Not Once, but Twice: Anansi Stories in the Atlantic World

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Thesis

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Introduction

Anansi stories have traveled the Atlantic world. From the storytellers of the Asante kingdom of western Africa to the plantation colonies of Jamaica, and to the Maroon communities of Suriname to the pages of British writer Neil Gaiman's fantasy novel *Anansi Boys*, Anansi tales have thrived. Whether he performed the role of a peculiar representative of Asante culture, an anti-authoritarian trickster secretly living among the enslaved populations of colonial Jamaica or Suriname, or was invoked as a champion of indigenous Afro-Caribbean culture, Anansi has endured. And regardless of the manner in which outside observers have come to regard the spider trickster, Anansi stories have continuously stood as beacons of the global African diaspora.

This thesis is devoted to Anansi's globetrotting journey. It asks whether and how changes in cultural-historical circumstances have affected the spider's stories, and how possible mutations were made visible by storytellers. I argue that between 1890 and 2020, altering political and cultural contexts resulted in shifting attitudes about the Anansi fables, but not in changes to the stories themselves. Rather, the spider's tales kept hanging on to their most important characteristics, which were as crucial to the Anansi mythos in 1890 as they were in 2020. Hence, Anansi always managed to preserve his own identity, even as the world around him changed.

Method & Concepts

As a matter of methodology, this thesis places a premium on narrative structure. Not just in relation to the Anansi tales themselves, but also in the context of the attitudes shown by American and European observers towards the Afro-Caribbean folk tradition. As will be shown in the first two chapters, Anglo-European discourse on the Anansi fables should be placed in the wider historical context of modern imperialism at the turn of the nineteenth century. By describing the Afro-Caribbean community's Anansi tales as "inferior" to the narrative traditions of their European colonizers, Anglo-European authors effectively told a story of their own: due to their "superior" trajectory in the past and overwhelming resources in the present, peoples of European descent were legitimized to sustain indefinite colonial rule in the future. This narrative conception of their imperial attitudes - a concept I refer to as the "colonial story" - was used to justify the project of empire-building, and reinforced the

notion of Anglo-European supremacy relative to non-European cultures. In this fashion, this thesis places storytelling at the heart of the nineteenth-century colonial ethos.

More specifically, this thesis is concerned with the link between the colonial story and the reception of Jamaican and Surinamese Anansi tales at the turn of the nineteenth century. Because the colonial story functioned as a crucial frame to the late-nineteenth century reception of Anansi fables, I hold that Anglo-European collections of the spider's tales should not just be seen as inquiries into the world of Afro-Caribbean folklore, but equally as assertions of a white, colonial Anglo-European identity that emerged at the apex of what Eric Hobsbawm has called the European "Age of Empire."[1] As historian Catherine Hall has noted in her discussion of the writings of Frantz Fanon, European settlers in the New World had historically imagined themselves as "the heroes of their stories, the champions of a modern world, expunging barbarism, as they construed it, in the name of civilization and freedom."[2] As such, nineteenth-century Europeans forged their identities in response to the pursuit of their colonial enterprise:

> "Europe," [Fanon] insisted, "is literally the creation of the Third World." Europeans made themselves and made [their own] history through becoming colonisers, becoming new subjects. Without colonialism, there would have been no Europe.[3]

In relying on Fanon's theoretization, Hall unearthed an important historical reality: that colonialism was a vital component in the construction of white Anglo-European political identities. By contrasting the "inferior" Anansi folk tales with the "superior" stories from the European continent, Anglo-European writers on the Anansi tradition were not *really* researching the unique qualities of indigenous Afro-Caribbean folklore. Rather, they were reinforcing contemporary beliefs about the superiority of white peoples. They were, in other words, strengthening the legitimacy of Anglo-European imperial rule by transmitting the themes of the colonial story to their contemporary readership. As a result, European and American readers could be reminded of their superior status relative to the non-white peoples of the world.

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[1] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914* (London: Abacus, 1987), 6-12.
[2] Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 14.
[3] Ibidem, 15.

