



Sámi allaskuvla
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The Art of Survivance:

Sacred Land, Storytelling & Resistance in Louisiana

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***“They took my dignity and my pride.
My spirit withered, but never died.”***

Helen B. Williams (from poem ‘Slavery’s DNA’)



For my grandmother, my ancestors, my family and all sacred lands.

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Abstract

Grounded in Indigenous research methodologies, this thesis explores the ways in which storytelling and resistance interrelate in Louisiana. Through delving into the historicity and cultural continuity of storytelling, as well as interviews with seven influential storytellers, four themes were uncovered; storytelling, sacred land, resistance and counter-narratives. The historical and cultural contexts of multiple ethnic identities in Louisiana is discussed, however this research is primarily informed by Black and Native storytelling. The findings demonstrate the relevance of protecting sacred lands, such as the Bayous and Congo Square, as they nurture oral tradition and histories of resistance in Louisiana. Further, the data analysis illustrates that storytelling and resistance coexist through the reclamation of silenced histories and cultural traditions cultivated by these sacred lands.

Čoahkkáigeassu

Vuodustuvvon álgoálbmotmetodologijain, dát masterbargu guorahallá man láhkái muitaleapmi ja vuostálastin doibmet giehtalága Louisianas, USA:s. Dutkosis guorahallá dárkilit historjjálaš ja kultuvrralaš joatkalašvuoda, ja jearahallá čieža váikkuheaddji muitaleaddji. Daid vehkiin lea gávdnan njeallje fáttá; muitaleami, bassi eatnama, vuostálastima ja vuostemuitalusaid. Das digaštallá mánggabealat etnikkalaš etnisitehtaid historjjálaš ja kultuvrralaš konteavstta birra Louisianas. Goittotge leat dán dutkamuššii ovddimusat vižžon dieđut main lea vuodđu čáhpes olbmuid ja álgoálbmot olbmuid muitaleamis. Gávdnosat čájehit man áigeguovdil lea suodjalit bassi eatnamiid, dego Bayous ja Congo Square, dannego doppe seilluhit njálmmálaš árbevieruid ja vuostálastinmuitalusaid Louisianas. Dasa lassin čájeha dáhtaanalysa ahte muitaleapmi ja vuostálastin bissu dáinna lágiin ahte olbmot váldet ruovttuluotta jávohuhtán muitalusaid ja kultuvrralaš árbevieruid maid dát bassi eatnamat leat ovddidan.

Key Concepts: Storytelling, Oral Tradition, Folklore, Resistance, Sacred Lands/Places, Survivance, Traditional Knowledge, Cultural Values, Spiritual Tradition, Self-Determination, Historicity, Colonization, Decolonization, Native/Black/Cajun/Creole/Mixed Identities, Inter-generational Trauma, Indigenous Research

Chapter One: Introduction

I Went Home Again

*I visited my home in the country where I lived long ago
Most of my friends are kindred, don't live there anymore
I walked to the place where I used to live
Where I played when I was a child.
Then I heard a voice whisper, "What's wrong you my child?"
"You have no need to be sad, lift up your head and smile."
These echo voices of my parents brought joy to my heart.
For in my mind I could see them, standing in the yard.
I could hear the siblings talking and the dogs barking too.
Mules and horses galloping around, I heard cows moo,
A rooster crowed, and a hen clucked
As her little ones ran under her wings.
In an oak tree by the hog pen I could hear the birds sing
These echo voices disappeared just when I began to leave.
I had a warm feeling inside for I knew my parents were pleased
To see their child come back home and look upon the old remains
I didn't see them there today
But they were with me just the same.*

Helen B. Williams (*From Birth to Longevity*)

This poem is written by Helen B. Williams, my 101-year-old grandmother. Her words encapsulate my own sentiments of engaging with my research process; the sense that my ancestors are pleased with my 'coming home' to what is now known as Louisiana. My paternal grandparents, along with multi generations of ancestors, hail from what is known

today as Castor, Sailes, and Arcadia in Bienville parish, Louisiana. Both of my paternal grandparents migrated to southern California during the Great Migration; a period in which six million descendants of enslaved Africans migrated from the rural south to urban cities further north in order to escape racial persecution and economic disparity.

From three months old, I was raised by my mother in Honolulu within the U.S. occupied Hawaiian Kingdom. Still, I spent time with my grandmother in California during most summers. Despite having been raised in an area that exemplified racial subjugation, my grandmother, who is of African and Choctaw descent, still breathes her love for home, her deep loyalty to Louisiana. She never lost her connection and devotion to place. I attribute much of this connection to her ability to hold onto land, a privilege many Black families have been denied.

Even though my grandmother stems from a humble economic background, she holds the deed to family land that has been passed down from generation to generation since the abolition of slavery. Members of my family continue to travel to this land in June each year for the Graveyard Working tradition; whereby all who have moved north, return home to honor the ancestors of the village as one community. This tradition reflects a hidden history of what has historically been referred to as ‘Decoration Day’. Birthed out of Charleston, South Carolina, Decoration Day symbolizes one of the first actions of newly emancipated enslaved Africans, who in the spring of 1865 marched in honor of 257 fallen Black martyrs in order to unearth them and offer them a proper burial. The *Black/Land Project* acknowledges this largely unknown story.

This reclaiming of land once used by the white aristocracy for leisure, and consecrating it as a burying ground for those they once held captive, was a powerful symbol of liberation and justice. It marked the end of enslavement with an act of collective self-determination.

Multi-generational pilgrimages to tend ancient graveyards were occasions for sharing family histories, and opportunities to pass on cultural rituals and lore (Black/Land Project, 2016).

In *Indigenous Methodologies*, author Margaret Kovach explains, “stories remind us of who we are and of our belonging. Stories hold within them knowledges while simultaneously signifying relationships” (Kovach, 2010, p. 94).

Prior to conducting my research, I had only briefly travelled to Louisiana twice to partake in Graveyard Working alongside my grandmother. In reflecting upon these times, I recognize the profound interrelation between storytelling and the land that is personified in this tradition, and how it has impacted my own understanding of this relationship. As we would honor our ancestors in the still fenced off racially segregated cemetery, my grandmother and older family members would share the stories of each ancestor, as well as how we came to inherit this land.

The general ambition of my research was inspired by the movement to protect Hawaiian sacred mountain, Mauna a Wakea from the construction of a thirty-meter telescope. Cultural historian and resource specialist, Kepa Mali, has stated that elders see it as,

The piko kaulana o ka ‘aina, the famous peak, summit of the land. But the peak, or piko, is also what we would call navel or belly button. It’s that which connects you back to the generations preceding you. Aha ho’owili mo’o, this line, this cord that connects the Hawaiian people from these lands, from these islands, which were the children of the gods or creative forces of nature, back to their cosmic origins. Mauna Akea, Ka Piko a Wakea. The summit, the piko that ties this earth to Wakea, the God father who is the sky (Mauna-a-wakea.info, n.d.)

The Mauna Kea movement embodies the understanding that stories which illustrate the genealogical, spiritual and cosmological ties of *Kanaka Ōiwi* (Native Hawaiians) to Mauna a Wakea, are intrinsic to their resistance.

Inspired by this integration of storytelling and resistance in Hawai’i, my original intention was to conduct research surrounding efforts to stop the Bayou Bridge Pipeline in Louisiana, also known as the last leg of the Dakota Access Pipeline. The Bayou Bridge Pipeline threatens

the cherished Atchafalaya basin, the nation's largest wetland and a National Heritage Area. The petrochemical industry has inundated predominantly poor communities of color throughout the entire state of Louisiana; leaving behind an altered and disrupted relationship to the land and Bayous. My first ambition was to explore how storytelling and resistance might interrelate in this particular struggle. However, as a result of the personal connections I made, the history I learned, and the opportunities that presented themselves in New Orleans, the aim of my thesis broadened. While my project initially focused on how storytelling manifests in rural environmental resistance struggles, I discovered that many of the storytellers that I interviewed in New Orleans, also possessed a strong relationship with Congo Square; sacred grounds in the urban Tremé neighborhood of New Orleans, where enslaved Africans would gather on Sundays to practice their cultural and spiritual traditions.

Therefore, my research question is: What are the ways in which storytelling and resistance interrelate in Louisiana, specifically in regards to sacred lands that hold historical, cultural and spiritual significance for Louisiana storytellers? My research is an exploration of storytelling as a means of resistance, whereby the storytelling of certain storytellers is shaped by their passion to protect these sacred grounds.

Central to my thesis is the concept of 'survivance'. Anishnaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor has promoted the term as an act of self-determination. Vizenor defines survivance as,

An active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry. Survivance means the right of succession or reversion of an estate, and in that sense, the estate of native survivancy (Vizenor, 1994, p. vii).

In this sense, survivance means more than the simple fusion of survival and resistance. As Anishinaabe digital media professor Elizabeth LaPensée says, "it is a way of life that nourishes Indigenous ways of knowing" (LaPensée, 2013).

Throughout this process, my research has been driven by a burning desire to explore my own genealogical ties to place in northern, Louisiana, embrace my Black Native identity through its celebration in New Orleans, and grant myself full permission to take pride in my

African heritage and spiritual traditions, as I had never fully allowed myself to do so before. In witnessing the ways in which storytelling has evolved as a means to protect sacred lands, honor one's heritage, cultural and spiritual traditions, as well as create counter narratives in south Louisiana, I have discovered how storytelling in itself is an act of resistance.

Structure of Thesis

My thesis is written for those who, like myself, are not deeply conversant with the cultural fabric of Louisiana. For this reason, I provide considerable context and history. The overview of storytelling and resistance reveals the cultural continuity of storytelling for Black, Native and Cajun peoples, the stylistic tropes and modes of storytelling as a discursive practice in Louisiana, and the kinship between storytelling and the land. I also provide general and brief contexts of the ethnic and cultural groups represented, as well as of the sacred lands that are discussed; the Bayous and Congo Square. The methodology chapter explains how I formed an intentional practice of engaging with Indigenous and decolonizing methodologies that integrate my political views, and also reflect the spiritual and cosmological perspectives of myself and ancestors. Prior to my analysis, which is based on interviews with seven storytellers from different cultural backgrounds, I provide their biographies to demonstrate that although it represents a small sample size, the work of each one of these individuals is significantly impacting their communities in south Louisiana. Although my research includes Black, Native, Cajun, Black Creole and Black Native identities, it is primarily informed by Black and Native storytelling and historical legacies of resistance. I focus on the Houma nation more than other Native peoples in Louisiana, because of the potential impact of the Bayou Bridge Pipeline on the Houma nation.

It is worth noting that my terminology is often intentional. Whenever possible, I use the terms Native and Black, instead of Native-American and African-American, in order to recognize that Native peoples and enslaved Africans and their descendants, did not willingly choose to be Americans, but were forced into succumbing to the national identity.

In addition, I prefer to use the term enslaved African as opposed to slave. I also capitalize the ethnic identities, as well as the sacred lands in focus.

Chapter Two: Methodology

My research is primarily based on a postcolonial Indigenous paradigm and includes elements of a Transformative/Emancipatory paradigm. It centers the relationships between storytelling, people and their environment, and sacred lands. The relationship between people and their environment and land is a spiritual and sacred relationship. The conceptual framing of this project is consistent with the stated ambition of this research being; to explore how storytelling coexists with resistance in Louisiana, as Louisiana storytellers have an intimate relationship with certain sacred places that have informed their storytelling.

According to Indigenous research scholar, Bagele Chilisa, the primary reason for doing research within a postcolonial Indigenous research paradigm is;

To challenge deficit thinking and pathological descriptions of the former colonized and reconstruct a body of knowledge that carries hope and promotes transformation and social change among the historically oppressed (Chilisa, 2012).

In addition, my research was informed by Indigenous knowledge systems. I felt this paradigm was appropriate because, as my research navigates the ways in which storytelling interrelates with spirituality and resistance to defend sacred lands from colonial forces, the purpose of postcolonial Indigenous research is to support the emancipation of historically silenced and oppressed peoples affected by colonization, through valuing their knowledge systems and philosophies. (Chilisa, 2012)

Based on Chilisa's notions of a postcolonial Indigenous research paradigm, my ontological assumption holds that there are multiple realities that are socially constructed. These realities are shaped by a set of multiple connections that these storytellers have with their environment, the cosmos, the living and the ancestors. (Chilisa, 2012) My ontology is

relational, meaning the social reality can be understood through relations with the living and ancestors, the land, the Bayous, the water, the animals and with other beings. My epistemology is that the knowledge is relational and will be shared with all of creation; myself, the participants, the ancestors, my own Louisiana ancestors, the land, the Bayous, the water, the crawfish, the animals and the cosmos. Because my thesis is focused on relations with the land and Bayous, I understand that much of the knowledge came from the environment and the pedagogy of place. (Wilson, 2008, p. 87) My axiology maintains respect for the communities of the interviewed storytellers' belief systems, and values their unique cultural ways of understanding. (Bagele, 2012)

Methods

For my methods, I mainly conducted semi-structured interviews that were based on a 'talk story' approach, as well as included techniques that were based on ethnophilosophy and philosophic sagacity (Chilisa, 2012, p. 211). Bagele Chilisa explains that ethnophilosophy "refers to the collective worldview of people that is encoded in language, folklore, myths, metaphors, taboos and rituals" (Chilisa, 2012, p. 131). In conducting interviews, I based my practice on my engagement with Bagele Chilisa's strategies from the *Decolonizing the Interview Method* chapter in her *Indigenous Research Methodologies* text book.

Shawn Wilson suggests, 'research is ceremony', acknowledging that it is a cultural practice that reflects the cultural values of the researcher (Wulff, 2010). This concept was central to my methodology and entire research approach. In my attempt to treat my research as such, I participated in a ceremony with a priestess in New Orleans, Louisiana who works with ancestors and the Orisha; West African spirits found in nature. This priestess also carried African and Choctaw ancestry, and her family and ancestors hailed from nearby mine in Louisiana, hence I felt that she was the appropriate priestess to help me traditionally engage with my ancestors. My ontology recognizes that my connection to Louisiana is because of my ancestors. Therefore, my research would not be possible if it were not for them. Because of this, I recognize that my ancestors have both inspired and guided my work.

In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith states, “Indigenous methodologies tend to approach cultural protocols, values and behaviors as an integral part of methodology” (Smith, 2001, p. 15). By virtue of this understanding, I felt it was of integral importance to find a way for me to honor and connect with my ancestors before starting my fieldwork. This way, I could invite them into this research process, as well as ask for their support. In the ancestor ceremony, the priestess advised me to create an ancestor altar in my home in order to continue invoking their guidance. In addition, some of my interviewees were suggested in this ceremony and their participation was a result of this insight.

The conversational method in Indigenous research differs from its use in Western research in several ways: a connection to indigeonus knowledge, a location within an Indigenous paradigm, a relational paradigm, a relational nature, purpose (which is often decolonizing), following a specific protocol that reflects the Indigenous knowledge, a flexible nature, collaboration, and reflexivity. (Kovach 2010; Drawson;Toombs: Musquash, 2017)

Bagele Chilisa discusses the relevance of offerings in *Indigenous Research Methodologies* where she writes,

Aseema (tobacco) among the Anishambe is a cultural symbol that is used to ask for help, to share information, and to thank people. Researchers must identify the cultural symbols that will allow them to gain entry to the setting and conduct interviews (Chilisa p. 221)

I was raised in Native ceremonies and have always provided Tobacco as an offering, however in my research I desired to engage in honoring all of my ancestors. To continue in this process of invoking my ancestors, I began each in-person interview by offering Tobacco to honor my Choctaw ancestors, Orisha incense to honor my African ancestors and Frankincense to honor my Jewish ancestors from my maternal lineage. I explained to the interviewees that I was doing so as a means to acknowledge that both me and my ancestors are present in this interview and process. The offerings are also my way of honoring and

thanking the interviewee on behalf of my ancestors. Prior to my phone interviews, I engaged in this process on my own, where I prayed at my ancestor altar, burned my Orisha incense to honor my African ancestors and Frankincense to honor my Jewish ancestors, and offered Tobacco to the land to honor my Choctaw ancestors. Following the interviews, I provided the interviewees with a gift. For the women, I gave them shawls symbolizing the movement to protect Mauna a Wakea. I chose these gifts as a way to honor Hawai'i, the place that raised me, and had the hope that it would facilitate solidarity in the struggles to protect sacred lands. Each interviewee responded with gratitude and humility to my spiritual offerings.

In addition to conducting semi-structured interviews, my research was also informed by my attendance at a number of highly relevant events, including: the *Louisiana Folklore Society Annual Meeting* in Houma, Louisiana, *Roots, Rocks & Ring Shouts: A Symposium on African American Spirituality* at Southern University at New Orleans, *New Orleans Voices of Congo Square*; a stage production that represents the African carnival traditions of New Orleans (Mester, 2018), the *Sacred Waters: Honoring Our Ancestors Retreat*; a retreat for Women of Color that focuses on healing, ritual and restoration in Tennessee (Sacred Waters Retreat, 2018), the *Nola Herb Gathering*; a conference embracing self-care as health care through the intergenerational and cultural uses of herbal and plant medicine (Nolaherbgathering.com, 2018), Orisha Song workshops, the *New Orleans Osun Festival*; a procession to the river to honor and pay homage to Osun; the Orisha of the sweet river and fresh waters, and the *21st Annual Charleston Middle Passage Remembrance Ceremony* at Sullivan's Island, South Carolina, where I honored my African ancestors who arrived via the middle passage alongside nearly half of all enslaved Africans that reached the shores of Turtle Island (North America). I attended two Black Indian parades, one Second-Line parade, which is a tradition in brass band parades, frequented Congo Square on Sundays and supported the Leau Est' La Vie resistance camp against the Bayou Bridge Pipeline. In Houma and Congo Square, I provided spiritual offerings while on these sacred grounds. These experiences provided a local grounded context for my previous reading and informed my understanding of my specific research locale.

I interviewed 7 Louisiana storytellers, who all feel strongly about protecting the places they deem sacred as they believe these places influence storytelling in Louisiana. In my semi-structured interviews, I asked the informants questions surrounding the particular themes that I had hoped to cover; storytelling, sacred lands and resistance. However, I did not anticipate the great length to which spirituality would be discussed, as well as the unforeseen theme; counter-narratives. We discussed the extent to which they felt storytelling and oral tradition are a significant part of the local culture or discursive practice, the nature of oral tradition and folklore that is specific to the Bayous, and how their relationships to the Bayous and Congo Square have influenced their storytelling. We also examined spirituality and their conceptions of sacred, their relationships to the places they deem sacred, the interrelation between storytelling and resistance to protect and defend the Bayous and Congo Square, and counter narratives to the dominant Eurocentric variant. I identified and broke down common themes and concepts from the interviews. (Chilisa, 2012, p. 214)

Though based on the four themes, each interview did not include all of the same questions, and I left space for open conversation where unanticipated questions could arise. I conducted semi-structured interviews because this research is not solely for, about, or from me. Therefore, as best I could, I wanted the interviewees who are from Louisiana to also have power in guiding the interview and bring forth the knowledge that they feel should be represented in the thesis. (Chilisa, 2012, p. 206).

In *Indigenous Research Methodologies* Chilisa discusses ‘sagacity’, which she defines as “a reflexive system of thought based on the wisdom and the traditions of people” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 211) She highlights the importance of including ‘sages’ or traditional culture bearers in research. Given the nature of my work, I felt it was appropriate and necessary to include priestesses whose ideology is based on reclaiming Indigenous African spiritual traditions. I consider the participation of traditional culture bearers as crucial, as their perspectives and relationships to these sacred lands adds another dimension.

In *Indigenous Methodologies*, Kovach explains, “within Indigenous epistemologies, there are two general forms of stories. There are stories that hold mythical elements, such as

creation and teaching stories, and there are personal narratives of place, happening, and experiences.” (Kovach, 2010, p. 94)

Stories as tools of data collection can provide a counter story narrative, as well as support those who have been colonized and oppressed to tell their own stories of the past, present and future from their own perspectives. Storytelling in research can also invite participants to express the significance of spirituality in their lives and communities by sharing stories and folklore that bear testimony to the connectedness between the living and the non-living, the community and their environment, people and the land (Chilisa, 201, p. 139).

Kovach also explains that, “through reflexive story there is opportunity to express the researcher’s inward knowing. Sharing one’s own story as an aspect of co-constructing knowledge from an indigenous perspective.” (Kovach, 2010, p. 100)

My thesis is deeply connected to my own story of reconnecting with parts of my heritage. As a result, my methodology was informed by and interwoven with my personal history and genealogy.

Chapter Three: Contextual Reality of Ethnic & Cultural Identities in Louisiana

Folklorist Scholar Nicholas R. Spitzer has referred to south Louisiana as a cultural gumbo where the ingredients are identifiable, but at the same time have all blended and therefore influence one another (Spitzer, 1985). However, this cultural diversity does not absolve Louisiana of the racial and ethnic injustice that continues to permeate the state. Still, it is important that the histories and cultural contexts from which my interviewees derive their knowledge, wisdom and lived experiences is explained. The cultural groups described below are not the only ones in Louisiana, but they represent the most prominent ethnic and cultural identities represented in my research.

Native Nations

Native communities inhabited the lower Mississippi region for 12,000 to 14,000 years. (Houzeau, 2011) At least twenty-nine Indigenous nations inhabited the Louisiana region; the Adai, Alabama, Apalachee, Atakapa, Avoyel, Bayougoula, Biloxi, Caddo, Chatot, Chawasha, Chitimacha, Choctaw, Houma, Koasati, Koroa, Mugulasha, Muskogee, Natchez, Okelousa, Opelousa, Ouachita, Pascagoula, Quapaw, Quinipissa, Souchitioni, Tangipahoa, Tawasa, Washa and Yatasi. Communities such as the Houma nation, built their villages alongside the rivers. (Houzeau, 2011, un-paginated) With an abundance of plant food, such as fruits, vegetables, fungi and nuts, these communities also relied on the Bayous which provided crawfish, oysters, clams and other protein (ibid.).

