

# *Morally Decadent Trickster Figures in Francophone Oral Literature beyond the “Hexagone”: a Case of Racist Colonial Administrative Policies*

- Daniel E. Noren  
Ferris State University

Over the past quarter of a century, a group of creative modern-day Pléiade writers, poets, and linguists in Martinique have been intensely purposeful in fanning the flames of the Créole language, keeping it alive and fighting on the forefront of the battle against the Frenchification of this centrally-located island of the Lesser Antilles. The three contemporary “*immortels*” of Martinique: Dr. Jean Bernabé, Dr. Raphaël Confiant and Dr. Patrick Chamoiseau, have written what amounts to a manifesto for the Créole language and culture, *Eulogy to Creoleness*, of which the following quote is a good summation of the actual state of their struggle and reality of living every day under the Créole banner.

*“La Créolité est notre soupe primitive et notre prolongement, notre chaos originel et notre mangrove de virtualités. Nous penchons vers elle, riches de toutes les erreurs et forts de la nécessité de nous accepter complexes. Car le principe même de notre identité est la complexité.”*

- Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, *Éloge de la Créolité*, (Gallimard, 1993) P. 28

One very important manifestation of the Créole language are the many oral traditions extant that have come down from centuries of lived experiences, and cohabitation with Europeans (French) in a minority relationship, from the point of view of culture and language. Dr. Patrick Chamoiseau describes the oral tradition aspect of the culture in vivid detail in the following passage:

*“XVIIe, XVIIIe siècles. En Martinique. D'abord, Imaginer la nuit sur l'une de ces grandes plantations de canne à sucre appelées habitations. Les champs se sont vidés. En haut du morne, la maison blanche du maître a connu la lueur des soirées familiales, puis s'est éteinte sous l'emprise du sommeil. Tout dort: l'économe, les commandeurs, les dogues d'Europe et les petits chiens créoles.*

*Au bas du morne, dans le quartier des esclaves, un personnage émerge de l'une des cases de nègres. Des esclaves sont là, sous un vieil arbre, qui l'attendent, qui l'espèrent. Cet homme n'a pourtant rien de particulier; d'âge mûr, il n'est ni plus ni moins insignifiant que les autres. Le jour, il n'est qu'un nègre de cannes qui travaille, souffre,*

*transpire, et qui vit dans la crainte, la révolte ravalée. Peut-être même est-il plus discret que plus d'un.*

*Mais la nuit, une exigence obscure dissipe sa lassitude, le dresse, l'habite d'une force nocturne et quasi clandestine: celle de la Parole, dont il devient maître.*

*C'est le Conteur."*

- Patrick Chamoiseau, *Au temps de l'antan, Contes du pays Martinique* (Hatier, 1988), P. 9

In her *Preface* to the *Contes et legends des Antilles*, Thérèse Georgel also writes a wonderful description of the Antillian story teller:

“Aux Antilles, comme l'a dit un poète martiniquais, ‘*Aujourd'hui c'est dimanche et c'est demain dimanche, et ce sera l'été quand l'été finira.*’ La vie antillaise donne une grande place aux contes. Ils font partie des veillées mortuaires. Ils sont de tous les soirs. Jamais on ne dit un conte en plein jour. On risque d'être changé en panier de bambou. On attend la nuit chaude, la nuit claire. Les contes sont dits en créole, ce créole naïf, léger, coloré, qui donne tant de sel aux récits et qui est résolument intraduisible. Le créole se parle dans toutes les isles et jusques en Louisiane. Sous les Tropiques, il n'y a pas d'aube ni de crépuscule. Le soleil, après une apothéose de quelques minutes, disparaît. Et la terre est plongée brusquement dans l'obscurité. Alors les lucioles volent. Les grillons se mettent à chanter. La brise de terre apporte avec elle tout le parfum des savanes. C'est l'heure des contes. On s'installe dehors, autour de la vieille ‘**da**’- servante qui fait partie de la famille. Elle met son vieux chapeau ‘bacoua’ contre le serein. Et elle commence :

*‘Bonbonne fois!*

*Trois fois bel conte.’*

C'est l'histoire du compère Lapin et de Léphant venue d'Angola. C'est l'histoire du petit Poucet, amenée jadis par quelque cadet venu chercher fortune aux isles du Vent. On rit, on pleure, on trépigne, on applaudit, on chante en choeur avec la ‘**da**’. On est parfois silencieux. Alors la ‘**da**’ crie: ‘*la cou dô?*’ (la cour dort?).

