A text is a tissue of words. The term comes from the Latin *texere*, meaning literally to weave, join together, plait or braid; and therefore, to construct,

fabricate, build or compose. [...] People put words together to make a mark, to leave a trace. They do this orally as well as in writing. [...] writing is not what confers textuality. (1)

Throughout this study, the term “oral text” will therefore be used to refer to the oral material collected by anthropologist, ethnographers and other investigators in their study of cultures and preservation of oral tradition.

A work dealing with oral tradition and oral literature cannot ignore the important contribution of social sciences such as that of anthropology and ethnography to the understanding of societies where culture and knowledge is transmitted orally. According to Barber, anthropology recognizes that studying the oral text is crucial to the understanding of a culture:

Anthropology has always had an intuition, sometimes an uneasy one that verbal texts have the capacity to shed light, in a way nothing else can, on the inner life of societies. Locally-produced texts, composed and transmitted according to people’s own conventions, in their own language, encapsulating their own concerns, do seem to speak as if from “within” (2).

As Barber suggested, looking into the inner life of societies through their texts gives voice to the subject of study. However, departing from the fact that anthropology is a western interpretation of other cultures and civilizations, the subjects of anthropological study have traditionally been represented as the “marginal” or the “other” whose culture was misunderstood and needed to be explored.

One way to see the cultural legacy of Africans in the Caribbean is through the presence of African oral tradition and literature within Caribbean literature. In point of fact, when confronted with the imposition of a foreign culture, the Africans whether in Africa or in the Americas, used distinct strategies to counter the threat of acculturation. I argue that there was resistance to acculturation through oral tradition at two different levels; first of all in times of slavery, engaged by the slaves themselves, who adapted African oral texts to their new environment and secondly during and after colonization by scholars who realized that it was crucial to put into writing these oral texts or use elements of oral tradition in their literary production in order to preserve their culture. While arguing this point, this study acknowledges the complexity of resistance strategies in the New World context as they gave birth to new forms of expression.

As a result, Caribbean oral literature is not an exact copy of the African oral texts because the latter have been transformed while they were being adapted in their adoptive societies. This complexity can be illustrated in two ways: firstly the transformation of the representation of Saints from Yorubaland to Cuba which led to the formation of the syncretic religion *Santería*; and secondly through the racialization of animal characters in Haitian tales where the slave reflects contradictory discourses of domination and resistance as a result of the New World context. I will demonstrate this through an analysis of Excilia Saldaña's *Kele Kele* and by comparing the Haitian text *Le Roman de Bouqui* by Comhaire-Sylvain with Wolof tales in *La Belle Histoire de Leuk-le-Lièvre* by Senghor and Sadjì. Therefore, this study will present the two Caribbean texts as written adaptations inspired by African oral texts but different from them.

The main objective of the comparison between African and Caribbean texts is to show that those who resisted and continued resisting acculturation articulated a response to the dominant discourse itself; it is a response to historical exclusion and oppression. As part of this response, the authors want to demonstrate the value of these African derived traditions and its adaptability. The message is for the society of the moment, for the dominant culture and for future generations to see that this oral tradition and its literature is part of Caribbean cultural identity and that even though the dominant culture has silenced the past, the incorporation of these voices in the national discourse is crucial to the understanding of the complexity of Caribbean cultural identity.

In fact, in order to understand Caribbean oral literature, it is necessary to relate it to African oral tradition which played a central role in the survival of African culture in the New World. When millions of Africans were imported into the Americas, their oral tradition, encapsulated in their memories, was the unique belonging they were able to take with them. Thus, it became a means of survival for slaves who found refuge in the only element that linked them to their homeland. As a result, Caribbean oral literature reflects the adaptation of African oral tradition and literature to the slave's life in the New World. Consequently, the analysis of the texts I have chosen will have a Caribbean focus. I will use the African texts as a comparative point to illustrate similarities but mostly discrepancies from one culture to another. This will not only show that African culture transformed itself and survived in the Caribbean, but it will also present the social and historical context in which this transformation occurred.²

² The African legacy in the Caribbean has been widely documented; among all the works cited in my bibliography please refer to these two entries for more information: Brathwaite, Edward K. "The African Presence in Caribbean Literature." *Daedalus*. 103.2 (1974): 73-109. Print.
Bastide, Roger. *African Civilisations in the New World*. New York, N.Y: Harper Torchbooks, 1972. Print.

This analysis will use two distinct but related theoretical frameworks: one will be used for the Haitian text and the other for the Cuban text. The analysis of Saldaña's *Kele Kele* will draw on Jossiana Arroyo's theory in *Travestismos Culturales: literatura y etnografía en Cuba y en Brasil* which deals with politics of identity in Cuba and Brazil. According to Arroyo, colonial studies, especially in the seventies, initiated the critical debate about the politics of identity in ex-slavocratic and colonized societies, by using ethnic groups, social class and gender as factors to determine the identity of the people of these countries. The contribution of feminist and post-colonial studies deepened the analysis by using race, gender and sexuality as relevant aspects for the definition of the cultural identity. (Arroyo 4)

Her theory of *travestismo cultural* tackles the same issues as the politics of identity and can be defined as the different strategies used by writers to represent the other or the marginalized in order to include them in the national discourse. In her book, she builds a bridge between ethnography and literature by analyzing and elaborating on Gilberto Freyre's *Luso-tropicalismo* and Fernando Ortiz's *transculturación* as two main theories that tried to define the *naciones mestizas* of Cuba and Brazil. Thus, her theory comes out of an analysis of slave societies, and arises from the strategies used to define the *masculine other* as well as the negotiation of his position within the society. This negotiation is comprised of discourses of *acercamiento*, *conciliación* and *subordinación* that Arroyo calls: *doble identificación*: "Aquí, los discursos de raza, género y sexualidad se manipulan, creando una "doble identificación". En esta "doble identificación" se articulan ambos discursos, el de acercamiento y conciliación, y el de la subordinación"

(20). This *doble identificación* is at the heart of the representation of the female protagonist Obba in Saldaña's text. The analysis of Saldaña's myth of Obba will reveal the navigation between multiple representations of the subject.

By building a bridge between social sciences and literature, Arroyo shows how ethnographic research served as a validation for the literary representations of the other not only in Ortiz and Freyre's literary work but also in numerous other Cuban and Brazilian texts. (7) In truth, these two countries were the last to abolish slavery in the Americas, thus the African element in their countries and cultures is significant and since defining the other was necessary to the integration of the distinct ethnic groups into the national discourse, Ortiz and Freyre's works included ethnographic researches about African cultures and their legacy to Cuba and Brazil. Therefore slavery is a key element in Arroyo's *Travestismos Culturales*. She notes that: "Aunque el *travestismo cultural* tiene las características de muchos modos de representación cultural y nacional, el hecho de que se dé como categoría en sociedades ex-esclavistas es de vital importancia" (36).

In addition, Arroyo's *travestismos culturales* seeks to link ethnography and literature as two crucial disciplines in the representation of cultural identity. However, by building a bridge between these two disciplines, Arroyo does not seek to restore Ortiz and Freyre's theories, rather to draw on them, underline their limitations, and supplement them. And yet, studying African cultures necessarily includes studying their oral tradition and representing the other's cultural identity involves a study of his/her original "texts" (in this case oral texts). Their "translation" into a new culture (which implies a written version of the oral texts) is seen by Arroyo as a mask of representation: "La máscara de la escritura en la que leo el travestismo cultural no sólo se erige como estrategia de dominio

sino que revela, además, la necesidad de unirse y perderse en el otro” (6). Thus, writing the oral texts not only reflects a power play between the writer and the storyteller, but it is also an attempt at a cultural and textual incorporation of the other into the national literature.

However, Arroyo argues that representing the other can be problematic: “La integración del cuerpo del otro en el discurso nacional, plantea el problema de la representación [...]. A esta estrategia de identificación con el otro, surge de los juegos de poder propios de la representación y es por esto que el cuerpo del otro se figura desde la raza, el género y la sexualidad” (5). The representation, which is carried out in terms of race, gender and sexuality, tends to produce a stereotypical image of the other.

Arroyo supports the idea that the other finds himself trapped in his fictional representation: “Si la representación es una forma de contener y transcender al otro, parecería que este otro queda plasmado en la ficción” (257). However, the other is also an agent in and against his stereotypical representation. While trying to navigate this marginalization; he/she constitutes an identity for himself/herself subordinated to his representation: “Es así como el sujeto de la escritura se “subordina” simbólicamente a la otredad para constituirse a sí mismo” (21). Therefore the *doble identificación* explains both the other’s entrapment and subordination as a result of his representation. This argument will also be relevant for the Haitian text where the representation of the slave in his oral literature is made of contradictory discourses.

Travestismos Culturales also tackles the issue of the dichotomy of orality versus writing as Arroyo draws from Walter Benjamin’s preoccupation about the disappearance of the storyteller to explain how literature and ethnography share a common path in the

work of Freyre and Ortiz.³ For Arroyo, Freyre and Ortiz link ethnography and literature just as Benjamin's storyteller links fiction and history. Thus, she sees the two disciplines as two components that are necessary to the understanding of oral culture as well as the writing of their oral texts.

As a result, the masterpieces of these two authors represent the crux of the ethnography/literature paradigm. Freyre's *Casa grande e Senzala* (1933) and Ortiz's *Contrapunteo cubano del Tabaco y del azúcar* (1940) are described as "parte de un proceso de reordenamiento del pasado que se cruza constantemente con la ficción" (Arroyo 40). Arroyo sees the ethnographic "truth" used by Freyre and Ortiz as a strategy to build an illusion of reliability and yet, ethnography embodies subjectivity as stated by Glen Bowman: "el sujeto antropológico [...] es una construcción específica del pensamiento occidental y, por tanto, forma parte de la ideología del colonialismo [...] y el colonialismo como parte importante del proyecto hegemónico europeo nunca ha sido un medio para entender otras culturas" (cited in Arroyo 35). Here Bowman condemns social sciences by explaining that the concept itself represents a western look at other civilizations. Even though Bowman's observation follows Arroyo's idea of representation of the other, it is important to look at ethnography as a science that is not totally objective, but whose importance lies not so much in objectivity as in its use as a tool to preserve part of the identity of disappearing oral cultures.

Arroyo's treatment of ethnography and literature for the definition of a national cultural identity will be used in my analysis of Excilia Saldaña's *Kele Kele* who works

³ According to Walter Benjamin, the storyteller—who talks about human condition from his own experience—is bound to disappear or at least be displaced, because of the new forms of narrating contemporary history (ethnography, history, media etc.). While these sciences seek exactitude through the faithful recompilation of data, and account of events, the storyteller draws from his memory which assembles elements and deduces facts. He forms a link between fiction and history. (Arroyo 39)

with both of these elements to incorporate racial and feminine voices in Cuban literary discourse. In addition, I will also draw on the analysis of the dichotomy of orality/writing which is an issue that arises when putting oral texts into writing oral texts. This will help draw attention to the distinct techniques used by Saldaña to reflect orality in written texts.

In the analysis of the Haitian texts *Le Roman de Bouqui*, I argue that the secular oral literature of the slave reflects two sides: the slave's internalization of racist stereotypes attributed to him by the master and an attempt to escape the position of the oppressed by using acts of subversion. These two elements combined might seem contradictory, but the complexity of the situation of the slave is exactly what makes it possible for the coexistence of contradictions within the same expression. Just as Arroyo's *Travestismos Culturales* argues that the *doble identificación* encompasses both the other's entrapment and subordination, the slave's discourse in the Haitian texts reflects both oppression and resistance.

This power struggle is described by Edouard Glissant in *Poétique de la Relation* when he defines the duality of the slave's counter discourse in his oral literature through the term *contre-poétique* or *poétique forcée*. He applies it specifically to the creole folktale: "Le conte créole est le détour emblématique par quoi, dans l'univers des Plantations, la masse des Martiniquais développait une poétique forcée (que nous appellerons contre-poétique), où se manifestait en même temps une impuissance à se libérer globalement et un acharnement à tenter de le faire"(412). As Glissant argues: the social environment described in the tales is the reflection of the daily life of the plantation slave. In this environment, the slave fails to entirely free himself from oppression as he recreates the stereotypes imposed upon him by the colonizer. However, it is through his

persistent attempts to gain freedom in his oral literature combined with his failures to liberate himself in reality, that he builds a new poetics which is as Glissant's counter-poetics suggests, the expression of the slave in reaction to his enslavement.

In fact, in a New World context, power is being negotiated; there is a struggle of competing discourses: that of the master and that of the slave. The slave's voice simultaneously reflects his situation of oppression through the discourse imposed on him by the master and his desire to escape that situation. One way to escape is through the acts of subversion performed in his tales. The notion of subversion represents strategies of resistance involving negotiation rather than domination or negation. The objective is to find a way to escape from oppression by playing with the limits and boundaries and transforming the imposed discourse. Subversion will be discussed at two distinct levels: firstly when the characters subvert the laws imposed by morality through the use of trickery, and secondly when the oppressed negotiate power by articulating a discourse which breaks with the pre-established order.

In *Histoire de la Sexualité*, Michel Foucault first underlined the tactical polyvalence of discourses in a relationship where power is being negotiated; "Il n'y a pas d'un côté le discours du pouvoir en face un autre qui s'oppose à lui. Les discours sont des éléments ou des blocs tactiques dans les champs des rapports de force; il peut y avoir des différents et même des contradictoires à l'intérieur d'une même stratégie" (134). As stated by Foucault, it is possible to see two sides of the same discourse contradict themselves. This does not prevent them from coexisting in the same sphere; their existence proves that the oppressed is starting to speak and form a counter-discourse as it seeks to address his issues and contradict the voice of the oppressor. Thus, the notion of

counter discourse can be understood as the moment in which the oppressed starts to express himself, this voice from within which he tries to clear away oppressive discourse as part of the process of redefining himself. The complexity of this situation is exactly what causes Foucault to define the counter-discourse not as a theory but rather as “a practical engagement in political struggle” (Deleuze and Foucault 209).

In 1972 when philosophers Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, discussed the links between the struggles of women, homosexuals, prisoners etc. to class struggle, as well as the relationship between theory, practice and power, Deleuze made an interesting observation regarding Foucault’s contribution to the notion of counter-discourse:

In my opinion, you were the first-in your books and in the practical sphere to teach us something absolutely fundamental: the indignity of speaking for others. We ridiculed representation and said it was finished, but we failed to draw the consequences of this "theoretical" conversion-to appreciate the theoretical fact that only those directly concerned can speak in a practical way on their own behalf. (209)

Here, Deleuze implies that speaking for others means taking away their voices. He agrees with Foucault by underlining that only those who were concerned could speak on their own behalf and negotiate this power struggle between the dominant discourse and the voice of the oppressed.

Following Foucault’s and Glissant’s arguments about the possible coexistence of contradictory voices in the discourse of resistance, I will examine the two distinct voices perceptible in the Haitian folktales of *Le Roman de Bouqui* by Comhaire-Sylvain and compare them to similar tales in *La Belle Histoire de Leuk-le-Lièvre* by Senghor and

Sadji in order to demonstrate the similarities and the differences in the Haitian tales as a result of the New World context. The comparison will reveal that important features of the African stories changed in the New World context to meet the realities of life in the plantations. While in Africa the tales explicitly sought to strengthen the community and give moral lessons, the Caribbean versions reflected individualism and immoral behaviors. These changes find their explanation in the counter-poetics of the slave, the analysis of which will prove resistance to acculturation through both the adaptation of these tales and their preservation by Comhaire-Sylvain.

The authors of the texts I examine are part of those scholars and writers who have understood the importance of cultural preservation and tried to carry out this task by incorporating oral texts into written collections of tales. Sadji and Sedar Senghor, for example, are advocates of cultural preservation. They fought acculturation in Senegal by introducing African oral literature into the educative system, allowing young francophone Africans to have access to both sides of their cultures. In her essay “Senghor et Sadji pédagogues: l’oralité africaine au service de l’écrit français”, Veronique Corinus argues that Senghor and Sadji foresaw the need to include the African element in the education of young francophone Africans in order to avoid acculturation:

Avec La belle histoire de Leuk-le-lièvre, Senghor et Sadji espèrent forger un outil de désaliénation. Leur manuel est conçu comme une défense et illustration de la culture africaine par laquelle ils montrent, non pas tant au colonisateur mais aux Africains eux même à qui ils s’adressent, leur héritage culturel et la richesse de leur identité. (329)

In fact, *La Belle Histoire* tries to counter acculturation by using the language of the colonizer as a tool to keep disseminating the traditional word among young Francophone Africans. “Il s’agit en même temps d’adapter cet enseignement au milieu africain et à la psychologie profonde de l’enfant noir. C’est à ce double souci que répond notre nouvelle méthode” (Senghor and Sadjì 1).⁴ The book is a didactic tool, created by Senghor and Sadjì for children of elementary school. Its purpose is to teach French to young francophone Africans through the use of their traditional culture.

In effect, the education Senghor and Sadjì received from the colonial school threatened part of their cultural identity; they could not identify with *nos ancêtres les gaulois* and had certainly experienced the uneasiness of identifying with French culture.⁵ Thus, they tried to bypass the assimilationist objectives of the French colonial educational system by building a bridge between French language and African oral literature: “Cependant Senghor et Sadjì, détournent les desseins ouvertement assimilationnistes poursuivis par l’administration coloniale [...] En rompant avec un enseignement inapte et des programmes absurdes dont l’inanité est tout entière contenue dans le fameux « Nos ancêtres les Gaulois »” (328).

According to Corinus, Senghor and Sadjì made a symbolic shift from assimilation to cultural métissage through *La Belle Histoire*. (26) Sadjì understood the concept of cultural métissage from his personal experience. His father was a religious chief who converted several people to Islam and he went to Koranic school before he went to the

⁴ The double preoccupation Senghor and Sadjì refer to in this quote finds its first illustration in the bilingual names of the characters which includes both the Wolof and French word for all the animals mentioned in the stories.

⁵ *Nos ancêtres les gaulois* is used in a pejorative way in order to refer to the French education received by young Africans from the francophone colonies. In history class, they were taught that their ancestors were that of the French people, the Gauls. This expression represents a symbol of assimilation and acculturation through colonial education.

French school at the age of eleven. These two aspects of his education are greatly reflected in his literary work where he acknowledges the importance of opening African cultures to other civilizations. He was one of the first Senegalese teachers of the country and taught during colonization in many regions of Senegal (most teachers were French). According to Senghor, who had a profound respect for Sadji's contribution to the Négritude movement:

Abdoulaye Sadji appartient, comme Birago Diop, au groupe des jeunes gens, qui, dans les années 1930, lança le mouvement de la Négritude. Abdoulaye Sadji n'a pas beaucoup théorisé sur la Négritude : il a fait mieux, il a agi par l'écriture. Il fut l'un des premiers jeunes Sénégalais, entre les deux guerres mondiales, à combattre la thèse de l'assimilation et la fausse élite des « évolués ». Il a, pour cela, multiplié, au-delà des discussions, articles et conférences” (Sadji 58).

As a fervent protector of African art and culture Sadji fought against acculturation and contributed to the Negritude movement through the publication of numerous articles about the social problem and the consequences of colonization on Senegalese society. He created in Senegal the first radio station with programs in local languages and was also a political activist who fought cultural assimilation and campaigned for the independence of his country. He was conscious of the irreversible mixture of French and Senegalese cultures, as a result of colonization. Thus, he advocated for a cultural métissage—the harmonious coexistence of these two cultural influences with an emphasis on Senegalese culture. (Sadji 56)

Senghor, one of the founding fathers of the Négritude movement, was also one of the most important figures of Francophone Africa. He was a poet and essayist who became the first president of Senegal. Born in a sérère village named Joal; he spent his childhood in an environment he often described in his poetry. In *Les Écrivains Noirs de Langue Française: Naissance d'une Littérature*, Lylian Kesteloot highlights Senghor's poetry about his attachment to his native land as an imaginary "retour aux sources ancestrales" (176). The traditional setting in which he grew up is the basis of his poetics and his literary work represents a mixture of his traditional African culture with the one he acquired through his French education. Both he and Sadjí experienced the influence of the French and Senegalese cultures and *La Belle Histoire* represents a bridge between these two elements.

However, despite their commitment to include the wealth of African oral tradition in the educative system of francophone Africa, there is an absence of orality in the narration of *La Belle Histoire*: "En effet, les contes présentés par Senghor et Sadjí, en passant de l'oralité à l'écriture, perdent tous les traits caractéristiques de la première. Le texte accède à un nouveau statut que nous appellerons l'oralité tierce [...]"⁶ (Corinus 331). As emphasized by Corinus, *La Belle Histoire* does not include features of an oral performance; there is no implied audience, the stories are clearly designed to be read and not told. The narrator does not directly address the reader nor does he appear in the middle of the story like Comhaire-Sylvain's narrator in *Le Roman de Bouqui*. There is no

⁶ "Ces différentes formes d'oralité tierce n'ont pas de rapport direct avec la performance initiale, spécifique et individualisée, mais avec un ensemble de contées renouvelées au cours du temps grâce auxquelles on a pris connaissance de la tradition orale." (Corinus 331)

mention of the sources or an agent of oral tradition such as the griot for example.⁷ The songs are the only trace of orality in the book, and the names of the animals in Wolof attached to their French translation carry didactic functions as they teach and enrich the vocabulary of the student in both French and Wolof. Their approach was different from that of Comhaire-Sylvain in *Le Roman de Bouqui*, who, as an anthropologist, was concerned with citing her sources and explaining the origins of the stories and their importance for Haitian cultural identity.