The concept of imperial culture provides a second important contribution to the theoretical framework of this thesis. Recent historiography has coined the term imperial culture to recognize the transnational influence exerted by colonial ideas on metropolitan European societies. In the context of twentieth-century Dutch missionary exhibits on the indigenous peoples of colonial empires, Miel Groten has argued that "propaganda activities of European missionaries played an important role in spreading *at home* ideas of European superiority, racial difference, and a civilising mission among metropolitan populations."[4] These ideas mattered, because of the weight assigned to them in the legitimization of colonial rule:

> It was these ideas that legitimated imperialism, and that therefore formed the core set of values in the so-called imperial cultures that developed into the colonising powers of Europe from the nineteenth century, including the Netherlands.[5]

As Groten noted, imperial cultures shared "common ideas" and "recurring features" - elements that reinforced notions of "white European superiority that European nations exchanged and shared."[6] As expressions of imperial culture, collections of Anansi stories also evoked notions of Anglo-European supremacy. By passing judgement on Afro-Caribbean folk traditions, Anglo-European discourse relied on the trope of the "dark heathen world" to underline the normative contrast between the indigenous populations of Jamaica and Suriname on the one hand, and the realm of European civilization on the other.[7] In this way, the shared language of European superiority was actively used to describe the Anansi fables.

It is important to emphasize that the United States was, as far as these colonial attitudes were concerned, also among the imperial cultures of the Anglo-European world. Such an assertion has not yet been properly appreciated in the literature of American studies. For example, Americanist Liam Kennedy's article on "imperial culture in the United States" was concerned with neither colonialism nor other historiographical considerations - rather, he produced an examination of the "imperial workings of the unconscious of white American manhood" rooted in a

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[4] Miel Groten, "Difference Between the Self and the Heathen: European Imperial Culture in Dutch Missionary Exhibitions, 1909–1957," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* Vol. 47, No. 3 (2019): 491.
[5] Ibidem.
[6] Ibidem, 492.
[7] Ibidem, 503.

close reading of the 1993 film *Falling Down*.[8] Similarly, literary scholar John Levi Barnard's monograph on the dialectic between "traditional" American classicism and its black counterpart has understood imperial culture in the context of "the ideology of Manifest Destiny as well as its representation in literature, architecture and other aesthetic forms."[9] Alternatively, historian Paul Kramer's study on the relationship between colonial violence and American nation-building in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War of 1898 does not incorporate the conceptual framework of imperial culture to narrate the United States' involvement in the American-Philippine War.[10] In this sense, the existing literature is flawed: for as will be shown in the first chapter, notions of European superiority were also present in American discourse on the Anansi tradition.

By recognizing the conceptual feasibility of describing the colonial story as an expression of Anglo-European imperial culture, this thesis brings a novel approach to the historiography of colonialism and the field of American studies alike. Rather than focusing on the history of either American *or* European forms of colonialism as has been done by such historians like Groten or Kramer, I present a transnational framework that positions the colonial story as a shared Anglo-European mentality. In doing so, I avoid the trappings of narrating American history in isolation from its peer countries in the transatlantic community - a methodological precursor to what Adam Fairclough described as the self-fulfilling prophecy of internalizing American exceptionalism in historiography.[11] Almost paradoxically, such an approach explicates how documents expressing colonial attitudes could specifically emerge in the United States, since they become rooted in a transatlantic imperial culture that had reached American shores. But this methodology also unlocks similar explanations in European contexts: after all, Dutch or British texts on the Anansi tradition were equally informed by the context of imperial culture. Therefore, my

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[8] Liam Kennedy, "Alien Nation: White Male Paranoia and Imperial Culture in the United States," *Journal of American Studies* Vol. 30, No. 1 (1996): 89.
[9] John Levi Barnard, *Empire of Ruin: Black Classicism and American Imperial Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 2-4.
[10] Paul A. Kramer, "Race-Making and Colonial Violence in the U.S. Empire: The Philippine-American War as Race War," *Diplomatic History* Vol. 30, No. 2 (April 2006): 169.
[11] Adam Fairclough, "History or Civil Religion? The Uses of Lincoln's 'Last Best Hope of Earth,' " in *Political Religion Beyond Totalitarianism: The Sacralization of Politics in the Age of Democracy*, eds., Joost Augusteijn, Patrick Dassen and Maartje Janse (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 208.

thesis develops the concept of the colonial story to understand how imperial culture was expressed in the broad Anglo-European cultural realm.

The third and final pillar of my methodology is rooted in the field of memory studies. Memory scholars Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney have developed a helpful framework for understanding the conceptual relationship between the realm of literature and the production of cultural memory. Concretely, Erll and Ringey have argued that literature has three important roles to play in cultural memory formation: the roles of medium of remembrance, object of memory, and mimesis of memory.