On répond ensemble: ‘*Non ! la cou dô pas!*’.

Et elle enchaine...On aime avoir peur, on frissonne. Une chauve-souris nous frôle. Un cigare brille dans l'ombre. On se rapproche de la 'dâ'. Les nuages prennent des formes fantastiques. Des feux follets courent sur les mornes. On pense aux 'zombis'. On se blottit contre la 'dâ'. Elle aussi a un peu peur ! Elle sent le vétiver, le ricin, le tabac. Cest délicieux!"

- Thérèse Georgel

In the forward of his most delightful collection of orature ("*oraliture*"), Contes Créoles des Amériques (Creole Oral Traditions of the Americas), Dr. Raphaël Confiant of Martinique states that the trickster figure in the plantation society is primarily a survivor, without morals. This is an anomaly since orature traditionally has been used as an entertaining educational tool in Western culture, instructing children in proper conduct. It is through the medium of the trickster figure that children learn that greed, selfishness and pride lead to bad ends. In the European tradition we can note such childhood heroes as Reynard the Fox, (*When Reynard Taught Wolf How To Fish*, and the moral of the story, "She/he who wants all, loses all." *How Reynard Tricked Chantecler Into Singing For Him*, "Don't be fooled by flattery."), or Turtle (*When Turtle Wanted To Travel To Far Off Lands*, "Pride comes before a fall.").

Three thousand miles to the south-east in Congo (former Zaire, and previously the Belgian Congo), Turtle's main qualification for being a respected and venerated trickster is due to the fact that his whole being is driven by the whims of "*mayèlè mabé*" (from the original Lingala), literally translated as "bad wisdom", though the linguistic fit implies the ultimate in a deceptive way of thinking, the supreme opportunist, having only one's most selfish interests at heart (much like Zaire's former president Mobutu, a product himself of the colonial environment, and the undisputed King of Zaire's tricksters).

The polarity between these oral traditions (continental Europe, and the Francophone diaspora), we believe, is due to two very opposing and different cultural milieus; one of the **colonizer**(Africa) or "**Planteur/Béké**" (Plantation owner, Caribbean) and the other of the **colonized** (Africa) and **slave** (Caribbean). The trickster figure in Francophone oral literature beyond the "*Métropole*" is the mouthpiece of his/her social position, commenting on daily life in the plantation society, or under the strong hand of the colonizer. As Dr. Confiant points out, the most important aspect of life as a slave in that harsh system was daily survival. Thus, Compère Lapin (Brother Rabbit/Bre'r Rabbit) must be extremely selfish and look out only for number one. Compère Lapin is first and foremost a survivor, at the expense of everyone else if necessary, just the opposite of the Western world's notion that the good of the many outweighs the good of the few.

Two thousand miles across the ocean in Senegal, Hampâté Bâ's trickster hero, the little hare "*Petit Bodiel*" (just like *Leuk le lièvre*) is given the following advice about being a successful and crafty individual, infused with deceptive personality traits. First he wants to learn:

“...les aptitudes à la ruse, afin de pouvoir faire comme au royaume des fils d'Adam, ‘où les plus rusés deviennent rois, **exploitent** les autres et les asservissent.’ ” - Petit Bodiel (Page 18)

Following is more advice and the experiences that *Petit Bodiel* goes through in the process of qualifying for tricksterdom, taken from Hampâté Bâ's *Petit Bodiel*, and quoted from a paper I gave at the Duquesne Language Conference in Pittsburgh in 1995:

*Premièrement, c'est chez un vieil oryctérope, animal très sage, que Petit Bodiel reçoit un avis très important. Il lui dit; "Guéno (Dieu) t'a donné une taille minuscule. Il faut, pour compenser, qu'il te rende plus malin. Je n'irai pas jusqu'à te donner le conseil d'être malhonnête, mais puisque tu es faible, tu dois être astucieux."*

*Ensuite, "La richesse et les pouvoirs élèvent les coeurs. Or, la ruse est un piège perfectionné pour les capturer sur la terre que nous habitons."*

*Un trompeur peut être élu par Dieu, ou le prétend. Quand Petit Bodiel retourne à la terre, il affirme; "Je suis le Représentant mandaté et même patenté d'Allawalam (Dieu) sur la terre."*

*Puis, le rusé a "un cerveau docile et fertile".*

-Hampâté Bâ, *Petit Bodiel*

The trickster figure in Francophone oral literature is the mouthpiece of his or her generation, and it is their eyes that provide us with a lens through which we can understand the plight of the colonized peasant or hopeless daily existence of the slave; it is history through the eyes of the “wretched of the earth” as opposed to those in power. Jean-Paul Sartre’s following statement from his introduction to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (*Les Damnés de la terre*) is powerfully appropriate:

*“Européens, ouvrez ce livre, entrez-y. Après quelques pas dans la nuit vous verrez des étrangers réunis autour d'un feu, approchez, écoutez: ils discutent du sort qu'ils réservent à vos comptoirs, aux mercenaires qui les défendent. Ils vous verront peut-être, mais ils continueront de parler entre eux, sans même baisser la voix. Cette indifférence frappe au coeur: les pères, créatures de l'ombre, **vos** créatures, c'étaient des âmes mortes, vous leur dispensiez la lumière, ils ne s'adressaient qu' à vous, et vous ne preniez pas la peine de répondre à ces zombies. Les fils vous ignorent: un feu les éclaire et les réchauffe, qui n'est pas le vôtre. Vous, à distance respectueuse, vous vous sentirez furtifs, nocturnes, transis : chacun son tour; dans ces ténèbres d'où va surgir une autre aurore, les zombies, c'est vous.”*

*“Europeans, you must open this book and enter into it. After a few steps in the darkness you will see strangers gathered around a fire; come close, and listen, for they are talking of the destiny they will mete out to your trading centers and to the hired soldiers who*

*defend them. They will see you, perhaps, but they will go on talking among themselves, without even lowering their voices. This indifference strikes home: their fathers, shadowy creatures, **your** creatures, were but dead souls; you it was who allowed them glimpses of light, to you only did they dare speak, and you did not bother to reply to such zombies. Their sons ignore you; a fire warms them and sheds light, and you have not lit it. Now, at a respectful distance, it is you who will feel furtive, nightbound, and perished with cold. Turn and turn about; in these shadows from whence a new dawn will break, it is you who are the zombies.”*

- Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Press Inc., 1968) P. 13  
(Copyright 1963, *Présence Africaine* by François  
Maspero éditeur)

In Jan Vansina's *Kingdom's of the Savanna*, he states “*The strong point of all oral tradition is that it is history as recorded by insiders. sic... The oral traditions are at opposite poles from the written records.*” (p. 9)

The following story, recounted to my brother in French, in Kinshasa, Zaire in 1985 is a prime example of a colonial era oral tradition, with the unique view from the colonized perspective. The trickster in the story is Turtle (“*Koba*,” in Lingala), the most common and most successful trickster of Central Africa.\* Turtle (in my opinion) represents the common Congolese peasant under the Belgian colonial regime. The pig in the story, “**Cochon**” in French represents the “**Colon**” or colonial. “*Colon*” obviously has a double entendre and the proximity to the word “*Cochon*” is perfectly appropriate (“*salaud de colon*”) for this classic story of **Colonized** vis à vis **Colonizer**.

The story opens up with Turtle arriving at his mud hut in a flurry and informing his wife that he has just had an encounter with Pig (Cochon) in the market. Pig reminded him about a large debt Turtle owed him, and warned Turtle that he was coming to the former's house to collect a significant sum of money owed him by Turtle (much more than Turtle had).