In fact, Comhaire-Sylvain was the first black female anthropologist of Haiti. She was, just as Fernando Ortiz, the a student of Malinowski who encouraged her to research Haitian folklore from a Caribbean perspective in opposition to the European one. (Gyssels1) She has written several collections of tales included *Le Roman de Bouqui*: a collection of fifty folktales that she collected from Haitian peasants and translated from Haitian Creole into French. According to Comhaire-Sylvain, *Le Roman de Bouqui* is more than a collection of tales, since culturally speaking it reflects the ideas and aspirations of the Haitian popular mind: “Le Roman de Bouqui est un monument national où l’esprit populaire a laissé inconsciemment la trace de ses idées et de ses aspirations” (11). In effect, even though these folktales find their origins outside the island, Comhaire-Sylvain stresses that the book is purely Haitian because it reflects the adoption and adaptation of foreign folktales by Haitian slaves who constituted through this process

⁷ In *La Belle Histoire*, the authors use stories they have heard during their childhood, but do not refer to their oral sources unlike *Les Contes d’Amadou Koumba* by Birago Diop and *Soundjata ou l’Épopée Mandingue*, by Djibril Tamsir Niane; two major adaptations of oral narratives in Senegalese literature. In these two books, the authors sources was the *griot*, an oral agent. Diop and Niane gave the credit of their stories to two *griots* respectively Amadou Koumba and Mamadou Kouyaté who represented oral tradition and conferred validity to their stories. In truth, Diop and Niane invented those oral agents for the purpose of rehabilitating the importance of oral tradition through writing by enhancing the role of the *griot*. In *La Belle Histoire*, there is no such thing, the authors used the material but did not refer to their oral sources.

their own oral literature: “*Le Roman de Bouqui* dans sa forme actuelle est profondément nôtre” (11).

In fact, by identifying Haitian peasants as her informants, she introduces a new element in the transmission of the original tales; the adaptation of the African, European and West Indian folktales which once chosen and transformed by the slave in the island, became Haitian. She explains that twenty five out of fifty tales of the collection are from West African and/or Bantu cultures and that five out of fifty are probably from Europe. Thus, the reason for this national appropriation of the folktales lies in the conscious or unconscious selection by the Haitian slave of certain tales rather than others and the changes undergone by the original versions during their adaptation. Comhaire-Sylvain supports this point when she states:

Toute diffusion est basée sur un point de contact dans les goûts ou dans les idées. Il n’y a jamais transmission intégrale de folklore d’un pays à un autre. Un peuple ne retient d’un autre que ce qui lui plaît, qui correspond à ses tendances intimes. Dès le début nous trouvons donc quelque chose d’haïtien : le choix des thèmes et des motifs, nous avons vu que dans le cycle du lièvre il y avait eu préférence pour les aventures où paraissait l’hyène. (11)

Thus, the fact that tales from the “cycle du lièvre” or adventures of the hare were preferred to other tales shows the importance of the choice of the characters in the slave’s adaptation of African tales. When the tales were adapted in the island, the slave used their form and content but subverted their message in order to construct a counter-discourse which reflects his social environment but also his voice which articulates his desires and

his aspirations. Using the allegory of the *nègre bossale* and the *nègre créole*, will allow me to read the Haitian tales as the slave's counter-poetics.

The *bossale* and the creole are represented in *Le Roman de Bouqui* by two animal characters, Bouqui and Ti Malice, the main protagonists whose series of adventures are the focus of the collection. Bouqui and Malice. In the stories, Bouqui and Malice are always looking for something to eat and their quest involves stealing from humans, killing the weaker animals and fooling the stronger ones. In it Bouqui (the hyena) is the big and dumb character who always ends up being trapped while Malice (the hare) is cunning and gets out of any situation thanks to his intelligence. While *Le Roman de Bouqui* focuses on Bouqui's adventures, *La Belle Histoire* is centered on Leuk's experiences. Leuk is a hare and Malice, whose identity is quite problematic, corresponds to a half human half rabbit character with a behavior which mirrors in many ways that of the West African hare. I will compare these two protagonists to Bouki-the-hyena and Leuk-the-hare in *La Belle Histoire*, which is also a series of adventures of these two animal characters, in order to show how the transformation of the characters from one continent to another reflect the slave's counter-poetics.

The Cuban text, *Kele Kele* by Excilia Saldaña is also a collection of stories, more precisely a poetic recreation of Afro-Cuban myths with Yoruba-derived deities called *orisha* as main protagonists. The book comprises five myths that Saldaña adapted by using both poetry and prose for the form. Through the use of numerous rhetorical figures and genres of African oral literature to accompany the narration, Saldaña tried to give an illusion of oral performance even though the text was written and also proposed a

different approach of these religious texts. She presented them as literature rather than sacred texts.

The book was published in 1987, twenty eight years after the Cuban Revolution. However, Saldaña still deals with problems of social, racial, gender and political issues addressed by the revolution that promised more than it achieved. She also tried to contribute to the national discourse by underlining the importance to include Afro-Cuban women into the Cuban literary scene. In fact, the nineteen eighties were an important moment in Cuban history: in 1980, Fidel Castro opened the Mariel port in West Havana to any vessel that would accept Cuban emigrants. During that time thousands of Cubans with varying relationships with the Cuban State left for the United States. He also loosened Cuba's ties with the Soviet Union by refusing to follow the economic changes—*Perestroika* and *Glasnost*—that were taking place in the Soviet Union during the late nineteen eighties. At that time, Afro-Cuban culture was often used to represent the new Cuban cultural identity since it symbolized a “more equal” society which allowed the expression of previously marginalized cultures. (Bethell 113-114)

Although these acts sought to include Afro-Cubans into the national discourse, they were seen as examples of “folkloric propaganda” because among all the elements that constituted Afro-Cuban culture, the music, the rituals, the myths and the gastronomy were the ones that were promoted the most, showing the folkloric side of it. This not only favored a superficial approach to the culture but it also hindered a deeper understanding of Afro-Cuban cultural expression. As Saldaña noted, her reason for writing *Kele Kele* was not to enhance the folkloric aspects of the texts, but rather to present a contemporary

way to experience and comprehend the depth of the African legacy to Cuban culture.

(Bettelheim and Ortiz 127)

As an award-winning Afro-Cuban poet who wrote short stories and children books; Saldaña was well known for her use of poetry in her works of prose. This blending of genres is illustrated in *Kele Kele*. (DeCosta-Willis 250) As a result, in addition to the slave's attempt to preserve his culture by adapting African oral literature in the New World, the concept strategy of resistance to acculturation in all its complexity can also be applied to the work of these scholars and writers who made it possible for present generations to have access to these texts and be able to study the historical, social and cultural messages they carry and counter discourses they present.

In order to provide a better understanding of my argument of resistance to acculturation through oral tradition, this study will be comprised of four chapters. The first chapter deals with the nature and position of oral tradition in pre-colonial Africa by presenting oral tradition as an intrinsic part of African cultural expression. Two societies will be used as illustrations: the Yoruba and Wolof societies which will be relevant to the analysis of the Haitian and Cuban texts in chapters three and four. The social structure of the Wolof and Yoruba societies will help establish the relevance of oral tradition and the importance of oral texts in these societies.

The second chapter is a historical background of the Yoruba legacy in Cuban culture and the racial dynamics between the *bossale* and the creole in Haitian secular oral literature. These two themes are relevant to the analysis of the texts in chapters three and four as it depicts the societies where these tales and myths have been adapted. Looking into the influence of Yoruba culture in Cuba will show how religion became one of the

main vectors of cultural preservation in Cuban society. In addition, this overview of the racial dynamics in the secular oral literature of Haiti will help me explain the racial struggle in a slavocratic society not only between the master and the slave but also among the slaves. The consequences of which, are reflected in the oral literature analyzed in the third chapter.

The third chapter proposes a comparative study of *Le Roman de Bouqui* by Comhaire-Sylvain and *La Belle Histoire de Leuk-le-Lièvre* by Senghor and Sadji. Following Glissant and Foucault's theories I argue that the slave articulates a counter-poetics in his tales in reaction to his situation. Thus, his stories are used as an outlet where his aspirations and desires can be fulfilled without restriction. This chapter also reflects the complexity of resistance as the slave conveys contradictory messages in his tales, of both oppression and resistance, as a reaction to his struggle.

The last chapter examines the dichotomy orality/writing in Excilia Saldaña's *Kele Kele* in order to show how an author can rework oral material while putting it into writing to give an illusion of an oral performance. In this chapter, I propose a new term: the orality-writer, who can be defined as the storyteller of modern times who tells stories on paper but uses rhetorical figures in order to reflect orality in her writing. In *Kele Kele*, the story entitled "Obba" will be analyzed as a bridge between ethnography and literature seeking to include the voice of Afro-Cubans and women in the Cuban national and cultural identity.

CHAPTER 1

Pre-colonial Africa: oral tradition and oral literature

This chapter examines the importance of oral tradition and oral literature in African societies before the European colonization by focusing on the organization of Wolof and Yoruba societies. Since literature is linked to social systems. A brief review of the structure of these two societies is necessary to the understanding of their literature. This will not only explain the relationship between oral tradition and the expression of African culture, it will also help understand what kind of literature was transplanted in the New World and which aspects were adapted rather than others.

Wolof society is based on a hierarchical order which attributes to each member a given function. According to the group in which one was born, one bears the family name of his clan and is entitled by birth to practice the profession attributed to its group. This order is prevalent in other West African societies such as the Mandinka, Bambara and the Soninké for instance. The structure follows a vertical pattern and is based on the formation of social groups following the surnames, socio-political ideologies and professional activities. The society can be divided in three parts: the *géer* (the free man), the *ñeño* (the client) and the *jaam* (slave or servant). The *géers* are at the top of the social hierarchy; they are farmers but are also the ones that occupy political positions within the society. The *ñeño* are a professional class of artists and craftsmen in close relationship with the *géer*. They are specialized in a specific craft and are the ones who make the tools that the *guéer* use for their farm work. Most *jaam* are *géer* that have been captured in times of war while others have been purchased as slaves at the market. However, this

form of slavery differs from that of the transatlantic slave trade. Once captured or purchased, the *jaam* becomes progressively part of the family. (Traoré 57- 58) As Traoré notes:

Avec le temps, les esclaves (*jon*) [*or jaam* in Wolof] finissent par s'intégrer à la famille de leurs maîtres à un tel point que leur statut réel n'est connu que des personnes directement concernées. De nos jours, la catégorie sociale des *jon* a très peu incidence sur le système social. C'est seulement en cas de conflit majeur que l'on rappelle à tel ou tel ancien esclave son origine peu glorieuse, lui signifiant ainsi de faire preuve de modestie. (58 brackets added)

Even though *jaam* means servant or slave, his status in the society is far different from that of the slave in the New World.

The main economic activities in Wolof society were the exchanges of goods and services between the *ñeño* and the *guéer*. The latter pays for the services of the *ñeño* by providing him with cattle and various provisions. We can name different groups of *ñeño*: the blacksmith, the weaver, the hunter, the jeweler and the cobbler. (Traoré 59, Hâmpaté Bâ 206). All of these groups divided by surname and professional activity ; mastered specific oral material. The oral texts that are used in preparation and during their craft belong to the sacred oral literature; it is not known by everyone and requires a certain context for its use. Those in possession of this knowledge have the obligation to respect truth and avert lies.

In societies where the transmission of knowledge is oral, lying is one of the worst crimes:

D'une façon générale, la tradition africaine a horreur du mensonge. [...] Mais l'interdit rituel du mensonge frappe plus particulièrement tous les « officiants » [...] à tous les degrés, à commencer par le père de famille qui est sacrificateur ou l'officiant de sa famille, en passant par le forgeron, le tisserand ou l'artisan traditionnel— l'exercice du métier étant une activité sacrée, comme nous le verrons plus loin. (Hâmpaté Bâ 199)

As explained in the introduction, the sacred oral literature can be used in the context of an initiation or during a practice that requires magical and religious formulas. For example, in his essay “La Tradition Vivante” Ahmadou Hâmpaté Bâ refers to the traditional blacksmith as “Le Maître du Feu” or master of fire. He explains that the craft of the blacksmith requires a ritual know-how involving purification and appropriate clothing before he starts working in his forge. During his work, the blacksmith pronounces specific words as he touches each tool and establishes communication between his hands and the tools. In the meantime, the apprentice watches silently the master of fire work with the metals. He will be taught progressively all the secrets knowledge of the profession.

The craft of the blacksmith requires an extensive knowledge of the elements of nature and this knowledge is only transmitted orally within the members of the same group, from the blacksmith to, his apprentice; the future blacksmith. Other crafts also have their specific rituals and knowledge transmitted orally. Each profession constitutes a school of apprenticeship, sometimes involving initiation to magical and religious practices. Some aspects of their craft were sworn to secrecy, where the members of the group could not reveal these secrets to those of other groups. The notion of castes was

created out of this secrecy in each profession. Castes were initially groups of people who exerted sacred functions in their society, but the importance of secrecy regarding the practice of their craft prevented marriages with members of other groups of professions. Unfortunately, in the present days, some groups still try to carry on the tradition of refusing to marry outside their caste even though the pre-colonial settings have changed. (Hâmpaté Bâ 211)

The socio-professional activities within the Wolof society were not limited to the act of carrying out a given task; it also represented the identity of the craftsman and his group. As Hâmpaté Bâ explains:

Ce qu'on apprend à l'école occidentale—pour utile que ce soit—on ne le vit pas toujours tandis que la connaissance héritée de la tradition orale s'incarne dans l'être tout entier. [...] C'est pourquoi la tradition orale, prise dans son ensemble ne se résume pas à la transmission de récits ou de certaines connaissances. Elle *est génératrice et formatrice d'un type d'homme particulier*. On peut dire qu'il y a la civilisation des forgerons, la civilisation des tisserands, la civilisation des pasteurs, etc.” (210).

Here, Hâmpaté Bâ shows that oral tradition is not only limited to social narratives and historical knowledge; it is also at the origin of the formation of specific types of functions, asserting the individual's role in the society. Thus, he refers to the castes as “civilization” showing through the use of this word, the relevance of the separation of the society in castes.

The best known example of a caste in West Africa is that of the griot. He fulfills numerous functions according to the category to which he belongs. The definition given

by Djibril Tamsi Niane in his version of the legend of Soundjata, the thirteenth century Malian king and emperor, gives an overview of the important role of the griot in the oral society. In the preface of *Soundjata ou l'épopée Mandingue*, Niane gives voice to the griot Mamadou Kouyaté, who supposedly told him the legend of Soundjata. The griot Mamadou Kouyaté introduces himself and explains his role within the Mandinka society:

C'est moi Djéli Mamadou Kouyaté, fils de Bintou Kouyaté et de Djeli Kedian Kouyaté, maître dans l'art de parler [...] nous sommes les sacs à parole, nous sommes les sacs qui renferment des secrets plusieurs fois séculaires [...] ; sans nous les noms des rois tomberaient dans l'oubli, nous sommes la mémoire des hommes; par la parole nous donnons vie aux faits et gestes des rois devant les jeunes générations. Je sais comment les hommes noirs se sont divisés en tribus, car mon père m'a légué tout son savoir. [...] J'ai enseigné à des rois l'Histoire de leurs ancêtres afin que la vie des Anciens leur serve d'exemple. [...] Quand une querelle éclate entre tribus, c'est nous qui tranchons le différend car nous sommes les dépositaires des serments que les Ancêtres ont prêtés (9-10).

As stated by Kouyaté, the griot was the king's counselor, the guardian of the constitution of the kingdom and its tradition; he is also the young prince's tutor and the living archive of his people's history. He insists on the sacred aspect of his profession and the respect of his ancestors to whom he owes his knowledge and wisdom.

If the use of some oral texts is attached to particular individuals, other texts can be used by any member of the society in specific contexts. These oral texts can be placed under the subcategory of secular oral literature which has several functions such as

entertaining and relaxing, strengthening the community and inculcating moral lessons etc. In fact, just as people read for fun in Western cultures, in African cultures, oral literature also offers time for relaxation. Another role of oral tradition, whether sacred or secular, is the assertion of the individual in his community; it seeks to promote a sense of pride in for belonging to the group. In African societies, the notion of collectivity is dominant and the main objective is to maintain the cohesion among the members of the community. (Okpewho 137)

This is why the glorification of communal values to consolidate the group is important. According to Okpewho: “A much wider service provided by oral literature, is to give the society—whether isolated groups within it or the citizenry as a whole—a collective sense of who they are and to help them define and comprehend the world at large in terms both familiar and positive to them”(111). For instance, we can see in the Yoruba myths, explanations of the origins of the world and/or the first acts of humankind. These myths also contain information about environmental elements in the Yorubaland. It gives the people the sense of affiliation to both their environment and their people.

One example which illustrates the importance of myths of origins in African societies is the myth of Obba. Obba is one of the three wives of Changó (the god of war and thunder). Her myth explains how she and her rival Oshun became rivers after a fight opposing between the two of them. “The river Oba is a tributary of the river Oshun. The waters near the confluence of these two rivers are always very rough, and when they meet the waters collide with great violence. Yoruba people claim they still remember the

incident that turned Oba and Oshun into rivers” (Cros Sandoval 251). Even today, this river runs through the Yorubaland which, not only explains why both Oba and Oshun are fluvial goddesses in Nigeria but also shows the importance of the myth within the Yoruba society where people still identify with their environment through the story of these two goddesses.

At the same time, these oral texts are didactic. According to Amadou Koné: “Les chants, proverbes et autres formes non narratives n’étaient jamais gratuits et visaient tous à l’intégration harmonieuse de l’individu au sein du groupe” (24). Most of the tales that will be analyzed in this study have didactic functions since it is common in African societies to teach ways of conducts through leisure activities. However, enumerating the functions of oral tradition will not suffice to give an accurate explanation of its importance in pre-colonial Africa. In order to understand it, it is crucial to recognize its omnipresence within these societies. Oral tradition is interwoven into the daily life of the community. As Hampâté Bâ observes: “La tradition orale est la grande école de la vie, dont elle recouvre et concerne tous les aspects. Elle peut paraître chaos à celui qui n’en pénètre pas le secret et dérouter l’esprit cartésien habitué à tout séparer en catégories bien définies” (193). There is in fact a fundamental distinction between the material and the spiritual world in western cultures, which is not necessarily the case in pre-colonial Africa.

This is why oral tradition encompasses religious beliefs, scientific knowledge (traditional medicine, science of the nature etc.), history, entertainment, initiation and practice of a profession (blacksmith, hunter, griot, cobbler, jeweler etc.). (Hampâté Bâ 193) these aspects are not mutually exclusive, than can sometime navigate in the same

sphere. That is why oral tradition is more than a feature of the pre-colonial African societies; it is a philosophy of life.

Religion for example, played a central role in the division of pre-colonial Yoruba society. Afro-Caribbean scholar Edward Kamau Brathwaite supports that religion is an incontrovertible element when dealing with pre-colonial African culture:

A study of African culture reveals almost without question that it is based upon religion— that in fact, it is within the religious network that entire culture resides [...]. In traditional Africa, there is no specialization of discipline, no dissociation of sensibilities. In other words starting from this particular religious focus, there is no separation between religion and philosophy, religion and society, religion and art. Religion is the form or kernel or core of the culture. [...] What we should alert ourselves to is the possibility, whenever “religion” is mentioned, that a whole cultural complex is also present. (74)

Therefore, it is not surprising that the transplantation of Yoruba culture in the Americas was carried out mostly in terms of religion because if pre-colonial Wolof society was organized in several socio-professional groups depending on their surnames, each of which exert a specific function within the community; pre-colonial Yoruba society was organized in clans according to their totem. At the head of each clan there is a god from whom all his members derive descent.

The Yoruba religious entity based on the system of *ochas* or *orishas* is very well structured; it represents the foundation of the whole society, to such a degree that when dealing with oral tradition in Yoruba culture, it is impossible to avoid the religious aspect

of the culture, for it is all interconnected. In his book *The voice of Africa*, anthropologist Leo Frobenius attests:

I consider the Orisha worship of the Yorubans as being purer and more original, more consistent and more unbroken than any other cult of the classical ages known to us. [...] especially with regard to the inner equation of social and religious development, these two elements are here represented on a common foundation, an indissoluble unity, and a radical identity, without parallel (187-188).

Frobenius's observation regarding the indissolubility of the religious and social identity shows the fusion between material and spiritual worlds in pre-colonial Africa which represents a fundamental distinction with Western cultures. However, the Caribbean is the place that witnessed the mixture of European and African cultures giving birth to a new form of expression which derives from both societies, but is also very different from each of them. The next chapter will look at cultural mixing through the survival of the Yoruba religious practices in Cuba which was possible because Yoruba religion was used by the African slaves as a tool for resistance to both oppression and acculturation in Cuba.