Firstly, Erll and Rigney have contended that literature has produced "collective memories by recollecting the past in the form of narratives."[12] As a "medium of remembrance," literature functions as a cultural reflection - a literary mirror - of the complex and diffuse social process of reconstructing the past. For Erll and Rigney, the theoretical recognition of literature as a medium of memory has an important implication, because it implies that "remembering the past is not just a matter of recollecting events and persons, but often also a matter of recollecting earlier texts and rewriting earlier stories."[13] In other words, if works of literature are to be understood as a medium of remembrance, it follows that texts play an active role in the transmission of collective memories. Thus, the 'sources' of collective memories should not be understood narrowly as particular events or persons, but as interrelated narratives and texts that conjoin to form a memory in the present. In such a framework, literature would function as an important forum for the production of meaningful collective memories.

Secondly, Erll and Rigney have argued that canonized texts have been able to establish a "memory of [their] own." As they note, works of literature may become "objects of memory" through the repeated rewriting of their narrative content. Regardless of whether these reproductions emerge as works of "pious commemoration [or] critical contestation," canonized texts like folk tales and myths may inspire rich traditions of active literary remembrance. That is, narrative traditions based on canonical texts continuously produce new versions of old stories in response to social, cultural, political, and economic changes in society. They are not

[12] Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, "Literature and the production of cultural memory: introduction," *European Journal of English Studies* 10, 2 (2006): 112.
[13] Ibidem.

just reflections of the way in which cultural memory is construed: they *are* the object that is being remembered, and thus, contribute memories and meaning to the culture that consumes them.[14]

Lastly, Erll and Rigney have described how literature has functioned as a literary imitation, or "mimesis," of cultural memory. Due to the inherently imitative characteristics of literature, imaginative representations of the act of recollection have helped to make the workings of remembrance observable to readers. More simply put, literary texts have helped to make the act of remembering visible to the public. As a consequence, works of literature are constantly engaged in a cultural dialogue with other memory-observing discourses like philosophy, psychology, historiography, and sociology. By making the nuts and bolts of memory-making visible for all to see, literature has allowed for a richer understanding of the process that ultimately results in the production of cultural memory.[15]

By highlighting these three roles, Erll and Rigney have underlined the relevance of texts to the formation of collective memories. Their insights have been taken up by other scholars with an interest in the relationship between literature and cultural memory production. For example, Stephen Knight's diachronic examination of the Robin Hood myth has drawn from literary sources like Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* in sketching out a brief history of the famed outlaw's image.[16] As such, the feasibility of Erll and Rigney's approach has already been demonstrated in scholarly literature.

Since this thesis is primarily concerned with the storytelling tradition of the Anansi stories, Erll and Rigney's work on the continual reproduction of canonical texts is the most relevant for our present purposes. Like the objects of memory described by Erll and Rigney, some elements of Anansi stories have been continuously re-imagined and rewritten. Since the substance of the Anansi tales underwent significant mutations due to forced migrations of west Africans in the transatlantic slave trade between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, stories about the spider trickster became less focused on upholding the Asante social order, and began to be reimagined as subversive folk tales in the context of lived

[14] Ibidem, 112-113.
[15] Ibidem.
[16] Stephen Knight, "Remembering Robin Hood. Five centuries of outlaw ideology," *European Journal of English Studies* 10, 2 (2006): 155.

experience on New World slave plantations.[17] In this capacity, the rewriting of the Anansi tales was reflective of the historical shifts faced by the people that consumed them, and the changing ways in which they began to remember the stories of their homeland. Hence, the "new" Anansi stories functioned as meaningful objects of memory for enslaved Africans in the Americas. As we will see in the third chapter, the Anansi fables continue to fulfill this function to the present day: after all, for the Afro-Caribbean community in the Netherlands, the *Anansi tori* serve as powerful reminders of the resilience and endurance of their ancestors in surviving the injustices of slavery and colonialism. Therefore, this research - through its second and third chapters in particular - demonstrates the viability of using cultural memory-related concepts in the study of indigenous folk tales.

