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World Music in
ZOUK
the West Indies

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with

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Zouk and the Isles of the Caribbees

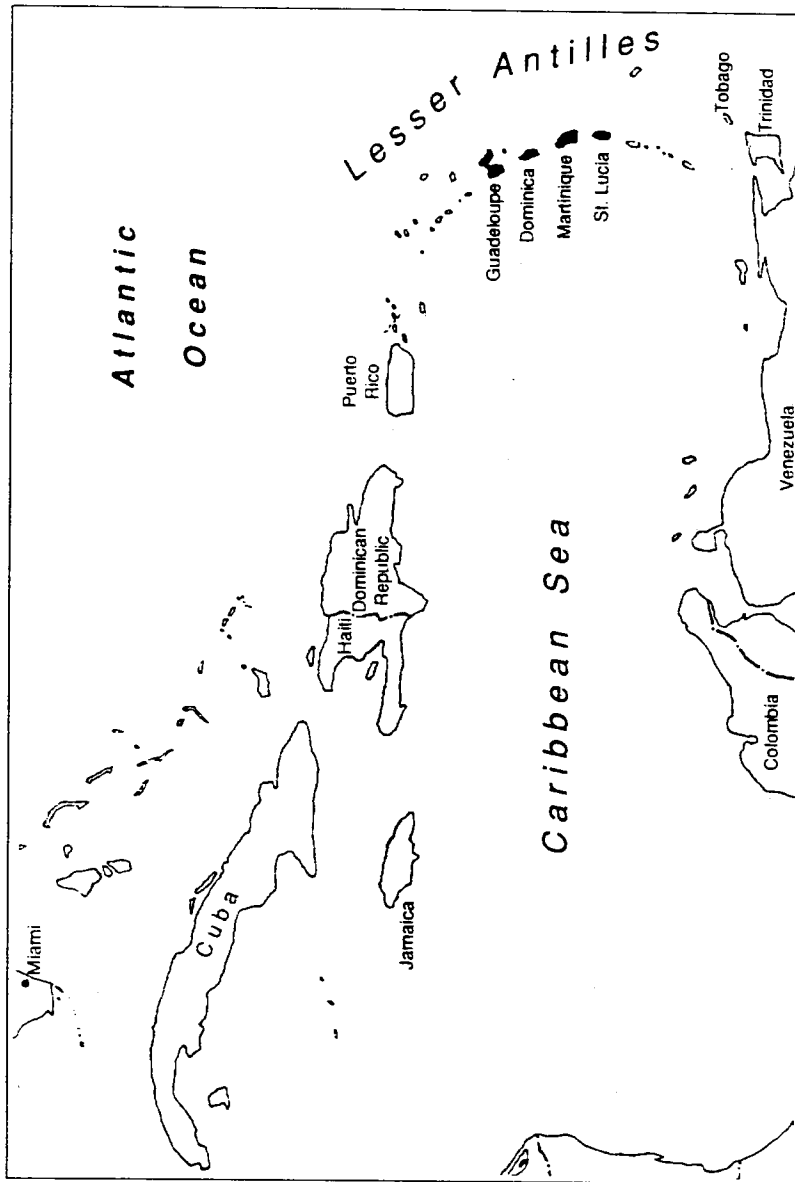


Fig. 1 The Caribbean.

“WHEN YOU PLAY ZOUK, people feel themselves at home,” a Caribbean friend observes. It is a phrase one hears often in the islands, and it expresses in a few words the substance of this study on the origins and success of zouk music.

“Going to a zouk,” or simply “to zouk,” has become part of everyday speech in the islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe. Consciously or not, the words have become synonymous with the infectious rhythms and lyrics of zouk music and the dancing and singing—involving virtually everyone present—that accompany its performance.

How has this music reached such heights of popularity? For an answer we must look, in part, to its roots in the geography, history, languages, and musical traditions of the islands. This includes an introductory look at the many faces of zouk—where it is performed, on what occasions, and to what audiences. In the following excerpts of a conversation, recorded in French at Pointe-à-Pitre in 1989 with my old friend Christian Géber, a Guadeloupean photographer and former magazine editor, we see some of the unique ways in which this music has entered people’s lives and consciousness.

CHRISTIAN GÉBER. At community festivals and holiday celebrations, zouk creates the atmosphere, you see; without it, there is absolutely no festival. Zouk has to be thought of as being associated with couples, with crowds. If I were to make an image to illustrate zouk, I think it would be a photograph, with lots of people in the background, hands in the air, and with a man and woman in the foreground, holding one another closely, the way we do when we dance zouk. . . .

Zouk is not something we do when we are alone. Suppose, for example, that a man and woman (you and I) are having a flirtation. I am at your place (as I am now) and I would like to convince you to—whatever it is people have in mind when they are having a flirtation! In the end, I wouldn’t be able to create the right atmosphere by playing zouk. On the

other hand, imagine my saying that I will come and pick you up tonight, that I know a certain nightclub, and so on. Then I *would* be able to set the right tone, to really get the wheels in motion. You understand? Here in this country such a situation always ends in the same way—with couples, in the midst of a crowd, all doing the same thing, together. . . .

Last night you saw what was happening at the nightclub. In the beginning there was music, there were women, there were men, and yet nobody was dancing. Finally, everybody did get up to dance, *but*, only after the lights were dimmed and the music—zouk—was turned up to a certain volume. As soon as you play zouk, you see, everybody dances. It is the only music that always succeeds in doing that, anywhere, no mistaking it.

Picture even a first communion. In the morning we go through all the religious rites. Then the priest, after delivering his homily at the end, will bless the crowd, and say, in effect, “You may now go home to zouk.”

It is the same at a baptism. When it is over, after the priest blesses the children he will say, “Well, now have a good Sunday and have fun,” which is quite openly a blessing to go out and zouk. What happens then? We have our little photo session in front of the church, and then we go home and get things organized, pay our respects to godmother, and do what else needs to be done at such an event. Then we have our first rum drink, and somewhere in the background, music will be played. Music is used at this point to indicate to people passing in the street that there is a family celebration going on in the house.

JOCELYNE GUILBAULT. But surely zouk isn’t the only music that can do that for you; wouldn’t any other music do?

CG. No it wouldn’t. *Really* (and I’m being serious!), you wouldn’t play James Brown, or whatever, to indicate that there is something important going on at your house. It wouldn’t make any sense. Zouk is the only music that creates the right kind of atmosphere. Within the range of what you might hear at a community festival, you might hear a Michael Jackson or a Bob Marley at the beginning, but only for a short time, and then something else will be played. But during the festival itself, zouk, primarily, is what will be played.

In general, we dance zouk indoors. At a baptism or first communion, for example, even though we are in the usual kind of Antillean house with a little balcony, we dance inside. It’s not complicated. We simply clear out the dining and living room furniture so we can dance. We do not dance outside.

JG. Why?

CG. Because there we are, inside, we are couples, dancing close to one another, and we can be more relaxed and free with our body movements. Corner areas, which permit more intimate play, are the favorite

spots. First some “zouk hard” [fast tempo] is played to warm people up. Later, “zouk love” [a slower tempo] is played, which is usually a good way to change over finally to “zouk slow,” or the “flirting” tempo. . . .