CHAPTER 2

Historical background: The Yoruba legacy in Cuba and the *nègre bossale* and *nègre créole* in Haiti

The transplantation of African cultures in the New World took many forms and understanding their expression through Caribbean oral literature requires a close look at the social and racial dynamics in the Caribbean during slavery. Consequently, this chapter will present a brief historical background for my analysis of the Cuban text *Kele Kele* by Excilia Saldaña and the Haitian text *Le Roman de Bouqui* by Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain. The analysis of the *bossale* and the *créole* in Haitian society is crucial to the understanding of the two main characters of *Le Roman de Bouqui*: Bouqui and Malice because Bouki-the-hyena and Leuk-the-hare (in Wolof tales) are said to be the representation of the *nègre bossale* and the *nègre créole* in the adaptation of the Wolof tales by the slave in Haiti. In order to have a better grasp at the analysis of the myth of Obba by Excilia Saldaña, it is necessary to understand how the religion of the Yoruba transformed and survived in Cuba and what are the new religious practices and beliefs which derived from this transformation.

Having underlined the importance of religions and their interconnectedness with oral tradition and literature in pre-colonial African societies, this part will deal with the use of African religions as a tool for resistance to acculturation and oppression in Cuba.

The Yoruba from southern Nigeria were the most dominant group of slaves imported in Cuba, known as *Lucumí*. It was mostly through their religious system that the process of syncretism was carried out in the island. (Sanchez 3) I will therefore focus on Yoruba religion since the Yoruba left a notable legacy in the Americas through their well-structured religious system. This will be followed by a brief overview of the formation of *Santería* or *Regla de Ocha* which derives from the syncretism of the Catholic and Yoruba religions in the island of Cuba where more liberal policies allowed the expression of the African slave's cultures and religions on the island.

To begin, it is necessary to underline that once transplanted in the New World, these religions became more than the foundation of cultural systems; they became a tool for resistance in times of slavery, when the need for moral communal support was a necessity for the slaves to endure the harshness of their existence. When dealing with the survival of African religions in Cuba, syncretism is crucial to the topic since it is through this process that these religions actually survived in Cuba. As defined by Jensen and Leopold in *Syncretism in religion*:

Other syncretic formations have emerged as the consequences of a dominant culture forcing on or “interpenetrating” (see Roger Bastide, in this volume) A culture of minority its own religion such as to make it the official religion. In those cases, syncretism may be seen as result of a resistance to power and a means to preserve indigenous gods in the clothing of the gods of the dominant culture. (4)

In fact, the slaves could not practice their religions freely because it was often labeled as superstition and witchcraft. Europeans imposed the Christian religion upon the

slaves — with certain limits—in the hopes of eradicating their animism which they considered barbarous. In addition, given the connection between religion and culture in traditional Africa, imposing Catholicism was used to facilitate the process of acculturation because the structural system of the societies where the imported Africans came from was already destroyed by their enslavement; the pre-colonial order was not valid in the New World. All the imported Africans were subjected to the master's culture and religion and their only salvation was what was left from their culture: their beliefs. (Washington 70) Even though slavery was admittedly a system of exploitation, it was also a system of cultural domination where the European power was convinced that its religion and civilization were the only valid ones. This was supposed to legitimize the act of violence and exploitation perpetrated on the people who belonged to different cultures. As a result, the slaves had to disguise the practice of their religion by using that of the master; this was the beginning of the religious syncretism which took place in the Islands. However, before these religions blended and formed a new religious expression, the slaves used Catholicism as a cover up and not as a religion they had fully accepted. (Perez y Mena 17, Cros Sandoval 37)

Andrés Pérez y Mena argues the same point:

This religious syncretism entails the combinement of the Catholic Church's European saints with those of the ancestor deities of the Yoruba people at the obvious open level of the iconography alone. But syncretism is a false proposition initially intended for Catholics. This historical confusion had its origins in Cuban *Cabildos* [...] there; the enslaved

created for themselves a façade within the popular culture by which to hide their worship of the *orisàs* and saints [...]” (17).⁸

Here, Pérez y Mena emphasizes the unconscious formation of a new religion as a direct consequence of the slave’s resistance to acculturation in Cuba. Consequently, the Afro-Cuban worship of *Orishas* and Catholic which occurred during slavery and colonization is one of the side results of the Africans’ resistance to acculturation in Cuba through the *Cabildos*, which altogether led to the formation of an Afro-Cuban religion mostly known under the name of *Santería* literally “the way of the saints” (Sanchez 3). It consists of spiritual and religious practices which involve the worship of Yoruba-derived deities called *orishas*.

The word *Santería* is sometimes perceived as pejorative by believers who prefer the terms “Regla de Ocha” or “Religión Lucumí”.⁹ The formation of this religion illustrates cultural mixing since it shows how the mixed practice of different religions created a new form of expression.¹⁰ This was carried out with the help of oral tradition which transmitted the religious knowledge by word of mouth for decades. As part of the syncretic process the slaves lost part of their culture since *Santería* is different from Yoruba religion in many aspects. In his essay “Problems of religious syncretism”, Roger

⁸ *Cabildos* are confraternities of Africans that Cros Sandoval defines as “influential mutual-aid religious brotherhoods or association of Africans of the same “nation” and their descendants, some of which were affiliated with the parochial system while others were not”(21). In regards to the numerous ethnic groups present in the Islands, the formation of *Cabildos* helped maintaining certain homogeneity within the members of the same group. In addition, they were tolerated by the church which assigned a priest to each *Cabildo*.

⁹ There are numerous *reglas de ocha* diversified throughout the Americas, mostly in Brazil where the influence of the Yoruba culture was significant. Although there is no precise link between them, their practices are very similar. It is the case with the *candomble* of Salvador de Bahia, the *macumbas* in Rio de Janeiro, the *vodus* in São Luis de Maranhão, or the *xangós* in Recife. (Montiel 464)

¹⁰ Cultural mixing in the Caribbean has many different purposes, national policies of cultural mixing in some ways helped whiten the population. In Cuba this phenomenon was called *blanqueamiento*. See Torres, Arlene. *Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean: Eastern South America and the Caribbean*. Bloomington u.a.: Indiana Univ. Press, 1998. Print.

Bastide, a French anthropologist and sociologist who specialized in African religions in Brazil supports this point when he notes that:

As we have seen through the period of slavery, the black gods were forced to hide behind the statue of the virgin or a Catholic saint. This was the beginning of a marriage between Christianity and the African religion in the course of which, as in all marriages, the two partners would change more or less radically as they adjusted to each other (Bastide 113).

In fact, due to their act of resistance through the disguised practice of their religion by using the Catholic saints as a cover, they succeeded in creating an Afro-Cuban religion with which Afro-Cubans can identify with. But this result was not what the slaves were expecting when they started to worship their gods in secret. In *La isla que se repite* Antonio Benítez-Rojo poetically presented the resistance engaged by the slaves who still believed in their gods:

Ave María, decían en alta voz los negros esclavos de las minas de cobre de Santiago del Prado, y a continuación, en un susurro, sin que ningún blanco escuchara, dirían “Ochun Yeyé.” Porque aquella imagen milagrosa del altar era para ellos uno de los *orishas* más populares del panteón Yoruba (30).

As stated by Benítez Rojo, the slaves did not forget their gods; they crossed the Atlantic and kept on worshipping them despite the attempts at cultural genocide, the sexual and physical violence and their physical dislocation.

Nonetheless, this permanent of oppression did not prevent them from preserving part of their cultures since they belonged to societies where the culture was expressed

mostly through orality. In her book *La civilisation du Bossale*, Maryse Condé asserts that: “Les noirs sont arrachés à des civilisations de l’oralité et n’ont pas besoin de l’écriture pour exercer leur créativité. Ce qui est admirable, c’est qu’ils aient pu la conserver dans les conditions d’existence qu’étaient les leurs”(27). She explains that although the enslaved Africans had physically lost their freedom, their cultures preserved in their memories and expressed orally could find ways to develop and create new forms of expression. The slaves quickly began to take refuge in their traditional world since it was the only thing that linked them to their homeland.

The knowledge of the magical forces of nature encapsulated in religious beliefs was known by those to whom their African ancestors transmitted this knowledge through oral tradition. Thus, using this oral material as a shield against oppression favored the survival of their tradition and religion leading to slave revolts. Roger Bastide observes that: “religion does not merely lend color to the social revolt; it is its very heart” (108). It was a tool for resistance to acculturation which resulted in religious syncretism, but also an important weapon for magico-religious practices that helped massive slave rebellions and escapes. The slaves would turn to their gods in search of revenge or help mostly for the organization of rebellions where strong religious preparations were done. Therefore, when dealing with slave escape, maroonage and rebellion, magical powers were often involved. (279)

For instance, in *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* Laurence Levine talks about “flying Africans”:

The African born slaves, were associated with conjure and magical powers exemplified in the frequently told stories of Africans who put up with the

treatment accorded to them by whites in America as they could and then simply rose up and flew back to Africa. In some versions, they delayed their escape until they could teach their American-born relatives and friends the power of flight as well. (86)

As Levine explains, the transmission of this magico-religious knowledge from the Africans to the American born slaves allowed the repetition of this practice, making it possible for people to witness the power of transmission of oral tradition from one continent to another.¹¹

Even though both resistance to acculturation through syncretism and magico-religious practices for escapes and rebellions allowed the survival of the African cultures and beliefs, several other factors led to more liberal policies regarding the expression of the African slave's cultures in Cuba. For instance, the lack of zeal of the Catholic Church originated a gap in education for young white and creole Cubans which led to the replacement of an educative authority by the black nannies whose role in the household gave them the image of mother figure. In addition, the late arrival of plantation work in the island and also the sugar boom made both Brazil and Cuba the last colonies to stop importing African slaves to the Americas which explains a strong demographic presence of Africans, an important influence on their culture in these two countries.

The first element that allowed more liberal policies for the expression of the Black's culture was the Catholic Church. Although it was the official religion of the

¹¹ In *Biography of a Runaway Slave* (1966) Esteban Montejo, the runaway slave who was being interviewed by Miguel Barnet talked about the Africans who were flying back to their homelands. His testimony and the quote from Levine's book are quite similar: "The Negroes did not do that [commit suicide as others did] they escaped by flying. They flew through the sky and returned to their own land. The Musundi Congolese were the ones that flew the most. They disappeared by means of witchcraft. [...] There are those who say the Negroes threw themselves into rivers. This is untrue. The truth was they fastened a chain to their waist which was full of magic. That was where the power came from" (134).

colony of Cuba from 1512 until 1898 its approach regarding the population was not as fervent as it was before. Cros Sandoval underlines the fact that: “The Catholic church in Cuba lacked the evangelical zeal and inspiration that were the engines of its proselytizing efforts during the sixteenth century [...] the church managed a few parochial schools that offered meager instruction to a limited number of townspeople” (22). Consequently, the religious gap left by the church was filled by the African slave’s religions which found in their practice a system of communal resistance.

Another element which favored the influence of African cultures in slavocratic societies is the bond between the Africans slaves and their masters’ families that who they influenced culturally and sometimes at times through religion. Robert Kent observes that black nannies became important in the cultural development of the white children in Brazil which can be paralleled with Cuba: “African nannies who cared for the children of their white masters “impregnated” Brazil from within by exposing young whites to African lullabies, stories and folktales, folk medicines and beliefs” (21). The relationship between the master’s children and the black nannies undoubtedly contributed to the mixture of culture and to a larger extent to religious syncretism. (Cros Sandoval 22-23) In effect, there was a need to fill the gap left by the Catholic Church in terms of education. Since the church was also supposed to provide instruction for upper and middle class families, its absence in the educative sector made private instruction very common in Cuban middle class households where the children often had black nannies that inevitably exposed them to their cultures, beliefs and values.

For a variety of socio-historical elements, one can understand the strong presence of African cultures in Cuba. First, the harsh conditions of plantation life were not

imposed on Cuban slaves until 1790. Since Cuba was not a plantation colony at first, slaves were working on leather production, domestic services, public construction etc. leaving them more “freedom” to infuse the rest of the population with their cultures. (Benítez-Rojo 39) In addition, the sugar boom in the nineteenth century made both Cuba and Brazil the last countries to abolish slavery. This explains the significant number of Africans imported illicitly after slavery was declared illegal in 1820. (Cros Sandoval 23)

Despite these reasons, the religions of the slaves, however, did not remain intact. They became through syncretism neither African nor Cuban but Afro-Cuban religions which allowed the combined worship of both the Catholic saints and the *orishas* of the Yoruba. These *orishas* underwent transformations throughout the process of resistance. Some of them became more important and their representation in the New World sometimes bore additional features they did not have in Africa. In the fourth chapter which deals with the resistance to acculturation through Afro-Cuban myths, the analysis of the representations of the *orisha* Obba will illustrate the transformation of the Yoruba gods in the New World. Since Obba’s representation in Cuba changed in many ways, she gained importance once she was transplanted.

Besides the important legacy of African religions in the New World, other aspects of African oral tradition contributed to counter acculturation. In Haiti for example, a new cultural expression derived from the adaptation of the African element in the island. I will illustrate aspects of resistance to acculturation in Haitian secular oral literature through the racial division *nègre bossale/nègre créole*, which shows the mark of slavery in the tales and also represents the articulation of a counter-discourse in the slave’s oral literature.

In the introduction of this study, it was stated that the slave has created— following Glissant’s expression— a counter-poetics or forced-poetics, that depicts both his struggle and his attempts to free himself from this oppressive situation. My analysis of the tales in *La Belle Histoire* and *Le Roman de Bouqui* are based on the differences between the Wolof and the Haitian tales which will show how this counter-poetics is reflected. The most important disparity between the two versions is the representation of the *bossale* and the creole through Bouqui and Malice.

According to Haitian writer Jean Price Mars, Bouqui is the personification of the *nègre bossale* and Malice represents the *nègre créole*:

Il nous paraît probable que, historiquement parlant, Bouqui est le type du « nègre bossale » fraîchement importé d’Afrique à Saint Domingue dont la lourdeur et la bêtise étaient l’objet de brimades et de nombreuses railleries de Ti malice, personnification du « nègre créole » généralement considéré comme plus adroit et même un peu finaud (57).

This assimilation of animal characters with slaves is due to the New World context, where the values of pre-colonial Africa were obsolete; the environment was hostile and the slave was experiencing both exploitation and oppression. Slavery, which is reflected in the tales through these two characters, is at the basis of the differences between the Wolof and Haitian version of Bouqui and Malice’s tales. Therefore, an understanding of the social dynamics of the slave’s environment in the Haitian tales calls for a definition of the terms *bossale* and *créole*. This personification illustrates the racial division which took place in the island in times of slavery and the formation of a hierarchy placing the *bossale* at the bottom.

The word *bossale* in French or *bozal* in Spanish has been defined by several scholars who unanimously attributed it Spanish origins. Sebastian de Covarrubias, lexicographer and cryptographer of the King of Spain Felipe the second, invented an etymology for the word in his dictionary *Tesoro de la Lengua Castellana o Española*; “El negro que no sabe otra lengua que la suya, y la lengua, o lenguaje se llama labio, y los labios bezos; de boca, boza y de allí boçal” (223). From this etymology, we can see that the term “bozal” in Spanish (now written with a “z”) has to do with the mastery of the language of the colonizer by the slave. In addition, the word “bozal” gained more meaning since it was later used to define the “New slaves who were unable to speak that language comprehensibly, thus, distinguished from the *ladinos* [...]” (Chaudenson 88). We can see in this definition that the *bozal* is the new slave and is now compared to the *ladino* who is “a term applied to a foreigner speaking Spanish...; a term applied to a slave who has spent more than one year in slavery” (88).

This definition of *ladino* mirrors that of the Creole slave or *criollo* defined as “a slave born in the country” (88). This shows the formation of hierarchy between the slaves, placing the “bozal” at the bottom. This hierarchy is established on the model of the hegemonic discourse which presents its race and cultural identity as superior. This discourse of power creates alienation among the dominated subjects who look up to this superior power’s model to build a hierarchy.¹²

In *Creolization of language and culture* Robert Chaudenson emphasizes the existence of this hierarchy when he underlines the struggle of the “bozal” in the Islands:

¹² In *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Frantz Fanon observes that the existence of an inferiority complex from the colonized subject is at the origin of the formation of a hierarchy among the colonized whose notion of inferiority is based on his position in relation to the colonizer.(15-16)

Physically at a low ebb, the *bozal* slave was also a social misfit who was still unfamiliar with all the chores and the life that awaited him. He did not even have at his disposal a means of linguistic communication that would allow him to understand what was required of him. Moreover, the term *bozal* always had a negative, even insulting connotation everywhere it was used. (89)

This description of the *bozal* in the Spanish Caribbean is also relevant in the French Caribbean, as Chaudenson states: “In Haitian creole for example, *bosal* means “brutal or “savage” (89).

Linguistically speaking, the *nègre créole* can be paralleled with the *criollo* in the Spanish colonies. In the French Caribbean as well, he is seen as better than the *bossale*; since he is “less Africanized”. He speaks the language of the colonizer and is more familiar with his condition. Sometimes, the creole has a white progenitor; which makes him a mulatto and gives him superior position by the color of his skin. He is said to have been saved by his white blood and sometimes, can aspire to other “lighter” tasks such as housekeeping instead of plantation work. Sometimes the mulatto slave is the one in charge of inflicting the physical punishment to his fellow slaves. This division between the slaves can lead to a lack of solidarity between them, where, even though they suffer from the same scourge, the formation of a hierarchy creates racism among them.¹³ This is how the difference between the *nègre bossale* and the *nègre créole* became such an

¹³ In her essay entitled *Exorcising Painful Memories*, Raphael Confiant and Patrick Chamoiseau Marie-José N’zengou-Tayo’s identifies the alienation of the colonized people as the origin of most problems in the French Caribbean society. She depicts a hierarchy of alienation, starting from the white man on top of the social ladder, the mulattoes and then the black slave at the bottom. These social categories built by the colonizer, classify people by the color of their skin which often goes with problems of identity.

important factor in the socio-cultural dynamics of the Caribbean under slavery. (Condé 33-34)

This racial dynamic was faithfully reflected in the oral literature of Haiti, the analysis of which reveals two aspects: one reflects the slave's internalization of racist stereotypes, and the other shows subversion performed by the latter in order to survive in his new environment. According to Condé, the secular literature of Africa was transplanted without much alteration to the Antilles.

La littérature profane de l'Ouest Africain forme un ensemble assez homogène, les mêmes animaux se retrouvent au sein des contes de peuples différents et étant affectés du même symbolisme. Vu leur caractère ludique et la sècheresse de leur énoncés, les devinettes sont transplantées sans modification dans les îles. (27)

In fact, one can find the same animal characters as well as the same stories with similar plots. However, Condé does acknowledge the transformation of some aspects of the original African tales, proverbs, puns and riddles, attributing this change to the internalization of the racist stereotypes about the slave.

This is illustrated through the *bossale* and the creole's representations by Bouqui and Malice who are very famous in both Senegalese and Haitian popular culture where they bear distinct names: Bouki-the-hyena and Leuk-the-hare (in Wolof tales) and Bouqui and Malice (in northern Haiti). In both Haitian and Wolof tales, Bouqui is dumb, lazy, stubborn, voracious, brutish, dishonest, selfish, physically superior but intellectually inferior to Leuk-the-hare/Ti malice. The latter is cunning, talented, and sneaky, loves his

family, and escapes any difficult situation thanks to his intelligence. (Senghor and Sadji 1, Price-Mars 57, Condé 37)

Most of the time, Malice uses Bouqui's strength to come to achieve his goal, and then, he always fools the latter and enjoys the spoils by himself or with his family. Malice is the *nègre créole*, the smart and sneaky one who knows the master and his language; he is not clumsy and ignorant as the *bossale* who is still learning how to speak. Malice knows how to talk others into doing anything, he manipulates and deceives and does not arouse suspicions because he is not as big and strong as Bouqui who represents a perfect scapegoat when one of Malice's plan fails.

However, when Bouqui uses Malice's intelligence, he never listens to the latter's advice and ends up being trapped in inextricable situations because of his gluttony and stupidity. Malice always finds a way out most of the time by using Bouqui as a scapegoat. Thus, Bouqui seeks revenge but since he is Malice's uncle; he always ends up forgiving him. Malice is the *nègre créole*, the smart and sneaky one who knows the master and his language; he is not clumsy and ignorant as the *bossale* who is still learning how to speak. Malice knows how to talk others into doing anything, he manipulates and deceives and does not arouse suspicions because he is not as big and strong as Bouqui who represents a perfect scapegoat when one of Malice's plan fails.