In 1699, Pierre le Moyne d'Iberville, Jean Baptiste le Moyne de Bienville, and a small group of soldiers, sailors, and artisans sailed into Biloxi Bay where they declared the region French territory (Dickshovel.com, 2017). Beginning in the 1700's, communities such as the Houma nation kept French settlers alive with their ingenuity and knowledge of the land, hunting and medicines of the lower Mississippi region for the first several decades of French settlement. In 1650, the Houma population was approximately 1,000 but declined to between 600 and 700 people by the year 1700 (What-when-how.com, 2017). With the transmission of infectious diseases such as smallpox, measles and cholera, the population of the Native nations throughout the area dropped from 100,000 to 32,000 over the course of 60 years.

The Houma were originally located in central Louisiana, but as French settlers encroached on their lands, they migrated south to the lower reaches of coastal Louisiana, an area deemed uninhabitable by colonial settlers. To avenge the dislocation of native communities, a Chitimacha man took the life of a priest. In retaliation, in 1706 the French assembled an army of 100 soldiers and killed an entire Chitimacha village, with the exception of 20 women and children whom they enslaved.

French soldiers continued to rampage, massacre and enslave Chitimacha villages for the following twelve years (Dickshovel.com, 2017). In 1718, the Houma joined the Chitimacha and migrated south to New Orleans, before traveling further north to what is now known as

Ascension Parish. When the Houma aided Natchez refugees, who were attacked by the French, they were sequentially attacked, leaving hundreds of Houma peoples to be sold and enslaved in New Orleans (What-when-how.com, 2017). Settlers attempted to enslave many of the Indigenous communities of the Mississippi delta, but were ultimately unsuccessful because of the inherent knowledge the Indigenous communities carried of the land and region (Houzeau, 2011).

Louisiana carries the third largest Native population in the eastern United States, many of whom come from racially mixed backgrounds and may speak French, Spanish and English in addition to Native languages (Kniffen, Gregory, Stokes, 1987, as cited in Powell, 2004). Despite Louisiana having one of the largest Native populations in the eastern United States, these nations generally, do not represent the stereotypical depictions of the “plains Natives” that many carry of Native peoples in so-called North America (Powell, 2004). There are four-federally recognized tribes of Louisiana and eleven state recognized tribes, including the most recent addition of the Natchitoches tribe, which gained state recognition in 2018 (Natchitoches Parish Journal, 2018).

The Federally recognized tribes are the Coushatta Tribe, Tunica-Biloxi Tribe, Chitimacha Tribe and the Jena Band of Choctaws. The state recognized tribes are the Addai Caddo Tribe, Biloxi-Chitimacha Confederation of Muskogee, Choctaw-Apache Community of Ebarb, Clifton Choctaw, Four Winds Tribe Louisiana Cherokee Confederacy, Grand Caillou/Dulac Band, Isle de Jean Charles Band, Louisiana Choctaw Tribe, Pointe-Au-Chien Indian Tribe, Natchitoches Tribe and the United Houma Nation (Natchitoches Parish Journal, 2018)

The United Houma Nation has been recognized by the state of Louisiana, but have yet to receive federal recognition from the United States government. Most relations between large Native tribes in the United States operate within the federal recognition model. According to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, a federally recognized tribe is defined as,

An American Indian or Alaska Native tribal entity that is recognized as having a government-to-government relationship with the United States, with the responsibilities, powers, limitations, and obligations attached to that designation, and

is eligible for funding and services from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Furthermore, federally recognized tribes are recognized as possessing certain inherent rights of self-government (i.e., tribal sovereignty) and are entitled to receive certain federal benefits, services, and protections because of their special relationship with the United States. (BIA.gov, 2017)

Most nations have gained federal recognition status through acts of congress, historical treaties, executive orders or court decisions made by a United States federal court. (BIA.gov, 2017) According to the ‘Administration for Native Americans’, state recognized tribes are Native American nations that are recognized and have a relationship with the state, but are not recognized by the United States federal government. Louisiana is one of sixteen states that have recognized Native tribes, like the United Houma Nation outside of the federal processes. (Administration for Native Americans | ACF, 2017)

The United Houma Nation has close to ten thousand enrolled members. Many reside along the Bayous of Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes. Cultural traditions include, fishing, trapping, weaving palmetto, and curing Spanish moss for crafts (United Houma Nation n.d.). The emblem for the nation is the crawfish, “representing both honor as it wouldn’t back down from anything, even unto death, and the most abject poverty if you ate it” (Powell, 2004).

In the 1930s, oil and gas was discovered in the Houma regions of coastal Louisiana. For several decades, petrochemical companies have recognized the economic value of the land in which the Houma reside; leaving them vulnerable to both manipulation and demoralization once again. (Unitedhoumanation.org, 2017)

African Descendants

As European colonizers were only partially successful in enslaving Native peoples, they ventured south to the continent of Africa, where they began the Transatlantic Slave Trade. African peoples were first kidnapped from their homelands on the shores of West Africa and brought to North America by way of the middle passage in 1619. Throughout the African diaspora, people are beginning to refer to the vestiges of this period as *maafa*, a Kiswahili term meaning ‘the great disaster’ or ‘Black African holocaust’.

In the United States, slavery legally took place from 1619 to 1865. The 13th amendment which abolished slavery, except for those convicted of a crime, was ratified in 1865. However, Mississippi did not officially ratify the amendment until February 7th, 2013 (Barth, 2013). Initially brought to the ‘new nation’ to provide free labor for the production of lucrative crops, enslaved Africans constituted a vital element of the economic groundwork of the United States (History.com Editors, 2009).

Enslaved Africans were first brought to Louisiana in 1706. After the construction of the cotton gin in 1793, the south became the epicenter of slave labor dependence for large-scale cotton production (History.com Editors, 2009). The majority of enslaved Africans that came to Louisiana, came from Francophone West Africa (Lindahl, Owens and Harvison, 1997, p. xxxii). According to the Louisiana Folklore Society, prior to 1730, two-thirds of enslaved Africans that were brought to Louisiana were kidnapped from the Senegambia region of West Africa, and were primarily Wolof or Bambara (Lindahl, Owens and Harvison, 1997, p. xxxii). Following the Haitian Revolution, which took place in 1791- 1804, an inflow of Africans as well as Free People of Color came via the Caribbean, who were originally from Dahomey (now the Republic of Benin) and Nigeria (Lindahl, Owens and Harvison, 1997, p. xxxii).

Because many Africans brought to Louisiana were from cultural groups that were in intimate relation to one another, they could preserve some cultural customs that would later be defining characteristics in the Creole culture of south Louisiana (Lindahl, Owens and Harvison, 1997). For example, many Free People of Color worked as chefs and in creating Creole cuisine, incorporated the African ingredient Okra into Louisiana gumbo. The word

'gumbo' itself is derived from the Bantu word *nkombo*. Another clear example is in examining the influence of Voodoo throughout Louisiana. The word 'voodoo' is derived from the African word *voudun*, which means "deity" in the Yoruba language and "insight" in the Fon language (Lindahl, Owens and Harvison, 1997, p. xxxii). Africans also played an imperative role in the formation of Jazz music. Jazz brought cultural groups together that may not normally intermingle otherwise. In New Orleans, brass jazz is widely popular, as is African Creole and Black Mardis Gras Indian chants, which have been referred to as "the most African of all musics found in North America" (Lindahl, Owens and Harvison, 1997, p. xxxiii).

Louisiana Cajun

Cajun refers to the descendants of French Acadians who arrived in Louisiana in 1765, and were displaced in 1755 in Nova Scotia, Canada by the British (Lindahl, Owens and Harvison, 1997, p. xxxiv). There were approximately 800,000 reported Cajuns living in Louisiana in the 1970's (Encyclopedia.com, n.d.).

Cajun dominant communities exist along south Louisiana Bayous and southwest Louisiana prairie, coastal marshes. Natives, Germans, Spanish and British Americans also lived in these parts, however, these cultural groups merged with the French Acadians as many married into Acadian families (Lindahl, Owens and Harvison, 1997, p. xxxiv). In the late 19th century, due to the rice industry and railroad, Midwestern settlers began to inhabit these areas and were absorbed in Cajun culture as well. However, some ethnic groups refused total immersion. For instance, the Isleños, who are descendants from the Canary Islands that settled in the St. Bernard parish region in the 1760's, have preserved their ancient Spanish dialect, along with the Germans of Robert's Cove, and the Croatians from the Dalmatian Coast in Plaquemines parish that have retained distinct cultural elements after more than a century of residing in Louisiana (Lindahl, Owens and Harvison, 1997, p. xxxiv).

The Territory of Orleans was known as the area inhabited by Cajuns and other cultures. American settlers purchased fertile land along the Mississippi River and migrated to south-central Louisiana, where they grew crops such as cotton and rice on land at no cost (Rudolphy, 2017). The Louisiana legislature designated the following parishes as Acadiana in 1971: Acadia, Ascension, Assumption, Avoyelles, Calcasieu, Cameron, Evangeline, Iberia, Iberville, Jefferson Davis, Lafayette, Lafourche, Pointe Coupee, St. Charles, St. James, St. John, St. Landry, St. Martin, St. Mary, Terrebonne, Vermilion, and West Baton Rouge. However, due to economic and environmental impacts, the boundaries of Acadiana have become more obscure (Encyclopedia.com, n.d.).

Cajun French is a particular dialect of French that is spoken throughout Louisiana Cajun country. During the mid-20th century, the language nearly disappeared, however the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana devoted much effort to resurrecting the language. As a result, it was reported in 2000 that there are 198,784 French speakers in Louisiana, many of whom speak Cajun French (Rudolphy, 2017).

Similar to Appalachians, many view Cajuns as a traditional folk culture, as they have distinct arts and crafts, foods like Jambalaya, music with the accordion and fiddle, and dances like the Cajun Jig. The community is also heavily influenced by Roman Catholicism (Encyclopedia.com, n.d.).

Creoles of Color

The culture of Creoles of Color or Black Creoles is derived from interactions between enslaved Africans, French and Spanish colonists, Cajuns, Native and *gens libres de couleur* (Free People of Color) cultures. Black Creole culture is the embodiment of syncretism, as much of it includes syncretized Catholicism that is inclusive of *voudun*, *traiteurs* or traditional healers and home altars. The predominant language is French Creole. Black Creole culture has influenced New Orleans Jazz and birthed zydeco music, as well as is

observant of the Mardi Gras festival. Congris, jambalaya and gumbo are some well-known dishes that characterize the cuisine (Everyculture.com, n.d.).

Because of the cultural diversity of Creole identity as well as its' fluid boundaries, Creole ethnic identity in general is very situational. They need to take account of their relations with major ethnic groups in the area while also recognizing and taking pride in their own diverse heritage (Everyculture.com, n.d.). The word 'Creole', which has a polysemic history and is derived from the Latin word *creare*, meaning to create, originally referred to the descendants of Europeans who were born in the colony of Louisiana. Today however, although its association as an ethnic identity fluctuates, it is frequently publicly referenced as those who have African-French/Spanish ancestry (Everyculture.com, n.d.).

Creole communities are found in downtown New Orleans neighborhoods, around Bayou Teche in Iberia, St. Martin and St. Landry parishes, the prairies in southwest Louisiana, which are also associated with Cajun country, and in parts of North Louisiana like Cane Rive in Natchitoches parish. There have also been large migrations of Creoles of Color to southeast Texas, and to parts of Los Angeles and San Francisco during the Great Migration (Everyculture.com, n.d.).

Black Natives

The historical relations between Native peoples and Euro-Americans has been extensively explored. As has that of Black peoples and Euro-Americans. However, relations between Native and Black peoples has been rather neglected, despite the fact that large numbers of mixed race Black peoples with Native ancestry exist, particularly in the southeastern United States. An estimated 95 percent of Black peoples in the United States have at least one Native ancestor (Powell, 2004, p. 1). However, few are able to utilize legal records as proof. In *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples*, Native scholar and political activist Jack Forbes, reveals the colonial influence and authority on racial categorization in the U.S. He explains that Natives who were not living

on the reservation or within their tribal territories, were often impacted by the movement to devise a white-black social system (Forbes, 1993, as cited in Powell, 2004, p. 2). Native peoples were frequently classified as black, negro, mulatto or people of color in the British slave colonies along the Atlantic coast (Forbes, 1993, as cited in Powell, 2004, p. 3). The California State Supreme Court desired to block all non-whites from equal citizenship and equal rights in 1854, when they stated,

The word "Black" may include all Negroes, but the term "Negro" does not include all Black persons...We are of the opinion that the words "White", "Negro", "Mulatto", and "Black person", whenever they occur in our constitution...must be taken in their generic sense...that the words "Black person", in the 14th section must be taken as contra distinguished from White, and necessarily includes all races other than the Caucasian (The People v. Hall, Oct. 1, 1854, as cited in Forbes, 1993, p.65).

A significant concept to racial categorization in the United States is the 'one drop rule', which insinuates that any admixture of African ancestry, automatically deemed a person Black. This design evolved into the foundation of the laws of slavery, segregation and identity politics (Powell, 2004, p. 15).

In *The Lumbee Problem: The Making of An American Indian*, author Karen I. Blu writes,

For Whites, blood is a substance that can be either racially pure or racially polluted. Black blood pollutes White blood absolutely, so that, in the logical extreme, one drop of Black blood makes an otherwise White man black...White ideas about 'Indian blood' are less formalized and clear-cut...It may take only one drop of Black blood to make a person a Negro, but it takes a lot of Indian blood to make a person a "real" Indian (p.196).

The term mulatto also carries considerable weight in the Americas, and is dehumanizing, as it is believed to be derived from the mule; an animal born of two different species (Forbes, 1993, as cited in Powell, 2004, p. 4).

Forbes further explains this classification when he writes,

From 1803 to the Civil War all free people of color in Virginia were required to register. The register for Essex County has survived and in it we find many Indian people listed but none are called Indians. Classifications given include black, dark brown, tawney, very dark mulatto, dark mulatto, shade lighter than a dark mulatto, bright mulatto, very bright mulatto, and very bright mulatto almost white (Forbes, 1993, p. 205).

He continues by presenting a quote from Robert K. Thomas regarding the Lumbee people,

Most individuals are listed most commonly as Mulattoes. In that time in North Carolina the legal category Mulatto meant having one white parent and one non-white parent. The non-white parent could be either Indian or Negro. Some individuals in these families are listed as white, few are listed as black, and occasionally an individual is listed as an Indian.... This meant full-blood Indian....by definition, a mixed-blood Indian would be a Mulatto (Forbes, 1993, p. 205).

In the Upper South, the term 'mulatto' was used as a general term for mixed-race people, whether they be a mixture of Black and Indian, White and Indian, or Black and White. In his book, Jack Forbes also mentions the term Mestee, which generally refers to mixed race people in the Lower South. In Louisiana, Mestee was used to classify someone who is less than one-eighth African (Nassau, 1994, as cited in Powell, 2004, p. 6).

Native groups of the South and Border regions absorbed Black peoples into their communities, but many have also lost their language. This has made it easy for the Bureau of Indian Affairs to declare them "blacks pretending to be Indians" and not "real Indians" (Nassau, 1994). The Colored Creoles or Redbones of Louisiana and Mississippi, along with the Creoles and Cajans of Alabama and Florida admit to being part black, but also

distinguished themselves as a separate culture (Nassau, 1994). In *Assessing the identity of Black Indians in Louisiana: a quantitative and qualitative analysis*, Francis J. Powell writes, *Ancestors of the people we now know to be Redbones came to the area when it was still a territory. They first came to the south (Lafayette area) and then moved to the west and central parts of the state. A Redbone is a person of mixed racial heritage who is a member of a group that defines its relationship to the dominant culture in a certain way. The racial mix may be any combination of two or more of the following: Native American, European Caucasian, Asian (i.e., English, French, Irish, Welsh), or Portuguese, Spanish, Moor, Turk, and any of the various Negroid sub-groups* (Marler, 1997, as cited in Powell, 2004, p. 11).

A major contributing factor to Native-African mixture was also the quest for freedom, which led many enslaved Africans to flee and enter Indian Territory. In addition, the child of an enslaved African male and free Native woman, was often times granted freedom. However, the child of an African and Spaniard was still deemed a slave (Forbes, 1993, as cited in Powell, 2004, p. 5).

Francis Powell writes,

As Native American societies in the Southeast were primarily matrilineal, African males who married Native American women often became members of the wife's clan and citizens of the respective nation (Wright, 1981). From the middle part of the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth century, Africans had been fleeing slavery along the same routes that Native Americans had used (Mulroy, 1993). The Muskogees and especially their relatives, the Seminoles of Southern Florida, accepted these African runaways and incorporated them into their nations because the Africans were well skilled in languages, agriculture, technical skills, and warfare (Mulroy, 1993)

(Powell, 2004, p. 4).

There is also turbulence within the historical relationship between Native nations and enslaved Africans in the south, as the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek and Seminole, deemed the 'Five Civilized Tribes' by the U.S. government, also enslaved African peoples. (Leiker et al. 2007, p. 10)

In the essay *Tangled Histories: Contemporary Research on African American/Native American Intersection*, author James N. Leiker explains how even though some Indigenous societies participated in slavery prior to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, scholars must regard the captive taking practices of some societies as different than “Atlantic-based chattel slavery, which regarded slaves as human commodities.” (Leiker et al. 2007, p. 11) In the late 17th and early 18th centuries, English colonists coerced coastal Native groups into fighting with tribes whom they considered “weak”. (Leiker et al. 2007, p. 11) During this period some Native nations participated in capturing runaway enslaved Africans to inhibit mutiny. As a result of the economic growth generated by the cotton gin, the Cherokee and Creek nations joined the profitable industry, and by the 1790's had adopted the system of chattel bondage of Africans. (Leiker, 2007, p. 11) However, it is important to recognize that their participation in the system was also a result of a “divide and conquer” strategy by the English. In 1730, a treaty entitled the Treaty of Dover was instated in England by a group of seven members of the Cherokee nation, who did not have positions of authority, and King George II.

Regarding the Cherokee and enslaved Africans, the treaty states,

That in the case any Negro slave runs away from his English master into the woods, the Indians of the Cherokee shall see what they can to apprehend him, and bring him back to the plantation from whence he fled, or to the governor's house; and for every Negro which the Indians shall thus retake, they shall have a musket, and a sentinel's unit of clothes. Whereupon we give you a full box of vermillion, with 10,000 flints, and six dozen hatchets.” (Miles, 2006, p. 31)

Anti-miscegenation laws designed to protect “white purity” were also instituted during this period. (Leiker, 2007, p. 12) Christian missionaries and the introduction of European models of slavery heavily influenced the worldviews of Native nations, regarding race and gender. For instance, prior to Euro-American contact, many southeastern nations traditionally equated women with fertility, and thus women assumed the role of the farmer. (Leiker, 2007, p. 12) However, Euro-American influence led them to view farm work as a duty solely meant for the enslaved African, regardless of gender, which also de-feminized the Black woman. (Leiker, 2007, p. 13)

Still, the vast majority of Native nations and peoples did not enslave Africans. Oral tradition and literature reveal histories of friendship, cultural exchange, large mixed populations and solidarity in resistance. In *Tangled Histories*, James N. Leiker explains how linguists have identified numerous similarities in Native and African languages. There is also a Black-Native literary tradition derived from the 16th century (Leiker, 2007, p. 13)

Another defining characteristic of Louisiana is its widespread recognition of Black and Native relations. This is most visibly demonstrated by the Black Indian masking tradition, typically referred to as the Mardi Gras Indians. The oldest cultural organizations that have embraced the original African tribes brought to New Orleans are Black Indian tribes. They are recognized for the preservation of the Indigenous art and music of their heritage, and are even considered the leading demonstration of traditional Black folk art (Smith, 1988). In *Historicizing the Mardi Gras Indians in HBO’s Treme: An Emancipatory Narrative*, they are referenced as “contemporary urban Maroons.”, referring to the Maroon communities of Native and African peoples who escaped enslavement and lived in the Bayous (Evans, 2011; Breunlin, Lewis & Regis, 2009, as cited in Gendrin, Dessinges, Hajjar, p. 291). Black Indian parades represent a time to celebrate the bonds between Black and Native peoples. Black Indian Chief Shaka Zulu has stated that the tradition began around 1718, when Black peoples escaping enslavement were hidden and protected by the Indigenous peoples in Louisiana. The cultural merge birthed a new masking culture (Craig, 2017).

Today's parades honor this history of Black and Native solidarity, as well as the Native heritages of many Black Indians who were a part of the undocumented creolization that resulted from the interaction between enslaved Africans and Native nations in Louisiana. Black Indian and poet laureate, Monk Boudreaux has stated,

Mardi Gras day we don't just be doing this for masking. We be doing this for who we really are. It was a hidden thing. The older people hid this because they was hiding from the government because they didn't want to be put on the reservation. That's why they kept it low 'file and they never to talked to nobody 'bout it. Mardi Gras day was the day (Swensen, 2017).

Chapter Four: An Overview of Storytelling & Resistance

Louisiana and the deep south have a rich history of resistance that has influenced the decolonizing praxis of today. Historically, Native and Black communities used their oral traditions and folklore to tell stories that reflected their current conditions, perpetuated cultural traditions, values, perspectives, and instilled hope and strategy. In the following chapters, I explore the cultural continuity of storytelling and delve into how this legacy of a vibrant oral tradition and resistance continues to have contemporary relevance.

As the overview of storytelling & resistance chapter unfolds below, the argument will be to demonstrate the historical embeddedness of storytelling in the practice of resistance; and through the central analysis reveal its continuing relevance in Louisianan life.