In the past four or five years, we have begun to hear zouk in yet another place—supermarkets. When the managers want to liven up the place and get the customers into a shopping mood, what do they do? They bring in Radio Caraïbe International, and RCI does shows on the spot, with speakers all over the place. And, of course, the programming will be very “zouk.”

Our shopping centers in Guadeloupe tried at first to imitate the ones in Paris, but for us the results were very cold. We had to change all that in the end, because those kinds of commercial spaces didn’t suit our people at all. We had to liven up the supermarkets with our own music so that people would feel more at ease. Because, when you play zouk, people feel themselves at home.

When Christian Géber thus reminded me of the many places one hears zouk in the island of his birth and of the obvious importance of this music to the people listening to and participating in it, he also pointed out, by implication, the necessity of understanding what lies behind the zouk phenomenon. His closing and infinitely telling remark, “When you play zouk, people feel themselves at home,” underlines how much zouk grows out of the local experience. But for us it also presupposes a knowledge of that experience, a knowledge that can help explain how people react to zouk generally and how these reactions may differ from island to island. In what ways, for example, is the zouk experience in Guadeloupe similar to that in Martinique, and why has it not assumed the same level of importance in Dominica and St. Lucia, even though (except for supermarkets) it appears in similar places and circumstances?

As a form of social behavior, zouk is an integral part of other local social activity. It is also part of the Antillean scene at large and contributes to that scene through its characteristics as a social, cultural, economic, and political phenomenon.

The significance of the recent success of zouk can be understood, therefore, only within the broad context of the islands’ geography, their colonial past, their social, political, and economic structures, and their ongoing quest for autonomy and individual identity.

An Island Setting

Stretched over 175 miles, the four islands of Guadeloupe, Dominica, Martinique, and St. Lucia constitute an unbroken string at the heart of the gently arching archipelago of the Lesser Antilles (see fig. 1). Their geo-

graphic proximity has permitted a regular movement of people among the islands. Small-scale traders, going back and forth from their native island to where they might buy and sell, have helped maintain the historical bonds that unite these populations.¹ Even though this interisland migration has not led to any form of stable political union (Lewis 1985, 221), the islanders have developed strong relations through family, friendship, work, and music.

Two other physical features have played a decisive role in shaping the similar character of these societies: these are island societies, with the physical isolation and constraints that this implies, and the islands are relatively small, ranging in size from a mere 238 square miles (St. Lucia) to 686 square miles (Guadeloupe). The populations of each island have traditionally functioned as tightly knit communities, in which everyone seems to know everyone else.

In the field of the popular performing arts, which concerns us here, this kind of community allows for the rapid dissemination of new music. As a market, it also has the potential of being quickly saturated. Once a concert is presented, half the people have already seen it. The populations are therefore always eager for change, and musicians are under great pressure to renew their material continually in order to maintain popularity.

The smallness of the islands also motivates people—including artists—to find jobs or to pursue an education elsewhere.² As we shall see, these experiences have a marked effect on the local music scene, as the artists return to continue their careers, fresh from their contacts abroad, or go on to become world figures in their own right, as zouk musicians and others have done, adding luster to their native island cultures. Translated, then, into a constant search for innovation and multiple contacts through migration, the particular geography of the four islands has greatly influenced the people's expectations and life experience and by extension, it could be argued, the ways they conceive, perceive, and value music.

The Legacy of a Colonial Past

*After geography there is the shaping
force of history.*—Gordon K. Lewis

Martinique, Guadeloupe, St. Lucia, and Dominica share a similar colonial past. All four have been under both French and English rule at various points in their history, and all four have been populated mainly by blacks, descendants of the African slaves brought over by the two colonial powers. All have suffered from class and racial discrimination and linguistic domination.

Zouk is the creation of black, Creole-speaking Antillean musicians. Their positions of prestige and power in the local media and their commercial success on the international market assume great significance for the islands' Creole speakers in a postcolonial society. In countries molded by the plantation system, the prominence of zouk artists on the local and world scene can be viewed, especially in the French *départements*, as a major contribution toward improving the position of Antillean artists in the class and racial power structure. Here is how the historian H. Hoetink views this struggle:

A basic [historical] pattern evolved in which a tiny minority of whites (owners or overseers of plantations, some technical staff, colonial bureaucrats and clergy, large and small traders and their clerks, and some artisans) occupied the highest rungs of the social ladder (though they were internally divided into classes and factions according to wealth, education, and occupation). The mass of slaves and their descendants were at the other end of the scale, while a mixed, colored section, although often desperately poor, received preferential treatment from the dominant whites whenever there were intermediate jobs that no white could or would take. In this way some coloreds succeeded in time in obtaining positions of a certain prestige and remuneration without, however, being accepted as social equals by the whites. The ultimate reflection of the durable social distance between these two groups is the continuing aspiration of the white group to preserve its racial endogamy. (1985, 69)

The situation has improved considerably since the colonial period. Blacks have moved into positions previously monopolized by native or metropolitan whites from France and England or by the old colored (mulatto) elite. Speaking generally about Caribbean societies, Hoetink states that "universal suffrage, [greater] political independence, and improved education have in most of these societies belatedly brought about a notable mobility of blacks and dark coloreds in the civil service, the education system, and the higher echelons of police and army" (1985, 74). He adds, however, that the decreasing political and, in some places, social importance of whites does not mean that the issue of color has lost all its former significance (see also Lowenthal 1972). There are still visible traces of the colonial past. Except for a small percentage of poor whites in Martinique and Guadeloupe, colored or white families still occupy important positions in the political and economic networks of the region and, not surprisingly, still arouse some resentment in the lower black social class. Yet, in Hoetink's words, "The whole racial power structure conspires to encourage the colored elite to emulate the white groups, both culturally and in physical appearance (fostering a desire for 'whitening' or 'improv-

ing the race'") (1985, 70). The early slave society with its rigid categories based on color has left a stigma on the population, even though in the Caribbean race no longer defines occupation.

In the French Islands, a Quest for Creole Identity

Although the four Creole-speaking islands all connect with zouk through its language, Creole, and value equally the significance of its spectacular achievements abroad, they do not all assign it the same importance. The vastly different sociopolitical and economic makeup of the French and formerly British islands have played a decisive role in the way that zouk has been experienced in each.

After sharing a similar colonial experience since approximately 1650, the four islands took different political paths during the second half of the nineteenth century. With the Treaty of Paris (1814), Martinique and Guadeloupe became French colonies. French Guiana, on the South American continent, followed three years later. In 1946, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana were declared overseas *départements* by the French National Assembly. Overnight, everyone in these former colonies was granted French citizenship and theoretically could enjoy all the rights of the *départements* in France. Although the idea of departmentalization was generally well received by the main political interests, disillusionment soon set in, which has not abated to this day. Indeed, even if it has had considerable economic impact, the neocolonial system has resulted in few social changes. The *métros* (the local term for *métropolitains* or whites from France) still occupy strategic posts: prefect (head of the *département*), rector (head of the schools), and commandant of the National Guard. The gendarmes, who represent the main forces of law and order, are also *métros*, with but few exceptions. In fact, the change in political status has caused an influx of European French civil servants (Hoetink 1985, 71). The economy, once principally agricultural and rural, has become mainly urban, a tributary of the French bureaucracy. Agricultural districts have been deserted with the move of half the populations of Guadeloupe and Martinique to the capitals to work as small dealers or civil servants. Now at the mercy of goods imported from France, these islands face France's inflationary prices. Tourism generates significant income, but not enough to slacken economic dependence on France. Unemployment, as high as 40 percent of the working population (Miles 1986, 6), has encouraged migration to France in such staggering proportions that the situation has been described by nationalists as "genocide by substitution" (Miles 1986, 6; Sainte-Rose 1983, 23).³ Heightened by the visible presence of whites in key political, educational, and economic positions as

well as in the armed forces, the combination of the growing exasperation of the massive number of unemployed and the notorious inefficiency of the French administration seriously aggravates racial tension.