\*J.P. Hulstaert, a Belgian priest in the Mbandaka area of Congo (right on the Equator) where the dominant ethnic group is the Mongo, collected hundreds of oral traditions during his forty-year career there. One of his works, *Contes Mongo*, comprises some 1,500 stories of which Turtle is clearly the most successful, deceptive, witty, and venerated trickster of the region.

Turtle comes up with a plan that cannot fail. He will transform himself into a table by turning over on his back, and his wife will use his flat, hard belly as a table, where she will be crushing peanuts with a flat stone to make peanut butter.

Pig arrives in a huff and demands Turtle's wife what has become of her husband. Turtle's wife responds that he just went out in the “*zamba*” (bush) to relieve himself. Pig, angered beyond reason, grabs the nearest thing, the “table” (actually Turtle) and throws it out the door with a tremendous heave. It lands way out in the *zamba*. A few seconds later Turtle comes casually strolling in and nonchalantly greets Pig who

immediately demands his money. “*The money I owe you?*” Turtle demands. “*O.K., no problem, let me go get it from the underside of the table, where I always hide my money.*”

Of course the table is gone, and Turtle “discovers” that Pig has hurled it out the door in his fit of rage. The blame and responsibility are thus cleverly shifted to Pig. Pig immediately runs outside into the zamba around Turtle’s hut and begins rutting around with his nose, in the brush and in the mud, like Pigs do to this day, looking for the table and money hidden under it, which he will never find.

The first observation one can make about this story is that it is clearly a new version of *La Farce de Maître Pathelin* (probably the most famous Medieval farce in the French Canon), adopted to the colonial context, a piece of colonial literature that has been absorbed into the Congolese culture as a sort of parody about the Belgian colonials where *colon = cochon*.

We would argue however that it is at heart an oral tradition of Congo because it is clearly an origin story such as is referred to by Jean-Pierre Makouta-Mboukou: “*Le conte peut aussi développer un paradoxe comme il y en a tant dans la nature.*”

- Jean-Pierre Makouta-Mboukou, ( *Introduction à la littérature noire*, p.13).

The story most likely ended in the following manner in its original version: “*And that is why pigs rut around in the mud to this day, using their broad noses in that curious fashion so unique to them*”. The original version of the story may be lost, but it most certainly would have been an origin story, explaining a curiosity in nature, why pigs use their noses like that to rut around, and most likely referring to wart hogs, or the famous Central African red forest hog, having been observed in nature by the hunters stalking them for fresh meat.

In the original story there was most likely a false trickster figure to oppose Turtle, perhaps Leopard, Civet, or Monkey, and the main dynamic of the story would not have had to do with money (a European import).

The interesting thing to note about the hybrid story is that the origin aspect of the story is no longer the central purpose and focus of the story, but rather the moral of the story which is that: “*It is perfectly fair and just to steal from the ‘Colons’, if you can get away with it.*” After all, they are just dirty animals who have been rutting around and depleting the country of raw materials such as gold, diamonds, rubber, ivory and copper at the expense of the Congolese for the past 100 years.

Francophone oral literature is a powerful insider communication tool of how the common villager or peasant/slave must live and survive with dignity, given the hostile and uncooperative environment of the colonizer/planteur, where he/she exists in a continual state of discrimination and humiliation. Ironically, if there is one word to sum up the ultimate, worshipped and venerated act of the hero/trickster of the Caribbean and Africa during the colonial and plantation society era, it is *deception*.

Ever since Diego Cão sailed down the West coast of Africa and “discovered” the mouth of the Congo River in 1483, and the slave trade that followed, an unsurprising attitude of “*each man for himself and God against all*” has ensued.

An interesting story that began circulating in Zaire, as far as we can tell during the mid 1980’s, illustrates this acquired fatalistic way of thinking well, and from the orientation of the insider’s observation, once again. It was near the end of Mobutu’s thirty year reign of pure tyrannical despotism in an economy that had become known as a *Kleptocracy*, where Mobutu was the chief thief. Mobutu had attempted to deify himself in the early

seventies by calling himself the “*Fondateur*” of the country, and a kind of benevolent father/king figure, wearing the traditional leopard skin hat of the Bakongo kings and carrying a scepter made of ivory and ebony.