West African Oral Tradition

Across the globe, people have created stories to gain understanding of the world (Achebe 1958, Vambe, 2001, as cited in Tuwe, 2016). Many peoples view storytelling as a means to chronicle and preserve ones' history, perspectives, environment and lived experiences, as it serves the purpose of passing down cultural knowledge, wisdom, values, worldviews and means of survival from one generation to the next (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1982, Asante 1987, Kouyate 1989, Alidou 2002, Chinyowa 2004, Gbadegesin, 1984, as cited in, Tuwe, 2016). Further, unlike reading a story aloud, storytelling encompasses song, play, dance, poetry and theater. (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1986, Utley 2008, as cited in Tuwe, 2016).

Inherent in Indigenous storytelling is a peoples' traditional knowledge, cosmology and epistemology (Tuwe, 2016). At the foundation of traditional knowledge is the traditional way of living of Indigenous peoples, including their spirituality, relationship with their environment and their local and ecological knowledge (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1982, Legat 1991, as cited in Tuwe, 2016). Traditional knowledge can be found in the language and stories of an Indigenous people. Indigenous scholars are proving that Indigenous traditional knowledge is a nonwestern equivalent to western science (Deloria, 1995; Colorado, 1996; Helander, 1992 & Kuokkanen, 2000, as cited in Tuwe, 2016).

Renowned Nigerian author, Chinua Achebe has written about how communities in Africa would gather around a fire after dinner to listen to stories among the backdrop of the beating drum (Achebe, 1958, as cited in Tuwe, 2016, un-paginated). Surrounding a central theme, the tale is shadowed by instruments, drum, song, and dance (ibid.). Storytelling was and continues to be regarded as a ritual in Africa. In societies without a written language, stories were the only source of survival for their history (ibid.).

Although many African societies do have ancient writing systems, most continue to be grounded in oral tradition. This practice has fostered communities that are known and admired for their spirited tales and storytellers. (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1986, Vambe. 2001, Chinyowa 2004, Vambe 2004, as cited in Tuwe, 2016). African storytelling specifically, is one of the most ancient cultural traditions throughout the continent. It allows storytellers to

carry on ritual, ceremonies, history and social codes of behavior (Chavunduka 1994, Vambe ,2001, as cited in Tuwe, 2016).

African storytelling as a unique genre, not only offers entertainment but also serves the purpose of instilling cultural values and moral lessons to its listeners (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1986, Utley 2008, as cited in Tuwe, 2016). In *Anthills of the Savannah*, author Chinua Achebe explains how storytelling “entertains, informs and instructs”. According to Achebe, storytellers determine right from wrong, and heroism versus the cowardly. Achebe states,

It is only the story that can continue beyond the war and the warrior. It is the story that outlives the sound of war-drums and the exploits of brave fighters. It is the story ...that saves our progeny (off-spring) from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort; without it, we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we the story; rather it is the story that owns us and directs us. (Achebe, 1987.p.50)

In Achebe’s view, storytelling strengthens a people by sustaining the fundamental teachings and principles of a culture (Achebe 1987, as cited in Tuwe, 2016). Storytelling instills morals and principals of life to the younger generation, all the while fostering their sense of belonging (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1982, Utley 2008, as cited in Tuwe, 2016).

Griot

Many African societies regard the keepers of the stories as the most esteemed peoples within their communities (Gries, 2016). Within many West African societies in particular, an oral historian is commonly known as a Griot (Gries, 2016). Although controversy over the terminology exists throughout parts of West Africa, the term ‘Griot’ has gained significant usage in the United States over the last several decades, particularly after the 1976 release of *Roots* (Hale, 1997). When describing the Griot in *The Role of Griots in Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali*, author William Gries quotes writer, historian and Griot D.T. Niane.

He states, “I teach kings of the history of their ancestors so that the lives of the ancients might serve them as an example, for the world is old, but the future springs from the past” (Niane 1, as cited in Gries, 2016, un-paginated). Further he says, they do not simply recount the past, but “rescue the memories of kings from oblivion” (ibid.).

In *The Griot: The Rhetorical Empetus of African American Fiction*, it is explained that the Griot traditionally fulfilled the role of the “genealogist, historian, spokesperson, diplomat, musician, teacher, praise singer, master of ceremonies, and advisor. Their primary function was to entertain, educate and perform rituals (Hale, Thomas 2011, as cited in ER123, 2011, un-paginated).

As the Griot collects stories, histories, songs, rituals and genealogies, the Griot is representative of the culture itself, as it conveys the shared history of the collective. When conveying oral history, Griots must do so in a lovely and musical manner. Along with history, they also carry the task of teaching and philosophizing about life (Gries, 2016). The Griot also wields *nommo*, the Bantu term that stands for the “magical power of words to cause change” (ER123, 2011, un-paginated). Traditionally, in many West African cultures, words are regarded as sacred and powerful, as they provide the only pathway to transmit the culture. Ervin (2004) writes,

Griots collect the stories and genealogy from all levels of society (Hale, Thomas 317). Griots do this because they are the wielders of nommo, “the life force, which produces all life, which influences ‘things’ in the shape of the word” (Jahn 124). Nommo is an “African concept [in which] the word is a life force; the word is creator rather than created” even after it has been spoken or written (Ervin, 2004, p. 92, as cited in ER123, 2011).

The Griot fosters harmony and unity in the society through utilizing the acquired knowledge of history, genealogy and tradition. In *The Cultural Self: The Novel as Griot in African American Fiction*, Eric Christian Atkinson writes,

This man or woman preserves the social customs and values of the culture and [...] contribute to social stability through education, entertainment and ritual performance as a means to promote harmony and unity. In the broadest definition, the griot is the culture in the sense that through the collection of stories, genealogies, histories, songs and rituals only to then disseminate them throughout the people so that everyone has the same shared history; a griot creates a shared community, a shared culture through their actions (Atkinson, 2011, III).

African Storytelling Form & Framework

In the academic paper entitled, *The African Oral Tradition Paradigm of Storytelling as a Methodological Framework: Employment Experiences for African communities in New Zealand* Kudakwashe Tuwe writes,

According to Achebe (1958), it would be almost impossible to study African literatures without studying a particular culture and its traditions on which African writers draw, for their themes and values, narrative structures and plots, rhythms and styles, images and metaphors for their artistic and ethical principles (Tuwe, 2016).

African oral tradition places great importance on the iteration of rhythm, language, verses, stanzas and gesture (Matateyou 1997, as cited in Tuwe, 2016, un-paginated). Being grounded in repetition allows the storyteller to more easily remember the stories and retell them by memory.

African storytelling is often a participatory experience, where communities join to hear and share accounts of values, morals, myths, wisdom, history and beliefs (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1982, Utley 2008, as cited in Tuwe, 2016, un-paginated). The interactive process of African

storytelling is central to communal life and to impart Indigenous cultural education to initiate community members into “full humanness” (Achebe 1958, Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1965, Sheppard 2009, as cited in Tuwe, 2016, un-paginated). Storytellers throughout the continent spend years developing and mastering skills and traditional training in order to understand complex proverbs and parables (Achebe 1958, Mungoshi 1975, Chavunduka 1988, Chinyowa 2000, Vambe. 2001, as cited in Tuwe, 2016, un-paginated).

According to Kudakwashe Tuwe’s research on African storytelling, like many tales globally, most African stories are separated into three main parts: introduction, body and conclusion (Matateyou 1997, Vambe 2004 as cited in Tuwe 2016, un-paginated). Once the audience is engaged, the orator will use varying methods and gestures to introduce characters and set the stage for the plot. Tuwe (2016) provides the example of how in Zimbabwe storytellers follow a call and response structure; the listeners join in song, dance and rhythmic shouting in response to the storyteller (Vambe. 2001, Chinyowa 2004, as cited in Tuwe, 2016). The body of the story is filled with representation, concepts and symbolism. The conclusion stresses the moral lesson that was also present in the introduction and body sections of the story (Chinyowa 2004, as cited in Tuwe, 2016).

At the Proceedings of the 38th AFSAAP Conference: *21st Century Tensions and Transformation in Africa*, held at Deakin University, scholar Solomon Iyasere stated, "the modern African writer is to his indigenous oral tradition as a snail is to its shell. Even in a foreign habitat, a snail never leaves its shell behind" (Iyasere, 1975, p. 107).

In his paper, Tuwe also discusses how African storytelling relates to a peoples’ humanistic philosophy as it relates to their holistic social, mental, emotional, and cultural enhancement (Chinyowa, 2000, as cited in Tuwe, 2016). He cites researcher, Chinyowa in his appeal for a paradigm shift of the pedagogical approach to storytelling, as most research regarding African storytelling simply compiles and transcribes folktales (Chinyowa, 2001, as cited in 2016).

However, as African storytelling, Chinyowa argues, reaches beyond entertainment and amusement, it is a didactic means to impart a peoples' wisdom and understanding Tuwe writes:

Far from being a mere source of entertainment, the story helps to sharpen the people's creativity and imagination, to shape their behavior, to train their intellect and to regulate their emotions (Tuwe, 2016).

Author Maurice Taonezvi Vambe discusses how African literature embodies oral tradition in Zimbabwe. He reveals how during colonization, liberation and post-independence, African literature played a major role in resistance to colonial ideology and cultural dominance (Vamber, 2004, p. 32). Vambe, M. T. (2004).

Tuwe (2016) cites Nigerian author Emmanuel Obiechina as he argues that proverbs and parables highlight the importance of a story and relays the beliefs and attitudes of a society (Obiechina 1975, Obiechina 1993, as cited in Tuwe, 2016, un-paginated). Proverbs and parables are powerful written elements in that they illustrate the structures, beliefs and expressions of a people; they ultimately reflect their collective wisdom.

Throughout the continent of Africa, many stories are animal trickster tales that impart knowledge (Banks-Wallace, date, 2002, p. 413). In the stories, animals assist the listeners in understanding cultural norms and behavior. More than mere amusement, these stories represent human strengths and weaknesses and that are informative and educational (Banks-Wallace, 2002, p. 413).

In the overview of African storytelling here, we can see something of the richness and historical deep complexity of African storytelling.

Black Oral Tradition in the Deep South

In West Africa, people orally conveyed their history, stories of nature, deities, animals and heroes from one generation to the next. For the Black community to survive in Louisiana,

they needed to create a distinctly oral culture within the dominant culture (Saloy, 1990). Resistance took different forms on the slave plantations, one variant of which was nurtured by an active oral tradition. In *Going to the Territory*, Black novelist Ralph Ellison writes,

But what we've achieved in folklore has seldom been achieved in the novel, the short story, or poetry. In the folklore we tell what Negro experience really is. We back away from the chaos of experience and from ourselves, and we depict the humor as well as the horror of our living. We project Negro life in a metaphysical perspective and we have seen it with a complexity of vision that seldom gets into our writing." (Ellison, 1986, p. 283).

Many stories in Black folklore derive from tales told in West Africa which survived the middle passage and hundreds of years of chattel slavery.

In the article, *Teaching Cultural Competence: An innovative strategy grounded in the Universality of Storytelling as Depicted in African and African American Storytelling Traditions*, author Jan Carter-Black writes,

Estranged from all remnants of familiarity, Blacks transported to the New World held stories and characters from the African folklore traditions. This was one of many survival strategies used by the Africans that allowed them to meet life head on even "when you ain't got much to start with." (Carter-Black, 2007, p. 43).

Storytelling provided a way for enslaved Africans to remember, connect and perpetuate their cultural understanding of the world which they were forced to leave behind, and also the world in which they were forced to inhabit. Embodied in Black folklore and storytelling are African traditions, ceremonies, spirituality, rituals and values which endured the middle passage (Hamilton, 1985; Hurston, 1935/1990; Lester, 1969, as cited in Banks, 2002, p. 412). Author and academic Julius Lester has written, "folktales are not cultural artifacts. In actuality, we are the tale and folktales are a mirror in which we can see (if we know how to see) our particular story" (Lester, 1987, p. xx, as cited in Banks-Wallace, 2002, 412).

In *Talk That Talk: Storytelling and Analysis Rooted in African American Oral Tradition* author JoAnne Banks-Wallace (2002) discusses the purpose storytelling serves in the Black community in North America, declaring that healing and communion with spirit are central and paramount and is regarded as sacred work (L. Brown and L. Goss, personal communication, November 19, 2000, as cited in Banks-Wallace, 2002, p. 412).

Folklore and storytelling also foster Black community, cultural identity and ultimately uphold both concrete and spiritual freedom (Cannon, 1995; Stewart, 1997, as cited in Banks-Wallace, 2002, p. 412). Stories have allowed Black people in the United States to critically examine epistemological and ontological questions and find answers from our own perspectives, and in our own voices, which has been pivotal in our survival as a people (Gillespie (1998, as cited Banks-Wallace, 2002, p. 412). Black storytelling in the US reveals a violent past of forced removal from ones' homeland, as well as the horrors of slavery and its vestiges (Goss & Barnes, 1989; Hamilton, 1985 i, as cited in Banks-Wallace, p. 412). Banks-Wallace (2002, p. 413) writes:

African American storytelling affirms the ongoing commitment of a people determined to nurture a unique, spiritually based culture in the midst of an oppressive environment (Cannon, 1995; Collins, 1990; Stewart, 1997, as cited in Banks-Wallace, 2002, p. 413).

Storytelling was a means of survival and resistance against a colonial hegemonic narrative and culture. Storytelling allowed enslaved Africans and their descendants to engage in collective intergenerational and cellular memory. Through stories, African descendants who are generations removed from their homeland can connect with the images, languages, sounds and textures of their homeland and traditional culture (Banks-Wallace, 2002, p. 411). Further, during slavery, storytelling allowed families to remain connected, share information, learn English and gain insight on their environments across plantations; birthing a new culture with traditions and values that were influenced by new realities (Faulkner, 1977; Gates, 1989; Lester, 1969, as cited in Banks-Wallace, 2002, p. 413). Still, certain stories maintain ritual, traditions and values that have never changed. However, even today, the oral

tradition of African descendent people undergoes constant change as the lived realities of the people are either forcibly altered or readily transformed (Goss & Goss, 1995; Tarpley, 1995, as cited in Banks-Wallace, 2002, p. 413).

Spiritual Traditions & Folklore

Zora Neale Hurston was an acclaimed Black folklorist, novelist and anthropologist. In her career, she spent time in New Orleans, where she wrote considerably about hoodoo, a Black spiritual tradition that stems from various West African traditions and beliefs of African descendants. Native to the deep south, hoodoo blends folklore, spirituality and conjure. Hurston's column, 'Hoodoo and Black Magic' ran from 1957 to 1959 in the Florida Newspaper, The Fort Pierce Chronicle ("Zora Neale Hurston Dust Tracks Heritage", n.d.). In her novel *Mules and Men*, which depicts Black folk customs in the deep South, she included her article 'Hoodoo in America', which chronicled her times in New Orleans. Hurston writes,

Folklore is not as easy to collect as it sounds. The best source is where there are the least outside influences and these people, being usually underprivileged, are the shyest. They are most reluctant at times to reveal that which the soul lives by. And the Negro, in spite of his open faced laughter, his seeming acquiescence, is particularly evasive. You see we are a polite people and we do not say to our questioner, "Get out of here!" We smile and tell him or her something that satisfies the white person because, knowing so little about us, he doesn't know what he is missing (Hurston, 2009, p. 2).

She later continues,

New Orleans is now and has ever been the hoodoo capital of America. Great names in rites that vie with those of Haiti in deeds that keep alive the powers of Africa Hoodoo, or Voodoo, as pronounced by the whites, is burning with flame in America with all the intensity of a suppressed religion. It has its thousands of secret adherents. Nobody knows for sure how many thousands in America are warmed by the fire of hoodoo, because the worship is bound in secrecy. It is not the accepted theology of the Nation and so believers conceal their faith. Brother from sister, husband from wife. Nobody can say where it begins or ends. Mouths don't empty themselves unless the ears are sympathetic and knowing (Konzett, 2002).

Hurston's decision to include 'Hoodoo in America' in her novel *Mules and Men* suggests that, the tradition of hoodoo is as relevant of an underground tradition of Black people as folk stories. Further, we must holistically accept the entire package of folklore, not just the stories alone (tashqueedagg, 2014). In an online blog post entitled, *Zora Neal Hurston: "Mules and Men" (1935): Part Two, Hoodoo*, user tashqueedagg states,

Hurston did a great service in recording African American folklore traditions at a particular moment in time, but she also gives us good reasons to see this tradition as part of the broader narrative of black working class resistance. Her inclusion of hoodoo is a powerful reminder that we cannot bracket these traditions when we study them (tashqueedagg, 2014).

Storytelling in Louisiana

Storytelling is a lifelong profession from which one will never retire. For this reason, in Louisiana, the best storytellers are claimed to be the elderly who have performed within their family and community for decades (Lindahl, Owens, Harvison, 1997). Louisiana storytellers often perform face to face or to small audiences; and reflecting the dynamic nature of storytelling, folk storytellers will modify their tales depending on the interests of the listener (Lindahl, Owens, Harvison, 1997, p. 4). These storytellers are also well respected in their local communities for having mastered other skills, such as basket making, wood carving, singing, composing music or holding other positions of power, such as a local politician.

There are national, regional, local and ethnic cultural styles of storytelling. Although many tales in Louisiana are of a general southern genre, some stories can be characterized as distinctly Louisiana tales, as they are versed and touched by local nuances, tones and distinctions influenced by the local environment and lifestyle (Lindahl, Owens, Harvison, 1997). In the southern part of the state, the Alligator and Crawfish serve as animal totems only found in Louisiana. Many Louisiana tales inform the essence of the diverse cooking, and the political and historical tales reflect the shared experiences between cultural groups. For instance, the Black, Native, Cajun and Creole communities are economically underserved by the state, however they share more than their experience of poverty, they also share stories, and have demonstrated that through their cultural integration, they could transcend certain social barriers (Lindahl, Owens, Harvison, 1997, p. 10).

The Louisiana Folklore Society characterizes several folklore genres, some of which include; the tall tale, joke, belief legend, historical legend, and animal trickster tale.

Tall Tale

Tall tales are normally told in first person accounts and represent common experiences to the listeners as they are told in familiar settings. Also, referred to as “whoppers,” “yarns,” “windies,” “trash,” and “lies” throughout Louisiana, tall tales are primarily factually true; however, the storyteller will add uncommon characteristics to embellish the story, making it difficult to distinguish the fact from fiction (Lindahl, Owens, Harvison, 1997, 13). The intonation of tall tales is told in a monotone manner. Some tellers will color their stories with sayings such as “this is the dying truth”; “if I’m lying, I’m dying”, this is no damned lie” in order to convince the listeners to believing them, and perhaps also to heighten the shared joy in the cultural complicity of sharing in this verisimilitude (Lindahl, Owens, Harvison, 1997, p. 13). Lindahl also argues that in Louisiana, tall tales are particularly popular among all-male groups. Louisiana attracted trappers, hunters and cowboys. In their pastime, many of these men would partake in gambling, horse-racing, and fishing where they would share such tales. Further, these tales are used as a means to gage new-comers to a community. For instance, they might use a tale to profess ones turf, and to test ones sense of humor and gullibility. Because tall tales are mostly relayed by men, women subsequently become the audience. Women might express disbelief and surprise to the stories, prodding the teller to continue telling peculiar tales (Lindahl, Owens, Harvison, 1997, p. 14).

Many tall tales are told in rural communities, where the primary subjects center on farm life or wildlife, as significant time is spent fishing, hunting and farming. They are commonly heard in the woods of northern Louisiana or the southern bayous. In *Swapping Stories: Folktales from Louisiana*, authors Carl Lindahl, Maida Owens and C. Renee Harvison illustrate how farmers might describe a hot sunny day, by telling a tale where the sun popped whole acres of corn; resulting in the creation of popcorn. Other such stories include hunters who describe seeing gigantic mosquitos that could lift children above ground.

Belief Legend

Belief Legends encapsulate the paranormal and mystic. In *Swapping Stories: Folktales from Louisiana*, it is stated that,

Legends are about belief but they are not always told by believers. Legend is best characterized as a “debate about belief” engaged by believers and nonbelievers alike, as they negotiate together the boundaries of the possible in their view of the world (Degh 1972, as cited in Lindahl, Owens, Harvison, 1997, p. 18).

Unique to Louisiana, legends are often told to family and friends within the community as warnings of supernatural powers, and therefore the importance of storytelling style of legends is secondary to the actual content of the legend. (Lindahl, Owens, Harvison, 1997, p. 14). Because Legends in Louisiana possess an unearthly basis, everyone is not a “true believer” of each legend. Those who are considered “true believers” are focused on the informational elements of the story that can further convince the listeners of its importance. They demonstrate its’ credibility by highlighting the identities of those who have experienced otherworldly events. However, there are generational differences between the beliefs in otherworldly happenings in the Cajun community. The older generation seems to carry more conviction around mystical happenings. For instance, in *Swapping Stories: Folktales from Louisiana*, Loulan Pitre states that the older generation “actually got each other to believe” in werewolves (Lindahl, Owens, Harvison 1997, p. 18).

Legends in Louisiana also engender “humorous anti-legends”, where the teller begins by creating a thrill, as listeners expect a dreadful end to the story. However, the teller quickly switches from horror to joke, ending the story on a humorous note instead.

Joke

Jokes also represent a rich oral tradition in Louisiana. Some of the oldest and well known jokes center on John; an elderly enslaved man who goes to great lengths to stir his master. In the stories, John attempts to challenge “old master” by outsmarting him. In *Folktales from Louisiana*, Alfred Anderson, a black storyteller from Donaldsonville, Louisiana tells tales like “The Old Coon” and “Skullbone” which illustrate how John’s efforts backfired. In the tale “Skullbone”, John is beheaded by his master. Stories such as this demonstrate how humorous jokes and stories convey ardent social messages. Based on African styles of storytelling, many of these stories are told within Black communities in Louisiana as warnings to one another to be careful and aware of the consequences when speaking with white people.