Although Martinique and Guadeloupe have enjoyed average incomes far superior to those of any neighboring state and have received relatively much better educational services, they have felt increasingly at odds with the French administration and laws that superimpose ways of thinking and acting that do not meet their own needs and philosophies. Over time, the political dependence of Martinique and Guadeloupe has led the islanders to question their cultural identity. Are they French? Are they Africans? Clearly, they are neither. As William F. S. Miles perceptively comments, "The quest for a Creole identity must reverse centuries of transmitted self-denigration, and counter the forces of an overseas consumer society, turning people into the consumers of a particular culture, as well as of particular products" (1986, 7). This quest for a Creole identity, while benefiting from the status of a French *département*, has been defined by many Antillean writers as a "deep malaise." At times, it has had a paralyzing effect, especially on artists, bringing creative production to a halt. At other times, this intellectual and emotional insecurity has incited many of them to action, turning them back to their folk traditions for inspiration in order to develop forms of expression that could help reassert their own identity, as, we shall see later, the zouk artists have done. In this cultural context, zouk, by being sung in Creole and created by black Antilleans, has been accorded an enormous importance, endowed, as it were, with the very specific mandate to assert Antillean identity, locally and internationally.

Former British Colonies and the Creole Link

Unlike the French-speaking islanders, Dominicans and St. Lucians are confronted more with problems of economic resources than they are with questions of cultural identity, and zouk does not play the same role here. The nationalistic political currents that led eventually to independence have bred a pride in being Dominican and St. Lucian. The flag, the national anthem, the constitution, membership in the United Nations—all symbolize for them the uniqueness of the two populations and reinforce a sense of identification. Although in many respects zouk has a deep connection with these two islands, it is not conceived of as a means of asserting their identity. Because of the lack of money and the necessary infrastructure, zouk is not produced here;⁴ consequently, it is perceived as a product from elsewhere, as a music from the French-speaking islands—Haiti, Martinique, Guadeloupe—and French Guiana. This is the popular

view of the English Creole speakers I interviewed, even though all recognize and celebrate zouk's "Creoleness" as well as its role in reinforcing the bonds among Creole speakers in the region.

After numerous exchanges between France and England, Dominica (in 1763) and St. Lucia (in 1814) were finally ceded to Britain. It was not until the 1970s that the British West Indian colonies were granted independence (Dominica in 1978, St. Lucia in 1979). The transition from a colonial to a postcolonial state structure involved some significant changes, especially in creating a number of national institutions—for example, to regulate markets and the financial system, to direct and control domestic and foreign investments, and to regulate foreign trade. Clive Y. Thomas explains that the expansion of the role of the state has not really been voluntary but has rather been dictated by "the structural necessities of their internal social situations and the historically formed links between their economies and those of the center" (1984, 53–54). In other words, the political independence of Dominica and St. Lucia has not meant economic independence. The two islands have inherited the economic problems of the colonial administration and are still struggling to reverse their backward economies.⁵

There is massive unemployment,⁶ and "that reservoir of unemployed helps to breed the well-known social problems" (Lewis 1985, 233). The problem of heavy drinking is notorious; men spend their last pennies trying to forget their miseries in rum shops. Drug addiction, violence, and crime threaten the whole country; juvenile delinquency has increased alarmingly. These social problems may not be worse, relatively, than those of other economically depressed countries; but, as elsewhere, they undermine society.

Artists, like many other islanders, have had to leave home to find work. Those who have stayed are faced with working for the Ministry of Culture, where there is little time to do creative work, or for commercial enterprises such as hotels, where creativity is rarely encouraged. Even artists with exceptional talent do not earn enough to have their work adequately produced and promoted. As a result, both islands have gradually lost most of their best artists and have instead become major consumers of foreign cultural products.

While zouk's position of prestige and power is seen by some Antilleans I interviewed as a hegemonic force counteracting racial and political tensions in the French *départements*, its success in the former British islands is rarely interpreted along these lines. Instead, it is discussed in terms of its characteristics as a Creole dance music. St. Lucia and Dominica do not experience the same tensions that undermine the French Antilles. In these sovereign countries, there remain only a few *béké* (white natives, traditionally part of the elite), and only a tiny minority of new white set-

tlers now live in the two English-speaking islands. Their presence is limited; blacks occupy all the strategic positions in politics, economics, education, and the police forces.

To suggest that racial tensions do not exist because blacks are in power would obviously be misleading. The inhabitants of both islands are well aware that their economy is still subservient to the capitalist world economy and thus, to a large extent, subject to what might still be termed "white imperialism."

Creole, the Language of Zouk

Much of zouk's strength in the four islands is the result of its being sung in Creole—and this for at least two reasons. First, the language is generally understood by everyone. The levels of comprehension among French-based Creole speakers within the Lesser Antillean group are very high. The linguist McVey Graham points out, for example, that St. Lucian Creole is well understood by speakers of other varieties: by 89 percent of Martinicans, 98.5 percent of Dominicans, and 76.5 percent of Guadeloupeans (quoted in Carrington 1988, 8). Creole speakers of the Lesser Antilles do not enjoy the same ease of communication with all French-based Creole users, however. Carrington observes that the French Creole of Haiti—used in *compas direct*, a music important to the development of zouk, as will be shown later—is less accessible, although still partly intelligible to the Lesser Antillean group.⁷

Second, and more important, zouk touches a sensitive chord because it endorses a language that has been totally rejected or at best ignored for generations. The official language has changed many times, from French to English and back again, as the European powers fought over the territories from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century.⁸ In the meantime, however, the daily spoken language that has steadily evolved over the years in all four islands has been French-based Creole. French Creole has developed in the same way as all the Creole languages in the Caribbean, as a communication system between Europeans and West Africans during the period of European colonial expansion, the trade in enslaved Africans, and the plantation phase of the Caribbean economy (Carrington 1988, 6). Today there are still unilingual Creole speakers. Yet Creole has no official existence: government business in all four islands is conducted in either French or English. In St. Lucia, for example, I witnessed a court case in 1983 where a unilingual Creole speaker had to rely on the help of a translator to communicate with the judge, even though, as I learned later, the judge spoke both English and Creole fluently.

Hearing popular tunes in Creole on the radio evokes strong feelings of home among Creole listeners and reinforces an emotional link with the

Creole speakers of other islands. This link is all the more understandable when one recalls that, not long ago, the use of Creole was forbidden in schoolyards and the language was not used in homes that had pretensions toward respectability. The social stratification and class relations during the colonial period have led West Indians traditionally to associate English and French with the upper classes: the powerful, the formally educated, officials, and city people. Creole was the preserve of the so-called lower classes: laborers, the unschooled (in the traditional sense), and the rural population. It is only recently that public use of Creole has not been scorned.