To implement his Africanization policies and a return to authentic African traditions and ways of living, renouncing European values, he founded the MPR (*Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution*). MPR agents were assigned to villages throughout the country to aid in the dissemination of what amounted to the almost blatant worship of Mobutu. One of the MPR programs was “Salongo” (from the Lingala “Sala”, imperative form of the verb “work”, and “elongo”, together). The use of a Lingala word instead of a French word was clearly a purposeful choice, just as if a similar program were to be envisioned for Martinique and Creole would be the obvious choice to appeal to the grassroots population.

Every Saturday a forced “Salongo” project was directed by all the village MPR “animateurs”. Ironically, the most common chore was the intense manual labor of the continual maintenance of the dirt road that ran through each village. Only those involved in export crop production like coffee benefitted by being able to sell their product to the trucks driving out to the processing sights.

The following story recounts the predominant attitude of the Zairois towards the Mobutu years, himself a perpetuator of neo-colonialism. Turtle is the trickster in the story and represents the MPR “*animateur*”, who is the incarnate symbol of Mobutu at the village level.

The story opens up on a typical Saturday morning, at the crack of dawn, in the mid 1970’s. Turtle is out and about rallying the animals to come together to do their weekly “*Salongo*”. The first animal that arrives, still rubbing his eyes from sleepiness, is Cockroach. Turtle indicates the part of the road where Cockroach should work and dig, and so he goes and begins working. Cockroach notices Chicken coming to work (most feared enemy of Cockroach) and runs and hides behind a tree.

Chicken arrives and asks Turtle if she is the first one to come to Salongo. Turtle answers that Cockroach has preceded her and that he is hiding behind that tree over yonder. Chicken runs to the tree and gobbles up Cockroach, her favorite dish. Chicken begins working and notices Civet Cat coming to work, so she hides behind the same tree.

Civet Cat asks the same question that Chicken did, and Turtle answers the same way, in the obvious parallelism style of the oral tradition, so Civet runs behind the tree and devours Chicken (the favorite prey of Civet Cat). Then Leopard comes to Salongo, and the same scenario unwinds and Leopard eats Civet Cat. Next a man comes and kills Leopard. Finally God comes, and kills the man.

The moral of the story is that nobody wins under the Mobutu regime, which was very true. Mobutu was by far the greatest and supreme Trickster of Zaire, who was able to amass a fortune of 8 billion dollars while the majority of the population of “*Zairois*” did not even have one pair of shoes to their name.

In another story that clearly comes from the Belgian colonial years, 1899 – 1960, Turtle represents the common villager who has no rights or respect under King Leopold’s administration of the “Congo Free State,” and thus has to seek equality through trickery, to go out and take it by his own wits since they will not grant it to him. The following passage, once again, is taken from my paper given at the Duquesne Foreign Language Conference:

Dans le conte suivant les deux personnages principaux sont Tortue et Faucon. Faucon servira comme adjuvant, son assistant. Ce fait même est drôle parce que Faucon est toujours idiot/faux héros dans les contes congolais. Un Congolais qui entend cette histoire sait tout de suite que Tortue aura des problèmes parce qu'il a choisi Faucon comme son complice dans la ruse. La ruse doit manquer.

Faucon est un mauvais adjuvant, un vaurien et un raté. C'est normal que Tortue ait un raté de société comme ami parce que Tortue représente le pauvre paysan, sous le régime belge, qui n'a rien et qui ne vaut rien.