Religious based jokes are particularly popular among many traditional groups in Louisiana, such as the Cajun Catholics. Confession and other religious rituals are playfully made fun of. For instance, in the story “Curing Corpses”, the ceremonial use of incense was mistaken as trying to “smoke” a corpse (ibid.). The focus of most jokes by Louisiana Baptist and Protestant groups center around sermons that put their listeners to sleep, or excessively serious congregations, like in the story “The Reverend Gets the Possum”, which is a mockery of those who possess a holier- than- thou attitude.

Historical Legend

Historical legends of local heroes and villains are another significant genre of storytelling in Louisiana. Many of these legends center around prominent historical figures, such as Huey Long. Huey Long was a Louisiana governor who was assassinated in 1935. Some legends paint Huey as a local hero, and others as a rogue. John Campbell referred to his dual nature when he stated, “Huey was the most outstanding individual I’ve ever known... He could be a statesman among statesmen. He could get down with the lowest people in the world. Or he

could be an s.o.b. among s.o.b.'s.... He was smarter than any of them” (Lindahl, Owens, Harvison 1997, p. 15).

Historical legends also characterize scenarios where the general public confronts those in positions of power (ibid.). Many also assume a distinctly local quality, such as stories of Bonnie and Clyde who were killed in Bienville, parish. Legends of Ben Lilly, a big game hunter, is described as being more “animal than human”, which illustrates the superhuman nature local stories assume as tales are retold through the generations (Lindahl, Owens, Harvison 1997, p. 16).

Trickster Tales

Africans who were brought to the south via the middle passage, carried the stories of their tricksters along with them. In an effort to maintain elements of their culture, language and customs they retold these stories so that parts of their homeland could be remembered by the future generations (Crawford, 2007, p. 9). Nevertheless, they also needed to create new scenarios and characters who represented their new lived experiences and environments. In these stories, animals frequently represent the cultural hero who uses magic and trickery to outsmart the more dominant character (Crawford, ibid). These tales mirrored the power relations on the slave plantations, and focus on deceiving the slave master. These stories allowed the slaves to express their anger and rage at the slave masters and their situations. In *A Ring of Tricksters*, author Virginia Hamilton writes, “They learned what justice was, and they learned, as slaves, they had none. But they were able to make up stories and even laugh in the face of their tragic predicament” (Hamilton, *A Ring of Tricksters*, p. 9, as cited in Crawford, 2007, p. 9). Further, Falkner writes,

The perceptive storytellers of slavery days thus exploited the naiveté of their supposedly intellectually superior white masters, who duped themselves into falsely believing that these stories merely served as harmless products of a ‘childlike’ people to amuse illiterate listeners or to entertain the master’s children (Faulkner xiv, as cited in Crawford, 2007, p. 9).

In Louisiana, animal trickster tales are common among Black, Cajun, Creole and Native communities. Bouki, which means 'hyena' in the West African Wolof language is a popular character among Creole and Cajun communities (Lindahl, Owens, Harvison 1997, p. 22). However, Br'er Rabbit, also known as Compère Lapin among Creole and Cajun narrators, is one of the most popular animal trickster characters and is rooted in both West African and Native southeastern folklore (Lindahl, Owens, Harvison 1997, p. 22).

A story that exemplifies an archetypal trickster tale is the Br'er Rabbit 'Tar Baby'. The story also includes the character Br'er Fox, who was originally a jackal in traditional West African folklore but became the fox upon arriving to Turtle Island (North America). In this tale, Br'er Fox uses a tar character to capture Br'er Rabbit. Br'er Rabbit believed the tar figure was real, and fell into it, causing his front and hind feet, as well as his head to stick to it. Br'er Rabbit pleads with Br'er fox to roast him, drown him, skin him or torture him in any way other than throwing him into the briar patch. Unaware that rabbits are born and raised in underbrush, Br'er Fox decides to throw him in the briar patch. Br'er Rabbit hops away "lively ez a cricket in de embers" (Martyris, 2017). The Tar Baby story is rooted in symbolism that is representative of slavery. In the article *'Tar Baby': A Folk Tale About Food Rights, Rooted In The Inequalities Of Slavery*, author Nina Martyris writes,

The allegorical symbolism, rooted in slavery and its inequalities, is not hard to decipher: The rabbit is the underdog who constantly has to outwit his more powerful (but dim) master in order to steal his food to survive. Legally, the food belongs to the "master," but morally, the enslaved have a right to it, too. "The briar patch," says Wagner, "is a symbol of the commons, the unenclosed, unowned land that provides refuge and resources that sustain the life of the community" (Martyris, 2017).

Further, the story illustrates how enslaved Africans were resistant and cunning through their learned survival strategies (Martyris, 2017).

This range of storytelling genres is indicative of the rich repertoire of possibilities they possess for addressing a range of social issues and concerns that might be shared across Louisiana's communities.

Native Storytelling

Similar to West African storytelling, Native oral tradition also provides pathways through which Native peoples impart their distinctive worldviews, genealogy, history, traditional ecological knowledge and values. Further, Native storytelling allows Native peoples to reject the often-internalized negative stereotypes of their people (Schulhof, 2010, p. 23).

Alternatively, stories can act as counter narratives that foster more genuine personal and collective Native identities, that are rooted in the ancestral perspectives of present-day communities, rather than in imposed colonial mentality (Schulhof, 2010, p. 23). In addition, as we have seen through the exploration of Black oral tradition, Native storytelling is also a form of resistance. In *More Than Bows and Arrows: Subversion and Double-Consciousness in Native American Storytelling*, Anastacia M. Schulhof reveals that Native storytellers utilize varying strategies in storytelling to defend their sovereignty.

Current Native American stories offer an alternative view of reality and are a covert form of resistance against the dominant American society (Cruikshank 2007).

Therefore, Native American storytellers utilize the —master's tools and their own —culturally distinct creative tools as a means for liberation

(Schulhof, 2010, p. 26).

In *There Is No Box: The Trickster in Literature*, author Margaret Crawford explains the extraordinary uniqueness surrounding Native storytelling of trickster tales in comparison to in other societies (Crawford, 2007). For instance, many western societies have belief systems that are based on Christianity that may specifically contrast with that of Native value systems. An example can be seen in how Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz who have written about

Native myths and legends state, “Christianity teaches that only humans have souls. Indians believe that even a stone, a tree, or a lake has a soul, a spirit, and there are strict systems of beliefs about the effects of telling certain stories in certain ways or at specific times” (Erdoes and Ortiz xx, 1998). Crawford explains the importance of cultural protocol in telling these tales. For instance, some can only be retold at certain times of the year or day. Some are held as sacred for only family members and should not be told to those outside of it. Some stories are also inclusive of sexual feats and are not deemed “dirty”. The late renowned Lakota medicine man, John Fire Lame Deer from the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota has discussed the importance the trickster and trickster tales play in lifting the spirits of those who have suffered. In *American Indian Trickster Tales*, he is quoted in saying, “Coyote, Iktomi, and all their kind are sacred. A people that have so much to weep about as we Indians also need their laughter to survive” (xxii, 1998).

In Louisiana, storytelling has still maintained its relevancy to Native communities. Faye Rogers Stouff of the Chitimacha nation has written a book, entitled *Sacred Beliefs of the Chitimacha Indians* on the sacred beliefs of her people and chronicled Chitimacha stories traditional knowledge as it was passed down by her elders. The Louisiana Folklore Society met with Nicholas L. Stouff, a storyteller from the Chitimacha community, who shared two significant stories that illustrated the interrelationship between the Chitimacha and snakes. *A Chitimacha Flood Story* tells of the time snakes and people rode out a flood through a clay pot together. Another tale revealed the creation story of Bayou Teche.

In the world of the Chitimacha, traces of the snake are everywhere: in the bayou, in their past; it is not surprising that Chitimachas once tattooed the images of snakes on their bodies (Lindahl, Owens, Harvison 1997, p. 23).

Bel Abbey, a Koasati elder worked with Tulane and Northwestern University students to preserve Koasati stories. In Jena, some Choctaw elders and grandparents continue to gather at night and tell children stories, many of which are animal tales that exist in many Native nations in the Southeast. These tales demonstrate cultural and moral guidelines (Lindahl, Owens, Harvison 1997, p. 23).

Another facet of Native storytelling in Louisiana is humor. Many stories include jokes about “the white man” and “ugly anthropology”. The Louisiana Folklore Society provides the following example that was told by someone from the Koasati nation. “The anthropologists came over. They asked questions all about us. How did we cook? How did we eat? Finally, one asked me, 'How do you sleep?' I said, 'Pretty well, until you began to ask all these silly questions!’”

Native Traditions of Storying Land

In Native oral tradition, distinct cultural and spiritual worldviews and perspectives color the narratives of relationships to land and place. The cartography in Native communities, merges both geography and historical and spiritual significance (Yi, 2016, p. 1). This understanding of ‘storying land’ existed long before colonial influence in the 15th century, as it was inherent in Native societies throughout North America. Contrary to the disparaging myth that Native peoples and knowledge systems are no longer relevant or practiced, there are many examples of its continual traditional and transformative uses (Yi, 2016, p. 2). Recognized Palestinian-American historian, Edward Said discusses in his essay “Yeats and Decolonization” how an integral element in ‘storying land’ that often times is erased in western cartography is the history of bloodshed, terrorism and imperialism (Said, 1990, as cited in Yi, 2016, p. 2). He further discusses the role imagination plays in revitalizing a “geographical identity” (Said, 1990, as cited in Yi, 2016, p. 2).

Said writes,

There is a pressing need for the recovery of the land that, because of the presence of the colonizing outsider, is recoverable at first only through the imagination. Now if there is anything that radically distinguishes the imagination of anti-imperialism it is the primacy of the geographical in it. Imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control. For the native, the history of his or her colonial servitude is inaugurated by the loss to an outsider of the local place, whose concrete geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored (ibid.).

The only way for Native peoples to transform the cartography after being expelled from their Indigenous landscapes through colonization is through imagination. Said explains, “to map, to invent, or to discover, a third nature, which is not pristine and prehistorical...but one that derives historically and abductively from the deprivations of the present”. Therefore, storytellers can restore and reclaim Native lands that may have physically changed as a result of colonial impact (Said, 1990, as cited in Yi, 2016, p. 2).

Even further, Said has discussed the close connection between geographic and linguistic violence, as Native land was renamed by western colonists throughout the centuries. An example lies in the journal of Christopher Columbus in which he renames *Samoet*, the island home of the Taíno, to *San Salvador* in honor of Columbus’ ‘holy savior’ (Said, 1990, as cited in Yi, 2016, p. 2). In *Cartographies of the Voice: Storying the Land as Survivance in Native American Oral Traditions*, author Ivanna Yi explains how the practice of ‘storying land’ directly combats centuries of geographic and linguistic violence. Engaging in ‘storying land’ is an act of resistance against the false narratives, names and meanings that have been imposed onto Native lands and peoples for centuries. Further, exploring the creation, naming and reconstruction of Native lands post-colonial assault, makes ‘storying land’ a vital part of decolonization and survivance through the reclamation of one’s narrative. Wesleyan University professor Indira Karamcheti refers to this practice as “linguistic reoccupation of the land” (Yi, 2016, p. 16).

Identity of Land & Place

There are many examples where the linguistics of Native languages is inextricably linked to land and stories that carry special meaning.

Scholar Ivanna Yi writes,

In Native American oral traditions, words are accorded generative power and are capable of bringing the world (literally “sky-earth, or kajulew” in Quich) into being. As seen in the Mayan Popol Vuh (alphabetic version recorded in the mid-16th century): “And then the earth arose because of [the gods], it was simply their word that brought it forth. For the forming of the earth they said ‘Earth’. It arose suddenly, just like a cloud, like a mist, now forming, unfolding” ([3], pp. 59, 65). Out of their breath, their imaginative saying, the Mayan gods create the land and the world (Yi, 2016, p. 3).

She continues,

When the land is storied, it acquires the cultural value of a place. Because the place-names of the Western Apache of Cibecue, Arizona are invested with the breath and story of ancestral storytellers, the names are traces of their presence; places, in being called their given names, remember their namers (Yi, 2016, p. 4).

Native creation stories connected to land allow storytellers to impart their cultural knowledge, and the Indigenous place names demonstrate the value and significance that particular areas hold. Indigenous place names carry the oral history and cosmology of a people. They act as ‘footprints’ and bring forth the unseen past into the present (Yi, 2016, p. 5). Changing names erases an entire history and identity of the land and place.

This potent role of storytelling as a decolonizing discourse of reclaiming land and suppressed history is consistent with the current more generic academic concern with toponymy and the naming of place in shaping consciousness of place and identity (Rose-Redwood et al, 2010; Berg and Vuolteenaho, 2009). We are now familiar with the inadequacy of speaking of a

public sphere and are more attuned to the notion of – sphericules (Gitlin,1998), the fragmentation of ethnic communities and the intersectionality (Yuval-Davis, 2006) of life in a world reviewed through the lens of post modernism, which has led me to accept that storytelling is a discursive practice that operates within distinctive ethnically embedded communicative networks. Particularly, the performative nature of much storytelling, which situates the storyteller and their audience in a specific space and time. Thus storytelling *in vivo*, and storytelling in a mediated form, will undoubtedly carry different dynamics that cannot be explored more fully here.

Chapter Five: Threats to Sacred Lands

In the following chapter I examine the historical and contextual realities of two sacred places in Louisiana; the Bayous in general, and Congo Square. The relationship between cultural identities and these sacred lands is explored, as well as past and current efforts to protect them.

The report of the 2001 Native American Sacred Lands Forum explains the significance of sacred lands as follows.

Sacred places embody values, beliefs, spirits, history, ceremonies, relationships and secrets. Sacred sites are at the core of cultural identity and health. Their protection and care is an ancient mandate and life-giving covenant. Yet hundreds of diverse native communities, whether recognized by the Federal government or not, have long watched sacred places threatened or destroyed by pothunters, extractive industries, government agencies, recreational interests and New Age spiritual seekers (NASLF, 2003)

In *More Than Bows and Arrows: Subversion and Double-Consciousness in Native American Storytelling*, Anastacia M. Schulhoff quotes Native *Takelma* storyteller and spiritual elder Agnes Baker-Piligram explaining the importance of protecting Sacred Grounds.

We need to stop spiritual blindness. Our sacred grounds are being destroyed all over the continent. Because we don't have a steeple in a building called a church, they don't think these are spiritual places. We need to stop the spiritual blindness and to stand up and be that voice, and to try to preserve the things that the Mother Earth has left here for us, and to walk a better path (Schulhoff, 2010, p. 50)

Bayous

In *Spirits of the Bayou: Sanctuaries, Cemeteries & Hauntings*, author Deborah Burst writes,

Bayous hold an infinite spirit lurking just beneath the surface. It is there the sacred waters mingle with the dead buried below, and with the onset of heavy rains they both rise again. South Louisiana gains much of its laissez-faire attitude from its giant network of bayous. The bayous hold no direction, no rules, and the waters amble their way through the blended trees. After all, they do rule this gritty empire (Burst, 2016, p. 183).

Abounding threats confront south Louisiana's Bayous. In Terrebonne parish, coastal erosion eminently jeopardizes its wetlands. A 2011 Houma Today article entitled; *Our wetlands: World's greatest disappearing act*, explains that coastal Louisiana has lost 1,883 square miles of wetlands since 1932. The Terrebonne wetland basin occupies 460 square miles, and the Barataria basin has about 422 square miles of land. When factoring in the effects of the hurricanes, more than a football field of land is lost each hour (Buskey, 2011).

Burst illustrates the threat of coastal erosion when she writes, "They call it coastal erosion and it engulfs land like a venomous monster eating away livelihoods and an entire culture of people" (Burst, 2016, p. 11).

The United Houma Nation, in partnership with the Neighborhood Story Project and Side by Side Community Projects conducted an oral history project entitled, *The United Houma Nation: Entre Yakni et Ok | Between Land and Water*. T. Mayheart Dardar of Venice, Plaquemines Parish states,

We are now facing the most challenging time for the tribe in two centuries—since the Americans came and we got pushed out of our agricultural lifestyle around Bayou Cane into in the lower bayous. The problems around coastal erosion are so big that we are not going to make it as family or individuals. The only thing that's going to happen on that level is that eventually we will be forced out into the surrounding communities. If we are going to make it as an indigenous nation, we need to support collective action

(Breunlin, Haviland, 2009).

The Bayou Bridge Pipeline poses another urgent threat to the Bayous, particularly the Atchafalaya basin, which is the largest wetland in the United States. Energy Transfer Partners is constructing the tail end of the Dakota Access Pipeline called the Bayou Bridge Pipeline. The pipeline route concerns the Chata Houma Chittimacha Atakapaw Territory (Nobbp.org). If completed, the 162-mile oil pipeline would cross 11 parishes and 700 bodies of water and Bayou Lafourche, which is the main clean water source for 300,000 Louisiana residents, including the United Houma Nation and St. James Parish. The United Houma Nation is a state recognized Native-American tribe, and the Freetown settlement in St. James parish is a historically Black community that is 95 percent African- American and referred to as “cancer alley” because of the increasing amount of industrial pollution (Foytlin, 2017). The United Houma Nation was not consulted regarding the project.

The *United Houma Nation: Entre Yakni et Ok* | *Between Land and Water* oral history project adapted writings from T.Mayheart Dardar and John R. Swanton’s *Myths and Tales of the Southeastern Indians* when illustrating the meaning and sacredness of the crawfish and Bayou for the Houma nation;

In the beginning, everything was covered by water. Land was needed to build the earth. Different animals dove down into the water to find it, but no one was able to succeed. Finally, the crawfish dove down to the bottom and carried the mud back to the surface. Holding it above the water, he created the land. For the Houma, the crawfish is our totem. Under the colonial administration of the French, and then the Spanish, our sovereignty was respected. We maintained a principal village around Bayou Cane supported by farming and seasonal fishing and hunting. In Article Six of the Louisiana Purchase Agreement, the United States agreed to recognize our autonomy. This promise, like so many others, wasn’t upheld. The descendants of the people of the crawfish were forced to abandon our village and rely on individual land grants in the lower bayou countries. Home was found between land and water (Breunlin, Haviland, 2009).

The oil pipeline would also significantly impact the Cajun community, and as earlier stated, the Atchafalaya basin is an integral part of Cajun country and culture. In *Crawfisherman's Fight Brings Pipeline to a Halt*, writer Eimilie Karrick Surrusco quotes craw fisherman Jody Meche, in which he shares why the Atchafalaya basin is extraordinary.

The Atchafalaya Basin is unique to the whole world. There's nowhere else like it. It's home to hundreds of species of migratory birds—there's bald eagles, so many bald eagles—and alligators, fish, and so much more. It provides subsistence for the Cajun people.

We've made our living from the basin for over a century, it gives us food for our families. For me, it's my way of life. It's where I grew up. It's what I know, it's what I've learned. (Surrusco, 2018).



A scene in the Atchafalaya Basin in Louisiana, USA, in the Sherburne Complex Wildlife Management Area, a Nature Conservancy reserve. Source: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, photographer not specified or unknown.

Meche also discusses the impact the oil and gas industry has already had in the Atchafalaya basin.

They created these pipeline right-of-ways, and instead of flattening out the dirt they excavated, they left it. They interrupted the water flow. And every year, the ecosystem has been on the decline. The crawfish is to the point where they won't live in our crawfish traps unless we let the traps stick out above the top of the water so they can come up for air. The water quality is so poor they can't get enough oxygen out of the water.

When I first started fishing, you hardly had any problems with crawfish dying. You could set your traps on the bottom, five or six feet in the water, and the crawfish would all be alive.

Now you go back, and all the crawfish are dead underwater (Surrusco, 2018).

The Bayou Bridge Pipeline would cross Houma sacred mounds, contaminate their drinking water, and impact their fishing, which is the main source of income for many residing near the Atchafalaya Basin. (Foytlin, 2017)

The Bayou Bridge Pipeline was placed in an area that predominately impacts Native, Cajun and Black communities. It is obstructing Native lands and waters, and the Bayous have always provided safety for Native peoples and escaped enslaved Africans seeking shelter from their common oppressor. In the 1700's, maroon colonies lined the shores of the Gulf of Mexico in Louisiana. Maroons were communities of enslaved Africans and Native peoples who had escaped bondage. The term 'maroon' is based on the French word *marronage*, meaning the act of running away (Houzeau, n.d.). Maroons settled on the shores of Lake Borgne near New Orleans and spread throughout the Southeast. Escaped enslaved Africans survived in the cypress swamps through their acquired knowledge of the terrain. With limited understanding of the lay of the land, white slave owners refrained from searching within the swamps (Rodrigue, 2014). The ecology of the Bayous allowed escaped

enslaved Africans to not only survive, but also to remain connected to loved ones still living on the plantations (Hirsch, 1999, p. 78). They remained in close proximity to the cities, which allowed them to trade animals, food, labor and firearms at night with free Blacks, mixed race enslaved peoples and Afro-creoles (Hirsch, 1999, p. 78). Maroon villages existed in the bayous and also in underground caves. Despite treacherous conditions, it was preferable to the cruelty they were forced to endure on the plantations.

St. Malo was a revered maroon leader who is widely recognized for uniting maroon networks that were surrounded by white settlements. St. Malo guarded the Bayous between the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain below New Orleans (Hirsch, 1999, p. 81). His notorious village, Ville Gaillarde was located in St. Bernard Parish along Bayou Terre aux Beoefs. In 1784, Governor Miro described it as being strategically located in a “most propitious land for the maintenance of human life”. He also explained how the colony was defended by five hundred men (Hirsch, 1999, p. 81). When maroons were captured, St. Malo led revolts in white settlements. He was executed on June 19th, 1784 on murder charges (Hall, 1992, p. 231). The history of the Bayous acting as sanctuaries for Native and Black peoples seeking refuge is another vital reason that they are considered sacred by both peoples.