The Print Media

Several organizations—such as the Groupe d'Études et de Recherches en Espace Créolophone, the Mouvman Kwéyòl Sent Lisi, the Komité pou Etid Kwéyòl, and the Association pour le Développement d'une Littérature en Langue Créole—have helped promote the language and establish a standard orthography. Creole has been used in St. Lucian newspapers since the fifties, first in the *Voice of St. Lucia*, and later in the more recent *Crusader*, but only in political cartoons and comic strips. In 1981, the newspaper *Balata* was created with the primary goal “of familiarizing the literate public with the writing system of the Creole language” (Carrington 1988, 18).⁹ The *Castries Catholic Chronicle* (St. Lucia) has also made great efforts, especially in several 1981 issues, to introduce the newly created Creole writing system. Along with *Balata*, this newspaper has been instrumental in influencing people's recognition of Creole as a language, not a patois, as they had been taught to believe under the colonial regime. Because of these papers' sporadic use of Creole or their infrequent appearance, however, they have not stimulated the formation of any Creole literary movements.

In Dominica, a few poets have published occasional small books of poetry featuring some works in Creole. The *New Chronicle*, a weekly newspaper, has promoted Creole writing since around 1987 by including sections of the Creole dictionary—in-progress.¹⁰

In the French islands, several newspapers and magazines using Creole have appeared on the market, all short lived, except for Martinique's *Grif an tè*, which published sixty-three issues between August 1977 and early 1982—the most impressive published use of Creole by far (Carrington 1988, 30).¹¹ Along with these attempts to promote the published use of Creole, a few isolated Creole monographs and books of poetry have appeared.¹² A special issue of the Martinican journal *Antilla* called *Antilla kwéyòl*, which appears three or four times a year, is one of the few Antillean publications today that regularly publishes articles in Creole.

Thanks to all these efforts, new attitudes toward Creole have led to a revision of the classic relation between the native and the European languages—even though the use of Creole in the print media remains marginal.¹³ These new attitudes, however, have not yet reversed the old associations (Carrington 1988, 11).

The Broadcast Media

Creole radio broadcasting in St. Lucia and Dominica is still limited. Apart from a daily five- to ten-minute program of information for farmers, a twice weekly half-hour news update, and a weekly fifteen-minute religious program, little else is broadcast in Creole on the government-owned station, Radio St. Lucia (Carrington 1988, 17–18). Important local events such as the 1979 elections, the consecration of the bishop of Castries in 1981, and special public education programs are occasionally covered in both Creole and English, but such programming remains peripheral. The only other broadcasting station in St. Lucia, the commercial, French-owned Radio Caraïbe International (RCI), like Radio St. Lucia, offers very few programs in Creole. Apart from a few on-the-spot commentaries, RCI offers only an hour and a half of daily programming in Creole between 7:30 and 9:00 A.M.¹⁴

The government station in Dominica, Dominica Broadcasting Services (DBS), devotes slightly more time to Creole broadcasting than Radio St. Lucia, but not enough to be truly significant.¹⁵ However, given the success of the announcements in Creole, DBS has aired educational and commercial advertisements in the language, drawing on folk images and using words with double meanings.¹⁶ The two religious stations in Dominica, Voice of the Islands and Voice of Life, include only snippets of Creole in their daily programming. Voice of the Islands, for example, presents a daily fifteen-minute Creole program at the end of the morning that includes Creole music and gospel readings and a half-hour Caribbean music program each afternoon (which may include Creole music). Voice of Life features a special program of Caribbean music (which may include Creole music) and four fifteen-minute weekly programs in Creole.¹⁷ In short, Creole is broadcast on these two stations but, as on DBS, only for a short time each day.

The situation was much the same in Martinique and Guadeloupe until 1981, when, after thirty-five years of state monopoly, the French government decided to grant private broadcasting licenses. Even though the control of this kind of broadcasting still includes restriction to the FM band and to the use of low-power transmitters having only a thirty-kilometer radius (Carrington 1988, 29), the policy change has led to the development of a fantastic number of private radio stations¹⁸ for a rela-

tively small population—twenty-nine stations for the 320,000 people in Guadeloupe and thirty-six for the 360,000 people in Martinique (these official figures do not include several pirate stations).¹⁹ Some of these are community stations; others are sponsored by political parties, whose interests they are designed to represent in Martinique and Guadeloupe. Most of the stations have a high proportion of Creole broadcasting so that anyone interested in listening to a program in the native tongue can now find something at any time. Zouk, then, by being sung in Creole, has gained pride of place in the French Antillean media.

Mass Media and the Popular Music Scene

Car radios, box radios, and record shop speakers all add their distorted sound to this musical potpourri. It may seem random but, like everywhere else, there are tastemakers at work.—Billy Bergman

It is widely acknowledged today that the broadcast media have a profound—often decisive—effect on the degree to which a given genre of popular music will be received and accepted by the public. To help explain the relative popularity of zouk in the four islands, it is thus important for us to know how broadcast music is selected, whether government programming policies and legislation play a role, who supplies the recordings, and how much broadcasters influence the choice of music finally played.

In Martinique, Guadeloupe, St. Lucia, and Dominica, there is a clear-cut policy regulating the *spoken* content of radio programming, but there is none governing the selection of music.²⁰ This is left totally up to disc jockeys, most of whom follow their own musical intuition and taste in addition to keeping up with the music in fashion in popular venues such as night clubs; only recently, telephone call-in shows have allowed them more direct contact with listeners' musical tastes. Before the advent of these types of programs, disc jockeys picked up information by attending community celebrations and festivals and by listening to friends' comments. At times, as in Dominica, vans provided by radio stations drove around the country to do programs on the spot. During these sessions, interviewers could hear people's reactions to the music being played. There is still no other medium that can provide a profile of Creole speakers' musical tastes.²¹ Disc jockeys' musical intuition, the music already in vogue, and the availability of records continue to be the main tastemakers at work and form the basis for decisions about what goes on the air.

In the four Creole-speaking islands, as elsewhere, musical intuition and taste are deeply influenced by formal education, which often implies going abroad. In the two former British colonies, higher education means

study in Britain, the United States, Canada, Jamaica, Trinidad, and Barbados; most of the disc jockeys interviewed for this study had lived for three or more years in one of these places. In the French islands, the usual destination is France.

Dominica and St. Lucia

The way in which disc jockeys in these islands allocate their air time is invariably influenced by their experiences abroad. During the seventies and early eighties, before the emergence of the indigenous musics zouk, reggae, calypso, and soca,²² they regularly programmed music from the United States (particularly soul and country and western) as well as "cadence" from Haiti. They did not give airplay to the Latin American, Cuban, or African music of the eighties because they had had little contact with it.²³

The success of calypso and soca cannot be attributed solely to disc jockeys' own experience and music selections, however; the touring and the physical mobility generally of Trinidadian musicians within the islands must also be credited. In St. Lucia, for example, the first policeband leader, saxophonist Nathaniel Griffith, came from Trinidad,²⁴ and, from the late forties to the early sixties, he influenced all the prominent musicians in the country. For over fifteen years, as Rudolph "Toto" Charles once told me, sheet music and complete arrangements came directly from Trinidad. Frequent tours by calypso singers helped cultivate a great appreciation for that music, and its enduring success in the two islands has been further reinforced by its international fame and the consequent influence on disc jockeys' programming.

