

Claudlin Pierre Louis  
Zouk and the  
Articulation of French  
Caribbean Culture

## Summary

The Transatlantic Slave Trade caused an abundance of cultures to mix and create their own, which is what makes the results that much more amazing. The French Caribbean has brought in creolization, and recently there have been discussions about transculturalism, transnationalism, multiculturalism, diversity, and hybridization. It would be disingenuous to not take the historical background and the geographical context. The slave trade took slaves from different parts of Africa and had them on multiple islands throughout the Caribbeans, making a lot of their background unknown as the diaspora causes them to be from all over. The Creole comes from a combination of those backgrounds that had diverse racial, cultural, linguistic, and geographical origins that came from their home countries in Africa. Because of those unique backgrounds and having to force them to communicate, the languages came to fruition. Another main point of this article is its discussion of Zouk. Zouk, which is a music form, encompasses those different backgrounds as well and only existed due to those different backgrounds being forced to meet. The slave owners did a lot to try to limit the slave's communication, but they persevered regardless and were able to make communication possible. Cultural identity comes to mind when it comes to the communication aspect because they had to develop their own as they came from a mix of their own cultures.

Many inspirations make up the rhythms of the Caribbean landscape. "Reggae, ska, calypso, Haute-Taille, soca, zouk, gwo ka, bèlè, cadence, kompa, bomba, salsa, son, timba, rumba, reggaeton, and dancehall, most can trace their primary origins back to a range of influences exhibiting both African and European influences. (Murdoch, H. Adlai)" Those are the majority, if not all music that came into the Caribbean. Being able to have a connection amongst people who came from different parts of Africa where they would have different languages/

dialects. The resiliency of those who were not only being displaced but to come together and make bonds is something that isn't common historically. Communication through the arts and music is nothing new but the way it is expressed, and the sounds made are what make it diverse. "Critically, the Creole language arguably came into being out of the forced encounters between these groups and serves as a fundamental metaphor for the key goals and tenets of French Caribbean creolization and the form of zouk music itself; (Murdoch, H. Adlai)" Essentially, the forced actions of grouping different cultures and people who shared the same skin color and fate did not deter them from being able to make zouk music. Those slaves and their situations, being under duress and still having the ability to come together and create, exemplifies the human spirit.

Zouk and Creole languages are tied in history as several Caribbean islands that were involved in the slave trade (Haiti, St. Lucia, and Dominica to name a few) have their adaption of Creole and zouk music. They share the similarities of resisting oppression and finding value in what they have and creating through struggles. "In its structure and form, then, the Creole language thus symbolizes cultural continuity, resistance to oppression, and the complex richness of ethnic admixture in a way that makes it material and metaphorical framework for Caribbean cultural communication and performance. ( Murdoch, H. Adlai)" This expands on the idea of the connection that the Creole languages and the connections between those cultures have. To consider zouk a symbol would be an accurate description and its importance to these Caribbean nations is shown in their histories. "The plurality of ethnicities, languages, and cultures are brutally thrown into forced interaction by colonialism and slavery gave rise to an infinite series of exchanges and combinations, producing in their turn new, complex, and creative ways of asserting identity. (Murdoch, H. Adlai)" This enforces the point that the mix of cultures and the

surrounding circumstances of slavery caused the creation of limitless possibilities for exchanges that established new identities.

In conclusion, this article gave a great viewpoint and painted a picture of how communication can still be achieved under the worst situations. Slaves were forced into unknown lands and forced to work without any real way to communicate with other slaves and they were able to adapt. Even though these countries are considered third-world countries, they should not be devalued for what they did and what they are doing. Establishing different variations of Creole and making their sub-culture that branched off from the various African cultures. Zouk was a result of those efforts to establish communication, and this allowed them to experience and express their feelings toward what they all shared- slavery. Music was a communication method and it allowed them another way of connecting. Being away from the land that they knew and then being forced into servitude with no means of communicating with those around them, they decided to make a way to communicate. Through zouk and Creole, they beat the odds and currently several islands use it to this day.

## Application

This article was a great way to show the perseverance of those and the importance of intercultural communication. I believe this article presents a lot for communication and shows resiliency even if your options are limited, humans find a way. Considering my culture was a direct result of the slave trade (Haiti), I would say this is very relevant to my real experience. It can be connected to others I know as well. The communication aspect allowed me to feel a connection to others who faced the diaspora and speak their variation of creole. I have friends from St. Lucia and Dominica and even though I speak Haitian Creole, their variations of Creole can be understood. I didn't know other islands spoke their variation of Creole until I was out of high school but something about discovering that made me feel a personal connection, even though we are from different islands. I don't know if those who were making the language ever envisioned the bonds/connections they were going to end up creating with the different variations of creole.

Regarding the zouk portion of the article, this is another showing of communication-related to my settings. We have Kompa as the most popular type of music in Haiti and that originated from zouk. Typically, if you enjoy the rhythmic beats of zouk, you can find similar music across the Caribbean and that is why they take heavy inspiration from different parts of Africa. I can enjoy the other types of music in the Caribbean nonetheless because they come from similar roots, and they have the usage of similar instrumentals. The biggest differential is usually what words are being used, accents, and the topic of the music. You can typically find each country listening to each other's music and seeing as Dominica and St Lucia speak different variations of Creole, they have a shared language in their music.

There are many reasons why the information I read in this article is relevant and extremely important. They factored in how communication was lacking for them and that caused the slaves to have no immediate forms of communication with each other. They faced adversity at every turn and regardless left behind something that only a small percentage of the world can understand. The diaspora that was caused by the slave trade caused those slaves to have to adapt and they left behind some groundwork for us to build on, which is what allowed me to come to America and better my life. The effects of slavery forced Haiti to have to fight for their freedom and then had to pay the price, both in actual currency and in their lifestyles. It would be a disservice to the world if we didn't acknowledge how the current state of a lot of the islands is still because of the slave trade. Communication won't ever go away and the only way is up as far as connecting through our arts, music, and history.

## References

Murdoch, H. A. (2021). Zouk and the Articulation of French Caribbean Culture. *Research in African Literatures*, 52(3), 187–222.

[Zouk and the Articulation of French Caribbean Culture: EBSCOhost \(cnm.edu\)](#)