Black, Native and Cajun communities also rely on the wetlands to hinder flooding during the hurricane season. If built, the pipeline will risk their wetlands, which act as a buffer, as well as pose threats to their crawfishing industry. The Houma people and descendants of enslaved Africans in St. James parish have both been forcefully uprooted and displaced from their ancestral territories. In an Indigenous Rising video, Indigenous activist Cherri Foytlin explains how this is a continuation of the same colonial forced displacement Native and Black people have endured for the last 500 years.

When I see these people talk about the horrors that they have to live through from extraction, how is that any different that the horrors that their ancestors lived through from slavery? I mean, whole groups, Isle De Jean Charles Choctaw Biloxi Chitimacha are being moved, they're the first climate refugees here in south Louisiana. How is that different from being moved off your land through a trail of tears? We're strong together now and we have an understanding of that. And some of

that trauma that we have in our genes is also resistance that we have in our genes, and we remember that. (Indigenous Environmental Network, 2017).

Along with taking legal action, steadfast direct action has also taken place by L'eau Est La Vie resistance camp, which means 'Water is Life' in the Indigenous-colonial Houma French language. The floating camp has led steadfast direct action to halt pipeline construction. Jackie Fawn, an Indigenous Yurok, Washoe, Filipina artist, produced a piece for *L'eau Est La Vie Camp*. Fawn introduces the artwork via Facebook, where she explains how the piece represents the sacredness of the Bayou ecosystem for Houma peoples, and depicts the necessary resistance to defend them for the following seven generations.

This image illustrates the journey of a Houma water warrior that stands to protect all that is sacred to her, the people, and the Bayous. She carries an old but powerful banner of the crawdad and of the ancestors. She is protected by the Great blue heron who she looks to for guidance as the powerful crawdad claws rise up from the water to stop the black snake that is the Bayou Bridge Pipeline. [Featured are palmettos, which cover our wetlands, a source of food and used as traditional Houma dwellings. The Blue heron on the left is one of our largest and most sacred water protectors, their feathers are traditionally given to warriors. They represent our strength to stand up and protect this land for the next seven generations to come. The cypress trees in the back, covered in tree hair or "Spanish moss" are the symbol of the Chittimacha tribe, and the Louisiana state tree. They are a crucial backbone to the ecosystem down here and horribly over forested. Yet Energy Transfer Partners plans to cut down dozens of old cypress trees in the basin, some of which are over a century old. This pipeline is known as the double headed snake] (Jackie Fawn Illustrations, 2018).

Congo Square

Maroon settlements are only one historical representation of Native and Black defiance to oppression in Louisiana. Early Native nations in Louisiana, such as the Quinipissa,

Acolapissa, Ouma (Houma), Chitimachas, Tunica's, Bayougoulas and others inhabited areas within and surrounding Bayou St. John and the infamous French Quarter, as it was nearby a Native portage that allowed them to travel between the Mississippi River and Bayou Choupic (Evans, 2011, p. 9) The historical marker located in Congo Square explains that, prior to the arrival of French colonists, the Houma and others would ceremoniously celebrate their annual corn harvest in the area because they deemed it holy grounds ("Preserving the Past to Strengthen Our Future", n.d.).

In 1724, *Le Code Noir*, also known as *The Black Code*, which were French regulations for enslaved Africans, authorized Sundays as a non-workday for all of the colonies' inhabitants, including enslaved Africans. This "Free Day" sanction continued under Spanish and American rule (Evans, 2011, p. 1). On Sunday afternoons, enslaved Africans and Free People of Color gathered throughout New Orleans, including on plantations, however, in 1817, a city ordinance restricted them to only one location on the outskirts of town; Congo Square (Evans, 2011, p. 1). On this day, they could practice their Indigenous spiritual traditions and cultural practices, however still under police supervision. In *Congo Square: African Roots in New Orleans*; the first comprehensive study of Congo Square, author Freddi Williams Evans writes,

In Congo Square on Sunday afternoons, to different degrees over time, African descendants spoke and sang in their native languages, practiced their religious beliefs, danced according to their traditions, and played African-derived rhythmic patterns on instruments modeled after African prototypes. This African population also bought and sold goods that they made, gathered, hunted, and cultivated much in the style of West African marketplaces. Even when those who gathered at Congo Square performed European music and dance forms, willful continuation of African culture in Congo Square conveys the agency of the gatherers in celebrating and preserving their heritage (Evans, 2011, p. 2).



Congo Square, New Orleans. Engraving by E. W. Kemble, to illustrate article “The Dance in Place Congo” by George Washington Cable, published in *Century Magazine*, February, 1886.

On Sundays, Congo Square drew as many as 600 enslaved Africans and Free People of Color playing music and dancing; making it the musical center of New Orleans (Candy, 2018).

Freddi Williams Evans illustrates the influence Congo Square has had on the local culture, as historians have traced the performative roots of Black Indian and Second line parades to the gatherings in Congo Square.

In many parts of the country, public performances of traditional African music and dance had long ceased. However, conditions in New Orleans enabled residents of African heritage to perpetuate and preserve these forms openly and with significant numbers of people. The African cultural practices in and around Congo Square influenced the evolution of indigenous performance forms. These New Orleans-based music and dance styles are integral to the local culture and serve to make New Orleans distinct. Those African practices that permeated the gatherings also influenced popular culture on the national level. (Evans, 2011, p. 42)

Further, Congo Squares’ dance, performance and musical influences, extend beyond New Orleans to the nation. Congo Square has become the cornerstone of legends surrounding Marie Laveau, the history of Voudun in New Orleans, and the legacy of African cultural

tradition in Louisiana and beyond. Nick Douglas sheds light upon the widespread influence of Congo Square in the online article entitled, *Black History: Congo Square, New Orleans- The Heart of American Music*.

If Congo Square was the musical heart of the city, then the Mississippi River was an artery that carried New Orleans' music and musical innovation throughout the country. Congo Square's musical influence flowed through the Mississippi's tributaries to musical cities from Memphis to St. Louis, from Kentucky to Minnesota, and Chicago to Pittsburgh. And the music of New Orleans influenced those who flowed into the city from every state in the U.S., from Kentucky boatmen like Abraham Lincoln to sailors on New England whalers. These visitors took the music and the experiences of New Orleans and Congo Square back home with them. New Orleans' port served as a part of the triangle of trade between Mexico, Haiti, and Cuba. This trade route carried more than goods and services. For hundreds of years this ancient trade triangle carried people, culture, music and musicians, lengthening the reach and influence of Congo Square's music (Candy, 2018).

The legacy of Congo Square has also been critical in the inception of Jazz as an American art form, and was the first home for the popularized New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival. Jazz musicians such as Louis Armstrong, Barney Bigard, Sidney Bechet, Johnny Dodds, Louis and Lorenzo Tio, Jimmy Durante, Pete Fontaine, Alphonse Picou, Fats Domino, Jelly Roll Morton and more, hail from New Orleans (Candy, 2018).

By the 1850's, Congo Square's gatherings became less frequent. It was reported that by the 1860s, Congo Square no longer served as a "public institution", however the gatherings continued until New Orleans came under federal control in 1862. After the Civil War, it was renamed Beauregard Square in honor of the confederate general (Crutcher, 2001, p. 49).

Previously known as Place de Negres, today Congo Square is located in the historic neighborhood of Tremé within Louis Armstrong Park. In *Protecting 'Place' in African - American Neighborhoods: Urban Public Space, Privatization, and Protest in Louis Armstrong Park and the Treme, New Orleans*, author Michael Eugene Crutcher Jr explains Tremés' resistance to development projects in Louis Armstrong Park. Beginning in the 1960s, Tremé's surrounding residents of Louis Armstrong Park have organized to affect the decisions made about the park (Crutcher, 2001, p. 11). Examples can be seen in the 1980 attempt by a private development company, Armstrong Park Corporation, to add an admission fee that would restrict the poor from having park access. Later, leaders from The Committee to Save Armstrong Park, expressed concern that development plans represented "a totally Eurocentric park that would be of no interest to Blacks" (Crutcher, 2001, p. 11).

Despite efforts to suppress cultural expression and gentrify these sacred grounds, the legacy of Congo Square prevails. Every Sunday afternoon, between three and six, one can still witness traditional African drum and dance, as well as at times participate in ritual and ceremony, all thanks to the Congo Square Preservation Society. The Congo Square Preservation Society has written that "the sound of drums still echo and call for people to gather and connection to their ancestral memory" ("Preserving the Past to Strengthen Our Future", n.d.).



The blessing of the Drums at Congo Square. Photographed by Fernando Lopez (Fotografi.ando)



The blessing of the Drums. Photographed by Fernando Lopez (Fotografi.ando)

The Congo Square Preservation Society was founded in 1989 under its original name; the Congo Square Foundation. Today, the Society provides cultural programming that honors the cultural, historical and spiritual foundations of Congo Square on a weekly basis. In addition, the Congo Square Preservation Society supports and promotes Black and Native artists in New Orleans (“Preserving the Past to Strengthen Our Future”, n.d.). They are most known for advocating to include Congo Square on the National Register of Historic Places in 1993, assembling the historic plaque in 1997, have organized five Congo Square International Festivals in the 1990s and Sunday drum workshops since 1989. In 1994 & 1995, they hosted 24 hours of drumming for the “Drumming for Life Vigils”. They have also created an educational fieldtrip for Pre-K through college students called the Congo Square Living Classroom, sponsored historic research, lectures, healing plant landscaping, and have created a marketplace for artists, drummers and dancers (“Preserving the Past to Strengthen Our Future”, n.d.).

Thus it can be seen that Congo Square is a location that has deep historical resonance and very significant current political and cultural significance.

Chapter Six: Biographies

The following chapter features the biographies of the informants. I include their biographies in order to demonstrate that although they represent a small sample, each interviewee has a legitimacy and authenticity that is based on the depth of their experiences and engagement with resistance to protect the sacred lands in their communities.

Jonathan Foret

Jonathan Foret was raised in Chauvin, Louisiana speaking Cajun French with his grandmother and working on a shrimp boat. He holds a Master's degree in Public Administration with a focus on Nonprofit Leadership ('South Louisiana Wetland Discovery Center', n.d.). Foret was a Peace Corps volunteer and for two years worked as a community development coordinator, teaching ESL and how to use a cast net in the Kingdom of Tonga (Jbatte, 2007). Foret was the first volunteer ever to be placed on a particular outer island in Tonga, and his placement was based on the fact that he came from a fishing community in Chauvin, Louisiana. After his time in Tonga, Foret briefly moved back to the United States to work for various non-profits before venturing off to Bangladesh and across Asia with the United Nations to work with disabled peoples (Jbatte, 2007). He then returned home to Louisiana and attended the University of New Orleans where he received his master's in public administration. After working as the grants and program administrator for the Louisiana State Museum, Foret decided to move home and act as the executive director of the South Louisiana Wetlands Discovery Center; an initiative that is transforming the way people teach, learn and understand Louisiana's vanishing coast. Foret is also working on constructing a new wetlands campus that will cultivate "learning, concern and action on coastal issues" ("South Louisiana District", n.d.).

With an active path of public service, Foret also engages in work that reveals his love for place through honoring the stories that make Houma, Houma. He is a key organizer of the Rougarou Festival; a family-friendly festival that happens around Halloween each year and celebrates the rich Bayou folklore of southeast Louisiana. The festival has gained accolades and has been listed as the "best new event" in the state by the Louisiana

Association of Fairs & Festivals and the Southeast Tourism Society names it a Top 20 Event in the month of October (Jbatte, 2007).

Nana Sula

Nana Sula is an Akan priestess of Mami Wata and cultural practitioner who has founded *Temple of Light Ile de Coin-Coin*, as well as an author, singer, artist and birth doula. Her shrine is located in the noteworthy New Orleans Musicians' Village, a community centered around the Ellis Marsalis Center for Music. The homes in the community are built for musicians who lost their homes in Hurricane Katrina in 2005. *Ile de Coin-Coin* is in honor of her Great-Great Grandmother, the renowned Marie Therese Coincoin, who is a symbol of self-determination as she was a freed enslaved woman who established the historical community of Creoles of Color along Cane River in Natchitoches, Louisiana. Nana Sula's work as a priestess and healer focuses on connecting people with the *Egun*; ancestors. Raised in New Jersey, her journey led her back to Louisiana, where her matrilineal ancestors hail from, over twenty years ago.

Nana Sula has a B.A. degree in African Studies and English Literature from Rutgers University. Her travels and studies have led her throughout Africa and the Caribbean, and she has volunteered with Operations Crossroads Africa since 1992 ('Congo Square Preservation Society', n.d.). Since 1985, Nana Sula has been a student of Yoruba, Ghanaian and Vodun African spiritual traditions. She was initiated at the Shrine of Imphema in Ghana, West Africa in 2007, and was given the title *Okomfo Korkoi Ama Tawiah* (ibid.). She has been a singer and songwriter with the reggae world beat band Zion Trinity and is the lead singer of *Mojuba*, a band which focuses on sacred Orisha music (NolaVie, 2015). She is the Founding Director of the Na'Zyia Doula Collective, and is a proud board member of the Congo Square Preservation Society and the HealHers Society of New Orleans (NolaVie, 2015). She also is a Mardi Gras Indian with the Queens of the Nation.

Nana Sula's book entitled, *Spirit of the Orisha* includes Orisha song lyrics in Yoruba with translations and phonetic pronunciation. The book is accompanied by a CD. The translation was conducted by Omoba Adéwálé Adénlé. It opens with Nana Sula's story of

how she was brought into the Orisha tradition when she was nineteen years old by her first love, Martin ‘Marty’ Salinas, whose family were practitioners. He brought her to her first *mesa* at his home, which is a ceremony where a practitioner channels the ancestors. A few months later, Marty passed away. From this moment, Nana Sula began her path of reconnecting with the spiritual traditions of her ancestors. She writes, “I was reminded of ceremonies long ago and my DNA reconnected with my African Mother’s voice. I remembered her! She began to call my name.” (Evans, 2014, introduction).

Deborah Burst

Deborah Cunningham Burst is an author, freelance writer and photographer from New Orleans but currently residing in Mandeville, Louisiana. Burst was raised in a military family, which led her to live in various locations, but New Orleans was always home. Burst had a career with IBM before deciding to pursue a path in journalism and creative writing. In 2003, she graduated cum laude with a BFA in Media Arts from Tulane University. Described as a “born storyteller”, for the last twelve years Burst has worked as a journalist, photographer, and freelance writer. In her career, she has published over 1,000 articles and twice as many photographs on local and national issues. In addition to her work as a journalist, photographer and author, Burst is also the co-founder of the Northshore Literary Society. She has participated on panels such as the Pirate’s Alley Faulkner Words & Music Festival and the Tennessee Williams Festival in New Orleans (Burst, 2016).

Deborah Burst has received twenty awards for her writing and photography and has been featured in television and radio shows, including the New Orleans and Mississippi NPR station (Burst, 2016). Of particular interest to Burst is history and architecture, which led her to write columns about historic churches. In 2013, she released an historic church book entitled, *Hallowed Halls of Greater New Orleans*. The book is a compilation of interviews with parishioners and photographs of historic churches taken over the course of 10 years. The foreword for the book was written by famed author Anne Rice who also hails from New Orleans (Burst, 2016). Her next book, entitled *Louisiana’s Sacred Places: Churches, Cemeteries and Voodoo* was released in 2014 and it delves into “history, mystery and the

blurred lines between sacred and profane” (Burst, 2016). *Southern Fried and Sanctified: Tales from the Back Deck* is her third installment in her series. (Burst, 2016). C.E. Richard, the author of *Louisiana: An Illustrated History* has written,

Literature that creates an authentic sense of place can be difficult to find. A writer who can capture the real spirit of a place is even more rare. Deborah Burst is such a writer, and her Spirits of the Bayou does justice to one of America’s most historic and hauntingly beautiful settings, South Louisiana. In words as vivid as her photos, Burst’s work brings readers what is inescapably sacred in this creole corner of the world (Burst, 2016).

Yeye Luisah Teish

Yeye Luisah Teish, also known as Iyanifa Fajembola Fatunmise is most recognized for writing *Jambalaya: The Natural Woman's Book of Personal Charms and Practical Rituals*. In the book, she “dramatically re-creates centuries-old African-American traditions with music, memoir, and folk wisdom” (Teish, 1988). She is the daughter of Serene “Rene” Allen who was of the Catholic faith and of Haitian, French and Choctaw heritage (‘Luisah Teish’, 2018). Her father, Wilson Allen Sr., was an African Methodist Episcopalian. Her father’s parents were two-generation servants and one generation from slavery. She also has Yoruba ancestry in her lineage. In the Yoruba Lucumi tradition, Teish is an *Iyanifa* (mother of mystery/mother of wisdom) and Oshun chieftess. She is one of the most recognized Yoruba priestesses across the globe. She is a noted artist-activist, storyteller, author, presenter and ritual theater director. She has received an Honorary PhD from the International Institute of Integral Human Sciences, a creative writing specialist certificate from Wesleyan University, and a Food & Nutrition certificate from Stanford University. She is also a teacher and has taught a storytelling master class for the Healing Story Alliance (‘Luisah Teish’, 2018). Along with *Jambalaya*, she is also the author of *Jump Up: Good Times throughout the Seasons with Celebrations from Around the World*, *On Holy Ground: Commitment and Devotion to Sacred Land* and *Carnival of the Spirit: Seasonal Celebrations and Rites of Passage*.

Raised in New Orleans, Louisiana, Teish spent much of her youth in the French Quarter where her family lived. On the edges of the French Quarter lies Congo Square. In her childhood, Yeye would lean against a great tree within the square. In *On Holy Ground: Commitment and Devotion to Sacred Land* she describes growing up amidst lush gardens, palmetto palms, marshlands and Spanish moss in abundance hanging from the trees (Birely, Teish, 2013, p. 7).

Yeye Luisah Teish moved to Los Angeles, California as a teenager and was introduced to the bustling concrete jungle, void of lush marshland and instead permeated with violence and heightened, militarized racial tensions. Having lived through the Watts riots, she remembers watching the National Guard ride down her street and pointing guns toward her as she walked into her house (Birely, Teish, 2013, p. 10). During these years, she expressed that to her, the city felt like a “dangerous trash dump” (Birely, Teish, 2013, p. 11). In *Roots, Rocks & Ring Shouts: A Symposium on African American Spirituality*, Yeye explains that in the 1960s she received a scholarship to be a teacher trainee with Katherine Dunham’s dance company, who was a pioneer and innovator in Black modern dance. While dancing with Kathrine Dunham, she not only learned African and Caribbean dances, but they also ate the food, wore the clothes and learned the politics of different regions throughout the diaspora. In the symposium, Yeye talked about how she had once found a small book on West African folklore. She had heard about Greek and Roman folklore and gods such as Zeus, but she yearned to learn more about African folklore and the Orisha. After leaving Kathrine Dunham’s dance company, she became a choreographer in St. Louis Missouri and led the Black Artists Group dance troupe. In 1969, she assumed the name Luisah Teish, meaning “adventurous spirit” and joined the Fahami Temple of Amun-Ra. A decade later she became an Orisha priestess in the Lucumi tradition and began teaching this knowledge in 1977 (‘Wikipedia Luisah Teish’, 2018). In an interview she has stated, "My tradition is very celebratory - there's always music, dance, song, and food in our services - as well as a sense of reverence for the children. It's joyful as well as meditative." (ibid.).

Jessica Parfait

Jessica Parfait has been an active voice against the Bayou Bridge Pipeline, as she says the route could damage places of archeological significance for the Houma nation (Durmansky, 2017). In her testimony at a public hearing she stated, “The fact is, is that pipelines damage our wetlands, and our wetlands are our best and most important defense against hurricanes and flooding. And all of this flooding damages our coast and destroys our unique history.”

Jessica Parfait has held the role of the tribal archivist for the United Houma Nation for the last three years. According to Fire River Films, Parfait hopes to “help her tribe preserve their culture and tell their own stories” (Fire River Films, 2017). Parfait has digitized and organized all of the historical information for the tribe. Additionally, she also leads the domestic violence program for the nation (Loyola Press Release, 2018). She is currently a graduate student at the Louisiana State University, where she is completing her M.A. degree in anthropology. She is studying the adaptive capacity of the tribe in a project in which “tribe members talk to Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) experts about manmade and natural disasters and how they have adapted, joining coastal experts at sea and using GIS to map areas of impact and interest” (Loyola Press Release, 2018). Parfait has stated that her work is a “form of resistance”, whereby she will publish and disperse her findings, which include timelines and story maps that demonstrate the effects the oil industry has had on the region.

Freddi Williams Evans

Freddi Williams Evans was born in 1957 and was raised in Madison, Mississippi. She is the daughter of Reverend R. L. and Carrie Cotten Williams. As an accomplished piano player, she received Bachelor Degrees in both music and psychology from Tougaloo College (The History Makers, 2010). While in college she also traveled to Ghana, where she studied traditional music. With a passion for travel and the arts, she developed her craft as a writer, and eventually received her Master’s degree in creative arts therapy with an emphasis in

music from Hahnemann University (The History Makers, 2010). In expressing her ambitions as a writer, she writes,

My goal as a writer is to promote, preserve and share untold and under-told stories of the African American experience. This endeavor reflects my passion for history and is focused in literature for children as well as adults. My disciplinary artistic background infuses my work as is illustrated by my years of research and numerous presentations on Congo Square, a historic and cultural landmark in New Orleans
(Evans, n.d.)

After getting married, Evans moved to New Orleans, Louisiana and worked as a music therapist. Evans is also a Fulbright recipient and has taught in Fulbright Teacher Abroad programs in Zimbabwe, South Africa and Japan, as well as studied in her travels to Haiti, Cuba and Ghana (Evans, n.d.). In 2002, Evans received the Special Congressional Recognition for Outstanding Contributions to the Arts ('The History Makers', 2010). Along with *Congo Square: African Roots in New Orleans*, which won the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities Book of the Year Award in 2012, she has also authored children's books *Bus of Our Own*, which won the 2004 Mississippi Book Award, *The Battle of New Orleans: The Drummer's Story*, *Hush Harbor: Praying in Secret* and *Come Sunday: A Young Reader's History of Congo Square* ('The History Makers', 2010). Evans illustrates her devotion for storytelling when she writes,

Themes that resonate in my writing include community, family and courage. For young readers, I strive to craft stories that inform as well as ignite a curious desire supporting a life long passion for reading. Throughout my diverse writing and professional endeavors, there exists a common thread of intention: to engage, enlighten and inspire. (Evans, n.d.)