Reggae came to Dominica and St. Lucia mainly by way of radio broadcasts and local record shops. Its two most direct musical antecedents, rock steady and ska, were introduced around 1972. Early hits by Desmond Dekker and by Ken Lazarus and Jimmy Cliff established the popularity of what became known as reggae. As a new musical genre from a sister Caribbean country, and one that addressed familiar themes such as injustice, exploitation, and poverty, reggae naturally caught on among people of all ages.

Music from the United States has had a tremendous impact since the Second World War. Its success has grown steadily, owing to the emigration to the United States of substantial numbers of islanders over the past fifty years and their frequent visits back home.

In the seventies and early eighties, Haitian compas direct, also called cadence-rampa, gained a strong hold in the two islands. This music, which is at the foundation of zouk, as we shall see in chapter 5, proved tremendously appealing in all the Creole-speaking islands because it was

sung in Creole and used a choreography similar to that of local dances. Its arrival in Dominica and St. Lucia was facilitated by many touring Haitian bands, some of which were now based in the neighboring French *départements*, as well as by French Antillean groups who had developed their own version of cadence-rampa after years of listening to Haitian music. Simply dubbed “cadence” in Dominica and St. Lucia, this music took on an even greater meaning for the islanders with the appearance on the market of cadence-lypso, a mixture of cadence and calypso.

Cadence-lypso was introduced around the mid-seventies by Exile One, a Dominican group living in Guadeloupe. The success of the group’s albums back home was extremely influential; it contributed to the further success of Haitian cadence and its Antillean version and prompted many local musicians in both St. Lucia and Dominica to form bands and to record. At the same time, cadence-lypso’s new blend of sound was extremely well received in the French Antilles, so much so that some of its characteristics, as we shall see in chapter 6, found their way into zouk. For the two English islands, cadence-lypso became and has remained the symbol of a golden musical era.

Since the beginning of colonization, St. Lucians and Dominicans had maintained a strong relationship with Martinique and Guadeloupe through trade and migration and also through their Creole connections.²⁵ But the popular music of cadence and cadence-lypso played a major role in reinforcing the links between the Creole-speaking islands of the region by establishing a common repertoire. Borrowing from both Haitian cadence and Dominican cadence-lypso, zouk was almost guaranteed a major share of the preestablished market, and, in record time, it produced hits in all four islands.

Martinique and Guadeloupe

Radio music programming in the French islands, as in St. Lucia and Dominica, has been largely influenced by disc jockeys’ own musical experience, their travel abroad, and the music already in fashion.

France has deeply influenced Antilleans’ musical experience, and its multiethnic population allows them to cultivate many tastes and to meet many different cultural groups. For example, they have had easy access to African music through the many French-speaking Africans living in Paris. This interaction with Africans has had a continuing influence back home through the efforts of a few disc jockeys who have become true aficionados of African music. As a result, even before zouk musicians borrowed from them, the musics of Zaire, Congo, and Cameroon were listened to regularly from the late seventies and are still part of the local repertoire.

Well before the advent of zouk, Latin American music, mainly from

Cuba, Argentina, and Brazil, was also part of the soundscape in Martinique and Guadeloupe.²⁶ Its success came first from its international fame in the forties and the fifties, access to it guaranteed by medium-wave radios. By the mid-sixties, the popularity of Latin American music was reinforced by touring Puerto Rican groups, later followed by groups from the Dominican Republic (1978) and Cuba (1980). Antilleans in France were also exposed to Latin American music during that period through many émigré musicians in Paris. Although Latin American music in the eighties has not been as popular as it used to be in the islands, it has left its imprint on most musicians over the age of thirty-five, as will be demonstrated in chapter 8 in relation, for example, to the music of Kassav.

French music, widely accessible to Martinicans and Guadeloupeans through the government-owned radio, Radio France Outre-Mer (RFO), has always been only moderately successful in the islands. Played mainly for the white population from France, its influence on Antillean musicians has been slight. Until the eighties, American dance music played only a small part on the local scene, whereas jazz has impressed the musical elite since the mid-fifties. As will be shown later, the influence of jazz on the leading zouk musicians is still evident.

Biguine, the native popular music of the French Antilles, has been part of local music making for over a century. Even though it lost much of its popularity after the seventies, its influence, especially at the rhythmic level, remains pervasive. As will be shown in chapter 4, it is seen as the substratum for nearly all Creole popular music compositions, including those of zouk.

Calypso and reggae came to Martinique and Guadeloupe through Caribbean artists and through European and North American broadcasts, which also brought them international fame. Now heard only occasionally, calypso reached the height of its popularity between 1960 and 1965 when stars such as Mighty Sparrow visited the islands. Reggae, too, had its day of glory, but only for a short time between the late seventies and the early eighties. Neither calypso nor reggae, however, played a direct role in the making of zouk, nor did either prepare the ground for zouk’s unprecedented success in the islands. Zouk’s true antecedents, as we shall see in chapter 2, were Haitian compas direct and Dominican cadence-lypso.

Building on Local Music Traditions

The Caribbean experience of popular music is shaped not only by the mass media and the profound effects of migration but also by local traditions. Along with the Creole language, these have been among the strongest elements contributing to the maintenance of the special relations

among Martinique, Guadeloupe, St. Lucia, and Dominica. As we have seen, the islands' history and development followed a similar colonization pattern, and the African, French, and English musical influences in the region developed into families of musical genres that can be easily recognized today. In spite of distinctive features that have evolved on each island, the styles of the various genres can be grouped into three rough categories, which are judged locally to have most profoundly marked the musical values and experience of the Creole-speaking peoples:²⁷ song-dances, with *bèlè* and *gwo ka* drum accompaniment; quadrille and related ballroom dances, with their typical instrumental accompaniment; and Carnival music and its musical ensembles.²⁸

The *bèlè* and *gwo ka* drum-accompanied song-dances feature spectacular interactive playing, dancing, and singing. They are characterized by a call-and-response form, close coordination between the dancers' steps and the rhythmic strokes of the drummer, and the obvious, intense involvement of the lead singer, who sings constantly at full volume with no vibrato, often exploiting the top of his or her vocal range. Active participation in the dancing and singing by everyone present is perceived as the key to a successful performance.

The quadrille, with its related ballroom dances, is strongly linked with the colonial past. Quadrille performances have always been highly valued since, historically, the performers' knowledge of the choreography and the social code of these events gave them prestige and a share of the power associated with the European traditions. Musicians, too, were praised for mastering this sort of music, which, everyone recognized, depended on a particular musical language with melodies, chords, and a bass-line accompaniment quite different from the *bèlè* and *gwo ka* song-dances.

Carnival music is less narrowly defined than either the *bèlè* and *gwo ka* song-dances or the quadrille. It includes any music or instrument (traditionally percussion) that makes people want to dance. Played as loudly as possible, it is characterized by lively melodies and a medium-fast marked beat. Singing, dancing, and playing all focus on the intensity of the act and on maximizing the effects.

From these local traditions and practices have emerged the principles by which music in general, and zouk in particular, is conceived, perceived, and valued in the four islands. Most of the people I interviewed for this study, for example, assume that music usually includes singing; at any rate, it must include dancing. For a music to be "hot,"²⁹ it needs to be loud and intense. For them, the popularity of a musical genre is largely dependent on the way the music encourages participation: the more participants, the more successful the presentation. In general, musical performances are conceived as public entertainment; they must therefore be spectacular, colorful, and well timed.