Literature Overview

Modern scholarly output has recognized the centrality of the Anansi character to Afro-Caribbean cultural formation. As literary scholar Emily Marshall writes in her book *Anansi's Journey*, the arachnid hero "is a complex and intriguing figure who has woven a fine tapestry of tales across Africa and the African diaspora." In Marshall's view, Anansi went through "a cultural metamorphosis" in becoming "symbolic of the struggles of black slaves." For "[l]ike Anansi," kidnapped Africans labored to overturn the "structured hierarchy" of the colonial plantation environment, and developed "coded strategies for survival and resistance." According to Marshall, Anansi was more than a symbol of indigenous African culture: he was a powerful reminder of the resistance strategies employed by the numerous West-Africans trapped in the European-run colonial systems of the Caribbean.[18]

Anansi has typically been depicted as the protagonist in so-called "Anansi stories," which are known as *Anansi tori* in Suriname. As Marshall describes them, Anansi stories originated in the social structures of the West-African Asante kingdom. Among the Asante, Anansi tales functioned as a "medium through which the power structures of the Asante were both tested and strengthened."[19] This

[17] Emily Zobel Marshall, *Anansi's Journey: A Story of Cultural Resistance* (Mona, Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2012), 48.
[18] Ibidem, 3.
[19] Ibidem.

argument was illustrated with a cautionary Anansi tale from the Asante, in which the spider trickster intervened in the private affairs of an infertile character called Akwasi and his wife, Aso, by engaging in an extramarital affair. Anansi subverted accepted socio-cultural norms regarding the "theft" of another man's wife, while simultaneously acting as a cautionary agent against the risks inherent to Awkwasi's infertility. As such, Asante Anansi tales managed to reinforce existing social norms around such topics like the stigma on infertility, even as their protagonist operated outside of society's bounds.[20]

Anansi stories are best classified as trickster stories. In the context of storytelling, a trickster is a character that displays a remarkably high level of intellect or knowledge, and relies on tricks, wit or magic rather than physical might to solve problems and overcome challenges. Like Anansi, tricksters are frequently characterized as residing on the fringes of societal norms, where they bend society's rules to their advantage. In the trickster tales in which they star, audiences are invited to simultaneously admire and vilify the trickster in question - to doubt their disrespectful methods and behaviors, but equally revere the trickster for their cleverness and resourceful nature. As theologist Rachele Vernon has put it, tricksters are best described as "archetypal big-bellied [men] with a hearty laugh, who [are] always ready to con you into giving [them] everything you had while loving [them] for the privilege."[21] In this capacity, tricksters appear as naturally ambiguous characters compared to the clear-cut morality of other narrative archetypes like the noble hero or the despicable villain.

Tricksters have been the recipient of voluminous scholarly attention. Writing about the tricksters of Western Africa, Robert Pelton has observed how the trickster figure "depicts man as a sort of inspired handyman, tacking together the bits and pieces of experience until they become what they are - a web of many-layered being." As such, Pelton suggests that the complexity of the trickster tales - in their "nobility and messiness" - reflects the complexity of the human experience, thus explaining their appeal.[22] In drawing on nineteenth-century anthologies of southern African

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[20] Ibidem, 47-48.
[21] Rachele Vernon, "Fidel and the Spirit of Anansi," *Black Theology* Vol. 16, No. 2 (2018): 126.
[22] Robert D. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa: A Study of Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 4.

trickster tales, historian Jimmy Pieterse has argued that trickster figures were regularly "deployed to subvert established orders and to re-imagine processes of social reproduction and, indeed, the very terms in which societal wellbeing was defined."[23]

In his landmark study on the folk tales of Africans trapped in the American system of slavery, historian Lawrence Levine has observed how trickster tales provided "psychological release from the inhibitions of their society and their situation." Because African captives found themselves prisoner to a "rigidly fixed and (...) alien authority system," Levine argues that enslaved Africans were almost naturally drawn to tales wherein the subversion of arbitrary authority figures was a commonplace theme.[24] As such, Levine's work suggests that for those entrapped in the degrading structures of the American slavery system, the recitation of trickster tales was not so much a spiritual experience as it was an act of covert resistance against their arbitrary oppressors. Furthermore, the historiographical relevancy of cultural forms to slave resistance was seconded in the research of Walter Johnson, who has noted that "cultural forms functioned as mechanisms of creating the political solidarity necessary to collective action" on American slave plantations.[25]