These two characters, however, are not uniquely known in Haiti, they are referred to under different names all over the Caribbean and even in North America. As Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain explains :

Dans le cycle du lièvre, devenu en Amérique noire « Brer

Rabbit » « Lapin » « Lapén » « Malice » « Malisia », ce sont ses

aventures avec l'hyène, qui ont été le plus fidèlement transmises. L'hyène que nous appelons encore en Haïti, dans la République Dominicaine, en Louisiane, et dans les Bahamas « Bouqui », du nom que lui donnent les Wolofs, cette même hyène qu'on baptise « Zamba » à la Guadeloupe est remplacée par le loup aux États-Unis, par le lion et le tigre dans les autres Antilles. (8)

In all these islands, Bouqui and Malice correspond to the same profile; they engage in immoral behaviors and are always making plans to steal or kill other animals. Their only preoccupation is to feed themselves; thus, Bouqui does not hesitate to attack the weaker animals because he is not clever enough to obtain what he wants through trickery while Malice fools the stronger ones.

Condé explains that the bad behaviors of Bouqui and Malice are in part due to the fact that the slave was living in a new environment where the values of pre-colonial Africa were slowly disappearing to be replaced by new customs:

Dans la société des îles, l'ancien ne peut prétendre à aucune supériorité. Les documents de l'époque s'accordent à dire combien les nègres nouveaux étaient des objets de risée de la part de leurs compagnons. [...]. L'ancien dépositaire d'une sagesse—Africaine— dont le peu de valeur est prouvée à l'esclave par la sujétion qu'il connaît, ne jouit plus d'aucun prestige. Il est vaincu, supplanté par les jeunes, nés dans l'île ou arrivés

très jeunes et assez malléables pour s'adapter sans efforts aux nouvelles coutumes. (29)¹⁴

In fact, we can see the new setting through the treatment of the *bozal* or (nègre *nouveau* in this quote) who was ridiculed and placed at the bottom of the racial hierarchy instead of welcomed and comforted by his counterparts. The slaves who were already in the islands or those who were born there believed that most of the values of pre-colonial Africa did not apply to their new environment where survival was their main preoccupation. As a reaction to their situation, a counter-poetics is formed in their oral literature. This forced poetics reflects on one side, the racial hierarchy based on the pretended natural inferiority of the *bossale* but on the other side, it reverts the state of mind of the slave who reacts to his domination by subverting the rules of the stronger ones.

Condé attributes the origins of these stereotypes to the travel literature, which was very popular during slavery and colonization. “C’est dire que le stéréotype du noir a pris vie et qu’il s’est fortement implanté dans la littérature de voyage” (21). In fact, The explorer, the missionary and the colonizer, are at the origin of the disappearance of these values and their replacement by the slave’s internalization of the stereotypes. The accounts of their journeys in the colonies were written mostly in the eighteenth century at the time where the superiority of the European over the African cultures was beyond doubt in their minds. Thus, they looked at the different cultures with disdain qualifying negatively what they did not understand and justifying the inhuman exploitation of Africans and West Indians through these stereotypes. Thus the slave was said to be ugly,

¹⁴ In *Lettres Créoles*, Patrick Chamoiseau and Rafaël Confiant explain that Bouqui and Malice’s immoral behavior was part of a resistance strategy seeking to promote a counter culture where the values of the dominant discourse are openly disrespected. (74)

stupid, sneaky, ungrateful, deceitful, lazy, either mean or incredibly naïve, naturally promiscuous and incapable of controlling his sexual urges, violent and brutish.¹⁵

(Benítez-Rojo 87, Condé 16-26)

As a result, we lack sources about the psychology of the African slave, his personal experience and his struggle at least before the appearance of biographies and autobiographies of slaves. “Le flot de documents que nous possédons ne nous renseigne guère, car, à travers ces innombrables récits et relations de voyage, portugais, anglais, hollandais et français l’homme d’Afrique est bien peu présent, sa description sommaire, sa psychologie à peine esquissée”(Condé 11). One of the ways to gain a better grasp understanding of his psychology, therefore, is through the analysis of his oral literature.

In addition, although the travel literature conveyed a racist discourse and provided a representation of the African slave as the “other”, it represents an important source for the understanding of how the racial hierarchy and discriminative discourses were formed in the Islands. Indeed, looking at which stereotype was conveyed in that literature can help us comprehend how the *nègre bossale* and the *nègre créole* were perceived in the French Caribbean and how the recreation of their environment in the Haitian folktales mirror these perceptions.

One example can be found in Lucien Peytraud’s study *L’Esclavage aux Antilles Françaises avant 1789* where quoted a popular tale collected in the French Caribbean that pretends to justify the enslavement of the black man from a religious point of view.

The tale in question has multiple versions across the Caribbean but bears the same

¹⁵ There is an extensive bibliography for the study of the formation of the stereotypes about Africans in the Caribbean. Condé summarizes it in her analysis and they are just enumerated in this study, however I invite the reader to refer to further bibliography about this topic in the French Caribbean: Père Labat *Voyage aux isles de l’Amérique (Antilles)* 1693-1705. G Boukson *Les Antilles en Question. Assimilation et Conflit de Culture dans les D.O.M* and Abbé Dugoujon, *Lettres sur l’Esclavage dans les Colonies Françaises*.

religious and discriminatory message, underlining the complicity of religion in the subjection of the black man. In Peytraud's version the tale reports that the black man was fabricated by the devil who was trying to imitate God while the latter was making the white man. As a punishment to the devil's actions, God made the devil's man black to make sure he could be distinguished from his creation (the white man): "Dieu fit l'homme et le fit blanc; le Diable qui l'épiait fit un être tout pareil, mais le Diable le trouva noir lorsqu'il fut achevé, par un châtiment de Dieu qui ne voulait pas que son ouvrage fut confondu avec celui de l'esprit malin"(11).

Another version collected by Samuel Feijóo in Puerto Rico is even more explicit in its association of the black man with evil and ugliness. "Al negro lo hizo Dios para completar un grupo y como lo hizo tan bruto, al diablo se lo entregó y de ñapa le dejó las narices como un buey, la cabeza de Carey, y los dientes de caballo y por eso digo yo: "que al negro lo parta un rayo"."(19) This version intended to make people laugh and mock the physical features of the black man through the details of the descriptions and the comparison of the physical aspects with that of animals. In addition, there was also a direct reference to his supposedly lack of intelligence through the use of the adjective "bruto" which reminds one of the stereotypes of the stupid and naïve slave.

Although the racist stereotypes came from the colonizer, these kinds of narrations were not exclusively used by the white population of the Islands; could at times be an integral part of this discriminatory discourse out of an inferiority complex:

L'attitude de l'esclave face au travail est nettement exprimée dans les proverbes. Nous ne reviendrons pas sur la réputation trop connue de paresse faite au noir. Il s'en explique : il le sait, « si le travail était une

bonne chose ce n'est pas le nègre qui le ferait ». Il s'indigne : il le sait, « celui qui travaille n'est pas celui qui mange ». Il se moque : « le nègre cherche le travail avec un fusil pour le tuer ». Peut-on le blâmer de raisonner ainsi, lui qui gîte dans les cases à nègre à demi-nu tandis que les fêtes vont bon train dans l'Habitation? (Condé 30)

Condé deliberately uses a cynical tone and speaks from the slave's point of view; her words reflect the desperation of the latter who sounds rather embittered in his proverbs. However, she legitimizes their use by the slave who is fully conscious that they are discriminatory against himself: "Le noir prétend dissimuler un profond complexe d'infériorité. Les proverbes restituent avec une fidélité surprenante tous les clichés des maîtres, des voyageurs et des missionnaires : ingratitude, sournoiserie, méchanceté foncière " (31). Part of this discriminatory discourse reflects the internalization of stereotypes in the slave's counter-discourse.

By contrast, Feijoo researched these proverbs across the Spanish Caribbean through a study of the African element in Cuban folklore. He affirms that since the secular oral literature is the mirror reflection of socio-cultural dynamics in the Islands, it is not surprising that we find discriminatory proverbs in slavocratic societies where the hierarchy between the slaves based on their skin color and sometimes their physical features reflects the importance to resemble the master both physically and culturally.

As an example, he cites the proverbs from Constantino Suárez's *Vocabulario Cubano*; "no hay negro guapo ni tamarindo dulce" (31). This proverb illustrates the stereotype of the hideous/ugly black man mentioned earlier. Just as Feijoo, Condé notes the existence of discriminatory proverbs, this time in the French Caribbean; "Si le travail

était une bonne chose, ce n'est pas le nègre qui le ferait" (31). This one proverb illustrated that the reason for the eternal punishment of the slave to work for others without retribution, was because he is said to be lazy by nature.

When comparing the African and Caribbean oral literature, one can see that these proverbs, however, are less likely to be found in the pre-colonial African repertoire. Their creation has everything to do with the transplantation of Africans in the New World, their enslavement and the new hostile environment where they are constantly told that they are inferior by nature and that they deserve this inhuman treatment for being black. "Ces misérables avouent sans façon qu'un sentiment intime leur dit qu'ils sont d'une nation maudite" coldly reported the missionary Père Le Pers in his journal of travels in the French Caribbean during slavery. In addition, as Koné observes, the belief in the grandeur of the African cultures was definitely shaken by the civilization of the white man. The latter developed the most efficient system of exploitation the planet had ever witnessed. His books, his knowledge of the world, his machines and the way he dominated nature forced the slave and the dominated people to doubt that the world was as perfect as the closed societies of pre-colonial Africa described it. (26)

Although the stereotypes had been partially internalized, the other side of the slave's counter poetic found a way to achieve a type of poetic justice by turning the plot of the tales to the slave's advantage through the use of subversion: "La civilisation du bossale est une civilisation des faux semblants, l'esclave y offre au maître l'image que celui-ci attend de lui, tout en se moquant avec les siens de cette étonnante crédulité" (Condé 35). In fact, through subversion anything seems possible; the slave finds refuge in an imaginary world where he gives life to all these stereotypes, unraveling all the defects

the master pretends to see in him but where he still manages to survive. He recognizes that he is placed in that position and his oral literature reflects this recognition as well as his attempts to free himself from this oppression.

Just as the Cuban slaves continued worshiping their gods while using the Spanish Saints as cover, these Haitian slaves gave their masters the satisfaction of a disguised obedience, and laughed at them for believing that they totally surrendered. Subversion is a key element for survival. One may ask: how did their culture survive all these centuries in such a hostile environment as the New World under slavery and colonization? Subversion, therefore, becomes a key element for their survival. Creole folktales represented an outlet for the slave where the environment of the *nègre bossale* and the *nègre créole* is still as immoral as in the proverbs, but the tales were also used for subversive purposes.

There is a dichotomy between good and evil, some animals are bound to lose and others will always win. In Africa, Bouki's bad behavior is always punished, and Leuk-the-hare's intelligence is rewarded. However, in the Haitian tales, this is not the case; the world the slave had rebuilt is fairer: "En un mot l'univers n'est plus manichéen; d'un côté, les éternels perdants, de l'autre les éternels gagnants. Dans son imaginaire, le noir reconstitue un monde plus clément" (Condé 36). Consequently, the moral lessons in the Wolof tales are replaced by the art of survival in the Haitian tales. The characters which seemed similar at the beginning are not what they were in Africa, and this is where the act of resistance lies; hidden behind mean and voracious protagonists who steal, kill, eat and sell their mothers and betray each other.

Glissant affirms that the creole tale reflects the dynamics of the plantation life: “Mais où il faut surprendre la pathétique lucidité du locuteur créole, c’est dans le conte lui-même, cet écho de la Plantation. L’analyse du conte montre comment les *manques* dont souffre la communauté [...] sont surdéterminé dans l’imagerie populaire” (413). Here, he implies that life on the plantation is characterized by the absence of vital elements, and this absence is at the origin of the voracity of the characters who throw themselves on defenseless animals and other opportunities to obtain food. I argue that beside the subversive behavior of the characters, the ability of the slave to reflect his reality in his tales is where the act of subversion lies. Not only when the characters subvert the laws imposed by morality by engaging in behaviors that defy the set of values imposed by the dominant power, but also when the slave forms a discourse through the transformation of the social order in the African tales. In order to demonstrate my argument that the slave’s tales reflect a counter-poetics of internalization and subversion, in the following chapter I will conduct a comparative study of the world of the Haitian tales as well as selected tales respectively from *La Belle Histoire de Leuk-le-Lièvre* and *Le Roman de Bouqui*: “Voyage au pays du mil” and “Bouqui et Malice vendent leurs mères”.

CHAPTER 3

Bouqui and Malice, a Caribbean counter-poetics : comparative study of *La Belle Histoire de Leuk le Lièvre* and *Le Roman de Bouqui*.

The third chapter of my study compares Haitian and Wolof folktales respectively from *Le Roman de Bouqui* (1940) by Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain and *La Belle Histoire de Leuk le Lièvre* (1953) by Léopold Sédar Senghor and Abdoulaye Sadji. The purpose of this comparison is to demonstrate how the slave engages in resistance to acculturation through the tensions reflected in the fictional world of his tales. These tales reflect a very complex world where the slave articulates, according to Edouard Glissant, a counter-poetics, the formation of which reflects a discourse that not only describes the struggle of the slave, but also proposes through African oral literature, forms of resistance to this struggle.

Foucault affirms that a counter-discourse arises after the imposition of a discourse: “There are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised; resistance to power does not have to come from elsewhere to be real, nor is it inexorably frustrated through being the compatriot of power” (142). Thus, the presence of a counter-discourse is subordinated to the existence of an imposed discourse of power. I argue that this counter-discourse is composed of two sides: the slave’s internalization of racist stereotypes and his attempts to free himself from his situation of subjection by

engaging in acts of subversion. The intermingling of these two elements forms the counter-discourse since they both represent a response in reaction to the slave's situation. However, it is important to acknowledge the contradictions of the messages they convey: if the slave internalizes the stereotype, how can he subvert the rules of the master and psychologically free himself in his tales?

Foucault argues that the existence of contradictions in a counter-discourse is possible, and yet, the slave's strategy is to create an imaginary world where he embodies the stereotypes assigned to him but also where he projects his desires and aspirations that he reaches with the help of subversion. In *La Civilisation du Bossale*, Condé also explains that the folktale of the slave reflects the internalization of the stereotype and his use of subversion in order to resist oppression. The coexistence of both internalization and subversion within the slave's discourse reveals a contradictory relationship where he negotiates his position between oppression and resistance.

Both *La Belle Histoire* and *Le Roman de Bouqui* represent important contributions to the preservation of oral tradition through writing. In *La Belle Histoire*, Senghor and Sadjì work for cultural preservation by blending African oral literature and the French language. They created a school textbook with a solid cultural background for young Africans based on the valorization of their African culture and the learning of the French language. According to Veronique Corinus : “Leur manuel convoque différentes formes de littérature orale africaine pour montrer la richesse et la singularité de la culture africaine [...] s’inspirant des travaux de Frobenius, il rappelle les fastes passés d’une civilisation riche et policée ” (30). Through this text, Senghor and Sadjì contributed to the

fight against acculturation by introducing oral literature in the French educative system in Francophone West Africa.

Le Roman de Bouqui is also a tool for resistance to acculturation. In “Trésor de veillées, les contes haïtiens recueillis par Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain”, Gyssels praises Comhaire-Sylvain’s considerable work in *Le Roman de Bouqui* as well as her other collection of folktales, proverbs and riddles: “ Le mérite de Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain (1898-1975) fut de récolter la manne que constituaient les fables « *fab’* » créoles, d’étudier en ethnologue et linguiste les origines du créole haïtien et des proverbes, devinettes et contes, brefs de ce qu’on appelle l’ « oraliture » ” (244). *Le Roman de Bouqui*, however, has a different approach from that of *La Belle Histoire*. Comhaire-Sylvain did hear the tales in her childhood but carried out fieldwork before she wrote the book. She collected the stories from Haitian farmers before translating and putting them into writing. Thus these collected stories, written down and delivered to them by Comhaire-Sylvain allowed young Haitians and those of the Francophone Caribbean to have access to the oral literature preserved by the farmers and delivered to them by Comhaire-Sylvain.

Very few critical texts have been written about the two books that are being compared in this chapter. Véronique Corinus’s article “Senghor et Sadjì pédagogues: l’oralité africaine au service de l’écrit français” acknowledges the resistance to acculturation performed by Senghor and Sadjì through their initiative to include the secular oral literature into the educative system of young Africans who attended the French colonial school. She criticizes the authors’ handling of the oral material in *La Belle Histoire* where there is almost no trace of orality. Senghor and Sadjì were not

concerned with recreating the atmosphere of an oral performance; on the contrary, they were interested in transforming and translating oral texts into short written pedagogical narrations which undoubtedly led to an alteration of the original material. In “Trésor de veillées, les contes haïtiens recueillis par Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain” Kathleen Gyssels—one of the few scholars who has done research and has written about Comhaire-Sylvain—examines the themes that are peculiar to French Caribbean tales. She affirms that self-derision, trickery, betrayal, resourcefulness and mischievousness are used by both the characters and the narrator to resist oppression in the tales of *Le Roman de Bouqui* which can be considered a written version of the slave’s counter-poetics. (Gyssels 245)

In order to demonstrate the tensions of this counter-poetics expressed by the slave in his tales, I will first examine the internalization of the stereotype and then the subversion. These aspects of the slave’s counter-poetics reveal the historical context of slavery and its representation in the oral literature. It can be seen through the lack of moral values promoted in the Haitian tales compared to the Wolof ones, the representation of the theme of hunger and the necessity for the characters to resort to trickery and betrayal in order to survive. Secondly, I will analyze the use of subversion by both the slave and his characters through the comparison of two selected tales: “Voyage au pays du mil” and “Bouqui et Malice vendent leurs mères”. In this comparison, aspects of internalization will also be underlined in order to show, as argued by Foucault, the complex coexistence of contradictory strategies in a counter-discourse.

The two main protagonists of both collections of folktales have populated the childhood of many young Africans and youth of the Caribbean who have heard of them

from their parents, grandparents, other relatives and nannies. Thus, a book containing their adventures has been crucial to the preservation of the target culture. Most tales in *Le Roman de Bouqui* were inspired by the adventures of the hare as stated by Comhaire-Sylvain : “Tous ces récits jusqu’aux moindres détails ont été recueillis chez nos paysans [...] Vingt-cinq d’entre eux sont probablement originaires d’Afrique où on les trouve dans diverses tribus. Appartiennent au cycle du lièvre (Afrique occidentale et bantoue)...” (7). And yet *La Belle Histoire* is closer to original oral texts narrating the “cycle du lièvre” or adventures of the hare. In addition, Corinus notes that even though *La Belle Histoire* is an adaptation and not the faithful transcription of the hare’s adventures, the narrations presented by Senghor and Sadjì are similar to many collections of Wolof folktales retelling the same stories: “Les contes qu’ils rassemblent sont effectivement très courants et l’on retrouve plusieurs d’entre eux dans les recueils des ethnologues qui ont œuvré au Sénégal” (Corinus 331).

Consequently, even though *Le Roman de Bouqui* was written and published before *La Belle Histoire*, I will consider the stories told in the second collection as the “original” versions because neither Comhaire-Sylvain nor Senghor and Sadjì created these tales, they were already well known in their countries and their task consisted in putting into writing what had been transmitted from generation to generation. The fact that one was put into writing before the other does not mean that the tales in *La Belle Histoire* cannot be considered as the original tales. The tales were brought to the Islands by the African slaves who heard them in their home continent: Africa.

In the Wolof tales, the hare never loses; he is presented by Senghor and Sadjì as the hero who learns from his mistakes and gains wisdom at the end of his adventure.

They confess that the succession of stories in *La Belle Histoire* is not the original order in which they were told to them during their childhood : “Présenter à l’enfant noir des récits isolés, sans aucun lien qui les rattache les uns aux autres, serait tuer la vie et le mouvement dont son imagination anime ces récits. [...] Il fallait donc trouver le lien et nous l’avons fait en groupant les récits autour d’un même personnage, Leuk-le-Lièvre” (1). As educators, they deliberately chose the tales in which the hare was the main protagonist and constructed the book around the same character for didactic purposes.

This manipulation of the oral material by the authors has to be taken into account when comparing the selected folktale of *La Belle Histoire* with that of *Le Roman de Bouqui*. Senghor and Sadjì chose the hare because he embodies intelligence which always triumphs over difficult situations and they modified some of Leuk’s bad behavior in order to transmit a moral lesson to the young readership. According to them, the intelligence of the West-African hare can be paralleled with that of the European fox: “Ce n’est pas par hasard que nous avons choisi ce personnage. Dans les contes et fables de l’Afrique Noire, il jouit, avec Diargogne-l’Araignée du même renom que le Renard dans les contes et fables de l’Europe” (1). However, while Leuk’s behavior has been changed in *La Belle Histoire* while an important part of the argument of internalization in *Le Roman de Bouqui* lies with on Malice’s immoral behavior compared to that of his African counterpart.

However, given the important role played by memory in the transmission of the oral texts, I will use the stories in *La Belle Histoire* as a point of comparison with the Haitian tales. In fact, the texts in *La Belle Histoire* cannot be considered as authentic oral texts collected by an ethnographer and put into writing exactly as they were told. Senghor

and Sadji both heard them during their childhood and wrote the book by accessing childhood memories. “Les deux auteurs puisent pourtant bien la matière de leur ouvrage dans le fond traditionnel sénégalais. (Corinus 331) Since memory was the same tool used by informants from whom the ethnographers collect their tales, the absence of features of an oral performance and the manipulations performed by the authors do not prevent the texts from having the same general content and message. Additionally, the aspects of oral performance were taken out from the stories because it is a book for elementary school and putting into writing an oral text entails the use of literary strategies involving a strong mastery of the language which was not the case for Senghor and Sadji’s young readership.