Along with working for the Jefferson Parish Public School System as an educator and administrator, Evans has also been an independent arts education consultant for Orleans Parish Public Schools, the Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, Louisiana State

Department of Education and the Mississippi Arts Commission ('The History Makers', 2010). In 2012, the New Orleans City Council passed an ordinance to officially name the sacred grounds "Congo Square", in large part due to Evans advocacy and historical research (Evans, n.d.). The story of Congo Square has spread internationally as she was sponsored by the American Embassies of France and Senegal to present her work.

Mona Lisa Saloy

Mona Lisa Saloy is an author, folklorist, educator and scholar from New Orleans, Louisiana. She received her Bachelor's Degree from the University of Washington in Seattle, and her MFA in Creative Writing as well as Phd in English from Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge (Mona Lisa Saloy, n.d.). Her work centers around contemporary Creole culture and the culture of Black New Orleans before and after Hurricane Katrina. In demonstrating the value of play, Saloy has documented sidewalk songs, jump-rope rhymes and clap-hand games (Mona Lisa Saloy, n.d.). She has also written about the Black beat poets, Black Creole talk and "safeguarding Creole traditions after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina" (What is Fellowship?, n.d.). Saloy is also an award-winning poet and her first published book of poetry, *Red Beans & Ricely Yours* was awarded the T.S. Eliot Prize in 2005. Her second book, *Second Line Home*, is a collection of poems that celebrate New Orleans by capturing the potency of every day New Orleans speech and family dynamics. *Second Line* has also been said to capture "the solemn grief, ongoing struggle, and joyous processions of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina" (What is Fellowship?, n.d.).

As a scholar, her work has been included in many journals, such as The Southern Poetry Anthology, Louisiana Folklore Miscellany, Children's Folklore Review, The Journal of Southern Linguistics, the Forward to Night Sessions: Poems by David S. Cho published by CavanKerry Press (2011), and the Pan African Literary Journal (Saloy, 2014). Furthermore, as a distinguished speaker and storyteller, she is a consultant to the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities and the Louisiana Division of the Arts (Saloy, 2014). Currently Saloy is a Coordinator and Professor of English at Dillard University and an active member of the Louisiana Folklore Society. In 2014, Saloy was recognized by the Margaret Burroughs/New

Orleans Chapter of the Nation Council of Black Artists as the best female artist and as an Exemplary Faculty in scholarship and creativity for her work as a professor and coordinator.

The biographies above provide a deeper understanding of the interview material in chapter seven. The distinctive repertoire of each informant demonstrates their extensive knowledge in Louisiana storytelling, folklore, spirituality, cultural perpetuation, resistance and their connections to place, all of which blend into the four primary themes uncovered; Storytelling, Sacred Lands, Resistance and Counter Narratives.

Chapter Seven: Data Analysis

In my interviews, the following 4 themes were discussed as central to their understanding of the interrelation between Storytelling & Resistance in south Louisiana: 1) Storytelling 2) Sacred Lands 3) Resistance & 4) Counter-Narratives.

Theme 1: Storytelling

Oral Tradition

As noted in the previous overview of storytelling & resistance chapter, the oral tradition is intrinsic to the cultural origins of these communities in south Louisiana. Some respondents noted how integral oral tradition has been in Louisiana, as it has historically been the only safe and oftentimes, legally permitted means of transmitting history and knowledge for certain peoples.

Jessica Parfait discusses how Terrebonne Parish, where much of the Houma community resides, did not comply with the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education ruling which desegregated public schools, until about a decade later (Ng-A-Fook, 2007, p. 55). This left much of the Houma population illiterate and only able to impart knowledge orally.

A lot of our elders are illiterate. We don't have a lot of written records. So, all of our knowledge, everything we have, comes from stories. And because of a lack of access to education, that continued here for a very long time... a lot of our history is still oral tradition. Storytelling. I'm trying to document that before it's lost.

(Parfait, 2018)

Nana Sula echoes the sentiment that colonialism has historically restricted certain peoples from being able to relay history and knowledge in any way other than orally.

Almost everything that we believe in is based on oral tradition. When Africans were taken, they were unable to take a notebook and drums with them. So, our traditions became preserved orally (Nana Sula, 2018).

Mona Lisa Saloy relates how she witnessed her grandfather struggle with illiteracy, yet she notes how this barrier had little effect on his ability to perform and tell stories.

Papa still couldn't read or write. He signed everything with an X until the end. But he knew the Bible by heart. He was quite a preacher. And he was very wise. He could really tell some stories (Saloy, 2018).

Similarly, Freddi Williams Evans discusses the importance of oral tradition in understanding the perceptions of historically silenced peoples.

Storytelling has helped me because I value oral tradition. People did not write down a lot of the history of Congo Square and African peoples. We don't have the written history that we should have. We have to piece together what we can. But when writing, I valued what had been passed down and that I had a reference to check up on. I would say "according to oral history"... I was not always bound to what was written down. White people actually wrote what they saw, but they interpreted it so badly (Evans, 2018).

Even though Parfait, Evans and Nana Sula have all noted that oral tradition has been central in making it possible for their communities to pass down history from their own perspectives, Nana Sula also recognizes the unique positioning of Louisiana in regards to its maintenance of parish records, and how that has been helpful in confirming the oral history of one's genealogy.

Well I think that here, there are a lot of slave narratives and oral history that has been preserved here in the south. Particularly in Louisiana, parish records were kept very well. For example, I may not have documents that my grandmother was a blood healer in Cane River, but I know she was a healer based on the ways in which people have told the story generation to generation in my family. This is how oral tradition

is preserved in most families of color. My aunty before she died told me “I want to teach you a healing prayer and you are to tell no one”. This day was very pivotal in my life because I knew she was passing a sacred baton on to me (Nana Sula, 2018).

Traditional Knowledge

Parfait also discussed how much of the traditional knowledge of the Houma people is passed down orally.

For a long time, it (oral tradition) was the only thing we had. And so, it was the only way to pass down our different types of traditions. Whether it be moss dolls or baskets or anything like that. And I think it still is because we’re still learning from our elders who aren’t capable of writing these stories. I don’t think they understand sometimes just how valuable the knowledge that they have is. They might not write a memoir about it but many of them love to talk about it. I’ll show up, and some of them will have two hour conversations with me about how much they love the land (Parfait, 2018)

Even today, storytelling in Louisiana is frequently interwoven with the transmission of traditional ecological knowledge. For instance, much of Nana Sula’s storytelling about the Orisha, takes place at herbal shops or coincide with community herb gatherings that are focused on teaching people of color traditional folk medicine, in particular medicine used by enslaved Africans.

Saloy speaks to this when she explains how in Louisiana, stories have helped Black and Black Creole peoples hold onto necessary survival skills that aided them in enduring slavery and its vestiges.

It’s our bread and butter. It’s how we live through everything. The stories are our anchor to wisdom, to faith, to our sense of ourselves. It’s an ancient strength that bubbles up when you need it. It was so honored.... the stories kept people, us,

healthy. We knew what plants we could eat. We knew what kind of mint you could make tea from. You knew where the bay leaf trees were. You knew what kinds of berries you could eat and not, only through the stories and what is passed on. There were no books on this (Saloy, 2018).

Jonathan Foret talks about how storytelling was interwoven with learning the traditional knowledge of his Cajun fishing community, while spending time with his grandmother.

I grew up with my grandmother babysitting me, when my great grandmother was still alive. So, it was my grandmother and my great grandmother, while my mom was working as a teacher. That was a beautiful way to grow up. It really was. My great grandmother spoke nothing but French and so we communicated even though I didn't speak French back to her. There were chickens. There was a garden. I would help pick up the beans and I helped peel shrimp as a kid. You know, like my grandmother gets an ice chest of shrimp and then we sat there and we peeled the shrimp, and while we did all of those things she told stories. This was a way for me to learn the history of my people while I'm peeling shrimp, while I'm fixing fish. When my grandmother was young there was no t.v. and so the entertainment was storytelling and some of them were fake stories and some of them were real stories. They were beautiful, beautiful stories. I have some of them written and some of them play on the same archetypes of most folktales you know, lots of snakes, lots of hypnotizing. You know, being connected to this and connected to that. It was entertaining and there was a lesson to be taught. And some of them were connected to our family. The storytelling and a sense of place, because our stories are connected to a place and they were told in that place, while doing situational things, like peeling shrimp, and chopping okra... this is where we discuss those things. It wasn't like we went to a coffee shop and those stories were being told. It was like while we were living our lives (Foret, 2018).

Cultural Continuity in Folklore

In her book *On Holy Ground: Commitment and Devotion to Sacred Land*, Yeye Luisah Teish relays that storytelling was a prominent aspect of her younger years. She writes about how on hot summer nights they would gather on the grass as her mother told stories of Br'er Rabbit and Br'er Fox, the moon falling in the well, and Pere Malfait who would come from the depths of the swamps and kidnap children left at home. She also describes how the people in her area frequently spoke in proverbs (Birely, Teish, 2013, p. 9).

As a young child growing up in New Orleans. I found myself in a culture, and especially in a family where we were educated and sustained through the use of story and proverb. When I was coming up, your intelligence was measured by your ability to decipher proverbs. Your view of the world came to you through the stories that the elders. Peoples' history came in the form of story, you know. So, I'm blessed because my mother was an avid storyteller who could make any piece of folklore, any piece of history or local news, sound like it happened to her yesterday. Stories that I heard from her when I was seven, I didn't find out that they were classic African-American folklore until I was 19, you see, because she told them in such a way that it made you think that it happened to her. But that's the beautiful thing about such stories. Even more ancient history has been preserved in them. You know, Aunt Nancy of Jamaica is really Anansi, the spider of Ghana. And just the fact that we know that recounts the history of one continent to the other. It proves the sustainability, and the viability of that tale with all of its meaning in that whole series of stories (Teish, 2018)

Jonathan Foret also discusses how Cajun folklore has preserved its essence from Nova Scotia, but has also been transformed as a result of Louisiana's influence. This is most clearly seen in Cajun folklore when examining the Rougarou; traditionally described as a werewolf figure that lives in the Bayous.

A lot of the folks down here were immigrants from Nova Scotia when they would not pledge allegiance to the English king. They were expelled and then came here and met up with the Native Americans that were in the area already. It could have also been settlers from France bringing those stories over. We don't have wolves in southern Louisiana, there are coyotes though. And so, the story sort of shifted too. Some people believe the Rougarou to be a shapeshifter and not necessarily a werewolf. The Rougarou could change shape to different animals. Typically, it would be a white animal. It would be like they saw a white dog walking along the street and that was a Rougarou, or there was a rooster in the tree that was crowing at midnight and that was the Rougarou. The traditional ones are more like a head of a dog and the body of a man. So, they've kind of used the dog or coyote version instead of the wolf because we don't have wolves around here. I think the importance of those stories is that it unites a group of people. It doesn't matter if you believe in the Rougarou or not. It just matters that these are the stories of a group of people. The folklore of a group of people (Foret, 2018).

Similar to Yeye Luisah Teish, Mona Lisa Saloy also had a realization at one point in her life that much of the folklore and proverbs she heard as a child from her grandfather were actually rooted in West African storytelling and were meant to transmit cultural values.

He told great stories. It wasn't until I was in college that I learned that these were West African tales, passed down by word of mouth, face to face, generation to generation. My favorite one is the one where he tells, sometimes it's a palm tree and sometimes it's a banana tree, but the father told his son (And then my Pappa told me. . . .) that if he climbed the tree to get the fruit just to gorge himself, he would make himself ill, and no one would ever forgive him for his lack of sharing. He didn't say lack of sharing; he'd just say no one would forgive him. He said, but if he climbed the tree and captured the fruit to share with everyone, not only would he help people, but even those who had lived and died before him would call his name in

reverence. That is our task; to give back and to help one another. He never explained that to me. What is it if you explain the proverb? (West Africans say that today still.) He expected us as we grew to learn what these things meant (Mona Lisa Saloy, 2018).

Teish shares an example of how culturally specific proverbs are, and how they influence our understandings of our cultural identities.

Your sanity, not just your intelligence, but your sanity is shaped by what stories you hear...how they are interpreted. This is a cultural thing. I was saying the other day, I just did a class on proverbs. I was in a session with women from a number of places and we were talking about proverbs, and I said you know I was told that “it is the squeaky wheel that gets the oil”. And the Japanese girl said “oh, I was told that the nail that stands up gets hammered down”. Okay, so I’m being told if you have a need, to open your mouth, and she’s being told if you stand up, you will be hammered down. Now that’s indicative of two very different cultures, where she as a woman has to be quiet or she’ll get hurt, and me as a Black woman better open my mouth or I’ll get nothing. (Teish, 2018).

Saloy reveals the imperative responsibility of folklorists. By uncovering personal and collective stories and histories, folklorists function as a compelling and powerful channel to gain understanding of a people.

Thank god for folklorists because we’re going to put the humanity back into the story of what happened. I used to think historians did that but they don’t. They stick more to the facts.... who did what. There’s no sense of who the people are. That’s what drew me to folklore. That this is the real humanity, like literature. It’s just that literature is often imagined; and as a creative writer I know that it’s imagined often from reality, just like people will fictionalize their life story or something. But when it’s folklore, it’s the real deal-- the real proverbs. It’s the real experience that is a

lesson. It's the lesson of the telling, plus the celebration of the telling, or the skill, or the beauty that's created. That's true art in its rawest form. And hopefully humanity will not lose that, especially in the age of artificial intelligence. I don't think any A.I. can do that. The folklore is what I live for. The stories. That's what endears me to books... which is why I can't have enough of them because I'm always looking for the next story, always looking to understand a people, or a time, or just what really happened (Saloy, 2018).

Performing Identity

An element that makes Louisiana especially distinctive in its storytelling, is its heavy underscore of performance. There are multiple expressions of this. In *Remapping Performance: Common Ground*, author Jan Cohen-Cruz writes,

Expressive culture in New Orleans is reflected not only in the wealth of storytelling in both art and everyday life, but also in how much people perform local identity (Cohen-Cruz, p. 45).

Louisiana is often times referred to as the festival capitol of the United States, as it is home to an estimated 400 festivals a year. The performative acts expressed in many of the festivals are also inextricably linked to identity.

Foret speaks to the influence of Louisiana's celebratory culture on Cajun folklore in his Rougarou Festival.

We come in with the festival and we make the Rougarou something fun. Our Rougarou is not terrifying. Our Rougarou has a top hat and cane and is dancing. This is our current depiction of the Rougarou (shows picture). This is not something that's terrifying. This is something that's like come have a good time down the Bayou. And that just sort of happens organically I guess (Foret, 2018).

In *Remapping Performance: Common Ground* Cohen-Cruz also quotes Nick Slie, a Cajun-born performer in *Cry You One*; an outdoor performance that takes the audience on a journey to witness the disappearing wetlands through song, story and procession ('Cry You One', n.d.). Slie States,

When the cultural form that you're looking at include storytelling, street dance and music, and parading, theater might become more like that. I have been particularly inspired by the social functions of these traditions. We need to codify what's particular about New Orleans theater. Some theater folk down here think we need more regional theater, but why just look at theater practices for inspiration? We deal with old forms- a Mardi Gras Indian down the street from me is weaving a half million beads in 300 days. That practice is more interesting to me as an artist than the latest opening of a play (Cohen-Cruz, 2015).

The Second Line and Black Indian parades demonstrate the ways in which performance relates to storytelling in New Orleans, as well as how these acts in themselves are representative of counter narratives to the dominant prevailing Eurocentric account. Second Line parades began in the late 1800s and its variations are exemplary of the Black performative traditions of New Orleans, such as Black Indian parades, jazz funerals and other street festivals throughout the year. Second lines occur every Sunday in a different neighborhood throughout the city. Historically, they are rooted in the African dances performed by slaves in Congo Square, and are a predominant element of the cultural fabric of New Orleans (Doleac, 2013). Second Line and Black Indian parades are participatory as they are rife with song, sacred and secular dance, drumming, brass bands, and ritual, such as the jazz funeral processions that are evocative of their historical roots in ancient African burial rituals. Another defining characteristic are the 'call and response' chants that conjure West African musical traditions (Ferguson, 2018).



Taken at the 2018 Mardi Gras Indian Super Sunday parade.

Mona Lisa Saloy speaks to the performative element in Black and Black Creole culture in New Orleans, which is reflective of the role the Griot plays in traditional West African societies; a storyteller who is also a musician and engages in performance.

We're hams (laughter). In every family, there's some hams, and we love it. When you encourage talent, it's going to blossom, and that's the bottom line. The ones who have the gift, who become something else in front of people, they could be the shy one; but when they get up in front of people, they pour their hearts out in song, or in story, or poem,s or something. But it has to be encouraged and nurtured. It's part of the beauty of life. It's innate art. It's humanity at its best. It's what softens us. It's what makes us appreciate nature. It is nature (Saloy, 2018).

As demonstrated in the overview of storytelling and resistance chapter, which discussed the continuation of West African culture through storytelling, Saloy expounds upon this by explaining how she has perceived much of the performative nature of storytelling in Louisiana's Black communities being innately West African in its expression. When asked if she believes that there is a performance element in storytelling, and if some of that element has been passed down from West African traditions, Saloy made reference to the 'Crick Crack' performance tradition that is popular throughout Caribbean nations. In this storytelling performance, the audience is an active participant, thus blurring the lines between audience and performer (Creighton, 2009). In the following quote, Saloy draws parallels between Caribbean styles of storytelling, and expressions of a similar nature in Louisiana that stem from the performative essence of West African traditions that focalize a leader and chorus, which affords the audience the opportunity to participate in aspects of the whole storytelling process (Creighton, 2009). Saloy states,

We do it a little differently than in the Caribbean, yet similar (they call New Orleans Caribbean North for good reason). For example, Papa would start to say "oh and then his brother said.. It would always be "And then." Whereas in the Caribbean they might say "crick crack". Oh, and this one I love... At the end of tales, we say, "we stepped on the pin, the pin bent, and that's the way the story went." Or sometimes, "we stepped on the spot, the spot splat, and that's the way the story stopped.. Like that. There was always a little... for us to get the signal, that it was time for it to be over. Even when the performance ends, it ends with a performance. Then there's some joy in that because you had this shared experience and you can savor it. That is very West African. I've seen it in other parts of where we have blossomed in the Americas.

We can see from the interview data above that storytelling in Louisiana is deeply embedded in a distinctive historicity; where historically rooted, diasporic cultures have a living continuity. A continuity that is marked by the contemporary circumstances and location of particular ethnic communities. It is apparent that in this context, storytelling is not some arcane preserve of cultural specialists; but continues as a living element in community life. As Paul Gilroy has noted, the cultures of communities marked by a history of slavery and dispossession are not static, nor are they fractured from their shared history: but may be seen as a dynamic “changing same” (Gilroy, 1991).

Theme 2: Sacred Lands

Each of my respondents felt a strong connection to place, and regarded particular places in south Louisiana as sacred. As scholars such as Ivanna Yi have noted in theorizing the conception of *storying land*, these places are significant for Louisiana storytelling, as they inhabit the folklore and hidden histories of certain peoples. Within the folklore and historicity of these sacred places, they are embodiments of traditional knowledge, spiritual tradition, and resistance to protect and care for the land.

In *On Holy Ground: Commitment and Devotion to Sacred Lands*, authors Yeye Luisah Teish and Leilani Birley recognize that they come from cultures that have maintained connection to land. They write,

We are blessed to be two women of color who have grown up in a spiritual culture that has survived centuries of oppression and kept its regard for the sacredness of land intact and in the forefront of our behavior and rituals

(Birely, Teish, 2013, p. III).

Spirituality

One cannot recognize the sacredness of place without observing its spiritual basis. Nana Sula explains how she views her identity as sacred, as she is a reflection of both her ancestors and future generations.

We are embodying sacred space by simply walking in the divine feminine because we resurrect the spirits of our grandmothers and aunties. We also stand on the strength and wisdom of our fathers and grandfathers, bringing us into alignment with all that is. As we live this journey, we come into the knowledge that we're ancestors in the making, so we have something that we must leave for the generations that follow (Nana Sula, 2018).

She continues by highlighting the love her ancestors held with the land. Who were they? What did they do in the world? All of these questions must be answered to understand who we are in this current time.

For me it will always go back to the ancestral connection. Who were my grandmothers? What were my grandfather's doing? They were honoring the earth. They were honoring their families. They were honoring their word. They were honoring their commitment to what they said. They were honoring sacred actions. Therefore, I too must strive to do the same (Nana Sula, 2018).

Jonathan Foret discusses the role religion has historically played in Cajun folklore.

There was a heavy religious undertone back in the day, largely catholic in this area. It was said that you would become the Rougarou if you did not observe lent for seven years in a row. That would mean going to The Way of the Cross (The Way of the Cross is a catholic ceremony on Fridays during Lent). Not eating meat on Fridays during that time... fasting... the whole 9 yards. I am living proof that that is not true. There was also a part of the story that you would be cursed to become the

Rougarou. There would be some powerful person who could curse... you know, use the force of magic, nature or whatever, to curse a person (Foret, 2018).

Deborah Burst echoes this in her book *Spirits of the Bayou: Sanctuaries, Cemeteries & Hauntings* when she writes,

Some say the Rougarou is a religious monitor. Many Cajuns are Catholics and mothers would tell their children if they broke their Lenten promise, the Rougarou would hunt them down. Older generations considered it a part of their cultural heritage, the passing of history from one generation to another (Burst, 2016, p. 205).