The criteria used to evaluate musicians are just as specific as those used for musical performances. Although a certain knowledge of the music of other groups and peoples is part of West Indian traditions and therefore expected, versatility is still highly regarded. Accomplished, knowledgeable musicians, I was told, should have an exceptional sense of timing, a convincing interpretation, and controlled rhythmic and melodic improvisation.

These characteristics of Caribbean traditional music and the responses they evoke inform the way in which music is heard and valued in the islands. The success of a performing group, therefore, as zouk musicians have demonstrated so skillfully, depends on the extent to which these characteristics are reflected in a performance—an experience within which "people feel themselves at home."

Zouk as a World Music in the Lesser Antilles

THROUGHOUT THIS BOOK, I have emphasized the great complexity of the responses and interpretations generated by zouk. But while there can be no analysis that can provide final answers to the questions raised by the zouk phenomenon, I do not want readers to believe that all the points of view presented here should be given the same level of importance. There is a hierarchy among the various issues raised by zouk: as we have seen in chapter 9, some of the concerns expressed in the debates were clearly given more attention than others.

In this study, there is one theme that, to me, seems to override the many debates on zouk, and that is "identity." I suggest that it is here that we can best understand the tensions that zouk has created in the islands. It cannot be assumed, for example, that because zouk has asserted a "we" on the international market it has solved the problem for Antilleans of defining their own identity. On the contrary, my hypothesis is that the ties that bind zouk with the international market have in fact brought the problem more sharply to the fore.

The Identity Equation

Like all other music movements, zouk has established itself as the sphere within which a "we" has been constructed.¹ In Guadeloupe, Martinique, Dominica, and St. Lucia, this "we" at a general level has referred to people sharing the same language, Creole, the same colonial past, and many of the same musical traditions. Until two or three years ago, zouk was associated in particular with young people, of both sexes, below the age of twenty-five. This association with youth, I suggest, can be understood in relation to the particular historical period, the eighties, during which zouk emerged. The dominant moments of this period in the Lesser Antilles have been described in the preceding chapters: new sources of empowerment through the newly acquired independence in St. Lucia and Dominica and the decentralization of power in the French *départements*;

the continuation of Creole speakers' struggle to have their cultural "difference" recognized; the alarming rise of unemployment and the corresponding growing insecurity of the populations and of young people in particular; the proliferation of mass media and greater availability of local music; and the exploration of new technology. As long as the "we" referred to Creole-speaking youths, Antilleans seemed to feel no ambiguity about what it was supposed to represent. Zouk emerged from and has functioned within the lives of the generation that grew in this context.

From this perspective, older people, not surprisingly, could not really see zouk as "their" music: it was too fast, too loud, too electronically oriented, overall too "different" from what they were used to in their own youth. Most people I interviewed in the islands in fact stressed that zouk for them had been the symbol of a generation gap. The most interesting question in relation to zouk, then, is the apparent disappearance of that gap. How, over roughly the past three years, did zouk, initially almost exclusively associated locally with youth, become institutionalized, in the French Antilles in particular, as an element of national identity?

As a fan explained, the gradual acceptance of zouk by the local population at large may be seen as "a way to recapture something extremely popular, acknowledged all over the world, that is associated with Guadeloupe." I suggest, however, that zouk on the international market has taken on another meaning for Antilleans than it has at home—a meaning that transcends differences between generations and even islands. Martinicans and Guadeloupeans in France forget their constant rivalry at home to become simply *Antillais*, a single community in exile. In the same way, as ethnomusicologist Christopher Waterman (1986, 18) has remarked on syncretic popular musical styles in sub-Saharan Africa, zouk has facilitated the construction of superethnic identities. For Antilleans in relation to non-Antilleans at home or abroad, zouk is definitely "we."²

The designation "we" necessarily signals a "they." The ensemble of the various subcultures (based on language, race, gender, age, occupation, class, or ethnicity) that constitute the body of zouk fans provides a wide range of what the "they" may be and cannot therefore be given a single definition. In all instances, however, it can be assumed that zouk has produced for its different fans a kind of boundary within which they can ascribe their difference. By "boundary," I do not mean a frontier, but rather a kind of bond that gathers people together through, for example, affective, linguistic, national, regional, or racial links.

In the Creole-speaking islands, I suggest that zouk has produced at least two forms of boundaries: oppositional and independent.³ From the standpoint of its oppositional boundary, zouk has presented itself as a direct challenge to the power of the predominant culture. For Creole speakers generally, zouk has been associated with their cultural struggle

to penetrate and be recognized on the international market and, for Guadeloupeans and Martinicans in particular, with the assertion of Antillean/Creole identity and difference within the context of the French departmental system. In addition, as explained above, by being associated almost exclusively with young people in the early eighties, zouk has symbolically created a space for youths outside and in opposition to that of older generations, thereby confronting the power of the dominant group. Zouk can also be said to have established an independent boundary, in and for itself, in the reinforcement of solidarity and the promotion of Creole identity among Creole speakers in the region.

While the zouk movement seems to have brought Creole speakers together one way or another, the ultimate challenge for them, however, remains to agree on the definition of the Antillean/Creole identity that is being promoted through zouk.

Zouk's obvious musical borrowings and appropriations have brought up the much-debated question, in Guadeloupe and Martinique especially, of musical "authenticity," the degree of its "purity" in relation to local musical traditions.⁴ The fusion of musical elements has also been at the source of a controversy on the importing of "symbolic codes," that is, the adoption of foreign ways of doing and thinking, and the subversion of these codes in the country.⁵ How do local musicians appropriate these codes, and what meanings do Guadeloupean and Martinican musicians and listeners assign to them? Conversely, how much is zouk linked with local traditions, and how much is this music representative of Guadeloupean or Martinican culture? Since, for example, traditional *gwo ka* music has been regarded by separatist movements as the symbol of Guadeloupean culture for many years, the question of whether zouk legitimately represents Guadeloupe, and, if so, what type of image it presents, has taken on a political tinge. In this context, the question of authenticity has become a question of individual and national identity.⁶

Even though the question of whether zouk legitimately represents individual or national identity has been given much importance in the Antilles, this, in my opinion, has not been the main issue: what has come out most strongly in public debates and in my own interviews has been the ways in which zouk actually threatens that identity. Zouk has indeed raised many fears in the islands. For a start, its inclusion of many features of the dominant musics on the international market (the use of the rhythm box, e.g.) has been interpreted as a sign of the gradual homogenization of local practices and therefore an erosion of the cultural uniqueness of the islands. In that same vein, there is thus the fear that local musics are being exploited and taken over by the system.⁷ For that reason, the signing by the group Kassav of a contract with CBS in 1988 has met with much suspicion. This new collaboration has been seen less as a step forward in

reaching a wider market than as a sellout of Antillean music to the multinationals. The compromises that had to be made by Kassav in the choice of, say, the songs and the performers to be used on the two 1988 and 1989 albums produced under the contract (Phoenix horns, e.g., were added to Kassav's own brass section) have been perceived by many musicians and other observers as putting at stake the integrity of the group. Along the same line, the enormous production of zouk recordings and the ensuing connection of zouk with commerce has also been received with mistrust, based on the implicit belief that commercialism necessarily precludes artists from contributing to a culture of resistance.⁸

At another level, because zouk's rhythm is closely associated with *mizik vidé* and is played at a similar volume, some people have suggested, as noted in chapter 8, that those who listen to zouk constantly may in the end confuse reality with Carnival and that what used to be a once-a-year cathartic experience may, if administered on a daily basis, be turned into a sort of escapism, a passivity in the face of social problems. They worry that zouk "cultivates" immaturity and, consequently, a lack of comprehension of one's own milieu.