The experience of slavery also occupies an important role in Marshall's narrative about the development of the Anansi stories. Her research positions the trauma induced by the European slave trade as a transformative event in the development of the Anansi tales. As captured Asante found themselves forced to adapt to a life of slavery on European-run plantations in the Caribbean, the substance and function of Anansi tales underwent significant mutations. As Marshall writes, the cruel realities of life in slavery demanded that the character of Anansi would "invert the social order without paradoxically upholding it." Anansi stories could only continue to resonate for the enslaved Africans that consumed them, if they allowed their protagonist to "destroy an enforced and abhorrent social system rather than just test the boundaries of a West African society with compliant members."[26] As a

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[23] Jimmy Pieterse, "Trickster tropes: Female storytelling and the re-imagination of social orders in four nineteenth-century southern African communities," *Historia* 55, 1 (May 2010): 76.
[24] Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 102-106.
[25] Walter Johnson, "On Agency," *Journal of Social History* Vol. 37, No. 1 (Autumn 2003): 118.
[26] Marshall, "Anansi's Journey," 48.

result, the trickster tales about Anansi transformed from being cautionary tales against the perils of breaking society's norms, into narratives that helped make rebellion against a morally corrupt plantation hierarchy imaginable. In this light, it was hardly coincidental that the anthropologists Melville and Frances Herskovits noted the commonality of Surinamese Anansi tales where "the small animal [outwitted] the larger one."[27]

Chapters & Sources

This thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter argues that the power structure of the colonial system greatly influenced the Anglo-European reception of the Anansi tales. In order to arrive at that conclusion, the first chapter dives into a literary analysis that sketches out the historical context of Anglo-European colonialism in the nineteenth century. In terms of primary sources, I provide an analysis of Ada Wilson Trowbridge's 1896 *Journal of American Folk-Lore* article on the Jamaican Anansi stories, and also take a similar analysis by the Dutch geologist Herman van Capelle from 1904 about the Surinamese Anansi tales into account. Afterwards, I will use the research of Charles Tilly and David Carr on the importance of narrative structure to flesh out the concept of the colonial story and further detail its relevance to the context of the Anansi stories.

The second chapter picks up where the first one left off. In order to identify the presence of the colonial story in the discourse surrounding the Jamaican Anansi tales more thoroughly, I bring two more nineteenth-century collections of Anansi tales into the equation: British writer Mary Pamela Milne-Home's book *Mama's Black Nurse Stories* from 1890, and American author Pamela Colman Smith's text *Annancy Stories* from 1899. I also discuss American anthropologist Martha Warren Beckwith's 1924 *Jamaican Anansi Stories* to provide some insight into the historical development of Anglo-European collections of Anansi tales. Furthermore, the second chapter is designed to explicitly identify the three crucial elements that have defined the substance of the Anansi mythos - bringing the plots, characters and antics at the heart of the spider's adventures fully into view.

[27] Melville J. Herskovits and Frances S. Herskovits, *Suriname Folk-Lore* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 140.

If the first chapter chronicles the rise and emergence of colonial attitudes in the reception of Afro-Caribbean folk tales, and the second chapter its apex as the frame accompanying collections of Anansi tales, the third chapter covers the colonial story's decline and transformation. In this third section, I discuss how the process of decolonization effected the erosion of overt white supremacy in the Anglo-European cultural sphere, and bring into view how this transition altered the reception of the Anansi tales. As the structures of modern imperialism collapsed, citizens of postcolonial countries like Jamaica and Suriname were able to formulate a new historical narrative of the Anansi tradition that centered the Afro-Caribbean slavery experience and emphasized the spider trickster's blackness. This new narrative took root. As we will see through a reading of Anansi-related texts produced in Jamaica and Suriname rather than Europe or the United States, by the twenty-first century, the postcolonial interpretation of Anansi's origins was incorporated into the kind of collections that had expressed notions of imperial culture a little over a 100 years prior. As such, Anansi underwent a second transformation: for the divine Asante trickster that transitioned into a conduit of Afro-Caribbean defiance in slavery, had now morphed again, this time into the champion of indigenous Jamaican and Surinamese culture that ultimately won recognition in the former imperial culture of the Netherlands.