## *Tortue\* n'est pas invité à la fête*

*Ce conte se concerne encore avec la sagesse de Tortue et son don dans l'art de la tromperie. Les autres animaux ne l'aiment pas, et ils ne l'invitent pas à une grande fête. C'est le seul animal dans le royaume qui n'était pas invité à cette fête. Notre cher compère Tortue à grand envie d'aller à cette fête, évidemment, et il commence à chercher un moyen.*

*Tortue va chez son ami Faucon pour lui proposer quelque chose de vraiment rusé. Faucon va porter un chapeau fait de la peau du pangolin (chapeau très commun dans la région, bon contre la pluie, porté uniquement par les paysans) et Tortue va se cacher sous le chapeau. Comme ça, il peut aller à la fête, sans être aperçu.*

*Faucon vole à la fête, Tortue sur la tête et bien caché au-dessous du chapeau de pangolin. Quand ils arrivent à la fête, tout le monde salue Faucon et il commence à manger à cœur joie et à boire du "masanga na mbila" (vin du palme). De temps en temps, Tortue prenait quelque chose à manger très vite, toujours inaperçu, et la fête continuait avec beaucoup de gaieté et réjouissance.*

*Maintenant, l'histoire devient plus grave: Faucon, devenu ivre à cause du "masanga" commence à danser et aussi à chanter une chanson improvisée sur le champ avec le refrain:*

***"Kóba Kóba, na mootoo na ngai!"***

***"Kóba Kóba, na mootoo na. ngai!"***

***(Tortue Tortue, sur la tête! Tortue Tortue, sur la tête!)***

*Les animaux commencent à se demander; "Mais, qu'est-ce qu'il chante là, et toute cette histoire de Tortue sur la tête? Il est pris par la folie, ou quoi?"*

*Enfin, les animaux s'approchent de Faucon, et ils découvrent Tortue caché sous le chapeau. Ils décident qu'il mérite la mort à cause de sa tromperie, et Tortue ne dispute pas avec eux. Il répond seulement qu'il préfère être exécuté dans la rivière parce que c'est son milieu naturel.*

**\*Pour rester fidèle à l'esprit du conte en Afrique Centrale, Tortue doit être masculin.**



Alors, ils vont à la rivière, et ils montent dans une pirogue, et au milieu, Tortue annonce: "Bon, ça va ici." On s'arrête et le bourreau prend sa machette et compte "Un...Deux ... Trois!" Il vise le cou étendu de Tortue, mais quand il prononce "trois", Tortue retire la tête et le bourreau coupe sa propre main qui tombe dans l'eau. Dans le chaos qui suit, Tortue plonge dans la rivière et disparaît sous la surface de l'eau.

Voici une sommaire de ce conte:

### Première Partie du Conte

Intelligence .....Imprudence, faux héros

Tortue

Il effectue la ruse en se cachant sous le chapeau pangolin.

Faucon

Il sert comme véhicule de la ruse.

Les animaux à la fête découvrent l'imposteur sur la tête de Faucon à cause de l'imprudence de ce dernier.

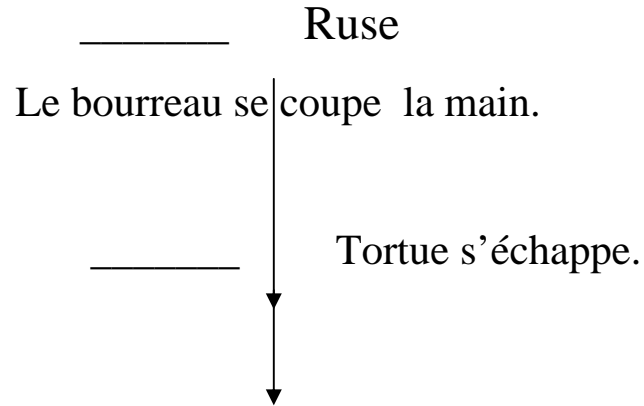
---

### Deuxième Partie du Conte

<b>Tortue</b>	<b>sera</b>	<b>exécuté!</b>
---------------	-------------	-----------------

Tortue, tout seul, héros intelligent





**“Quand on est victime de la  
discrimination (Tortue n’était pas invité à la  
fête) la ruse est acceptable, et même  
recommandée.”**