In *La Belle Histoire*, even though Bouki is present in almost all the stories, the book focuses on Leuk’s evolution through his exploits with other animals and also humans. Corinus explains that:

Le héros africain connaît en revanche une véritable initiation ; le lecteur suit les étapes de sa vie qui le conduisent de sa naissance parodique à sa mort symbolique. Son évolution dans le temps s’accompagne d’une transformation de son être. Bien qu’il ne départisse jamais véritablement de sa stature de *trickster*, il change foncièrement en changeant de l’égoïsme à l’altruisme (28).

In fact, Leuk’s adventures are put together in an order that teaches the reader how Leuk learns from his experiences. Even though he was presented as the smartest animal of the bush, he still learned a lot from others and he experiences an evolution in his behavior after he has lived through all these adventures.

This constitutes according to Corinus: “le récit d’une longue initiation qui conduit le héros de la sauvagerie d’un animal inculte et méchant à la dignité d’un homme sage et instruit” (28). For example, the first tale “Le plus jeune animal”, symbolically represents his birth among the animals and introduces him as the smartest of all times.¹⁶ After that tale, the series of adventures is presented as a spiritual journey at the end of which Leuk finally finds wisdom and decides to use his intelligence for the greater good. For example in the following tales “Leuk découvre la brousse” and “Leuk découvre la mer”, he discovers the bush and its inhabitants, and then explores the forest and the sea. During his journey, he meets characters who will help him (Diargogne-the-spider, Mbélar-the-swallow, Mame Randatou-the-fairy etc...) and others who will try to harm him (Bouki-the-hyena and humans).

The reader also witnesses Leuk’s physical transformation after he is severely beaten by humans which according to that explanatory folktale entitled “Mame Randatou la fée” explains how hares got long ears, short tail and back distorted legs. We also witness how Leuk goes from being carnivore to becoming herbivore which in the African oral tradition would be an explanatory tale that explains describes why hares are herbivore. This not only symbolizes Leuk’s radical change from a mean animal to a wise and intelligent one, it also gives validity to the stories. Given that in real life, hares are herbivores; this tale seeks to make the young reader believe that these stories are not solely for entertainment, and that the messages they convey such as the respect for the

¹⁶ In the first tale of *La Belle Histoire* Senghor and Sadji describe how Leuk distinguished himself from others during a meeting where all the animals were discussing who was the youngest. Each of them tried to give an approximate date of birth and Leuk came up with the smartest idea by simulating his birth in the middle of the reunion in order to prove to all the animals that he was the youngest.

elderly (13), the virtues of listening (17) and the use of intelligence for the greater good and not for deceit (128) should be taken into consideration.

Le Roman de Bouqui, however, does not follow the same rules as *La Belle Histoire*. The interweaving of both internalization and subversion to form a counter-poetics, is a reflection of the complexity of the slave's resistance through his oral literature. Thus, the tales of *Le Roman de Bouqui* are sometimes not connected and the series of adventures do not follow the same pattern; there is no quest at the end of which the characters gain wisdom and the dominant message is the advice to engage subversive strategies in order to survive in a hostile environment. In addition, to subversive strategies there is, as explained by Condé, the internalization of racist stereotypes. "Nous ne savons pas combien de temps il fallut au stéréotype pour être intériorisé. [...]. Outre le fait que nous avons déjà cité— les railleries des esclaves à l'endroit des « baptisés debout » et des « nègres nouveaux » en général—le désir de s'éclaircir symbole de l'ascension vers le maître..."(33). The modification that was done to Bouki and Leuk when transplanted in the Haitian oral literature, contributed in transforming them into the *bossale* and the creole. Accordingly, by using hunger, mistrust, betrayal and trickery as the main themes of the tales, the slave paints characters and their world which correspond to the stereotypes previously attributed to him by his oppressor. A close look at these themes and modifications in *Le Roman de Bouqui* will help illustrate how the slave reflects his struggle and his situation through the way he takes on his identity built by the oppressor.

In *Le Roman de Bouqui* the constant hunger is the motive of almost all the misdemeanors and crimes perpetrated by Bouqui and Malice, portraying the stereotype of

the hungry and the stealing slave. Gyssels argues that hunger is an obsession in creole tales: “Dans l’imaginaire afro-caribéen et africain américain, la faim est obsessionnelle dans tous les contes issus de l’esclavage aux Antilles françaises” (245). In almost all the stories, Bouqui and Malice are starving and as a result, try to feed themselves at all cost, constantly stealing from others and betraying each other.

The omnipresence of hunger contributes to the description of an environment where survival is the main preoccupation; the geographical space more resembles that of the slave in the plantation. For example, several tales of the collection begin with an introductory phrase about hunger or famine. They are presented as a justification of Bouqui and Malice’s future crimes: “C’était en pleine famine, les provisions étaient rares et très chères”(29). Other tales of the collection begin the same way, the sentence varies but the message remains: “Il y avait une fois, dans un pays désolé par la famine...” (32). Sometimes, the narrator gives a detailed description of the starvation that strikes the two protagonists : “Bouqui avait maigri de façon effrayante, sa tête devenait longue, ses vêtements flottaient, il avait dû serrer sa ceinture de deux crans, ses yeux s’enfonçaient et son regard était égaré comme celui d’un fou. Malice lui est tout petit, la faim a sur lui moins de prise” (45) Given the opening of the tales, it seems understandable to any reader that Bouqui and Malice’s preoccupation will be to look for food in order to fight this constant hunger.

Despite the constant starvation, there is no sign of extreme sadness and no victimization of the slave since the main objective is not only to entertain but also to construct, as Glissant argued, a counter-poetics. According to Gyssels, self-mockery and derision seem to be the dominating voices in these folktales: “Ces narrations où

l'autodérision et le dérisoire dominant nous laissent perplexes, effets troublants que l'absence de glose ou de métadiscours intensifie encore" (244). In creole societies, these stories were usually told during wakes or evening gatherings where the audience needed consolation, relaxation or entertainment. (Gyssels243) These moments represented an opportunity for the people of the same community to express their struggle through humor and creativity by transforming their oppression into funny stories to alleviate their sufferings.

When reading *Le Roman de Bouqui* or any collection of creole tales, the reader is left perplexed by the behavior and the actions of the characters such as matricides (64) and domestic violence (179). While some see these animal stories as funny but yet meaningless, while others can read beyond the actions of the protagonists, the dynamics of the oppressed under a society where the rules of slavery are the only valid ones: "The triumph of cunning became self-serving, not oriented to saving the group from outsiders. With the shift from a focus on the community to a focus on the individual these creole tales signal new moral boundaries of behavior" (Browne 90). For example: in the thirteenth tale "Ce que Malice ne pardonna jamais à Bouqui" Malice and Bouqui ate Bouqui's mother because they were hungry and wanted to get rid of an extra mouth to feed.¹⁷

Apart from the theme of hunger, there is also the stereotype of the lazy slave who would only work when he is forced to. According to Condé: "L'attitude de l'esclave face au travail est nettement exprimée dans les proverbes. Nous ne reviendrons pas sur la réputation trop connue de paresse faite au noir"(30). In fact, laziness and idleness are

¹⁷ In "Ce que malice ne pardonna jamais à Bouqui" (59) Malice succeeded once again in fooling Bouqui by talking him into eating his own mother, however, Bouqui got his revenge at the end, by eating Malice's mother in return.

mentioned in the tales as a habit of the characters who are described as naturally reluctant to work: “Malgré leur misère, ces Messieurs ne voulaient pas travailler” (Comhaire-Sylvain 45). Thus, Bouqui and Malice prefer to steal or sell one of their relatives instead of working. Houston Baker affirms that laziness and idleness are characteristics of trickster animal tales: “The subliminal component of black animal tales is apparent in the delineation of the trickster as a cunning figure who tricks others into doing his work. The “avoidance of work” situation motivates the action of such tales...” (22). Malice and Bouqui’s profiles—that of the trickster and his partner in crime—are the reasons why they were both chosen by the slave to be the most important actors in his counter-poetics.

Thus, their physical representations can seem problematic since they act like animals but are sometimes described as humans. Comhaire-Sylvain questions their nature by stating that they are humans but not ordinary humans: “D’abord chez nos paysans, Bouqui et Malice sont des hommes et non des animaux. Pas tout à fait des hommes comme nous cependant. Bouqui en particulier est une espèce de brute, grand gros, laid vorace avec une longue queue” (13). Even though the physical descriptions of Bouqui and Malice are very similar from one continent to another, in Africa, the two characters are clearly animals and are not identified with humans.

However, in the New World, the slave’s assimilation with animal characters relates to the experience of the Middle Passage and the treatment suffered by the slaves who were forced to live in inhuman conditions. By identifying themselves with the animals of the tale, they not only reflect their oppression, but they also allow themselves to take on the form of animals in the fictional world of the tales, which gives them more opportunities to fulfill their aspirations and desires, and challenge the rules of morality.

In their tales they do not often express remorse and there is no moralizing discourse from the narrator. Malice's ability to fool and deceive is his salvation while Bouqui's stupidity and perpetual attempts to get revenge allow the audience/reader to admire Malice's intelligence. The narrator supports this argument by closing many tales with the same message: "Qui n'est pas le plus fort, doit être le plus malin" (106). "Oncle Bouqui crois-moi, laisse là ta vengeance, malgré son petit corps, Malice est le plus fort" (109). Although the African tales also extol the virtues of intelligence over physical strength, they do not have a racial connotation seeking to attribute the intelligence to the *nègre créole* (seen as more civilized) and the stupidity to the *nègre bossale* (who embodies barbarism).

Accordingly, the opening sentence of the tale "Le taureau du roi" in *Le Roman de Bouqui* mirrors Lucien Peytraud's story about God, the devil and the creation of the black and the white man mentioned in the second chapter of the study: "Voilà, Dieu distribue l'esprit comme il veut, c'est une chose qu'on n'achète pas au marché, Malice sera toujours intelligent, Bouqui ne cessera jamais d'être un imbécile" (68). Here, the narrator presents Bouqui's stupidity as a fatality which was imposed upon him by God just as Peytraud and Feijoo's stories explain that God made the devil's man Black in order to distinguish him from his own creation: the White man. Since Bouqui and Malice are more than simple animal characters in a New World context; the opening of "Le taureau du roi" does not simply state that Malice will always be smarter than Bouqui, it implies that the creole will always be more civilized than the *bossale*.

Bouki and Leuk's racial identities were not the only changes they experienced during their transformation into Bouqui and Malice. Their names also suffered alterations

in the process of adoption and adaptation of the tales. These alterations are important because almost all the changes that have been done to Bouqui and Malice's profiles contribute to their transformation as two important figures in the Haitian slave's daily life: the *bossale* and the creole.

Bouki which means "hyena" in Wolof kept his name. According to Comhaire-Sylvain, it is because there was not an equivalent of the hyena in the lands where the slaves lived (9). In the case of the hare, he was easily assimilated to an animal from the same family: the rabbit. In Haiti he is called Ti Malice: the word "malice" which means "mischief" refers to his ability to fool other animals. In other regions of the island, he is called "Lapin" and in African American folktales he corresponds to Brer Rabbit (Comhaire- Sylvain 9). Throughout the tales of the collection, Malice's racial identity and family ties are problematized: when Leuk crossed the Atlantic to become Malice, the slave gave him a black grandmother, an unknown mother and a foster family. This reflects once again the historical context of slavery since in the slave's tales; Malice's family is spread apart. In fact, it was common for a slave to be separated from their family members; they could be sold at any moment to any plantation owner. Thus, it was common to see children taken away from their parents because they were sold and sent to another plantation or sometimes another island.

For instance, in the first tale of *Le Roman de Bouqui* entitled "Le bain de Bouqui", the narrator explains under what circumstances he met Bouqui and Malice, and gives information about their families: "Je les ai tous connus à cette époque, il y avait Madame Bouqui chez qui les enfants habitaient et puis dans un autre village, il y avait Madame Gainedé, qui était la mère de Bouqui" (19). As is the case in Africa, Malice is

Bouqui's nephew but in the Haitian tales, Comhaire-Sylvain goes further by explaining that Mrs Gaïnedé is Bouqui's mother and that Malice comes from the Gianacou family.¹⁸

According to her, Malice is only part of Bouqui's family because he was raised among them, but in reality he is the son of Gianacou with another woman. (19) The information about his parents was given in the first tale, and later on, in the nineteenth tale, the narrator informs us that Malice's grandmother was "une nègresse de Guinée" (86). The way Malice's racial identity is presented in this collection of Haitian folktales implies that he is Caribbean born (his grand-mother was referred to as a slave, so he was born in the Islands) which confirms his personification of the *nègre créole* who was defined as an island born slave sometimes of mixed race. Thus, Malice's identity is once again tied to slavery through his clear affiliation with the *nègre créole* and through his family. Given the Wolof equivalent for Gaïnedé and Gianacou, Malice's familial ties in the Haitian tales are very different from that of the hare in the Wolof tales. The slave invented a distinct family for Malice (except for his affiliation with Bouqui), signifying through these new elements that the context has changed.

Another interesting change which shows how the transformation of the African hyena and hare into the *bossale* and the creole demonstrates an internalization of the stereotypes is Bouqui and Malice's difference in their mastery of the French language. Bouqui does not speak correct French in Comhaire-Sylvain's tales; he speaks what Frantz Fanon referred to as "parler petit nègre" whereas Malice speaks perfect French: "Mayiche, chai toujours été faïb pour toi, donne à ton noncque Mayiche" (69) instead of

¹⁸ In Wolof, the word "Gaïnedé" written without the "e" means "lion", and yet in *La Belle Histoire* and other African tales, Gaïndé-the-lion is not affiliated with the hyena, they belong to separate families. In her introduction Comhaire-Sylvain attributed the word to the name Togolese people from Dagomba give to the cry of the hyena; "ganié". (Comhaire-Sylvain 9, Senghor, Sadjji 1)

“Malice j’ai toujours été faible envers toi, donne à ton oncle, Malice”.¹⁹ On one hand, Bouqui’s incorrect French can be paralleled with one of the main characteristics attributed to the *nègre bossale*: that he does not speak correctly the language of the master. On the other hand Malice’s mastery of the language of the colonizer confirms him as the symbol of the *nègre créole* who is seen as better than the *bossale*; since he is “less Africanized” and more “civilized”.

This aspect regarding the language of the two characters illustrates the linguistic difference between *nègre bossale* and *nègre créole* which resulted in the formation of a hierarchy of races. By recreating the language barriers between Bouqui and Malice, Comhaire-Sylvain reflects the racial barrier between creole and *bossale*; an element only present in the Caribbean tale. It reflects one of the numerous differences between African and Caribbean variants such as the difference in terms of morality, the family ties between the different animals and the use of subversion as means of survival.

In order to show how contradictory strategies navigate together in the same story to form a discourse of counter-poetics. I will now deal with the internalization of the stereotype in “Bouqui and Malice vendent leurs mères”. The first example of internalization is the personalization of the *bossale* and the creole and the creation of an environment that matches their representations. The merciless environment depicted in the Haitian tales refers to the Caribbean under slavery where atrocities equal or worse than a matricide were committed everyday. In Bouqui and Malice’s world, there is a significant lack of moral values and principles; trickery and betrayal are prevalent themes, while hunger is presented as a motive to steal and kill. All the misdemeanors in

¹⁹ In *Peau noire, masques blancs* Fanon explains the expression “Parler petit nègre” which was used by the colonizer to define when the colonized who does not master the language speaks incorrect French or has a heavy African or Caribbean accent. (16-25).

the African tales are accentuated in the Haitian tales where self-derision is omnipresent. It is perceptible in every aspect of the tales.

Gyssels observes: “Certes la cruauté s’y décline de manière apparemment anodine; un ton de badinage creuse l’écart entre la mimesis [...] et les réactions de ceux qui sont les « héros » de la narration et chez ceux qui constituent l’audience” (245) . In fact, Bouqui and Malice do not sell their aunt; they sell their mothers at the market. Therefore I emphasize the choice of such a sacred parent as a mother as the ultimate evidence of the lack of morality of these two characters while in the creole tale this should not surprise the reader as it is an ongoing theme. On the morality of creole tales Browne notes about the morality of creole tales: “In my explorations of bookstores in Martinique, I saw the creole folktales, replete with lessons that run counter to the standards of “respectability in France...” (90). This is in part because the world described in these stories is a world without boundaries and without restrictions, where mothers are sold or eaten.

Gyssels affirms: “Le conte comique illustre jusqu’où peut aller la bassesse des enfants et des parents, en temps d’extrême dévastation et de totale désolation qui sont le cortège de la traite négrière et de l’esclavage ” (245). She notes that this immoral behavior is a direct cause of slavery because in the world of the slave, such actions are perpetrated everyday. In addition, the fact that Bouqui and Malice are the one selling their mothers subverts the societal roles of power since they take the place of the master and exercise his power in order to reverse the pre-established order.

Another important aspect of the Haitian version is that Malice and Bouqui did not exchange their mothers for food, they instead sold Bouqui’s mother for money and

bought food with it. “Il la vendirent pour soixante gourdes à un parent de Cologuère qui comptait s’en servir pour travailler dans son jardin et la manger le cas échéant ”(31). The introduction of money as an exchange value for their mothers, trivializes their crime even more. More importantly, it also creates once again, a metaphor for slavery. It was clearly stated in the narration that the new owner of Bouqui’s mother would use her to work in his garden or eat her in case she was not productive enough.

Trickery and betrayal both illustrate internalization and subversion. On one hand, the internalization of the stereotype portrays the characters as dishonest and selfish. On the other hand, the use of subversive strategies invites the audience/reader to subvert in order to survive. J. Mason Brewer describes the trickster rabbit in African American tales as follows: “The animal tales told by Negro slaves with Brer Rabbit as the hero had a meaning far deeper than mere entertainment. The rabbit actually symbolizes the slave himself. Whenever the rabbit succeeded in proving himself smarter than another animal the slave rejoiced secretly, imagining himself smarter than his master” (3-4).²⁰ Thus, the lesson dispensed to the audience/reader is an invitation to use subversive strategies instead of frankly engaging a physical resistance with other characters.

Selfishness, as well as trickery and betrayal, are prevalent themes of the tales. Gyssels also believes that these behaviors which are frequent in creole tales originate from mistrust. For instance, after having sold Bouqui’s mother, they bought a donkey and other provisions with the money. But Malice who is even more selfish than his African counterpart Leuk, does not leave one part of the provisions for Bouqui to believe in his good faith. He hid everything and made him believe it sank in the mud.

²⁰ Comhaire-Sylvain explains that Brer Rabbit is the African American counterpart of Malice, and the West African hare. (8)

As for Bouqui, he acts exactly as the savage described by the colonizer, and this trait of his personality was emphasized in the Haitian tale because Bouqui is the *bossale*; thus he is more savage and less intelligent than the creole (Malice) who is so smart that he does not need to use physical strength, he prefers subversion in order to succeed in his undertakings. In fact, the Haitian tale gives a longer description of how Malice convinced his mother to allow him to tie her with a loose rope and pretend that she was going to be sold in contrast with Bouqui who brutally tied his mother with a solid rope and forced her to follow him. This part emphasizes on the difference between two methods employed to accomplish the same action. Like Malice, Bouqui could have convinced his mother to follow him with the rope around her neck and pretend it was a joke; but on the contrary, he automatically used force.

In *Le Roman de Bouqui*, Malice never stops deceiving others until his last breath while in *La Belle Histoire*, his tricks are in a certain way justified. This behavior is due once again to the historical context of slavery where the slave who is uprooted, lives in a world where injustice governs; he is hungry, tired, mistreated and rejected by the same society that exploits him. He deals with his struggle through different ways and as a result, instead of a moral lesson at the end of the tales, the most useful advice he can give to his fellow slaves is to always put themselves first and not to trust anyone in such an dreadful world as that of the plantation.

For example, in the tale “Le pari de commère baleine” from *Le Roman de Bouqui*, Malice fooled the whale (baleine) for fun whereas in *La Belle Histoire* “la rencontre de l’éléphant et de la baleine”, Leuk had a reason for playing this trick on the whale. These two tales are structurally and thematically similar, but in the Haitian collection, Malice

made a bet with Commère baleine (the whale) because he was bored. There were no extenuating circumstances and no reason for the bad trick he played on the whale and the elephant.

Comparing tales of *La Belle Histoire* with *Le Roman de Bouqui* also enables the reader to retrieve the missing pieces of the puzzle in the Haitian collection. Comhaire-Sylvain explains that during the process of transplantation and adaptation of the oral texts, losses and alterations can occur. Consequently, it is normal to note a certain disconnection between the tales in the Haitian collection: “Il se produit des erreurs de détail d’interprétation, des omissions, des développements et des transformations suivant le génie de la race qui a reçu le greffon” (11). For example in “le pari de commère baleine”, Malice tricks the whale just like the hare did in the Wolof tale. But the reason for his scheme was not explained.