Lastly, a stylistic note on the use of language in the sources cited and the way I have presented block quotes. This thesis is based on both English-language and Dutch-language primary sources. In order to preserve the integrity of the source material, I have generally chosen to cite sources in their original language. However, some exceptions were made: particularly, the third chapter features a trio of Dutch-language Anansi stories that were partially translated into English to better accommodate the flow of the text. Every time I took this route, I provided the original language of the cited passage as a footnote. In addition, I have elected to depart from the general guidance that block quotes be no less than four lines or 50 words in length. The reason for this decision was rooted in storytelling concerns: by using block quotes, I have tried as clearly as possible to underline the argumentative importance of some citations relative to others. Since the length of citations are of no relevance to their actual utility in the text, I decided to use block quotes quite

liberally. The resulting formatting choices may be somewhat unorthodox to some, but are, in my opinion, justified by the narrative potential they unlock.

I: Anansi Stories and the Context of Colonialism

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the historical context of the Jamaican and Surinamese Anansi traditions. I argue that the context of the colonial story is crucial to our understanding of the manner in which the Anansi tales have been collected and reproduced. As we have already seen, the structural changes wrought by the transatlantic slave trade resulted in the substantial transformation of the Asante Anansi stories. While there is no particular evidence to suggest that the abolition of slavery amounted to a similar shift in the substance of the trickster tales, the abandonment of coerced labor in the British Empire and the American South cultivated interest in the Anansi tradition among Anglo-European audiences. Consequently, collections of Jamaican and Surinamese Anansi stories published at the turn of the nineteenth century asserted emergent notions of a white Anglo-European identity vis-à-vis conceptions of inferior Afro-Caribbean cultural forms.

Contemporary articles of the Jamaican and Surinamese Anansi traditions were sensitive to an hierarchical worldview. As we will see in the later pages of this chapter, Anglo-European writers who gave first-hand accounts of the Anansi storytelling tradition crafted their texts with language that othered the subjects they described. As a result, the picture they painted of the Surinamese and Jamaican Afro-Caribbeans was normative in nature.

The narrative line of this chapter is primarily rooted in a sequential discussion of scholarly literature. I will begin this section with a reading of Karwan Fatah-Black's dissertation on Suriname and the Atlantic world in order to build the historical connection between colonial power structures and cultural formation. I then turn to Catherine Hall's monograph *Civilising Subjects* to bring into view the historical relationship between political identity and colonialism. Since collections of Jamaican Anansi stories were also produced and consumed in the United States, I shall incorporate a brief examination of American colonialism into this history as well. I do so by calling attention to scholarship like Susan Harris' study of *God's Arbiters* and Paul Kramer's work on the racialized depictions of Filipino insurgents during the

Philippine-American War. Next, I discuss and dissent from literary scholar Emily Marshall's view that descriptions of (Jamaican) Anansi stories were not defined by elements of racial stereotyping around 1900 - an argument which is rooted in an analysis of two contemporary accounts of Jamaican and Surinamese storytelling traditions. Lastly, I will present the theoretical insights of Charles Tilly and David Carr on the important link between narrative structure and human consciousness so as to frame colonial discourse as a distinct story relevant to both the historical moment of the imperial era and the manner in which the Anansi tales have been reproduced.

Suriname and the Black Atlantic

In his dissertation, historian Karwan Fatah-Black has challenged the skepticism some historians have formulated against the notion of an "Atlantic world" in the early modern period. As the argument of these scholars went, the early modern era lacked the required levels of "interconnection between the various Atlantic regions to speak of an integrated world."[28] According to the critique of historians like Pieter Emmer, the interatlantic trade of the period was too small to allow for large-scale economic interdependence between the economies of Europe, Africa and the New World.[29] That being said, authors such as Emmer have not been categorically unwilling to recognize some form of a contemporary Atlantic system. In their view, the integration of the Atlantic world began with the gradual rise of European values that "[led] to the modern world." As Emmer puts it, the spread of institutions like free labor, property rights for the individual, and the monogamous nuclear family should be considered the primary legacy of early modern integration, not the establishment of transoceanic trade as a pillar of economic activity.[30]

In his study on the early modern history of Suriname, Fatah-Black has described the city of Paramaribo as an important nodal point in the contemporary Atlantic network. As a nodal point, the Surinam capital was defined as a city that "[facilitated] connections between different regions in the Atlantic world." In contrast to the analysis from Emmer, Fatah-Black's narrative revolves around the myriad

[28] Karwan Fatah-Black, "Suriname and the Atlantic World, 1650-1800" (PhD dissertation, Leiden University, 2013), 16.
[29] Pieter Emmer, "The myth of early globalization: the Atlantic economy, 1500-1800," *European Review* Vol. 11, No. 1 (2003): 37-38.
[30] Ibidem, 43-45.