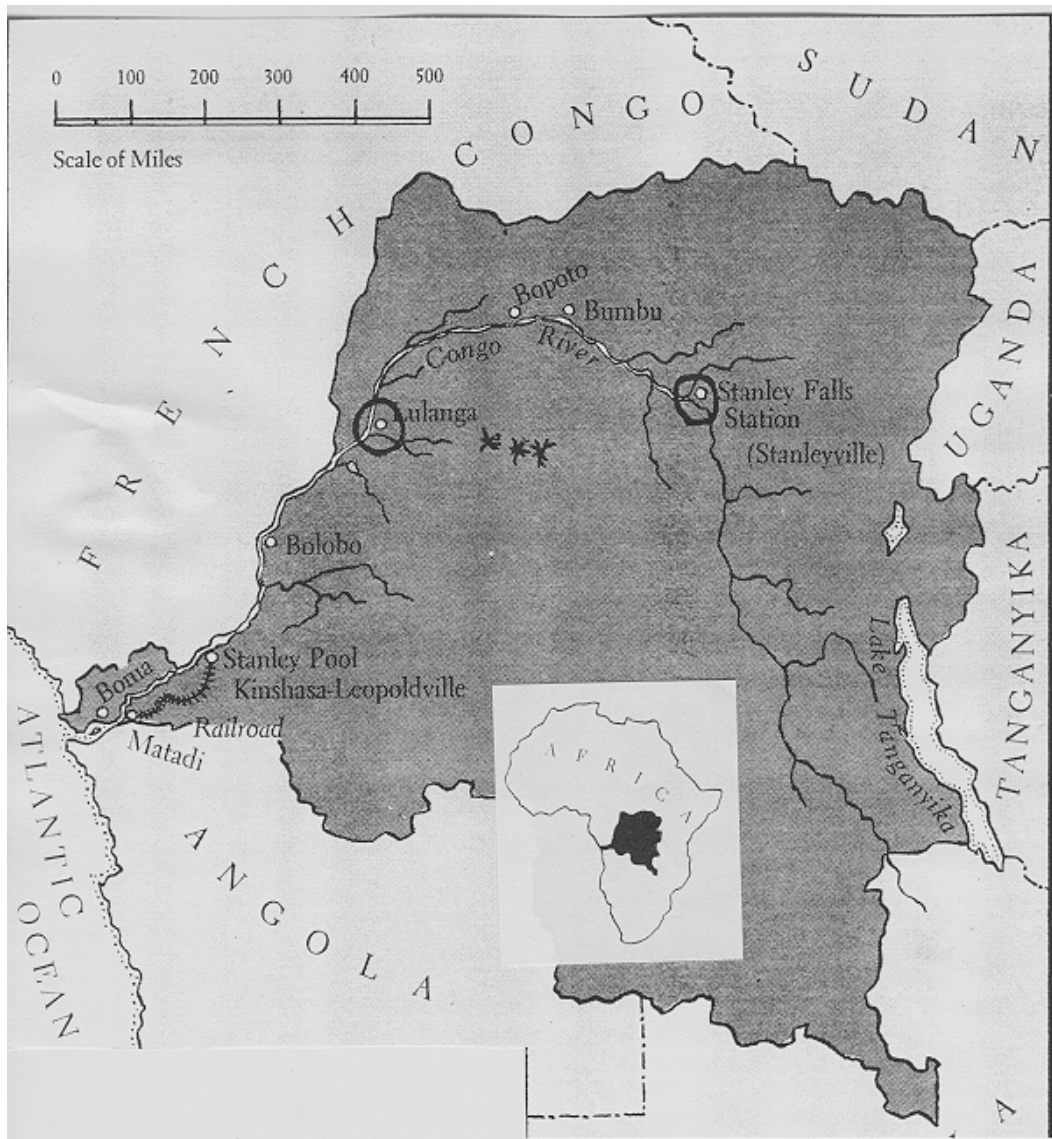
Ce conte se présente comme un bon exemple de ce dont M. Raphaël Confiant parle dans son oeuvre *Contes créoles des Amériques*, en considérant le manque de morale dans les contes populaires des Amériques; “*cette cruauté qui peut choquer le lecteur moderne.*” - *Contes créoles des Amériques* (Editions Stock, 1995) Page 13.