While the Haitian folktale focuses on how Malice tricked the whale and omitted the part where the origin of the action is explained, the African version, explains that Leuk needed milk from both the elephant and the whale because Mame Randatou-the-fairy required it as a payment for the medical care she provided him after humans had severely beaten him.²¹ Thus, Leuk came up with this scheme where he fools both the elephant and the whale by promising them a gift in exchange for their generosity.²²

Having illustrated the internalization I will now deal with subversive strategies used by the slave and his characters. This will be illustrated at three distinct levels: first

²¹ In the Haitian version, Malice made a bet with the whale because he was bored; he challenged him to drag him out of the water by pulling on a rope. He tied the whale with a rope and gave the other side to the elephant making him believe that there was a present on the other extremity and that he needed to pull with all his strength in order to get it. Even though he was intrigued by the heaviness of the present Malice promised him, the elephant succeeded in pulling the whale out of the water.

²² He gave each animal an extremity and asked them to pull with all their strength in order to get the heavy present. When both the whale and the elephant met, they understood that they had been fooled by the hare.

in the slave's adaptation of the African oral literature to his reality, second throughout the incorporation of fairer endings in tales where innocents are oppressed and lastly through Bouqui and Malice's use of trickery. Firstly, the slave's adaptation of the African oral literature to his reality is an act of subversion since the slave kept the plots and the characters of the African tales but changed the moralizing message into an encouragement to use trickery as a strategy to survive. Secondly, subversion is visible through the disruption of the manichean world of the Wolof tales; the importance to render justice for the oppressed is significant because the slave identifies with his characters. Thirdly, the most obvious use of subversion can be seen through Bouki and mostly Malice, who use tricks in order to withstand oppression.

I will illustrate the interweaving of internalization and subversion in the tales: "Voyage au pays du mil" and "Bouqui et Malice vendent leurs mères" from *La Belle Histoire* and *Le Roman de Bouqui* respectively because the comparison will help point demonstrate how the changes effectuated by the slave when he adapted the African tale reflect the two elements that constitute his counter-poetics. According to Glissant : "Le conte déboucle à la source cachée des oppressions et il jubile dans les bonheurs inconnus, peut être obscurs. [...] Nos récits sont des mélopées, et des traités de joyeux parler, et des cartes de géographie, et de plaisantes prophéties, qui n'ont pas souci d'être vérifiées" (1). Glissant notes that the creole tales are not simple narrations, but represent both an outlet and a refuge where desires and aspirations can be fulfilled. It proves the ability of the slave to negotiate power in his oral literature. In fact, the Haitian tale "Bouqui et Malice vendent leurs mères" conveys a totally different message from the corresponding Wolof tale "Voyage au pays du mil".

On the surface, there is not much distinction between the two stories, but when the two texts are analyzed in their historical contexts, one can see that the changes effectuated during the adaptation are very subtle; these are necessary strategies when subverting. Gyssels argues that “Bouqui et Malice vendent leurs mères” can be read in different ways: “Parmi les centaines de contes, j’ai choisi Bouqui et Malice vendent leurs mères parce qu’il peut ou bien choquer le lecteur, ou au contraire lui paraître insignifiant. Soit on rit jaune, soit on mesure l’immense tragique qui se cache derrière une fabulation aussi invraisemblable” (245). She acknowledges that one can see the story as a narration which portrays the world of the plantation where people are traded like cattle, but others can see the story as a simple narration where the two characters tried to sell their mothers and find themselves punished for such an awful crime.

The slave’s subversion is textual in that he reworks the oral text and makes changes that help him identify with the trickster in his stories. Therefore, the fact that the Haitian tale can be read with or without the historical context of slavery in the New World, illustrates the ability of the slave to subvert the Wolof tales. In the process of adaptation; the slave reshaped the African version and gave it a new form that reflected both his oppressive situation and his ability to fulfill his desires of justice in his imaginary world. This allowed only the most alert audience/reader to decode the hidden message while others would laugh at Bouqui and Malice’s setbacks unaware of the possible interpretation of the story in a New World context. Thus, in *Le Roman de Bouqui* the meaning of the slave’s tales is implied rather than clearly stated. Only with a historical, political and social contextualization of the adaptation of these tales can the reader decipher the message they convey.

A second act of subversion in the slave's counter-discourse is the disruption of the pre-established order in the Wolof tales. The manichean world of the African tales where the hare always wins and Bouki always loses does not prevail anymore. In a world where he is subjected and exploited, justice is a luxury for the slave, it represents a desire he does not have access to. This explains why the slave deliberately breaks the structure of the African tales in order to introduce these new elements. Thus, in the Haitian tales, the world is fairer; Malice who is the Haitian representation of the hare is often punished for his misdemeanors because the slave tries to dispense justice for the oppressed in his adaptation. This concern for justice is present in the Haitian tales because the slave identifies with the characters. To him, the protagonists are not simple animals, their profiles are representative of that of the *bossale* and the creole, and thus, he sympathizes with Bouqui and Malice's situation as well as the characters who are struggling.

Consequently the tale "Bouqui and Malice vendent leur mères" does not end with a victory by Malice. In his adaptation of the African tale, the slave imagines a fairer ending. As Maryse Condé observed in *La civilisation du Bossale*: "En un mot l'univers n'est plus manichéen; d'un côté, les éternels perdants, de l'autre les éternels gagnants. Dans son imaginaire, le noir reconstitue un monde plus clément" (36). The creation of a structure where the characters can achieve justice despite their vulnerability in this society is part of the subversion of discourses that do not allow the weak to have justice. The Haitian tales not only breaks the order built in the African version, it also tries to create justice for the oppressed such as Bouqui's mother.

Therefore, in the Haitian tales, Bouqui and Malice both experience punishment, Bouqui for selling his mother and Malice for betraying his uncle. Unlike Leuk, he does

not leave Bouqui hanging in a tree and take the rest of the beef to share with his family. On the contrary, Malice who had secured the donkey and the provisions in a safe place went back to take them home after he fooled Bouqui. In the Wolof tale, Bouqui knows that he was fooled by Leuk as he watches his nephew eat the beef that has been cooking for hours. However, the Haitian tale, which is more concerned with justice for the oppressed presents a different ending, Bouqui goes home thinking that he sold his mother for provisions that he ended up losing in the mud. However, the Haitian tale, which is more concerned with justice for the oppressed presents a different ending. By providing Maman Bouqui with a means of provision and transport to go back home safe and sound while Bouqui and Malice both lose everything they had purchased with Maman Bouqui's sale, the oppressed are fictionally freed and justice is served.

Just like the story where Bouqui eats Malice's mother after the latter ate his, Malice is once again punished: "[...] L'âne avait disparu. Savez-vous qui s'en était emparé? Vous n'auriez jamais deviné. Il faut que je vous dise, Maman Bouqui! Oui, Maman Bouqui avait réussi à se sauver et pour retourner plus vite auprès de son méchant fils, elle avait pris cet âne blessé qui avait l'air abandonné" (Comhaire-Sylvain 31). The narrator explains that ants took the provisions with them and on her way back home, Bouqui's mother, who had escaped from her new owner, found the donkey Malice had hidden on her way back home, the donkey Malice had hidden.

The third illustration of subversion is the choice of trickster characters, such as Bouki and Leuk, and their adventures by the slave when adapting Wolof tales in Haiti. "Nous avons vu que dans le cycle du lièvre il y avait eu préférence pour les aventures où paraissait l'hyène" (Comhaire-Sylvain 11). In effect, there was a preference for the

adventures of Bouki and the hare instead of that of other animals such as the turtle, the lion, the spider etc. I argue that this preference was grounded on the character's profiles since just like the *bossale* and the creole, Bouki and mostly Leuk always use subversion to succeed in their undertakings. Given that the *bossale* and the creole were a product of the New World context, the power play between the two characters mirrors the dynamics of slavery where the hierarchy of races and the hostile environment originated such behavior among the enslaved population.

Comparing the African and the Haitian folktales helps understand what has been omitted or changed and why. Browne observes that: "...Key features of the African stories changed in the New World context to meet the realities of plantation slavery. Whereas in Africa the trickster tales ended up in securing the community good, the Caribbean versions favored outcomes that benefited the individual" (90). In this case, the justification of Leuk's action are absent from the Haitian tale where Malice is presented as an immoral character who tricks others for fun. I argue that there is no justification for Malice's actions in the Haitian tales because the *Le Roman de Bouqui* does not narrate the protagonist's quest for wisdom, neither does it seek to instruct the audience/reader and provide, as observed by Browne, moral lessons for the community, the focus is on trickery as subversion which is an important reversal of power by the slave who takes control of his future by subverting the rule of the his society where individuality prevails.

All the elements which contributed to the formation of the slave's counter-poetics are part of his experience in the New World; his oral literature is full of marks of domination and oppression but also of resistance. As seen in the comparison of "Voyage au pays du mil" and "Bouqui and Malice vendent leurs mères" internalization and

subversion are both part of his discourse. The contradictory messages contained in his tales are a proof of the complexity of resistance in the New World context where the slave could only rely on a few tools to fight oppression and acculturation. Gyssels explain that “Bouqui and Malice vendent leurs mères” calls for a reflection about the complex world of the slave: “Ce conte incite à réfléchir à ce qui a pu engendrer un tel assemblage de signes signifiants et de dialogues paradoxaux” (245). I have demonstrated that the writing of these oral texts enabled a written form of transmission to resist acculturation but also proposed a new reading of slavery in the French Caribbean from the slave’s perspective.

The latter used his creativity to shape an imaginary world which became an outlet for all his fellow oppressed. Never had he imagined that the world of his tales would form a counter-discourse where his deepest desires and aspiration would walk side by side with his daily struggles, allowing a contemporary reading of these texts for present generations to understand the complexity of their cultural identity. Gyssels explained: “Aux Antilles, société toute entière marquée par l’esclavage et la colonisation, l’anthropologie s’expose moins dans les musées [...] que dans cette tradition orale qu’a fidèlement transcrite Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain” (245). Thus, the anthropologic work of Comhaire-Sylvain was at the service of Haitian cultural identity by resisting acculturation. Fortunately, other authors such as Excilia Saldaña have also found ways to use traditional oral texts, by working with both social sciences and literature to speak to contemporary issues. I will illustrate in the following chapter how Saldaña has proposed, just as Comhaire-Sylvain, a way to resist acculturation through ethnography and literature combined.

CHAPTER 4

From ethnography to literature: the new storyteller and the adaptation of Afro-Cuban *patakinés* by Excilia Saldaña

In this chapter, I propose the idea of the new storyteller; the orality-writer which can be defined as an agent of both oral and written literature who combines literature and ethnography in the shaping of a national discourse seeking to include the voice of the marginalized or the other, in the definition of his/her country's cultural identity. In *Travestismos Culturales*, Jossiana Arroyo tackles the issue of the political debates about cultural identity in Latin American countries, specifically Cuba and Brazil where there have been attempts to textually include the other in the national discourse. She argues that these representations use distinct strategies to manipulate the image of the other so as to always position him as different: "En otras palabras, al representar a estas poblaciones negras, el travestismo cultural las manipula, subordina y estereotipa racial y sexualmente amparándose en un discurso de armonía y amor nacional" (5).

In fact, the other is always identified as different since his existence validates that of a dominant power that places him in this category. According to Elleke Boehmer: "The concept of the other, which is built on the thought of *inter alia*, Hegel and Sartre, signifies that which is unfamiliar and extraneous to a dominant subjectivity, the opposite or negative against which an authority is defined" (21). And yet, Arroyo's theory emphasizes those strategies used by the authority to define what Boehmer calls the

unfamiliar and extraneous. This definition of the other is carried out in terms of race, gender and sexuality: “El travestismo cultural como estrategia de identificación con el otro, surge de los juegos de poder propios de la representación y es por esto que el cuerpo del otro se figura desde la raza, el género y la sexualidad” (5). In this chapter the other corresponds to the Africans and Afro-Cuban women. Thus, both race and gender are key elements in the determination of the identity of the other which are two elements used by Excilia Saldaña in *Kele Kele* through her representation of Afro-Cubans and women.

These distinct points will be illustrated through the analysis of *Kele Kele*, Saldaña’s adaptation of five Afro Cuban myths called *patakín*. The collection of stories represent resistance to acculturation through the blending of oral tradition with literary strategies in order to transform the opposition of orality and writing into complementary elements that include the voices of the marginalized in the national discourse. In addition, this chapter will demonstrate how Saldaña’s version of Obba’s myth, unlike other ethnographic adaptations and transcriptions of this *orisha*’s story, represent a strategy of cultural preservation by Afro-Cuban’s through the incorporation of issues relevant to Cuban society such as: the inclusion of the African elements into the national discourse and the feminist critique of patriarchy.

Through this process, Saldaña allows Cubans to identify with these traditional texts while continuing the chain of transmission of her ancestors’ legacy. “Así termina la historia que hoy te vine a contar; ayer me la dijo mi abuela y mañana tú la repetirás” (41). This invitation to transmit the story from generation to generation not only shows how Saldaña strives for cultural preservation, it also positions her as a narrator who respects

the rules of storytelling through an appropriate use of rhetorical figures, and witticism in her written version of oral texts.²³

In his essay entitled “The Storyteller”, Walter Benjamin predicts the disappearance of the storyteller due to modern ways of telling stories which do not necessarily involve transmission from mouth to mouth. In fact, Benjamin attributes it to the apparition of other means of communicating stories such as writing; he underlines that the best written stories are the one which are the closest to their oral versions since they contain the main material that is passed on, which is knowledge through experience. “Experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn. And among those who have written down the tales, it is the great ones whose written version differs least from the speech of the many nameless storytellers” (1).

However, Saldaña who deliberately distanced herself from the version of the storyteller, revealed herself to be a new-storyteller who reflects orality in her writing while adding new elements to the stories for social and political purposes. She confesses about her *patakines*: “las oí de viva voz y ahora he querido contarlas agregando mi propia resonancia”. (11) Thus, Saldaña’s *Kele Kele* moves away from ethnography and comes closer to literature in order to propose a new vision of the national cultural identity. Similarly, Arroyo draws from Walter Benjamin’s preoccupation about the disappearance of the storyteller to explain how literature and ethnography share a common path in the definition of a national identity of Freyre and Ortiz’s who have both used ethnography to articulate their fictional work about the marginalized populations of their countries:

²³ Witticism is often called shorter form of oral literature or even referred to as “minor” form. They are frequently used in everyday speech situation because they have a neat structure and a sharp poetic appeal. Proverbs, riddles, puns and tong-twisters are examples of Witticism. (Okpewho 226)

De este modo, la recopilación de mitos, folclore, historias y biografías personales que acompañan las referencias literarias en las dos obras monumentales *Casa Grande e Senzala* (1933) de Freyre y *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (1940) de Ortiz, son parte de un proceso de reordenamiento del pasado que se cruza constantemente con la ficción. Este cruce hace de la etnografía una ciencia totalmente inmersa en la escritura.” (39).²⁴

In fact, unlike Ortiz and Freyre, who have used the social sciences as validating authority for the information contained in their literary works, Saldaña uses literature as the main tool to position the narrative viewpoint from the other’s perspective.

Arroyo supports the idea that ethnography creates an illusion of validity for the sources of the literary text: “La verdad que reclama el texto es solo una estrategia para construir su ilusión de totalidad y que, incluso más que por una verdad el texto estará cruzado por varios subjetividades o dominio de verdad” (41). Consequently, the presence of ethnographic sources confers authority to the information presented as literature but does not prevent it from being subjective. As I stated earlier in the introduction, even though ethnography is a social science seeking to provide the scientific truth, it embodies subjectivity because it proposes a nonobjective look at different cultures. This subjectivity reminds Arroyo’s critique about the representation of the other whose image is hindered by a subjective mask. Therefore, as an example of the subjective

²⁴ Arroyo explains that Benjamin defines the storyteller as a narrator who works with both history and fiction to constitute the singularity of his narration that she calls “magia fundadora” (39). This “magia fundadora” is what Arroyo identifies in Ortiz and Freyre’s work as the literary incorporation of the other’s oral text which was collected through ethnographic research. Consequently, she presents Ortiz and Freyre as modern storytellers who combine literature and ethnography just as Benjamin’s storyteller blends history and fiction.

representations of the other, I will analyze Obba's myth along with Saldaña's feminist critique to patriarchy.

My interest in Obba was triggered by the relatively minor position she occupies in Africa where she is hardly worshipped, in contrast with the position and representations she was given in the Americas especially in Cuba and Brazil. (Bascom 5) Her representation underwent religious and cultural changes as she became more important in the New World, first of all as a divinity, secondly through the numerous adaptations of her myth in the Americas. Her myth can be used as an example of Arroyo's *travestismos culturales* since her representation changed from one place to another, she was given more importance in Cuba where she became a multifaceted goddess : "Mi definición de travestismo cultural alude, en ese sentido a ese cambio continuo de posiciones que termina por convertirse en un circuito que encierra una postura melancólica de la subjetividad " (7). Obba's identification changed in terms of race, gender and sexuality and although Arroyo looks specifically at the masculine other, her argument can also be applied to Obba's case who corresponds to Boehmer's definition of the other.

The *orisha* Obba is a fluvial divinity who is said to own the main river running through the eastern part of Yorubaland in Nigeria (Cros Sandoval 250). In Cuba where she is associated with Santa Rita and Santa Catalina de Siena, she is the goddess of home, the good mother and good wife; very much respected by her husband Changó.²⁵ (Illes 772, Cros Sandoval 252) Although her myth has many versions, they all share the fact that she cut her ear and cooked it in *amalá* with *Quimbombó*. The *amalá* is Changó's

²⁵ This aspect of her personality was accentuated among Afro-Cubans who deeply respect her dedication. They describe her relationship with her husband by saying "Changó Obba *o mague alada yina*" meaning; Obba is the most esteemed wife of prince Changó. She symbolizes marital devotion and her sacrifices for love are not seen as stupidity but as example for pure devotedness. This characteristic is absent from African representations of Obba.

ritual dish: made with cornmeal and honey in Cuba, and it accompanies the *Quimbombó*, an okra stew. The reasons for her sacrifice vary depending on the informant: Ochún worshipers report that she is the one who convinced her rival Obba to cut her ear to earn Changó's love and other sources argue that the deceiver is Oyá. (Bascom 5) In Africa, Pierre Verger reports that she was courageous and strong; her femininity, which is not emphasized, is rather outshadowed by her physical ability to fight. She is described as a courageous woman who has fought and beaten several gods of the pantheon and even the malicious *orisha* Eshu, and is often depicted as a warrior queen.²⁶ (Conner and Sparks 71)

In *Encyclopedia of the spirits*, Judika Illes argues that: "being overshadowed is the central theme of Obba's sole surviving myth" (772). Indeed, the fact that she was eclipsed by Ochún and Oyá and even her husband Changó is what gives her a different position in the Americas where there is an attempt to rehabilitate Obba as a valuable *orisha*. Illes underlines that Obba is not submissive; she insists on the fact that she is a beautiful, powerful and wealthy woman who is financially independent and is involved in commerce and politics. In addition, she regularly serves as counselor for her husband before he goes to war. This aspect of her personality was omitted in Saldaña's version where she was presented as a princess, consequently an heiress and not an independent working woman.

Another side of Obba's numerous faces is that in some location in Africa, she is represented as the guardian of prostitutes. (Illes 772) In *Queering creole spiritual*

²⁶ Pierre Verger was a French ethnographer who investigated the Yoruba legacy in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil. He collected the Yoruba version of Oba's myth and translated it in Portuguese in *Lendas Africanas dos Orixás* (1985). In the book's preface, it is said that Verger collected this tale in Oshogbo, Nigeria during his initiation on becoming an *Ifá* priest; it was part of the tales he had to memorize for his initiation.

traditions; lesbian gay bisexual and transgender participation in African-inspired traditions in the Americas Conner and Sparks, explain how Obba was literally a transvestite in the New World where she is represented as a transgender and transsexual. They report that in the Americas, it is a rule that Obba's priestesses be females. (71) Although she was associated with prostitution in Africa, the transgender element added to Obba's representation is uniquely mentioned in the Americas. As a result, we can deduce that in the New World, her role as a woman is not only accentuated but also includes masculine characteristics.

Obba's representations differ from Africa to the Caribbean, but more importantly from the storyteller to the orality-writer's narrations since it reflects the written representation of the other's oral text. To illustrate this point, Saldaña's Obba will be compared to that of Lydia Cabrera in *El Monte* which contains two versions of the myth. The fundamental difference between Cabrera and Saldaña's handling of Obba's myth are illustrative of Arroyo's concept of the other as part of *travestismo cultural* in the sense that it proposes two different images of the same orisha depending on the way her text was adapted. Thus, Obba, who fits into Arroyo's definition of the other, has different representations in Saldaña's and Cabrera's adaptations.

Firstly Saldaña presents the myth of Obba in fictional form, representing the racial and gendered aspect of the *orisha's* identity in order to highlight issues relevant to Afro-Cuban women of her time. Secondly Obba is presented by Cabrera under the form of an ethnographic document. She gives two versions of the myth and cites her informants and the method of collection of the stories, while indicating that objectivity was her priority. "Me he limitado rigurosamente a consignar con absoluta objetividad y

sin prejuicio lo que he oído y lo que he visto” (Cabrera 10). Even though Cabrera’s *El Monte* tries to move away from a subjective representation of the marginalized, she still engages Afro-Cubans as subject of study.