What is most interesting to note about these questions of authenticity, homogenization, integrity, commercialism, and, to a certain degree, escapism is that the emphasis is not so much on the "they" in the "we-they" equation of defining identity as it is on the way zouk's interrelation with the international market rearticulates local practices. In other words, what is at stake here is not zouk in and for itself but the processes that it activates and, in connection with them, the difficulty of defining the "we" at the national level.⁹

Musical genres have often played a crucial role in the expression and negotiation of identity.¹⁰ As musicologist John Shepherd wrote, "The music of a culture may say something to that culture that the culture itself does not wish to hear or recognize, the music may be thought of as only existing within the cracks and margins or beyond the boundaries of what passes for 'reality' in that particular culture" (1988, 112–13). I suggest that what zouk has done is to make more visible, in ways that are particular to the music field,¹¹ the dilemmas faced by Antilleans in their quest to assert their difference in the modern world. These dilemmas have become all the more real as the local populations have been undergoing a series of marked social changes with implications for virtually every facet of their lives.¹²

Winds of Change

Regardless of one's own position on the zouk phenomenon, everyone I interviewed for this study spoke of zouk as the symbol of a new era in the

Antilles by associating it with a remarkable number of local changes—economic, sociopolitical, and cultural. This association of zouk with change has indeed been a major point of interest as well as a cause for concern for Antillean musicians and nonmusicians alike since the Kassav hit “Zouk-la sé sèl mèdikaman nou ni” burst on the scene in 1984. That song, it will be recalled, which proclaimed, in effect, that “dance is the only solution we have,” was regarded as retrogressive in spirit by some nationalist intellectuals and hopeful by others, who saw in it the freshening winds of change.

Economic Changes

Until the eighties, music in the French Antilles had always been conceived of as an important activity, but clearly not until recently as one involved in a country's economy. Zouk, as many journalists have noted, has helped change this perception by contributing substantially to the increase in imports into the French Antilles of Guadeloupean records pressed in France. Gilbert Pincemail (1988) reported, for example, that the value of such imports rose from Fr 1.99 million in 1980 to Fr 5.06 million in 1987, while total record imports from the United States¹³ declined from Fr 2.15 million to Fr 176,230.

The enormous annual production of zouk records has been seen as intensifying the economic activities of various sectors related to the music industry. Referring to the rising production and import figures, Christian Boutan, SACEM representative in the French Antilles, in an interview at Fort-de-France, Martinique, in March 1990, explained the implications for the islands of the commercial success of zouk. In his own assessment, zouk has helped generate new jobs and create new markets. The direct beneficiaries include a wide variety of people, not only authors, performers, producers, publishers, and distributors, but also radio announcers, artistic managers, promoters, journalists, organizers of megashow productions, and owners of nightclubs, music stores, record shops, and recording studios. A great many zouk singers, in particular, have made more money in a week than most other Antillean singers make in a month. Since zouk is extremely difficult to reproduce on stage—save for a very limited number of groups who can afford recording-studio equipment on stage—playbacks¹⁴ have become *the* attraction of the evening in most Antillean nightclubs. With no equipment to carry or musicians to pay, zouk artists have earned substantial incomes this way: the fee for a playback performance in a nightclub normally runs between Fr 2,000 and Fr 5,000 but can reach as high as Fr 15,000. As a playback performance usually lasts no more than twenty minutes, zouk singers can often present more than one playback performance a night.¹⁵

The production of zouk records has been accompanied by the creation of products related to music and other cultural enterprises. The first video clips of Antillean stars featured zouk songs. The zouk label has also been exploited to increase the sale of other products. Kassav set the pace by using its own international reputation to market a new mixed drink and a new brand of cosmetics. But turning a cultural expression like zouk into a business is certainly not new. In the forties, Antillean drummers and singers were already using traditional Creole music in their performing jobs on cruise ships. What *is* new in both Martinique and Guadeloupe, according to Boutan, is that the marketing and distribution of Antillean music has developed to a much greater extent. It involves many more participants, including, for example, radio deejays (who until the advent of *radios libres* were not free to play as much Antillean music on their programs as they do today), disc jockeys of mobile discos, and managers and artistic directors (who until the eighties, it should be recalled, did not exist formally in the French islands). The exploitation of Antillean music, zouk in particular, is now highly organized, relying on marketing strategies and a wide distribution network to reach both local and international markets.

Local record producers Henri Debs from Guadeloupe and Jean-Michel Mauriello from Martinique indicated in interviews that they have developed a new communication network with foreign publishers (with a view to selling licenses), distributors, and artistic agencies. Influenced by the wide market that zouk has created, foreign producers and international companies such as CBS, they explained, have developed a greater interest in Antillean music and have signed contracts with some of its leading artists: to name only two, Tanya St. Val has signed with Philips and Zouk Machine with BMG Ariola, in France. In the hope of making further inroads into the international market, in late 1988 a group of Martinican and Guadeloupean producers formed a distribution society called Cocosound Distribution Musique Afro-Antillaise.¹⁶

In the present Antillean economic situation, where a high rate of inflation is coupled with a high level of unemployment, the income generated by zouk's commercial success has been seen as providential by artists and people related to various sectors of the music industry. In my interviews I was told that this success has been especially meaningful, to young and old alike, in the fight against the incipient psychological depression brought on by disheartening economic conditions.

Sociopolitical Changes

The commercial value of the zouk enterprise has kindled interest in extending to Martinique and Guadeloupe the force of French legislation in

transactions related to the music business. As there is more money at stake, more legal controls have gradually been applied over those who can assume the various roles involved in music production. Christian Boutan explained, for example, that music publishers, hitherto free agents, are now required to be registered officially and to demonstrate a basic knowledge of the workings of the music industry. As a result, zouk has encouraged greater work specialization in all music-related domains. For example, it has induced many artists to make the transition from amateur to professional status. Before the eighties, very few musicians could earn their living by simply playing at dance halls or hotels. Today, artists such as Ralph Thamar, Eric Virgal, Jacques Darbaud, Tanya St. Val, Joelle Ursull, and many others live exclusively by their music—a new possibility in the Antilles, which has been widely acknowledged in the local media.

Encouraged by the development of the Antillean music industry, some young people are now interested in pursuing a specialization in the field. Some special courses have already been offered in the French Antilles. In 1990, for example, ten Martinicans and two Guadeloupeans took a six-month training course on artistic development (Stage de Formation en Développement Artistique), aimed at developing arts management skills. The classes were given in the islands during the first five months, and one month was spent at the Institut d'Études et de Recherches Internationales sur la Nouvelle Communication (NOVOCOM) in France.

As the music profession is seen today as providing new work opportunities, young Antillean artists are becoming more interested in pursuing their music education. As a result, schools of music have recently grown in number and, at the same time, acquired a new social meaning in the Antilles through their connection to the new realities of the Antillean music scene.