In Cajun country, it is clear that the Catholic religion had an influence on the perceived role of the Rougarou, as the folklore was used to ensure the people adhere to religious customs.

Yeye Luisah Teish explains the importance of honoring the sacredness of the elements in nature and how she is witnessing a growing trend of people returning to traditions of making places sacred.

I can't imagine living in a world where nothing is sacred, and we're headed there. I think that if we do not recognize the sacredness of place. If we don't recognize the power, as a people and as a species, we will go crazy. Birds recognize that trees are sacred, fish recognize that water is sacred. If we cannot recognize that certain places are sacred and/or can be made sacred, regarded as sacred... I've seen within the last twenty-five years, a trend now where no matter what religion people belong to, or what neighborhood they're in, or what race they are, if there's an accident on this corner or somebody dies here, people now have the habit of making roadside alters. You see that? That is a very, very old tradition that is being reborn in urban areas out of spiritual necessity. That certain things, certain spiritual acts... if we lose them all together, we are no longer human. Having spaces that are sacred is part of participating in the energy of nature. You cannot not have places that are held in high regard (Teish, 2018).

For the peoples of Louisiana who are the focus of this study the domain of the spiritual has not been some revered element of being that is located and nourished in an imagined non-substantial world. On the contrary as we shall see below, the spiritual is permeated through the lived world and has a particular grounding in space and place. Thus, land and place is not merely a territorial domain: it is also a site of spiritually suffused memory and currently lived spiritual engagement where the fusion of identity and place takes on a multidimensional character.

Historical Trauma & Land

Scholars like Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart and Joy DeGruy have identified the ways in which historical trauma and post traumatic slave syndrome relate to Native peoples and descendants of enslaved Africans. Two respondents, Yeye Luisah Teish and Nana Sula, both felt strongly about speaking to the complexity surrounding those who have had their connection to land disrupted, particularly in the south.

Yeye Teish illustrates how peoples who have been colonized have a relationship that is suffused with trauma, which has not only had physical and emotional ramifications, but also a spiritual impact on the connection the ensuing generations have with their environment.

We've only got one earth. One planet earth. If you are a human, then you belong somewhere on earth. But if you are a child of an enslaved person, an immigrated person, a migrant person or a person whose home base has been invaded, there's an alienation that occurs with that kind of exploitation. You have to re-acclimate to a new land base. I mean let's take a minute on the enslaved African who saw snow for the first time. "What on earth is this? We didn't have this in my homeland. This is mysterious. This is different." How do we acclimate to a different landscape? Imagine people, especially African people, from the dense interior of the rainforests who may have seen great rivers and streams, but all of the sudden these people are

chained to the bottom of the deck crossing the seemingless ocean. Think about the people who had never seen an ocean, and all of a sudden... this is not a river or lake that can be crossed. This is an endless journey to a mysterious place. You know? Getting to the place, landing in the place, and acclimating to the reality that you're in a different land can be daunting. Now once you get there and you realize you're going to be there, that land is your place of survival. It is the foundation of your existence. Besides being plantation chattels... slaves. I have to learn which of the plants I can eat in the wild. What is the name of that flower? And very, very important for the person operating out of an indigenous mind, who are the spirits on this land? Who are the spirits of this land? (Teish, 2018)

Yeye Luisah Teish continues by explaining an intellectual and spiritual transference that occurs after physical forced migration and genocide, and the ways in which collective peoples can attempt to repair and heal their relationship with the land.

Now we have to make an intellectual transfer from the African animal to the western hemisphere animal. The jackal in folklore in West Africa becomes the American fox, you see what I'm saying? And the same is true with the plants. With the elements; with the wind, with the water, with the sun, with our view of the sky. Also, your relationship to land can be changed by the occurrence of massacres. If there's a massacre on a plot of land, it either becomes dreaded and avoided or we take the other step and acknowledge the presence of many ancestors fell there so we make it sacred. We make it sacred, you see? That's the way we handle that kind of occurrence (Teish, 2018).

In *On Holy Ground: Commitment and Devotion to Sacred Land* she describes her formative years in Louisiana. She writes,

The crickets and the frogs sang at night and the fireflies danced in the darkness. Rattlesnakes and cottonmouth moccasins curled up in the blackberry bushes and once

in a while some bold alligator would crawl out of the bayou and end up on the dinner table with the crabs and the cornbread. We pulled crawfish from the creeks that ran alongside the house and on special days, we had picnics on the levee and wove hair ornaments, bracelets and belts from the wild clover that grew there
(Birely, Teish, 2013, p. 8-9).

She later continues,

I thought the land and the water belonged to us. I enjoyed climbing up on top of the house and looking over the vast expanse of moist green land. It appeared to me that the trees were the nappy hair on the Earth's head. I loved this place where all of nature appeared to perform for me (Birely, Teish, 2013, p. 9).

With a pronounced connection to the land she lived upon, she was disheartened when a white man gave her family a legal document stating that they needed to build a fence outside their home, and the land she played upon that was beyond the fence, was now the property of Exxon, the oil company. Exxon replaced fruit and willow trees with pipelines that emitted radioactive waste. With this colonial assault, also came a radical shift within the consciousness of the community she lived in. She explains that when the company came, the title “subdivision” was changed to “suburb” (Birely, Teish, 2013, p. 10).

With this change, she writes,

Now we were supposed to behave differently. There was an encroaching message to give up our “old plantation ways.” We were made ashamed of self-sufficiency and told to become “more civilized” consumers. The “plantation shame” still hides in the consciousness of many African Americans in the North and West.
(Birely, Teish, 2013, p. 10).

As Pan-Africanist intellectual Frantz Fanon popularized, Teish speaks to the ‘colonized mentality’ and urbanization that ensued after their second forced migration; the Great Migration.

You have the people in New Orleans that have become urbanized. And the people on the West Bank are viewed as 'dem country people', which is another land phenomena that was created. A lot of the Free People of Color or the Black people that started moving north; that Great Migration, they would look at landed people in the south; people who were growing their own food, and building their own buildings, and raising their own animals, and there was a feeling of "oh they're just a few decades off of the plantation". You see what I'm saying? And it took a lot to make people understand that the Great Migration north also had its drawbacks. At first it was just escape from the plantation, get off the land. But then you get to the northern cities and all you've got is concrete. All of the sudden the land is not feeding you. The land is not taking care of you (Teish, 2018).

Even though Nana Sula recognizes the trauma that her African, Native and Creole ancestors have endured, she also identifies an advantage of people who have remained in the rural south uninterrupted for the last century. Whereas many fled to the north to escape racial oppression, many of those who endured the rural south have been able to physically maintain the land that their ancestors lived on.

We have been fortunate in my family, in North Carolina and Louisiana, to still have the land that our Great-Great Grandparents lived on. There are family members and neighbors that are holding sacred space that could say, "Grandma so and so, from two generations back lived here. Her house was right over there, over yonder," and, "so and so had the well right over here." That's why everybody up north goes down south. They say "I'm a go down south and see my people." In truth, people yearn to reconnect with their roots and the stories of their grandmothers and grandfathers in order to know who they are better. When you know the stories of your people, it gives you confidence to move forward. Especially when you see what they have endured.

Most often Granny and them are still in the same house with the Aunty on the corner and the Uncle down the road. A lot of our traditions have been held together orally, and on top of that, here in the south we're blessed to add that other component, which is we still have this land and our people on it that can still tell our stories. The land and the people are critical. When you have land, that's something nobody can take from you. Your ancestors Àhe (life force) is on that soil (Nana Sula, 2018).

Jessica Parfait recognizes the emotions Houma elders experience in witnessing the loss of their homelands.

I can look at maps, I can look at old aerial photographs and I can see land loss. But the feeling of that, and the effects that has had, isn't conveyed in the images as well as it is in hearing elders talk about it. Like my grandmother for instance, when she talks about the land loss, it just leaves an expression and sadness in her face... how much she loves the land she grew up in and the culture. I just interviewed an elder this past weekend and I think he started out the interview with "it's the craziest place in the world but it's the most beautiful place in the world." And just hearing him speak with such passion about something that's not there anymore... images in any archive cannot convey what elders can (Parfait, 2018).

In the above statements, Nana Sula and Parfait personify the integral connection between stories, the land and its people in Louisiana. As Nana Sula delineated, her connection with the land is not solely based on one with the earth and the elements that nourish her, but it is also a way for her to maintain her connection with her ancestors. For Parfait and future generations, the elders also play a central role in conveying the integral relationship between the Houma peoples and the land. In this light, land does not simply carry our collective stories and history, but it is intimately tied to our genealogy and personal stories as well.

Protecting the Bayous

In *Spirits of the Bayou: Sanctuaries, Cemeteries and Hauntings*, Burst illustrates the inherent power of the Bayous

The bayous themselves have created their own territories, laid claim to their own land. Imagine a spider web and its finely tuned fibers, some small, others large, but all equally stunning. And so are the bayous carving banks and tendrils of land, some thick and some thin, all deep inside these mystical forests (Burst, 2016, p. 184).

As the swamps in Louisiana instigate fear in many people, Jonathan Foret reveals his reverence for the Bayous.

It is a sacred place (the Bayous). It's a sacred place because stuff decomposes in the swamps. You know that swamps aren't like a prairie of beautiful flowers. It's a place to be respected. And that may fall in with the sacred bit of it, you know? There are things that can eat you in there. But I wouldn't be afraid. I wouldn't be fearful of it. But I would be respectful of it (Foret, 2018).

Deborah Burst explains her frustrations when writing about environmental issues in Louisiana, and how it has led her to write about its sacred places.

When I was at Tulane they kept telling me, you need to be an environmental journalist. In the early years, I was almost like a specialty writer on coastal erosion. I received many awards for it. I wrote in some national and local magazines. Then I just had to take a break from it. It was so frustrating because you think you were finally getting something done and then there would be some kind of political change, be it a new president... a new congress or whatever, and you would fall apart. So, I believe it's critical that journalists not only write about the environment, but write

about those sacred places... places people don't know about. You can write about the science of the environment, but it's also important to write about those sacred places that could disappear at any moment. Sacred meaning, we've got to keep them. I guess I kind of evolved as I got older, saying "alright I want to go to the artistic side instead of the scientific side." (Burst, 2018).

She later spoke specifically about one place in Louisiana that she considers especially sacred.

I'd say the Atchafalaya basin is probably one of the most sacred places in the world. It is the largest river swamp in the world. I mean there's so many unique things about it. (Burst, 2018)

Similarly, Jessica Parfait considers the Atchafalaya a highly sacred place, as in the past and present, Bayous provide for and protect the Houma people.

It (the Bayou) has always provided for us. Before this government came in, before assimilation happened, we built our homes out of moss and palmettos which were readily available. We ate fish and shrimp and whatever was in the waters. It provided everything we needed. I would also say that in a time of forced assimilation and the trail of tears, and boarding schools, they (Bayous) also harbored us. We were protected from a lot of those things because we were hiding in the swamps... At a very specific point moving southwards, the census records stop. I know my ancestors inhabited places south. They just didn't go there, and they just didn't bother people, and those people were allowed to flourish. There just weren't paved roads or anything that went there. Some places were only accessible by boat (Parfait, 2018).

Burst relates honoring the places and traditions she deems sacred, with her creative work as a writer.

Sacred places to me is not only religion, but it's the history of the place and it's the history of the customs and the culture. Be it a church, cemetery or a tradition... like funeral traditions. We have the most unique funeral traditions from all over the world. You know, I describe Second Line and different ways we bury our dead. But also, sacred to me are the Bayous. They are sacred because this is the stomping grounds of our native American culture. Right there on city park under those sacred oaks, along Bayou Metairie that is no longer there... way before the Europeans got here. That was their hunting ground, and that's where they would camp out and do their hunting and fishing. Those trees, some of them were 800 years old. You see, that's sacred grounds. And a lot of these grounds they worshiped because they were sacred.... So, my sacred places, I tell people... they automatically think it's religion, and I say well, it's also trees. Trees are sacred to me. Without them we would die. So, sacred to me is anything that is well worth sharing the story. But it has to be beautiful. It has to be unique. As a creative, it's important that we educate people on the nature of why it's sacred, so we don't lose it. I can continue and write articles about it, but there's something about books that's forever (Burst, 2018).

In acknowledging the historical trauma that has unsettled Black peoples' relationship to land, particularly the forest and ocean, Yeye Teish holds special reverence for the Bayous, as they have existed as places of refuge for Native and enslaved Africans in Louisiana.

Really, really important for African-Americans, and I'm happy to say that more and more African-Americans are overcoming this difficulty, but especially in urban Black people, especially in people who have been ghettoized, is a terror of the forest. There is a fear of the woods, because that is where we were lynched. When I first published Jambalaya, and I said to people I'm going to go do a presentation at such and such encampment, like the place we're at now for this conference, there would be people

who first of all would say “aren’t you afraid to go into the forest like that? You know what happens to us in forests.” You know the tree has strange fruit. Your relationship to nature has been traumatized. You got people who came from a forest in Africa that was their livelihood and their understanding, you put them in alienating circumstances, put them in a vast body of water to a different landscape, but the forest here has now been made into an enemy. The only time, the first, that the forest becomes a friend is when maroons are escaping from the plantation. Now knowing the swamps and the forest becomes important. You know, one of the things that we knew, was people were kept from learning how to swim because if you could swim then you could escape. There was not encouragement for us to learn how to swim which gave people a strange relationship to the water. But the Bayous became places of refuge. The Bayous became the friendly danger where one could escape. One could hide inside the body of a decaying tree. One could get lost in the Spanish moss. One could hide out there and could not be found. You know? So, we had the relationship of camps of maroons hiding out in the swamp (Teish, 2018).

As a very specific environment, the Bayous have a unique ecology and topography that is also suffused with the very specific history of its relation to people of color and their histories of oppression and resistance. It frames storytelling within a historically powerful and culturally evocative context.

Protecting Congo Square

This particularity of locale, history and the continuing vitality of storytelling is also to be found in the current context of Congo Square.

In her book, *Congo Square: African Roots in New Orleans*, Freddi Evans writes,

African and cultural leaders around the world continue to be inspired by the legacy of the African descendants who gathered in the sacred space at Congo Square. Like “African seeds planted in the American soil”, a phrase coined by writer Keith Medley, the cultural practices and performances that persisted in and around Congo Square bore fruit to manifest itself and make New Orleans a distinct North American city (Evans, 2011 p. 117).

In her younger years, Yeye Luisah Teish grew up near Congo Square. She speaks to the transition from refuge in the Bayous to finding urban places of sanctuary, like Congo Square.

We come out of the swamp into the more urban areas and we get places like Congo Square. We get places where Free People of Color can gather and reestablish their sense of community without the overseer looking over their shoulder (Teish, 2018).

In the middle of the crescent city, one of the most noted physical aspects in Congo Square is a particular tree, that many regard as sacred.

In the video *Teish in New Orleans* on youtube, Teish states,

I have memories of my grandfather used to go there and lean up against a big tree, and just take in the sunlight (‘Teish in New Orleans’, 2010).

In a presentation about Haiti and the music of Congo Square at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival in 2011, Luther Gray from the Congo Square Preservation Society states that Houma people have explained that the area was regarded as sacred ground for the nation and trees were a significant part of their rituals on those grounds.

Native and Indigenous people, they would have their rituals on sacred ground, but sacred ground was not a place where people inhabited. So, your sacred ground wasn't where you lived, it was a place that you went to. And so, this area of Congo Square was sacred ground. It wasn't a place where people lived, they traveled there for their rituals. And one of the things they always did was they would plant a tree in the Four Directions, the north, the south, east, and the west. And there's a particular tree in Congo Square that is, I'd say twice as big as any other oak tree, and...we don't know by fact, but I believe that that was one of the ones ('Haiti and the music of Congo Square', 2011).

Teish also made reference to the same tree in our interview when she acknowledged the particular sacredness of that tree in Congo Square.

Lean up against that tree. That tree has a lot of history in its bark. That tree has seen and heard gatherings that's gone on there for 400 years (Teish, 2018).

Freddi Evans explains how for her, Congo Square is reminiscent of her experiences in church.

Congo square is sacred because of what happened there and because of the people... the repeated gatherings of hundreds and hundreds of peoples, sometimes thousands. That makes it sacred. We know about the religious practices. It was a praying gathering. It's just as sacred as any church. You had the unification of mind, body, spirit carrying them to places beyond where they were, to give them the fortitude to keep going. It pulls you together like church (Evans, 2018).

Nana Sula explains the importance of honoring cultural protocol while in a sacred space, and how people continue to do so in Congo Square.

I think there are a lot of people that come to the park that don't know what all of the drumming is about. But then they see that we're sincerely dancing, pouring libation and calling on the power of our ancestors. It is not a joke. There is an order to all things. We open in prayer. We honor the ways of our ancestors. We pour libation as a drink offering to them. We drum. We give reverence to the ancestors, drummers and dancers. We follow a protocol. And in the end, we close in prayer. So, it's not just like we're out there beating a drum and acting wild and crazy. We're setting examples of how to be in sacred space (Nana Sula, 2018).

As a specific location in the middle of a major city Congo Square acutely characterizes the distinctive role of place as commonplace for merging the present histories of identity and spirituality with a trajectory of struggle and resistance that continues today.

This section on Sacred Lands reveals another dimension of the complex dynamic that is storytelling in south Louisiana. It shows how storytelling as historical transmission of shared knowledge and performance within a culturally specific environment, is grounded in particular locations that themselves are richly suffused with spiritual and historic reverence.

Theme 3: Resistance

At Stake

All of these Sacred Places are at risk, whether it be by the petrochemical industry and its impact on climate change, or from real estate development and gentrification. The respondents explain what they feel is at stake if these sacred places are not protected and why it is important to safeguard them.

Jonathan Foret illustrates the fear he carries around coastal land loss and what it would mean for his Cajun culture and community.

There is a diaspora of people, people who can afford to move out are moving out, you know what I'm saying? What happens to our culture? If our culture is so tied to the land, what happens when you move away from that land? And can you continue to participate in that type of culture? Especially for us that are so connected to food and seafood, if we don't have access to the seafood. Or is it that we move north as the land washes away, and we always are close to the coast? Because we may lose our house to flooding down the Bayou but if we move up a little bit then we have what we had before. Do we just keep moving north until... I mean like at some point we're going to reach land that doesn't go underwater (Foret, 2018).

Jessica Parfait echoes Foret's sentiment when she explains the threat of losing an entire way of life for coastal communities.

I just want to say everything. Hurricane protection. Everyone will tell you that our protection against hurricanes were the barrier islands and those are disappearing so quickly. Those are basically little speedbumps before hurricanes hit the coast and now they're just a fraction of what they used to be. I do a lot of research around coastal land loss. As we're losing a lot of this land, flooding becomes worse, salt water intrusion becomes worse, we're losing cypress forests, we're losing animals that are either dying or migrating, and with that goes an entire way of life; an entire culture. People in coastal communities, they can't fish where they want to fish. We're losing historic sites and tons of historic settlement sites are underwater. We're losing history. We're losing culture. Eventually we're going to lose homes (Parfait, 2018).

Both Foret and Parfait are fearful that their cultures, Cajun and Houma, may not survive environmental degradation and coastal land loss in south Louisiana. Further, Foret is fearful that with this loss, aspects of his culture and heritage may not continue to be relevant for the future generations of Louisiana Cajuns.

I also wonder like, let's look at ancient Roman cultures, ancient Greek cultures, like what was at stake for them? Is their culture in existence now?... Because their culture has morphed into whatever it is now... and maybe that's another arrogant thing for us to think that we want to protect our culture. We want to protect our heritage... but what if that's just what the people need at that particular time due to their environment, and their surroundings, and what's around them? Then it just changes to fit the needs of those people. If our culture and heritage doesn't fit the needs of the people then is it valuable to keep it the way that it was? I don't know. There are many cultures that do not exist anymore. And there's a reason for that. Is this our reason? What we're facing, is this the reason why this doesn't exist anymore? And then it changes to something else? Future generations of us are going to go someplace. We want to talk about the importance of stories, what if that's all those people have... the future generations from us. What if all they have are the stories of what it was like. (Foret, 2018)

Foret here is asserting his understanding that storytelling is much more than an artistic accomplishment and cultural amusement. He is concerned about the role of storytelling with a vital cultural continuity that must have an apparent and substantial context.

Freddi Williams Evans explains that if Congo Square is not protected from development, it would not only be a loss for the descendants of enslaved Africans in New Orleans, it would be a tremendous sorrow for all Black people in the nation.

If it's not protected, the legacy, the history is at stake. If we don't protect it physically, we would lose more than a landmark. It's more than a physical location. You would lose a physical location but it's a reference point to African culture in New Orleans, in the nation. Everything goes back to Congo Square. It's... ground zero for everything that is African based (Evans, 2018).

Nana Sula shares the consequences of mass development on sacred grounds for both the developer and those who regard it as sacred.

It would be a tremendous setback if mass development was done to reconstruct Congo Square. It would not stop the power of our ancestors, but it would alter the vibration of the land. I doubt our ancestors would allow that. There is a mighty ancestral force there that will come out of nowhere to protect us. It has protected our ancestors for generations and will protect us as well. That's the reality that we're dealing with in Congo Square! So, big money people or developers might try to take something from the land, but there will be something taken from them in the end. It's equivalent to taking sacred rocks in Hawai'i, you can take them but in the end, you will return them because you will realize that there is an omen upon your head that you're not prepared for. Congo Square is no exception. It is sacred ground. That's why the Congo Square Preservation Society was erected. The Congo Square Preservation Society's sole purpose is to guard the sacred ground and make sure that our ancestors are honored. (Nana Sula, 2018).

Yeye Teish mirrors Nana Sula's statement above, but takes it a step further by upholding her spiritual belief that the Indigenous spirits of the land and the Orisha (West African spirits in nature) will aid in the resistance to fight the desecration of sacred grounds.