In his essay “Do storytellers lie” Isidore Okpewho explains the important role of the storyteller in the shaping of his society’s identity as he adapts his/her story to the realities of its audience:

when he maneuvers his interests, his backgrounds, or personal circumstances into his portraits of favored characters, he is in essence offering a critical perspective on issues relating to his community's social or political history, or else putting his signature, his seal of approval, on an experience he sees as bearing some relevance for himself or a community of interests he identifies with. (226)

The maneuvers of the storyteller invite the reader to a social interpretation of the myth. As explained in the first chapter of this study, oral texts reflect the society they belong to, and the critical perspective Okpewho refers to is what is absent from Cabrera’s version. In both of Cabrera’s versions, jealousy is the main motive: Obba did not cut her ear in order to feed her husband in times of famine; she did it for him to stay next to her since Changó was always with his two other wives Ochún and Oyá. Obba’s beauty and qualities are hardly described and her gesture is interpreted as the result of a trick played by one of her rivals: “Obba que adora a Changó [...] no ha perdonado a Oyá, que fué la que le dió el consejito de la oreja. Vive apartada, ocultando su oreja mocha” (Cabrera 226). Saldaña’s Obba emphasizes the *orisha*’s physical beauty, irreproachable behavior as well as her love and submissiveness to Changó.

This difference regarding Saldaña and Cabrera's description of Obba shows that in *Kele Kele*, a critique of the submissiveness of women in a patriarchal society is the main message, whereas in *El Monte*, Obba's story is presented as the informant told it to Cabrera with no added critical element. "He querido que sin cambiar sus graciosos y peculiares modos de expresión, estos viejos que he conocido, hijos de africanos muchos de ellos, [...], sean oídos sin intermediario, exactamente como me hablaron..." (Cabrera 7). The purposes of the two authors were clearly different; however, by contrasting Saldaña and Cabrera's work, I will demonstrate how Saldaña is an example of the new storyteller: the writer who valorizes orality by creating an illusion of an oral performance. This new storyteller will serve as an avatar of the traditional storyteller whose disappearance Benjamin predicted. As an example of the new storyteller, I will indicate how Saldaña maneuvers her interests, her backgrounds, and personal circumstances by introducing a feminist critique to patriarchy through the myth of main characters such as Obba. She tries to counter acculturation by molding traditional texts to fit the audience/reader's interest. By deliberately changing aspects of the myth, she rejects the idea of the validating authority of the ethnographic "truth" and chooses the literary engagement instead, the literary engagement by adding racial and feminine discourses with which her fellow Afro-Cubans will be able to identify.

In order to demonstrate Saldaña's adaptations of oral texts in *Kele Kele* as resistance to acculturation by preserving the African legacy in Cuba, I will divide the chapter in three sections. In the first section I will analyze the structure and the content of *Kele Kele* as means of valorizing African verbal art through writing. While looking at the structure, content and oral features of *Kele Kele* four different points will be argued:

firstly the hybridity of her narration which blends poetry and prose, secondly, her use of rhetorical figures such as repetition, parallelism and ideophones to emphasize the dramatic effects in her storytelling; thirdly the presence of Yoruba-derived language which illustrates resistance to acculturation through their presence in Saldaña's lexical register, and lastly Saldaña's inclusion of songs, proverbs and riddles in *Kele Kele* as features of African oral literature.

In the second section I will demonstrate Saldaña's incorporation of African and feminine voices into the national discourse in Obba's myth by giving an overview of how she uses the authority of the storyteller as a way of addressing specific issues of her community which also includes her feminist critique about woman's responses under patriarchy. In the third section, I will demonstrate Arroyo's argument about how race gender and sexuality are used to present the mold the image of the other into the national cultural identity. She argued that: "el travestismo cultural manipula, subordina y estereotipa racial y sexualmente amparándose en un discurso de armonía y amor nacional" (Arroyo 5). Thus, through a comparison between Cabrera and Saldaña's approach of this myth, I will analyze the dynamics of representations of Obba.

As a start, it is important to underline Saldaña's concern for the preservation of her cultural heritage, since it is where her act of resistance resides. Her resistance to acculturation seeks the preservation of her identity through a fight against cultural amnesia. She does this by creating the illusion of an oral performance through the way her myths are presented. In his essay "African Oral Arts in Excilia Saldaña's *Kele Kele*" Gabriel Abudu observes that the stories are "poetic recreations of *patakines* where *santería* gods are *dramatis personae*" (134). The adaptation of the myth is thus poetic

and it is through this poetry that Saldaña crafts what can be qualified as a written oral performance reflected through the use of rhetorical figures, proverbs, songs and riddles. Her poetic recreation of the five myths: “las tres suspirantes”, “La lechuza y el sijú”, “Obba”, “Los reyes relampago y el trueno” and lastly “Kele Kele” shows how she blended different genres to constitute a singular form of narration.

As Myriam DeCosta-Willis states, Saldaña incorporates the use of poetry in order to innovate the structure of her narrations: “Saldaña is noted for her experimentation with forms, particularly her use of rhymed prose that blurs the generic boundaries between poetry and narrative. [...]” (250). *Kele Kele* is an example of how Saldaña reworked these myths by combining poetry and narrative to create a text with a focus on social themes through the adventures of the *orishas*.

There is an emphasis on the way the stories are told and the text itself reflects these aspects through its structure, its rhetoric and its hybrid form. Firstly, the structure of *Kele Kele* can be described as hybrid since it is a collection of written stories which resemble, according to DeCosta-Willis: “.... a poetic prose piece that is structured as a Greek drama but is rooted in Afro-Cuban oral tradition” (250). As a result, we can distinguish different genres of both written and oral literature in the book: short story, poetry, fable, songs, proverbs and riddles.

First of all, Saldaña constantly uses repetition, parallelism, imagery and idiophones mostly in the poems, which serve as preambles, interludes or epilogues to the narrations in order to enhance the dramatic effect and make her narration sound like an oral performance, which positions her as a storyteller/orality-writer. Repetition, which is the rhetorical figure she uses the most is according to Okpewho “one of the most

characteristic features of oral literature” (71). It emphasizes a point that the author needs to stress and also gives a rhythm, and musicality to the narration itself. This feature is described by Okpewho as the “sing-song quality” of repetition (7).

For example, the poem preceding “Los reyes relampagos y el trueno”²⁷ which deals with the struggle of people of African descent and their past of slavery is designed as a song with the repetition “la negra piel” or black skin, after each sentence. This poem represents resistance in its use of oral features since its form corresponds to African verbal art, signifying an opposition to the dominant European form of writing. The poem-song starts as a complaint in the names of *la negra piel*, constant object of oppression. It can be read as a song where the storyteller would say the first sentence and the audience would respond “la negra piel”. This poem-song seeks to invite the audience to reminisce together with the storyteller about the shared past of suffering:

Corta caña muele azúcar
la negra piel.
Bajo el sol bajo la sombra
La negra piel
Cose las galas ajenas
La negra piel (65).

As we can see, the first part goes over a series of thankless tasks “la negra piel” fulfills daily, especially the plantation work, a mark of slavery. However, the poem-song ends

²⁷ The fourth tale “los reyes del relámpago y el trueno”, tells the adventures of four *orishas* Oyá, Oggún, Changó and Obba. They are caught in a love triangle where Oggún loves Oyá, Oyá loves Changó and Changó loves Obba. Their love also explains cosmic phenomenon such as the combination of thunder and lightning (Changó and Oyá respectively represent these two natural elements), they both conspired against Oggún(god of the forest).

on a note of hope through a call for rebellion. The uprising is illustrated by the exclamation mark and the imperative tense which accompanies the call:

¡Que fulminen las agujas!
¡Que quemen la cama blanca!
¡Que arrasen la huella del pie!
¡Que desaparezca el cepo! (66)

The poem's change of tone is supposed to elate the audience but also provoke a sense of communal resistance. As an aftermath of the rebellion, a new beginning is announced:

¡Que borren trapiche y miel
para que sobre el arcoiris
dance y cante, niña eterna
la negra piel! (66)

In these last four verses *la negra piel*, full of joy would sing and dance on the rainbow: symbol of peace and hope. The inclusion of such a poem in the book contextualizes the narrations; the reader/audience is constantly reminded that she/he is in an Afro-Cuban context or at the least in a society where slavery and miscegenation have left their mark.

Another important rhetorical figure frequently used by Saldaña to reflect orality is parallelism; it produces aesthetic effects as it requires from the storyteller: “selecting details that seem to be independent of one another but at the bottom have a common affinity and bringing these together to present a convincing picture or image” (Okpewho 78). For example, Saldaña includes the poem of the prologue “un son para niños Antillanos” by Nicolas Guillén which deals with miscegenation in the Caribbean.

Guillén acknowledged that although the conditions of arrival of the Africans and the Europeans in the islands were different, they formed a new expression.

The repetition “África llorando” shows that he is conscious of the conditions in which the Africans arrived in the New World, emphasizing that the cultural mixing was not a harmonious process, rather a difficult course of action which called for sacrifices from the Africans. However, the next verse shows the outcome of this cultural amalgamation, with the semantic parallelisms “Iban cargados de negros, iban caragados de blancos”, and then the word “mulatto” links the parallelism as a metaphoric figure for a physical encounter between blancos y negros. By using the poem in the prologue which deals with miscegenation in the Caribbean, Saldaña illustrates the island’s cultural diversity while emphasizing the African element.

However, miscegenation can also be seen as a negative element as it was initially used to whiten the population. Cuba, for example, has promoted the immigration of Europeans to the islands in order to counter the threat of being outnumbered by the Blacks. Therefore, whitening the population was a strategic political decision and not a desire to create cultural diversity. (Schmidt-Nowara 104) In her introduction, Saldaña acknowledges the cultural diversity but stresses the importance of recovering the African element in Cuban culture.

Lastly, there are ideophones which are: “idea-in-sound, in the sense that from the sound of the word, one can get an idea of the nature of the event or the object referred to” (Okpewho 92). Just as the rhetorical figure of repetition, they give a rhythm to the narration; they also vivify the oral or written text by allowing the audience/reader to have the sensation to be part of the narration. For example, the aesthetic of the fourth tale, los

“reyes del relámpago y el trueno” is mainly through ideophonic forms. (Abudu140) The ideophonic forms also remind the reader that even though the story is written, its primary form was obviously oral. One example is when Saldaña reproduces the noise when Oggún knocks at the door of Oyá’s father: “Tocolororó- Oggún a la puerta tocó”. (75) Then, she reproduces the sound of the opening door: “Chirría, Chirrió- la puerta, el padre abrió” (75). And the sound of the Changó and Obba’s arrival:

¡Pácum! ¡Pácum! ¡Pa!
Ha vuelto Changó de Imá
¡Pácum! ¡Pácum! ¡Po!
Ha vuelto Changó de Oyó
¡Pácum! ¡Pácum! ¡Pa!
Ha vuelto con Obbá
¡Pácum! ¡Pácum! ¡Po!
El rey se enamoró (79).

The rhymes and repletion of noises make the story come alive as a theatrical performance. The storyteller goes beyond the act of narrating and includes the art of acting during his/her performance by imitating the noises.

Along with the use of rhetorical figures, Saldaña also uses language as a tool for resistance. In *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* Ashcroft Griffith and Tiffin affirm that: “One of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language” (5). The use of Yoruba-derived Afro-Cuban words in the last story “Kele Kele” symbolizes resistance to acculturating discourses of national identity

because it shows that although the Yoruba language has not totally disappeared from the culture, it is still present in the memories of the descendants of the slaves.²⁸ “Oñi o oñi abé, Oñi o oñi abé” (112).

Saldaña does not translate Ochún’s song; her words appear as incantations which convinced the god of the forest to open his home and metaphorically his heart to the goddess of love and beauty. The use of this language confers magical power to Ochún’s song as she uses it as self-praise while presenting herself to Oggún. Abudu observes: “Saldaña recognizes the evocative power, dramatic intensity, and strong sense of cultural defiance emanating from these Yoruba words that have survived in Cuba over the centuries” (140). Accordingly, the language of the African ancestors which has been preserved and transmitted from generation to generation is given a sacred power as it is used here, in magical circumstances going beyond lexical and semantic explanations.

The inclusion of witticism is another aspect of Saldaña’s valorization of African oral tradition in *Kele Kele*. Songs, riddles and proverbs accompany the narration and confer to the myths, traditional wisdom and highlights the orality in the stories. According to Okpewho: “proverbs have the tendency to attract the imagination of the listener by the poetic effectiveness of their expression and to lend authority and weight to the argument...” (226). For instance Obba’s story is preceded by a proverb which alludes to the end of her romance with Changó. Given the main theme of Obba’s myth, which is

²⁸“Kele Kele” narrates Oggún’s anger after Changó and Oyá’s conspiracy in the previous story. Oggún imprisoned himself in the forest, where he started to poison the trees and fruits. The reason for his anger were Oyá and Changó’s betrayal which left him heartbroken. As a result, he made himself an iron heart where he wrote the word “olvida”. This isolation and massive destruction of the nature preoccupied both humans and *orishas* who decided to meet under the sacred tree to discuss the matter. The only absents were Oyá, Obba, Changó and Oggún himself. After a long debate, they still did not come to a decision; Ochún (goddess of love and beauty) was the one who finally brought Oggún out of the forest with her charms. She filled the forest with honey and reopened his closed heart.

love, one can see this proverb as a prediction of her heartbroken ending: “Cuando el amor se desgarrá, no se le puede recoser las orillas” (55). This proverb not only illustrates Obba’s mutilated ear and the fact that they cannot be sewn back, it also reflects the end of her relationship with Changó whose attraction to his wife disappeared when she cut her ear. The word “orilla” also helps the prediction as it can be related to Obba’s transformation into a river after her heart was broken. As a result, we can see that Saldaña includes African wisdom in a way that a real traditional storyteller would have used during an oral performance. This not only consolidates her position as the new storyteller, but it also shows that it is possible to have a written form of an oral performance.

The second story “La lechuza y el sijú”²⁹, is preceded by a poem which takes the form of a riddle; a word game which usually precedes storytelling in Africa (Finnegan 442).

- ¿Quién silba en la noche?
- El viento al pasar
- ¿Y quien le responde?
- La espuma del mar. (43)

The riddle has didactic functions as it helps sharpen the intellect and , it also allows interaction between the storyteller and his audience since one question is posed by the storyteller and the audience has to answer; thus, the audience is invited to participate in

²⁹ The second myth, “la lechuza y el sijú” tells the story of a traveler who arrived in a kingdom and fell in love with the princess who also loved him very much. The princess, who wanted to run away with the traveler, consulted the oracle in order to know what to do; the latter advised her to wait until the traveler returned for her and that if she hears him whistling, that would be the sign that he had finally returned. The traveler transformed into a sijú and the princess who has waited for many years transformed into an owl. The owner of her heart still continues to whistle to alert her that he has returned.

the oral performance. Here, the poem riddle relaxes Saldaña's audience after the tension of the first story and prepares them for the next one (Abudu 136). In fact the first story "Las tres suspirantes" involved a verbal duel between Death or *Ikú* and one of Olofi's daughters. The exchange immersed the audience/reader into a dialogue full of eloquence and wisdom.³⁰ The verbal dual in which Olofi's daughter defeats Death transforms eloquence into a weapon. By controlling the discourse, Olofi's daughter uses her wisdom as the power to wield that weapon.

The importance of eloquence and rhetoric in Saldaña's adaptation are important to evaluate her strategies of narrative strategies combined with ethnography. The title *Kele Kele*, which literally means "gently, gently" (147) announced that the framework of the book would be literature. Saldaña invited the reader to enjoy her *patakines* that she qualified as "hermosas leyendas de amor", downplaying the strong religious aspect which most likely would have been the main if presented solely as a work of ethnography.

To demonstrate Saldaña's use of literary adaptation rather than a purely ethnographic approach, I will first contrast her methodological approach to the myths with Cabrera. Secondly, I will show how the cultural versus religious focus in *Kele Kele* also contributed to the literary rather than ethnographic approach of the collection. Lastly, I will illustrate how Saldaña identifies with the racial and feminist issues addressed in her writing and how these elements are reflected in Obba's myth.

³⁰ In the first story, "las tres suspirantes" the three daughters of Olofi (or Olodumare supreme diety of the Yoruban pantheon) fell in love with Orula (*orisha* of divination) and suffered so much from it that their father thought they were ill. He sent them to the same Orula so that he could use his powers to find the origin of their illness and prescribe the adequate medicine to cure them. The latter suggested hard work and the girls worked so hard they produced numerous goods they needed to sell it at the market. *Ikú* or death found the two elder ones on their way to the market and played a bad trick on them by informing the two girls that Orula had died. The two daughters of Olofi immediately died of grief and Death took them away. The third one was then sent by her father to look for her sisters and met death who tried to play the same trick on her. Fortunately, she defeated him with the help of her wisdom and ended up marrying Orula.

Cabrera published several collections of Afro-Cuban tales, proverbs and other oral texts but her most outstanding work is *El Monte; Igbo Finda Ewe Orisha, Vititi Nfinda* (*Notas sobre las religiones, la magia, las supersticiones y el folklore de los negros criollos y del pueblo de Cuba*), “a volume of nearly six hundred pages widely respected by scholars and *santeros*” (Marting 112). Unlike Saldaña, she did not perform an adaptation but tried to put into writing the exact words used by her informants as faithfully as possible qualifying the method of interpretation of social sciences as “pretensión científica” (7). Her preoccupation for exactness was so important that she did not apply a specific ethnological method for collecting the stories. However, as explained in the introduction of this study, representing the other’s cultural identity involves a research of his original “texts” (in this case oral texts) and their “translation” into a new culture implies a written version of the oral texts, which Cabrera effectuated despite her avoidance of social science’s methods.

And yet, this written representation is what Arroyo describes as a mask of subjectivity:

“El sujeto de la escritura que se acerca a su sociedad “desde adentro”, produce una narrativa en la que objetividad científica del discurso se diluye, reformulando perspectivas y significantes de su lenguaje cultural. Los distintos niveles del texto se abren, pues, a una definición de la nación que se complementa con una inversión subjetiva como a los socio-políticos” (46).

In point of fact, although Cabrera contributed widely to the preservation of Afro-Cuban culture, her framework of social science in *El Monte* creates a distance between her and

her subjects of study. Despite her intention to distance herself from a western methodology in *El Monte*, this book is categorized with Cabrera's anthropological works³¹ because of her focus on the ethnographic texts of a community instead of the fictional and her representation of the subject as object is what creates the distance.³²

Saldaña's version however, is different from Cabrera's and other versions of the myth in many aspects. First, she changed elements of the story and the narrative where she is the dominant voice, which is very uncommon when dealing with ethnographic documents which faithfully reproduce the oral material without modifications. According to Gerald Thomas: "If the reader wishes to appreciate the oral tradition, then it is the folklorist's role to present the material as faithfully as possible, and not to present an edited text, pleasing to the eye, unless he openly admits to having renounced all scholarly pretensions" (138). Although she conducted extensive research before the redaction of *Kele Kele*, Saldaña's main source of information is her grandmother, Ana Excilia Bregante, a woman who greatly influenced her literary work and her personal life. Secondly, as for the method of collection of the myths, they are totally absent from her introduction and preface where authors usually present their sources and explain how they carried out their adaptation.

Thirdly, one major difference in Saldaña's version is the motivation of the characters: Saldaña chose the version of the myth where Obba cuts her ear as a sign of

³¹ See Rodriguez-Manguel's *Lydia Cabrera and the Construction of an Afro-Cuban Cultural Identity* (2004) where she discusses *El Monte*'s anthropological nature as well as the encounter of ethnography and fiction in Cabrera's work.

³² Cabrera clearly stated in her introduction that social sciences' methods could be limiting since it did not match the way her informants deliver their stories. On one hand she pointed out the western obsession for details and accuracy, the lack of respect for secrecy and silences, and the danger of interpretation. On the other hand, she underlined the importance of patience in order to win the informant's trust, the sacredness of the Afro-Cuban culture as well as the position of the Afro-Cuban language and expression in the book which she tried to keep as intact as possible.

love and sacrifice instead of jealousy, removing her rivals Ochún and Oyá from the story. Two other versions by Samuel Feijóo and Romulo Lachatañeré³³ did depict Obba as submissive and mentioned that she cut her ear in order to please her husband but they did not emphasize Obba's physical beauty and all her qualities that made her the embodiment of the perfect woman and the good wife.