In conjunction with the intense production and marketing of zouk works and the increased work specialization in the music industry, the need for greater professionalism in each speciality has become an issue. Workshops have been organized by associations such as the Conseil Guadeloupéen de la Jeunesse to inform musicians about the responsibilities and rights of the various professions involved in the music business.¹⁷

This focus on information about the music industry has been accompanied by the institutionalization of some artistic practices and the formation of new organizations. For example, the first association of lyricists in Guadeloupe, Paroliers Musique, was created in 1989. In the same year in Guadeloupe, the Syndicat des Auteurs, Compositeurs et des Artistes Musiciens (SACAM), created a few years earlier, was reorganized and given a new start. A new enterprise for production, distribution, and artist management called RCI Productions, operating in both Martinique and

Guadeloupe, was also created in 1989 to meet the growing demands of the artistic community.

Cultural Changes

As we have seen, the success of zouk on the local and international scene has played a major role in transforming the status of musician in the Antilles into a respected profession.¹⁸ In addition, publicity about how zouk emerged on the international market (mostly in reference to Kassav) and its great reliance on technology has helped convince Antilleans of the additional need to recognize and value the many *other* professions, such as composers, lyricists, sound engineers, programmers, and arrangers, involved in the production of mass-distributed music.

It has been widely acknowledged that zouk has been a prime factor in helping change negative attitudes toward Creole, both inside and outside the islands. Locally, it has served as a catalyst for many Creole movements in their efforts to promote the spoken and written language. Publishing Creole texts on zouk record jackets has probably been one of the best educational tools to emerge to help make Creole better known and recognized as a distinct language. At yet another level, the use of the Creole language and the integration of many aspects of Creole musical and dance traditions in zouk have reinforced the cultural bonds that already exist among the Creole-speaking islands of the region.

In welcoming female band members as soloists in performing groups, zouk musicians have participated in the widespread movement toward a greater integration of Antillean women in all sectors of activity. This has helped make women's presence in the artistic milieus more visible, which in turn has contributed to the development of a greater awareness of the active roles that women play in the sociopolitical, cultural, and economic development of the Antillean countries. At the same time, zouk has become a source of employment and prestige for many women singers. A few of them have become role models for other women by symbolizing financial success, personal achievement, and perseverance. By allowing women to work as lyricists as well as singers, zouk has also created a new outlet in the previously male-dominated music industry. As writers of lyrics that enjoy a wide audience, women can express their own preoccupations, perceptions of the world, and desires for change.¹⁹

The change of attitude toward local music has also been most noticeable in the communications media. The international success of zouk has played a major role in the deghettoization of Antillean music in local radio programming, particularly in the French Antilles, where it is no longer confined to special programs. Since 1989, Antillean music has been placed

in competition with other international musics on the hit parade; on Guadeloupe's Radio Caraïbe International, for example, it appears as part of a new program appropriately called "Melting Pot." This program publicly recognizes zouk as of international value and, at the same time, frees Antilleans to express other musical tastes. As Guadeloupean political scientist Eric Nabajoth explained, it shows how zouk's international success has helped Antilleans lose their inferiority complex and feel comfortable in placing their works in competition with others on the market (personal interview, 20 April 1990). On the international level, zouk's fame has helped replace ignorance or indifference about Antillean music and culture with respect and admiration. Antillean musicians have recently acquired an enhanced social status and established a new presence in French organizations, as was demonstrated by France's choice of Antillean singer Joelle Ursull to represent the country at the Eurovision contest in 1990. After having faced a certain resistance and at times animosity from the media, Antilleans now perceive this change of attitude as a breakthrough, especially given their continued dependence on France.

All these changes, it should be emphasized, did not take place without creating disturbances and controversies, as noted in chapter 9. The growing use of playback is an example worth reviewing. While playbacks have been one of the most lucrative venues for zouk singers over the past few years and have become practically an institution in the French islands, they have also been the source of much resentment among many musicians. For them, playbacks represent only one more way to prevent them from playing in public and earning an income. Their frustration has been such that some of them have decided to become singers themselves in order to take advantage of this easy way of making money—a change of direction, not always successful, that has created its own malaise in the artistic community.

The increased presence of female zouk singers is another instance in which a change associated with zouk has not taken place without meeting some resistance. Since Jocelyne Béroard was accepted as a soloist in the group Kassav, women have had far easier access to soloist roles in groups, but because of their fast-growing numbers, they have now begun to be perceived as a threat by some male singers.

The tensions caused by the disruption of certain traditional ways of doing things, the conflicts of interest, the repositioning of some people in terms of power relations, the shift in priorities connected with the rearticulation of local practices—all permit us to see how, in their own ways, the changes associated with zouk ultimately bring into focus the issue of a distinctive Creole identity and the manner in which it is being sought, and shaped, by the Antillean people.

Zouk and World Music

Zouk signals a new era of outreach to international markets, a phenomenon not only of the Lesser Antilles but of other small and industrially developing countries as well. For a start, zouk is part of the eighties "world music" trend.²⁰ As a world music, it typically embodies characteristics of musical genres that are currently highly valued in the international music market. Its production characteristically requires great collaborative organization: while most parts are recorded in the Antilles, the brass section is usually recorded in Paris, where the final mixing is also done. Its musical style²¹ emerges from a combination both of sounds and of people (a brass section from Paris, Antillean musicians from Martinique and Guadeloupe, etc.) and of institutions (SACEM, SACAM, RCI Productions, to name only a few). It integrates, rather than juxtaposes, musical elements of the past and the present into a unified product. Its compositional styles and their histories are "mixed, layered, altered and mediated by [the artists]" (Meintjes 1990, 46). Finally, through this "trafficking of sounds and signs," to use Meintjes's expression (1990, 63), it capitalizes on a great part of its success by consciously (or unconsciously) offering its listeners a wide field for different interpretive moves.²²

Zouk is part of a world movement that advances the desire of every nation not only to be recognized but also to *participate* in the workings of global economics and power. As does all world music, it faces a double bind. On the one hand, in order to assert Creole identity within the dominant system, zouk is forced to a great extent to use the dominant system's language (its technology, e.g.).²³ In the process, it necessarily takes on some of the characteristics of the system from which it aims to distinguish itself. On the other hand, as Meintjes points out, "To regulate and incorporate subordinate groups, the dominant class is forced to reformulate itself constantly so that its core values are not threatened. In reformulating itself it necessarily takes on some features of the subordinate groups that it suppresses" (1990, 68).²⁴ This situation manifested itself most clearly when the French media attempted to appropriate the zouk phenomenon by advertising its leading exponent, Kassav, as a French group as opposed to an Antillean group, after Kassav won international recognition on the music market. While this struggle over the meaning of zouk confirms its potency, it also shows how much music becomes contested terrain in power relations.²⁵

As do all other world musics, zouk creates much stress in its countries of origin by underscoring how its relation with the international market reformulates local traditions and creative processes.²⁶ As it emphasizes the workings of world political economy at the local level, zouk renders more

problematic for Antilleans the definition of the "we" as a site of difference. It challenges in fact the traditional way of thinking about the "we" as a self-enclosed unit by highlighting its relational character.²⁷

World music seems far ahead of other fields of activity in its use of active social forces that are diverse and contradictory as agents of change and in its reliance on both local and international forces in the shaping of individual and social identities. Although world music may have triggered a subtle transformation of the power center in the music industry, it remains to be seen whether it will continue to foster the acceptance of world differences without parallel shifts in political and economic systems.