It's like somebody says that central park is holier than this spot over here and that's only because of what they've invested in it. That's just because they've found a way to exploit it. But we know that there are power spots. We know that there are lay lines. We know that there are places where the air is purer. You know where the soil is better. But here we go bottled water, if there's a place where the water is really clean it gets bottled and sold to you. You see so in the meantime, you've got idiots that can't see that running a pipeline is going to poison a whole bunch of people. The earth is a living breathing being, which means it has consciousness. Which means it responds to abuse... I have told people over and over if we keep dumping shit into the ocean, we keep playing around with chemicals, we keep playing with recombinant DNA and all of that kind of stuff, one day, we're going to piss Yemaya off and she's

going give us something that makes Godzilla look like a kitten. You can't keep doing it without suffering (Teish, 2018).

When asked what is at stake if her neighborhood is not protected from gentrification, she responded by stating;

A discontinuation of the culture. For example, in Trem , the kids can no longer walk down the street playing instruments. People complain about the noise. Well, when you live in a small house, where are you going to practice? I mean, we live outside. And so, what you do? Make music. That is potentially the next great so and so. But they'd rather stop our kids from doing that. Another thing is under the overpass, under the I-610... they took all that beautiful Avenue of the oaks and put the interstate. Of course, they did that to most Black cities... and we took that back. Now there's festivals under there. And Black men sit there and talk smack. The new residents don't like seeing Black men in a huddle telling stories... that's a problem right now. They want those men to disperse. Well, it's their right. They're retired men; they might be infirmed; they probably worked hard their whole lives. They might not have a lot of money. They might not have a place where they can congregate at home. So, they can get a crate, turn it upside down... play cards or something else... They might have a little taste of something, or drink a cold beer, or sometimes they're not drinking at all. But I am just appalled that I keep hearing these kinds of complaints. And it's just not fair. Even Stallings playground, which is across the racetrack, there's a group of men who hang out every day, and the white residents want them gone. That is terrible. We were there, the Neighborhood Association of the 7th Ward... because we needed a place to meet. They would say "see, see those people need to go." No, they live here; this is their neighborhood. The playground is not just for kids; it's for everyone. And so, what are they doing?... Their telling stories, their laughing, nobody's killing each other.... So that's what's wrong. If you move people into the neighborhood who are not from the culture, en mass, then who's going to learn to mask? Who's going to learn to bead? Who's going to learn to

dance? Who's gonna learn how to sing? Who's going to make something beautiful? It's not going to happen... That's the danger of gentrification. I mean people can afford to do what they want to do. But if you love the culture, why would you want to interrupt it? (Saloy, 2018).

Acts of Resistance

It is clear that the respondents feel strongly about protecting these sacred places as they have demonstrated that they are vital for their physical and cultural survival. In addition, these sacred places carry and personify stories of resistance within them.

Jessica Parfait has stated that her work is a “form of resistance”, whereby she will publish and disperse her findings, which include timelines and story maps that demonstrate the effects the oil industry has had on the region. In a short film produced by Fire River Films, she states,

We come from a very strong line of strong matriarchal women, who have always done what they've had to do to fight for their people, and that's what I want to continue to do. (Fire River Films, 2017).

Teish elucidates varying ways that resistance has historically manifested in Congo Square with the legendary Black, Native and Creole voodoo practitioner, Marie Leveau.

Congo Square became a very, very important meeting place... especially under the practicing voodoo practitioners under mademoiselle Marie Leveau, who was actually running a central intelligence agency out of Congo Square. That is where she gathered her people, where she conducted rituals to turn attention there, while something else was actually going on elsewhere. That is where, she had different segments of the community to come together, the Black people, the white people, the

Native people, they all would come together in Congo Square. That is where... she set things up so that the hairdressers who were doing the hair of the politicians' wives, and through gossip and getting information about them, that she could use to blackmail them. She was continent a blackmailer. Oh yes, she was expert. And the square was a place for... it was a place for calling attention to power. So, there was the famous case of how she changed the public execution law, because when they would hang somebody, they'd make a public picnic out of it. It became a landed public event, like a picnic ground. And so, white people would come and they'd make picnic baskets, so they could sit out and watch the Black man be hung. That was the event of the day. She had made a promise to this one man that his son would not hang, and she stepped into the crowd and invoked the lightning. Lightning struck the gallows so that they could not hang him. After that, they changed the public execution law... they changed the public execution law because it was such a display. You know Congo Square has all kinds of stories and energies in it (Teish, 2018).

In the age of technology, where everything is on full display, Nana Sula expresses the need for communities globally to examine the strategies of resistance practiced by their ancestors, and revitalize them for the present and future.

We're coming into a time where we have to move as our maroon brothers and sisters did. We have to fortify ourselves and move as a strong body of people rather than on individual levels. That's how our ancestors made it. (Nana Sula, 2018).

Freddi Williams Evans explains that the simple act of embracing one's own cultural traditions on sacred ground in public, in spite of immense pressure to assimilate to the dominant white American culture, is in itself resistance.

They were stripped of culture, language. As long as they could, they practiced their cultural dance and music. They were not willing to take the European culture. Congo square shows that they were not willing to give up their culture. As much as the laws tried to take it (their culture) away... they wouldn't let them (Evans, 2018).

The following statement mirrors Freddi Williams Evans' reflection, as Nana Sula explains the history of reclaiming Congo Square in order to continue that practice of resistance today.

After Hurricane Katrina, Congo Square was gated off and closed. Several of us spiritualists, dancers and drummers, came together and decided to “break into the park”. We said, “Wait a minute. You think our ancestors waited for permission from these white folks to do what they had to do?” Why can't we just get in there and go the back way? Our ancestors would bust the gate down. What's wrong with us? Why are we sitting up here waiting for permission from people who don't want us in there anyway? The next Sunday, several of us met by the sacred tree, and we began to drum again and organize (Nana Sula, 2018).

Jessica Parfait is also enacting resistance as she explores the impacts of oil and gas on the Houma nation. Parfait has stated her intention in participating in the fourth Indigenous Women's Divestment Delegation in 2018. She explains the necessity of including the personal stories of those impacted by environmental damage that is perpetuated by the petrochemical industry.

I will be attending this delegation through my research I have learned a lot about the effects of oil and gas on my community. I have learned how much environmental and human damage they are accountable for, and I want to put personal stories to the survivors of their collateral damage. Historic communities have already been lost and communities of color suffer at disproportionate rates along Louisiana's Cancer Alley, and if the industry is going to continue to harm our people and the environment, then investors should know what they are funding (WECAN, 2018).

Ancestral Power

The role of ancestors was also inherent in the resistance of some interviewees. Nana Sula highlights the important role that Congo Square plays in connecting with ancestors to aid her people in current struggles.

The obvious sacredness is that our ancestors were able to practice their spiritual traditions without being interrupted during the time of slavery. They have drummed and danced on this land since the 1700's. Africans were able to sell their goods, dance, drum, buy and trade. We go there today to continue to honor their legacy and call on their power. As we drum and dance on the earth, we are reconnecting with them and asking their power to join us in this current time. We need them now as much as we did then (Nana Sula, 2018).

As Nana Sula expressed the importance of the drumming in Congo Square to call the power of the ancestors, scholars like Clarence Bernard Henry, have demonstrated that the drum has acted as the heartbeat of many resistance movements throughout the African diaspora (Henry, 2008, p. 127). In the National Museum of African American History and Culture, a caption reads,

The drum, imbued with a powerful force is a sacred instrument. Drummers play rhythms to call specific Iwa or ancestral spirits, who aid in the struggles of daily life. Drumming is associated with slave rebellions across the Americas, which is why whites banned the drum and ceremonies (National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington D.C)

Nana Sula continues by re-emphasizing the role the ancestors play in the liberation of Black and Native peoples, and the importance of seeking their support to erase the false narratives that have been told about who they are.

We've won almost every fight historically through the power of our ancestors. Almost every successful maroon community, rebellion, and successful movement has been because the people joined together and called upon a force deeper than them and higher than them, that they could not see. They had faith on the unseen level that they would be helped, based on the perseverance of their ancestors. We have survived the plantations and reservations because of the power of our ancestors. In some cases, it looks like we've lost. But we know that it's the strength of our ancestors and our traditional beliefs that have carried us through. We know that in spirit, we have actually won (Nana Sula, 2018).

Yeye Luisah Teish not only reiterates the historical and current attempts to sever the relationship between Black people and the land, but she notes the ways in which Black people in Louisiana have persevered in defying that severance.

Some people would say ok, give me forty- acres of the gold rush country in California. Some people would say give me forty acres of downtown Manhattan. Some people would say, you know, give me forty acres of this that and the other. But as we start talking about reparations, I sincerely doubt that reparations are going to result in the giving of land. They'll find a way to give some money to some organization that is supposed to represent reparations to us but it won't be. It won't be that. It feels like there's a real directive to keep us either alienated from the land, separated from the land, or in a life and death struggle to keep the land. Keep it from being polluted... And ironically in the middle of all that, our spirituality is still able to recognize the sacredness of a tree. We still do baptisms in water. We still have stories about fantastic creatures that live in the environment (Teish, 2018).

The present concerns of sustaining influence and power for struggle and resistance, reveals the fusion of the themes related to spirituality, the importance of place, and the continuing relevance of storytelling as a means of bringing history and cultural knowledge into the practice of politicizing these sites of struggle.

Theme 4: Counter Narratives

Complementary to the theme of resistance, there is the related theme that focuses upon the necessity of identifying the colonial gaze that has been imposed upon Black and Native consciousness; and the essential task of producing counter-narratives that will challenge this hegemonic assault. It is bringing to the context of storytelling and resistance in Louisiana the decolonizing and liberatory agendas that are central to Indigenous methodologies.

Yeye Luisah Teish explains the important role storytelling plays in one's quest for identity, and the cause and effect of Eurocentric false narratives on Indigenous and Black peoples.

Searching for identity is something that just about everybody goes through throughout the world, but that quest is a major theme in storytelling, in mythology, in fiction. Going on the quest is sometimes projected as the quest for a cup, or the quest for a book, but it's always a quest for one's own place in the world. That's the real meaning of that quest. It becomes even more important for peoples whose original lands have been invaded and plundered, and for people who have been removed from their native land because... their sense of grounding is disturbed. It's very much uprooted. Especially with people of African descent, we are scattered all over the diaspora. We're scattered all over south and central America, the Caribbean islands, we're scattered all over this hemisphere especially, with a negative mythology out there that says the only way we got here was as slaves, and that story is not true. When we start to move away from the Eurocentric story of history we find out that there were all kinds of global travel before Columbus. Our definitions of race were very different actually. What's known as the white race didn't even exist. That's not a definition. Unfortunately, history becomes the story of the conqueror. It becomes how the conqueror tells the story. And so, Indigenous people everywhere, finds that their history is distorted, misplaced, etc. That makes the quest for being, and the quest for grounding more important and more difficult (Teish, 2018).

Teish continues by discussing the conflicting and false narratives that permeate the United States, and the impact it has had on the psyche of Black youth.

You have the stories that your elders and your neighbors are telling you. You have the lie that you are being told in school, you know... in 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue is a lie. Then you get the fantasy that's projected on television. And so, as an African-American youth, you may not articulate these terms, but what's going on in your psyche. Your sanity, not just your intelligence, but your sanity is shaped by what stories you hear, how they are interpreted (Teish, 2018).

In examining the implications of certain narratives, Teish recognizes the contextual differences and interpretations of the narrative by the colonizer and colonized.

We will find this kind of dynamic between cultures and we will always find a misinterpretation by the colonizer. We will always find a misinterpretation by the colonizer. I think the example that comes to mind there is if you're touring Mexico, you know there is a place called "isla de mujeres"; "island of the women". But if you have a western educated tour guide, he's going to point to it and say that's the "mountain of the witches". Those are two different stories, you know. Said very distinctly, but a clear distortion of history. So, everything becomes what story have you been told, and what story do you believe (Teish, 2018).

She also illustrates how the attempt to disconnect Black people from the land, has sustained false narratives that not only dishonor the intersections of their struggle, but also contributes to division within and among social movements.

It's very funny the way those dynamics go back and forth toward land. I have to say even over the last twenty-five years, I have seen Black people in urban areas become more land aware. There was a time when being land aware was uncool. And this is

another manipulation that happens... let's see in 1968 I wrote an article for Mid-City community news in St. Louis Missouri. At the time that is when there was the very first budding of discussions about ecological and environmental concerns in the inner cities. So, I was teaching at Pruitt-Igoe, which is one of the worst projects in the world... I was investigating lead poisoning because the children in Pruitt-Igoe were eating the paint off of the wall and getting very, very sick. And there was zinc oxide in the water because Monsanto was poisoning the water... and I remember I had to write an article because the general tenor was urban Black people thought that the environmental movement was taking attention away from the civil rights movement and the Black Power movement. I had to say, the fact that this movement is dominated by young white men is a trick. We need to take a look at the fact that our communities are the most polluted. We need to take a look at the fact that our communities are where they dump the stuff. We need to take a look at what's happening to our water. But when a rich country like this, projects an image of limited resources, then it keeps people fighting over access to those resources, including the resource of attention. Who and what are you allowed to pay attention to? And, Black concern and energy is often manipulated by labeling something as the province of whites. White people do this, so you ain't supposed to do it. Or, this is white peoples' concern, it ain't your concern. Anytime somebody tells me it ain't my concern, I'm going to investigate if it is my concern. I'll tell you whether or not it is my concern (Teish, 2018).

In the above statement, Teish discusses the presumed division between the civil rights and Black power movements, and the environmental movement. She explains that even though communities of color are often times the most impacted by environmental issues, many within these communities have been conditioned to believe that environmental concerns belong to the white populace. This psychology, along with a disrupted relationship to land, neglects the intersectional dimensions of systems of oppression and hinders participation in resistance against environmental racism.

Freddie Williams Evans explains how much of her relationship with Congo Square is to offer a counter narrative to the dominant one that has been told, which has erased the perspectives of Black peoples.

My relationship (to Congo Square) is one of wanting this information known. My purpose is to tell the story. This is one that is under told and in many cases not told. My whole relationship is to tell it, starting with the general public (Evans, 2018).

Through sharing his uncles story, Jonathan Foret explains how the folklore of the Bayous is changing over time, and this has had an influence on the role that the Rougarou plays for the Cajun community in resisting coastal erosion.

There's my uncle, who had an encounter with the Rougarou. It was all soul's day... so it was a holy day of obligation. He was a teenager... and nobody was home and he decided to go hunting in the backwoods behind his house. Because it was a day of holy obligation, you're not supposed to kill anything, right? So, he's out hunting and he sees this rabbit in the distance and so he pulls his gun and then he hears this "roaaar" kind of thing. He turns and he looks and he sees the Rougarou, red eyes, teeth with the fangs and everything. He gets terrified and he had a little hunting dog with him and they just turn around and run. By the time he gets back to the house, the little dog is already there by the door waiting... But when he tells that story it was not that the Rougarou was coming after him because he wanted to get him. It was coming after him because he was doing something wrong to one of the creatures in the swamp. The way he tells it, the Rougarou is there to keep everything in order. And to keep things how they should be in the swamps. I really like that idea of the folklore changing from this wolf creature wanting to eat people, to this superhero of the swamp making sure that everything is the way that it needs to be and should be. Especially as we deal with coastal land loss and trying to protect and restore the coast for the people here (Foret, 2018).

Foret has adopted his uncle's perception of the Rougarou as a protector of the Bayous, who must also be protected. He uses the folklore to raise awareness about coastal erosion through the *Rougarou Festival*.

The Rougarou Fest was a way for us to raise awareness about coastal land loss in a way that could be fun and culturally appropriate. Because if the Rougarou does not have a place to live then neither will we... I think that the festival in the long run may have an influence on how our folklore is used for the people. We are sort of making the Rougarou a little... I mean we acknowledge everything about it, but by making it more of a protector, I think we help to guide my uncle's experience. (Foret, 2018).

Deborah Burst agrees that the Rougarou Festival is a culturally appropriate, unique and effective way of educating people about environmental issues in Louisiana through the use of folklore.

I believe folklore should be those stories that the grandparents or great grandparents hand down from the ones before them, like Rougarou and the Honey Islands swamp monster. They still talk about the Jean Lafitte being out there. I interview people, if they've experienced visits from their family while at the cemetery. I'll put that, but I don't ask for that, they volunteer that. I don't want my books to be, "Oo the scary, haunted cemetery". I want them to see the history, the folklore, the culture. But I believe coastal erosion, as you saw in the book... it can be very difficult to understand. It can be very political... very controversial. It's hard to explain that to people who aren't from here. Jonathan, did a great job in using folklore to help educate people about coastal erosion (Burst, 2018).

In our interview, Jonathan Foret told me the story of "Lost Island" or "Isle Dernière"; a barrier island that suffered a massive hurricane that wiped out 200 people in 1856. Along with an existing fishing community, the island attracted wealthy plantation owners who

would visit the during the summers. Foret discusses the importance of telling the untold stories of this hurricane, such as one where a servant told the family he worked for the best strategy to survive; and when the family refused his advice, they all perished other than him and the daughter whom he rescued.

The reason I tell you that story is this ain't our first rodeo. Our people have been doing this for generations. We have lost people to this. We have seen this island disappear. By tapping into our own history, there's a little bit of power and/or resilience, I hate that word, but a sense of... yeah, like this ain't our first time doing this. We goin figure it out. Or as they did then, there are going to be places that are not inhabitable. For us to think that we're going to draw this line in the sand and that's going to be it, like that's not happening. We live in a delta. This is what delta's do. You know what I mean, especially delta's that have been engineered to not allow the settlement to go to rebuild land. That's what we need to do with the stories. Is to reconnect the people to their own history to understand what has happened and what was the future of those folks. Let's look at that, and then maybe we can figure out that may be our future as well (Foret, 2018).

Foret believes these stories should continue to be told, so his community understands that they have endured environmental catastrophes and their culture has still survived.

Stories that reflect the strength and resilience of ones' people is an essential aspect of survivance. As illustrated in the data analysis chapter, survivance stories and cultural continuity through storytelling, are socially relevant and necessary in addressing the contemporary struggles faced by these communities and peoples across the globe. Traditional storytelling not only reminds collective peoples of who they are and where they have culturally and spiritually come from, it reawakens memories of past strategies and practices that uphold their self-determination for the present and future.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

My Ancestors

*We don't know how they felt inside
When they lost their freedom and their pride.
Would you want to walk in their shoes?
This isn't the life that I would choose.
They tried real hard to break the chain
But when they pulled, it tightened again
No matter which way they turned
Their lives were forever ruined.
Many true stories were never told
They lost their identity when they were sold.
Their names and culture were all gone,
Left in a new world all alone.
With severed roots and broken vines,
Oh how I wish that I could find,
My birth origin from which I came,
Then I would know my real name.*

- Helen B. Williams (Excerpt from 'From Birth to Longevity')

Just as I had opened with my grandmothers' poem 'I went home again', I am closing with an excerpt from her poem 'My Ancestors'. In this excerpt, she mentions silenced stories as one of the many consequences of colonization and slavery, and colors the intergenerational trauma that has ensued from a disrupted relationship with ones' homeland, and how that has

impacted her quest for identity. It is a reminder that even though Louisiana has a conscious Black and Native historicity and cultural continuity, this does not wholly fill the continuing void for the descendants of enslaved African and Native nations who were forcibly relocated from their homelands. Still, as demonstrated in my research, traditional storytelling can resurrect the silenced stories and can help to heal this disrupted relationship to land. Throughout this research process, I have been able to intimately work with my ancestors in a way that has been nourishing and healing. By exploring storytelling and resistance in Louisiana, I was afforded the opportunity to develop my own personal narrative, and place it within the collective stories of peoples working towards liberation and self-determination.

In summary, there were four primary themes that were identified; Storytelling, Sacred Lands, Resistance and Counter-Narratives. These themes are interrelated, and are reflective of the continuing relevance of the salience and power of storytelling in Louisiana.

My informants represented varying ethnic and cultural identities, who revealed the ways in which Louisiana has maintained the continuity of its' historical presence within each community. The interviews illustrated that even though all groups have a shared marginalization and cultural assault from the dominant population, their perspectives are shaped by distinct cultural and historical differences. These differences are integral to understanding the grounded experience of struggle and resistance in the present. It is also paramount that one takes a holistic approach when examining resistance in diverse locales such as Louisiana, and the intersectional identities and dynamics should be accounted for.

The data analysis chapter demonstrates the profound and emotional relationship between the informants and the Bayous and Congo Square. This connection between the storytellers and the sacred lands and sites of struggle highlights that their distinctive repertoires shape the continuing vitality of storytelling in Louisiana. The informants expressed that they felt their communities' oral histories were rather neglected by the media, and they believed these stories were of particular importance in regards to media surrounding coastal land loss and gentrification.

Much of my data is speaking to the power of storytelling as a performative act. The vitality of the story along with the co-presence of storytellers and audience, adds a distinct dimension to the communicative process. To translate traditional storytelling within these communities to the western dominated media sphere is a process that eliminates this element, even though the cultural resonance and symbolic power may persist. However, in the context of a 24-hour news cycle it is difficult to carry all of this potential forward. This suggests that further research which more directly explores the interplay between storytelling, relationships to land, and the media sphere, (mainstream media as well as Indigenous and ethnic minority media), is both necessary and desired. We must also examine how these elements surface within the social media sphere of contemporary resistance movements and explore culturally appropriate means to integrate these stories within a wider media sphere.

Carrying out research from within an Indigenous research paradigm carries a responsibility of bringing your own identity with you into the research process. The essential relational nature of the methodology carries with it a strong sense of obligation toward those who join you in the revelation of the issues under examination; and in this research, I have been honored by the trust and commitment of the people who have generously given of themselves in enabling this research. The vitality of storytelling in Louisiana, revealed in this study, is a resource that must be cherished and whose powers should not be underestimated.

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