The cruelty and harshness of the environment wherein the trickster lives and breathes causes him to be deceptive and an opportunist. The story just mentioned was actually an example of how an erroneous colonial policy is remembered in the oral tradition, affirming John Vansina’s earlier quote. The Belgians were actually involved in cutting off hands of Congolese people, as a form of punishment for not bringing in their daily rubber quota ( a couple kilos every day, collected from the forest), and for other reasons as well.

The account of these atrocities has been well documented by Edmond Morel in his work *Red Rubber, the story of the rubber slave trade flourishing on the Congo River in the year of our lord 1906.*

Quoting from “The Testimony of the Kodak”, 10 March, 1904, Lake Mantumba, in the Lulunga region, Belgian Congo (map on following page), we find that cutting off hands was a common occurrence, even on the sides of the “*pirogue*” (dugout canoe) like in the story of Turtle:

*“There are still many more poor beings around the Lake (Mantumba) without hands-and I have heard these poor men tell their present Government officer at Bikoro, in my hearing, that their hands had been hacked off against the sides of canoes , to which they were clinging, by government soldiers.”<sup>3</sup>*



Map of the Belgian Congo with Lulanga encircled

*The woman sitting down was an old creature named Eyeka. I knew her well. She was the sister of Eloba's mother—they came from the town of Mwebi, which is on the west shore of Lake Mantumba. Mwebi was attacked by the (government) troops from Bikoro, in pursuance of the customary punitive policy for not working rubber (not procuring a daily quota).*

*Eyeka more than once told us in the Mission how she lost her band. When the soldiers came to Mwebi, she said, they heard a bugle blow, and she and her son and many people fled.*

*They ran as shots were fired, and her son fell by her side. She fainted and fell down too. Then she felt some one cutting at her wrist, and she was afraid to move, for she knew that if she moved her life would be taken.*

*In the opinion of the State the soldiers, in killing game for food, wasted the State cartridges, and in consequence the soldiers, to show their officers that they did not expend the cartridges extravagantly on antelope and wild boar, for each spent cartridge brought in a human hand, -the hand of a man, woman or child. These hands, drying in the sun, could be seen at the government posts along the river (Congo River).*

*...Mola was tied up and taken away to the lake-side, where, owing to the tightness of the thongs round his wrists, the flesh was badly swollen. The officer directed the thongs to be beaten off, but his soldiers translated that into beating off his hands-which they did with the butt end of their rifles against a tree. The (Belgian) officer was standing by drinking palm wine.*

- Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, (An authoritative text, background and criticism, Norton and Company, New York, 1971), P. 97

In conclusion, it is not difficult to understand why the trickster figure living in an oppressive environment and under the iron fist of the colonizer, dictator (Mobutu), or the slave master/béké must become a cruel, deceptive, and sadistic individual himself simply to survive; yes...survival, the most primal drive of humankind. It is out of that dehumanizing environment that the trickster figure of the Francophone diaspora beyond the "Métropole" has evolved. Unfortunately, the dehumanizing dynamic works both ways, as Aimé Césaire has so poignantly noted in his *Essai sur le colonialisme*, and maybe explains why we find so much crime, cruel acts, and deceptive ways of thinking in France and in our current Western "Civilization," for the French are not the only imperialists in the world historically and contemporaneously speaking. Quoting Césaire:

*"Ils prouvent que la colonisation, je le répète, déshumanise l'homme même le plus civilisé; que l'action coloniale, l'entreprise coloniale, la conquête coloniale, fondé sur le mépris de l'homme indigène et justifiée par ce mépris, tend inévitablement à modifier celui qui l'entreprend; que le colonisateur, qui, pour se donner bonne conscience, s'habitue à voir dans l'autre la bête, s'entraîne à le traiter en bête, tend objectivement à se transformer lui-même en bête."*

- Essai sur le colonialisme (Pages 19-20, vers 13-14)

---