Saldaña's *patakines* also show her literary engagement: she deals with political issues such as the Cuban revolution, racial issues such as miscegenation and the inclusion of African culture into Cuban national identity and also feminist critiques to patriarchy. (Saldaña 9, 10, 45) This her adaptation moves away from ethnology and uses literary strategies to include these themes in the myths. In writing *Kele Kele*, she worked with the myths as cultural element more than purely religious material. Her preface, where she confessed that religion was not her main concern while writing the book supports this point as she affirmed that she was more interested in preserving the wisdom of her people through culture:

“Las religiones no desaparecen por decreto, sino gracias a la cultura y la ciencia; como forma de la conciencia social están destinadas a perecer; [...]. Y con la religión desaparecen los ritos, las supersticiones injustificadas, la magia inmediata. Pero la sabiduría del pueblo no desaparece. Cuidarla es nuestro deber y nuestro derecho” (11).

³³ Rómulo Lachatañeré: Cuban ethnologist who carried out research in the late 1930s to 1952 and produced the well-documented *Manual de Santería*. His various essays appear in *Archivos del Folklore Cubano*, which was published until 1933 and then superseded by the journal *Estudios Afrocubanos*, a forum for Afro-Cuban topics published by “The Society for Afro-Cuban Studies”, founded by Fernando Ortiz in 1938. (Sanchez 17).

As Saldaña notes, emphasizing cultural aspects over religious ones is a more viable form of preserving the wisdom and knowledge of her people, since according to her, religious beliefs will ultimately disappear.

Another element which contributes to *Kele Kele*'s literary focus is Saldaña's transformation of the ethnographic material into a social reflection and critique of post-revolutionary Cuban society. As stated by Okpewho, the storyteller offers: "a critical perspective on issues relating to his community's social or political history, or else putting his signature, his seal of approval, on an experience he sees as bearing some relevance for himself or a community of interests he identifies with"(226). This is exactly what Saldaña does by putting herself in the position of the storyteller and relating her stories to her experience and her community's social and political history.

Understanding Saldaña's persona and literary commitment helps our understanding of why she chooses to interpret these Afro-Cuban myths. Her work is an embodiment of black woman's writing, which, as stated by Emilia Ippolito in *Caribbean Women Writers: Identity and Gender*, is crucial to emergent literature and as such is: "A key part of the literature of the region. In a socio-political context based on hierarchical, racial divisions riddled with marks of oppression, domination and resistance, black women's writing is a vital sign of re-empowerment within the emergent literature"(7). Ippolito underlines the importance of incorporating women's voices as an integral part of the Caribbean postcolonial literature which was male-centered and where women were mainly represented as mother-figures, symbol of values and guardian of tradition rather than powerful individuals who could fight next to their male counterparts for the formation of the nation.

As Elleke Boehmer notes: “Nationalist movements encouraged their members, who were mostly male, to assert themselves as agents of their own history, as self-fashioning and in control. Women were not so encouraged [...] they were marginalized both by nationalist activity and by the rhetoric of nationalist address”. (224) Through *Kele Kele*, Saldaña rejects this position and undertakes the role of self-fashioning of Cuban national discourse as she includes both African and female voices in her narration, using traditional wisdom as a primary solution to contemporary preoccupations. Indeed, in *Kele Kele* Saldaña sought to reaffirm the role of African legacy in the shaping of a Cuban national identity. She wanted her literary work to tackle the issues of gender and racial identity and made it clear that these two aspect should be reflected in her writing: “I am a woman, and my work carries that stamp implicitly. [...] And I don’t want to only write as a woman, but as a black woman” (cited in Randall 198).

In regards to Arroyo’s argument about the interconnection between literature and ethnography in the definition of cultural identity, one can read Saldaña’s *Kele Kele* as a cultural and historical document, mostly through the section “Antes de empezar”, and the prologue which are both presented as a historical lesson allowing a better understanding of Afro-Cuban cultural identity. Hence, she started with a historical background about racial diversity and the formation of the Cuban population emphasizing the African element since it was the one that was undermined by a dominant European discourse. Saldaña explained the formation of a Cuban culture similar but distinct to that of the people from both Africa and Europe. “Cuba es un producto nuevo y auténtico, nacido de España y África [...] Mirarnos en el espejo de aquel pasado es ver nuestro rostro de hoy” (8).

By portraying African culture through oral literature, she invites Afro-Cuban people to counter acculturation which will allow a better understanding of their identity: “La realidad actual es otra. Desposeído de los elementos sacros, el universo africano del que somos beneficiario se nos muestra en toda su espléndida belleza, en toda su sabiduría [...] ignorarlo es ignorarnos; desconocerlo es desconocernos” (10). As she acknowledges that it is important to give voice to the African part of her identity, she shows that it was through the wisdom, knowledge and art of storytelling that would best be able to reflect African influence on Cuban culture.

Saldaña also resists acculturation through the use of intertextuality, using a poem by Nicolas Guillén entitled “un son para niños Antillanos” as a prologue preceding the narration of the myths. Through this poem, she tried to illustrate how cultural diversity is important in order to comprehend the formation of a Cuban cultural identity through miscegenation. In addition, she highlights in her introduction that the African element in Cuban culture needed to be emphasized and not diluted into a dominant discourse:

Esta verdad que salta a la vista en la música, en los bailes, en la literatura, en las costumbres, en las fiestas tradicionales, en la idiosincrasia, en la piel de nuestro pueblo, fue negada sistemáticamente, en forma expresa o elíptica, por las instituciones sociales y los hombres que detentaban el poder hasta el triunfo de la revolución (9).

Here, Saldaña not only points out the silenced African culture in Cuban history, in the nineteen twenties, she also argues that one of the first political steps towards breaking the silence regarding the African legacy in Cuban culture was the Cuban revolution, although

in the literary field, poetry had already been working for the inclusion of Africans in the cultural identity.

In fact, in Cuba, a movement called Afro-Cubanism was born as a response to the European avant-garde in addition to the problematic incorporation of the Black population into Cuban life and the political problems following the Spanish-American War. (Jackson 22) Guillén was one the most influential voices of Afro-Cubanism because of his poetry which tried to valorize the African heritage in Cuban culture. Even though Guillén's poetry at times presented an exotic representation of the music, religion and sexuality of the African descendants and of the Caribbean, it was also an important step into the incorporation and valorization of the African element in Caribbean cultural identity.

Through the intertextuality, Saldaña's *Kele Kele* is filled with historical references to the position of Africans and their culture in Cuba. As an illustration, the beginning of her second story "la lechuza y el sijú" can be read as an allegory of the Cuban revolution, since it narrates the overthrow of a tyrant in a country similar to Cuba (Abudu139).

"Se había expulsado un tirano reyezuelo, y proclamado" (45). Since the war, the social and political life of the country was somewhat fairer than it was before: "Que ninguna cabeza tenía que inclinarse delante de otra cabeza. Que ninguna mano pediría limosna..." (45). In fact, it shows how Saldaña uses traditional myths to examine Cuban history and although her description of the consequences of the revolution was too optimistic, we can see the reflection of her political opinion through her attempt to include history in the collection. The descriptions lead the reader to believe that the country in question was Cuba: "En el país de nuestra historia—que era un país muy, pero muy, pequeño— cierta

vez hubo una guerra” (45). Nevertheless, the romanticized description of the outcome of the tyrant’s overthrow in this story can be seen as an illustration of the expectations of Blacks who fought for the revolution hoping that their situation would change.

Saldaña also used the allegory of the revolution to resist acculturation as seen in her argument at the beginning of the book that even after the revolution, there was still much work to be done. “la llegada de la república no resolvería la secuela de la discriminación dejada por el esclavismo” (10). By pointing out this issue in her introduction, she shows that one of her objectives is an attempt to right the helm through her collection of stories where she invites the readers to apply the *patakines* to their daily lives, and to identify with the characters and their world: “Porque el *patakín* está destinado a los hombres, y estos, en su simplicidad cotidiana, o sublimados hasta la deificación, los verdaderos protagonistas” (11).

Saldaña deliberately reworked the identity of her characters in order to present them more as humans rather than gods; through this characterization, her *orishas* are depicted as ordinary persons who are far from being invincible. They make mistakes; fall in love, cry and die. Consequently, these gods and goddesses’ lives serve as an example for those who will listen to the stories and pay attention to Saldaña’s words of wisdom, such as the advice she gives to women through Obba’s story. Saldaña’s eloquent warning for obedient and submissive women gives the *patakín* of Obba, the role of a prediction.

According to the definition of the process of divination, Obba’s myth by Saldaña can be read as a contemporary session of divination in which Saldaña allowed herself to interpret the *odu* and give Obba’s story as the corresponding *patakín*.³⁴ They are full of

³⁴*Patakínes*, are used by the *dilogún* (oracle of the shells) when he performs divination for a client. During a divination session, the oracle prays and tosses the shells on a mat and then he interprets them according to

advice and sometimes provide explanations of the natural order of the world. These *patakines* contain the Afro-Cuban philosophy and vision of the world. In the case of the *patakín* Obba, the advice would be directed towards women who belong to societies similar to that of this *orisha*. These women would receive the advice of the *dilogun* not to comply with the rules of the patriarchal system. As a result, Saldaña's interpretation of Obba demonstrates a resistance to acculturation by highlighting the African legacy in Cuba, while also using a didactic tale to serve as a feminist critique of the position of women under the patriarchal system.

In her essay “Palimpsesto feminista para “Obba” y “Oyá” Alicia Vadillo also argues that as an Afro-Cuban woman writer under a patriarchal system, Saldaña’s adaptations of the myths must incorporate a feminist critique: “Su propio sentimiento de mujer afrocubana que vive en una sociedad que en teoría lucha por eliminar el control patriarcal, la obliga a darles a sus cuentos una visión política e histórica, además de feminista” (2). This feminist critique can be seen through Saldaña’s emphasis on Obba's submissiveness to Changó. It is also reflected through Obba’s physical assets, which Saldaña highlights in order to empower African beauty. In spite of all these elements, Obba’s husband rejected her without pity. He decided to live with another woman leaving her heartbroken and earless. Obba’s sacrifice was portrayed as useless since it provoked repulsion from Changó.

Giving a detailed description of Obba’s perfection as a woman and as a wife however not only re-empowers Afro-Cuban woman who physically correspond to her

their position and their combination. Each type of combination has its name and corresponds to stories; these combinations are called *odu* and those stories corresponding to the *odus* are called *patakín* or Afro-Cuban myths which narrate the adventures of the *orishas*. The *odus* and the corresponding *patakines* have to be memorized by the *dilogún* before he passes initiation to become a priest. (Cros Sandoval 127)

description but also prepares the reader to sympathize with the unfair treatment she received from Changó. Obba is a princess and the heiress of a throne. Saldaña's physical description of the goddess deliberately played on stereotypes, attributing to Obba the physical features generally attributed to black woman. Her goal was to praise African beauty through the empowerment of African features. Thus, Obba was described as being a very dark skinned young woman, with long thin legs, small waist and wide hips with a wide nose and thick lips, small ears and big hair. The repetition of the sentence "¡Qué linda era la muchacha!" and "¡Qué negra era" eight times overemphasizes Obba's physical features as beautiful.

Indeed, she was not only a beautiful black princess, she was also a hard worker, a good cook, a celibate young girl and after she got married, a faithful wife. Before each paragraph Saldaña attributes to Obba another quality which contributes to her overall description as the perfect traditional woman who embodies the perfect wife: "¡Qué linda era la muchacha! ¡Qué linda y que armoniosa era [...] ¡Qué linda era la muchacha! ¡Qué linda y que buena cocinera era! [...] ¡Qué linda era la muchacha, qué linda y que regía era!" (56-57).

As Saldaña commented: "Para una mujer enamorada, ayudar a su hombre no molesta, y, claro, Obba amaba a Changó como han amado siempre las muchachas, desde antes de antes hasta la fecha" (60). At first, Obba was very happy; her husband loved her so much that he was called *Obbalube* which means Obba's husband. In their castle, Obba was serving her prince with love and devotion and she never complained about the amount of work. However, right after the description of Obba's unconditional love, Saldaña showed that it was exactly what would cause her fall.

As Ursula Tidd notes in her book entitled *Simone De Beauvoir* : “In short, patriarchy furthers its aims by encouraging women to experience themselves as docile bodies for male consumption” (58). Obba became an object of consumption for Changó when she fed him with her ear. The act of mutilating her body to compensate for the lack of provisions symbolizes more than a sacrifice for love; it constitutes a way for Obba to fulfill her obligations as —according to the rules of patriarchy—a good wife. Changó’s response to this sacrifice was to leave her, since the body that fed him did not attract him anymore.

Saldaña’s critique is clearly directed to women like Obba who become objects of consumption for men and blindly obey to the discourse of authority. Thus, submissive and honest Obba did not hide her mutilated ear to her husband; neither did she explained the reason for her sacrifice when Changó ordered her to take off her kerchief. As a docile woman she answered: “yo oigo y obedezco” (62). Thus, earless Obba lost both Changó’s love and her legendary beauty. She cried for years until she became a river. According to Saldaña it is a river where woman who have been abandoned go in order to drown their bad memories: “Un sueño de agua que corre por el monte, un río de amor que nadie puede detenerlo, al que van las muchachas abandonadas para ahogar en su corriente los malos recuerdos, sólo los malos recuerdos...” (63). By presenting the river as an outlet for abandoned women, Saldaña uses water as a symbol of rebirth which allows Obba to express her sorrow, albeit to her death, and reincarnate into a body of water, source of life. This connection with the river also reminds the reader of Obba’s representation in Africa where she was a fluvial divinity. (Cros Sandoval 250)

In *Worldview, the Orichas and Santería: Africa to Cuba and Beyond*, Mercedes Cros-Sandoval observes that the *orisha* Obbá was Changó's most esteemed wife. In Cuba, she is the goddess of home, the good wife, she who symbolizes marital devotion. Her sacrifices for love are not seen as stupidity but as an example for pure devotion. However, Saldaña insisted on the elements which positioned Obba as a martyr, a victim of the society she belongs to. The main goal was to show that her submissiveness and numerous qualities were not the key to happiness. After Changó rejected her, she lost her position as a wife which was presented in the tale as her only function. What defined Obba as a woman was suddenly taken away from her. Her naiveté and unconditional love appears to the reader as a dangerous plague which made her lose everything. Changó did not acknowledge Obba's sacrifices neither did he acknowledge her value as a loving a generous wife. Thus, through the representation of Obba's submissiveness, Saldaña presents a feminist critique of her society.

Similarly, Arroyo's theory of *travestismo cultural* demonstrates that representing the marginalized and his/her culture through race, gender and sexuality provides a subjective image of the latter that reveals the problematics of the representation of the other in the national discourse: "La integración del cuerpo del otro en el discurso nacional, plantea el problema de la representación [...]. A esta estrategia de identificación con el otro, surge de los juegos de poder propios de la representación y es por esto que el cuerpo del otro se figura desde la raza, el género y la sexualidad" (5). Obba underwent a similar process of representation when she crossed the Atlantic. When she was adopted and adapted in the Americas, her role as a woman was accentuated and her sexuality transformed.

The numerous contrasts in Obba's representation created a versatile image of the *orisha*; she was not only portrayed as a warrior-queen, an independent woman involved in politics and commerce, a beautiful, devoted and loving wife but also a transgender, guardian of prostitutes (Conner and Sparks 71, Illes 772, Cros Sandoval 252). Saldaña was conscious of the multiple representations of this *orisha* since she possesses an extensive knowledge of the Yoruba culture.³⁵ Thus, it is not surprising that she chose to rework the profile of this *orisha* and adapt her myth in order to provide a critique of patriarchy and of the representation of African elements in Cuban national identity.

Saldaña's *Kele Kele* showed that the problematic transcription of an oral text could be the opportunity to exert creativity not only by blending orality and writing but also by distancing the narration from the exactitude of the social sciences and bringing it closer to a committed literature reflecting resistance to acculturation and addressing contemporary socio-political issues. Benjamin's concern to see the storyteller disappear might find a tentative solution in an alternative version: the orality-writer, an artist who performs his craft on paper making it possible for the modern generations to access and preserve their oral legacy while keeping in mind that the version they are reading is what have been saved from a performed oral text and, unfortunately impossible to reproduce with exactitude when put into writing.

³⁵ According to DeCosta-Willis: "Saldaña uses Afro-Cuban myths and folklore in her work, but her knowledge of *lucumí* or Yoruba culture, particularly its vocabulary and legends (called *patakín*), is based on extensive research in ethnographic history" (250).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrated how resistance to acculturation was carried out in the Francophone and Hispanophone Caribbean through the transformation, adaptation and syncretism of African oral tradition. In fact, through the work of Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, Leopold Sédar Senghor, Abdoulaye Sadjí and Excilia Saldaña in dialogue with the theories of Arroyo and Glissant, I have proven that African oral tradition can be taken out of its pre-colonial context and used to resist acculturation whether in Africa or in the African Diaspora.

In Cuba, the example of the religious syncretism between the Yoruba and Catholic saints demonstrated how strategies of resistance to acculturation gave birth to new forms of religious and cultural expression. In Haiti, I found that the contradictions reflected in the image the slave was projecting in his tales were due to his situation of oppression which forced him to articulate a counter-poetics where he used distinct tactical strategies to express this dynamics. He engaged in subversive discourses and strategies in order to survive these conditions of oppression.

In my argument, I applied Glissant's notion of counter-poetics to the personification of the *bossale* and the creole in the characters of Bouqui and Malice since this aspect of the adaptation showed both internalization and subversion that Glissant describes. A study of these two characters as metaphor therefore demonstrates the navigation of contradictory discourses within the slave's poetics. The *bossale* and the creole bring the New World context in the tales through the formation of a racial

hierarchy which is at the origin of their existence; while Bouqui and Malice illustrate subversion through their trickery that resists oppression and seeks out strategies for survival. The slave's predilection for such trickster characters denotes a conscious fight for survival through protagonists that use subversive tactics to achieve this goal.

Besides the transformation which occurred as a result of the adaptation of the oral texts, the biggest change was in the form of transmission which went from being oral to written. In this study, the change in the method of transmission shows that when resisting to acculturation in an oppressive environment, preserving the culture under major oppression such as slavery and colonization calls for adjustments and subversive strategies to carry out the difficult task hindered by the master and the colonizer. Unfortunately, during this process, part of the endangered culture is lost or transformed, which is the case for the religious syncretism in Cuba. However, this unavoidable transformation can be the opportunity to exert creativity just as Saldaña did in her collection *Kele Kele*, by using literary strategies to recreate oral performance within her narration and through this literary feat, assuming the role of the new-storyteller, or what I have called an orality-writer.

Cultural preservation under oppression also creates contradictory discourses as shown in my analysis of *Le Roman de Bouqui* where the character's internalization of stereotypes negotiates with strategies of resistance to the dominant discourse. The relationship between Bouqui and Malice's world and that of Haiti under slavery triggered other questions by writers regarding the possible future re- adaptation of these two characters' adventures to the post-slavery context. For example, just as the slave modifies the Wolof tales by providing a space for justice for the oppressed, Jacques Stephen

Alexis³⁶ rehabilitates Bouqui twenty years later in his tale “Le dit de Bouqui et de Malice”. Therefore, the flexibility of these oral texts might allow for a greater emancipation of the *bossale* figure in Creole societies through the creation of new adaptations seeking to change Bouqui’s image and actions. Thus, a gradual development of Bouqui in Alexis’ tales and other works for example can be used to portray the changes of the image of the *bossale* in Haitian societies just as Senghor and Sadji changed and adapted the figure of Leuk in order to convey a moral message for their young readership.

Through this study I have demonstrated, that oral literature does not need to have a fixed form repeating the traditional texts over and over again. By using Jossiana Arroyo’s *Travestismos Culturales* for the analysis of Saldaña’s *Kele Kele* I demonstrated that the combination of disciplines such as ethnography and literature can help create a literature that deals with both history and fiction and that serves socio-political issues. One such strategy used by Saldaña for preserving traditional cultures once they are removed from their historical contexts is through the constant updating of the cultural material allowing people to identify with it and relate it to their contemporary realities and oppressions.

On a larger scale, this study showed cultural adaptability and the creation of a new culture during the process of cultural mixing or resistance to acculturation under oppression. When under oppression, the cultural loss is significant, it is interesting to consider the possible results when the transformations occurs out of other forms of

³⁶ Jacques Stephen Alexis was a Haitian writer, poet and communist activist best known for his novels and collections of short stories. He was very active in the socio-political life of his country; he fought against Duvalier’s dictatorship and was killed in Haiti after he returned from a forced exile. The tale I refer can be found in his collection of stories *Romancero aux Étoiles: Contes* (1960).

migration from one continent to another, differing from that of slavery. In this case the forms of adaptation may have more freedom to exert creativity since the context differs from that of slavery and colonization where the degree of domination and attempts at cultural genocide hindered and in some cases silenced cultural expression. This issue is very relevant today given the phenomenon of globalization particularly since European countries feel that their cultures are threatened by the massive immigration of foreigners from the Third World countries to the old continent.

As a result, the world will soon have to face more questions of cultural preservation as well as issues of racism originating from the desire to protect one culture from external influence. What is interesting is that the dominant European power that was once imposing its culture upon African, Latin American, West and East Indian cultures is now concerned by the threat of foreign influence that will ultimately transform their culture through the strong demographic presence of people from other continents in Europe. These threatened European cultures might find their answers in the creative strategies of resistance to acculturation developed by the Africans under slavery and colonization that the Francophone and Hispanophone texts studied have presented.

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