practical connections that originated in Paramaribo's colonial community - both in relation to its European center, and to other cities in the region. His study firmly positioned the city as part of an Atlantic network that was "not just trans-Oceanic, but often regional in nature." Thus, Fatah-Black argues that the communal networks of colonial Suriname were hardly as self-contained as the macro level examination of historians like Emmer would suggest.[31]

In addition to the economic integration of Suriname with the rest of the Atlantic world, Fatah-Black has also recognized the importance of the movement of people and ideas to the interconnected nature of the Paramaribo community. Even though the Surinamese connections to the broader Atlantic sphere were sometimes purely economical in nature, these also frequently entailed the coming and going of persons, who "took with them the latest news, their cultural traits and ideas about the world."[32] This melting pot of influences in the colonial Americas paved the way for what cultural scholar Paul Gilroy has described as the "black Atlantic world," or the cultural sphere wherein a composite black identity emerged that was neither fully African nor European in origin. As Gilroy writes, the black sense of self has been "produced in a syncretic pattern in which the styles and forms of the Caribbean, the United States, and Africa have been reworked and reinscribed [in different contexts]."[33] To this extent, both Gilroy and Fatah-Black have recognized the cultural transformations that occurred in the wake of the New World's colonization.

Cultural Formation and Colonial Power Relations

Other historians have also emphasized the historical link between cultural formation and the structures of colonialism. In her essay on the early history of the African community of New Orleans, Gwendolyn Midlo Hall has described how "cultural influences intensely interpenetrated the extremely varied population of the Americas." As a result, native Americans, Africans, and Europeans in early modern Louisiana were all "acculturated by the people and the world they encountered."[34] In

[31] Fatah-Black, "Suriname and the Atlantic World," 9 and 17.
[32] Ibidem, 4 and 17.
[33] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3.
[34] Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, "The formation of Afro-Creole culture," in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, eds., Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 59.

her study on the relationship between the power structure of the British Empire and the formation of English identity, Catherine Hall has described the relations between colony and metropole as "mutually constitutive, in which [conceptions of] both coloniser and colonised were made." As Hall puts it, the concepts of colony and metropole - represented in her case study by England and Jamaica, respectively - could be "understood only in relation to each other." Moreover, she argued that the act of marking differences between colonizers and the people they colonized - that is, the construction of a "white" English identity *vis-à-vis* a "black" Jamaican identity - enhanced the imperial structure in which such distinctions were relevant. For by "constructing boundaries for the body politic and the body social," English rulers were able to formulate and police the power discrepancies at the heart of their colonial project - effectively linking ideas about race, identity and culture to the exercise of political power.[35]

Other historians have also come to recognize the formative experience of colonialism on European culture and history. For instance, research by Miel Groten has examined the way in which imperial attitudes influenced the architecture of Glasgow's nineteenth-century City Chambers.[36] And in his article on the contentious debate surrounding the Dutch documentary series *De Slavernij*, Guno Jones has written about the controversial, yet central position occupied by the slave trade in conversations about Dutch history and identity.[37] This mode of discourse has been taken up by local governments as well: in 2019, the Amsterdam city council commissioned a study on the Dutch capital's historical association with the slave trade that emphasized slavery's relevance to the city's historical consciousness.[38] A similar study was undertaken on behalf of Rotterdam's city council by the Leiden-based *Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* (KITLV), which equally underlined the centrality of the slave trade to metropolitan Rotterdam.[39]

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[35] Hall, "Civilising Subjects," 8, 12, 17.
[36] Miel Groten, "Glasgow's new town hall: imperialism, nationalism and civic pride," *Urban History* (2020): 5.
[37] Guno Jones, "De Slavernij is onze geschiedenis (niet): Over de discursieve strijd om de betekenis van de NTR-televisieserie *De Slavernij*," *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review* Vol. 127, No. 4 (2012): 68.
[38] Pepijn Brandon, Guno Jones, Nancy Jouwe, and Matthias van Rossum, eds., *De slavernij in Oost en West: Het Amsterdam-onderzoek* (Amsterdam: Spectrum, 2020), 9-12.
[39] "Het koloniale en slavernijverleden van Rotterdam," official project page, KITLV, accessed: 23 January, 2021, https://www.kitlv.nl/research-projects-het-koloniale-en-slavernijverleden-van-rotterdam/; "Onderzoek:

In the United States, the link between colonial power relations and the construction of national identity was also embedded in the cultural discourse. As literary scholar Susan Harris has noted in the context of the American occupation of the Philippines, "most nineteenth-century Americans, no matter what their race or religion, were taught that to be [an American citizen] was to be white and Protestant." Additionally, prevalent notions of American exceptionalism entailed the belief that the United States was a country "under a special mandate from God to represent freedom and fair dealing to the rest of the world." These notions of implicit superiority necessarily entailed a negative assessment of "the other" - that is, the popular belief that contemporary Filipinos were to be seen as a savage, uncivilized and unassimilable people in dire need of cultural re-education. Hence, the ideas of American exceptionalism - coupled with the opportunity to take power after the Spanish-American War of 1898 - undergirded the country's colonization of the Philippines following the Treaty of Paris.[40]

Historian Paul Kramer has gone one step further, and described the American military effort during the Philippine-American War (1899 - 1902) as a "race war" that placed "colonial violence at the heart of American nation-building." In Kramer's words, the Filipino insurrection was understood by American soldiers "in racial terms," as they deployed the concept of race as justification to engage in a "war of racial exterminism in which Filipino combatants and noncombatants were understood by U.S. troops to be legitimate targets of violence."[41] Kramer's conclusions were echoed in the work of Silvan Niedermeier, whose study of photo albums of American soldiers during the Philippine war found notions of "masculinity, racial superiority, and exoticism" embedded in the contemporary wartime

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Slavernijverleden van Rotterdam is veel groter dan gedacht," *AD*, 31 October, 2020, https://www.ad.nl/rotterdam/onderzoek-slavernijverleden-van-rotterdam-is-veel-groter-dan-gedacht~ade5d18e/ (accessed: 23 January, 2021). For the research produced by the KITLV as part of its Rotterdam project, see: Gert Oostindie, ed., *Het koloniale verleden van Rotterdam* (Amsterdam, Boom, 2020); Alex van Stipriaan, *Rotterdam in slavernij* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2020); Francio Guadeloupe, Paul van de Laar, and Lianne van der Linden, eds., *Rotterdam, een postkoloniale stad in beweging* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2020).

[40] Susan K. Harris, *God's Arbiters: Americans and the Philippines, 1898-1902* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 6, 13, 7.

[41] Kramer, "Race-Making and Colonial Violence in the U.S. Empire," 169 and 172.

narratives.[42] As a result, the conceptual link between American colonialism and national identity formation has been well-established in the historical literature.

Anansi Stories and the Abolition of Slavery

The relationship between colonial structures and cultural formation has not only been assumed in the pages of academic journals and professional monographs. For in the contemporary discourse of the nineteenth century, the abolition of slavery took on a particular meaning as an historical moment in the cultural history of the Caribbean region. Literary scholar Emily Marshall has argued that the 1834 abolition of slavery in the British Empire triggered a sense of "panic amongst folklorists," who believed that the abandonment of coerced labor would lead to the "untimely death" of black folklore and folk culture. These concerns contributed to the emergence of publications from Anglo-European writers like Pamela Milne-Home, Ada Wilson Trowbridge, and Pamela Colman Smith, who authored late-nineteenth century collections of Jamaican Anansi stories for the European and American markets based on interviews with local residents.[43] In response, contemporaries praised the "preservationist" efforts undertaken by Anglo-European collectors. For example, the Jamaican newspaper *The Daily Gleaner* published an article in 1899 entitled "Our Anancy Stories." In the piece, the paper wrote:

> It is a pity that [the Anansi stories] have never been regularly collected and recorded, for the race of the old time house slave woman who held her audiences breathless with the wonderful doings of 'Anancy', his wife 'Crooky' and his son 'Tacoma' is almost passed away.[44]

Melancholic views of Jamaica's colonial heritage like those found in the *Daily Gleaner* effectively connected the country's Anansi tradition with the history of slavery on the island. After all, they assumed that the abolition of forced labor would pose an existential threat to the folkloric heritage of the colony. As such, Marshall's account of the general sentiment of the times regarding the preservation of black

[42] Silvan Niedermeier, "Imperial narratives: reading US soldiers' photo albums of the Philippine-American War," *Rethinking History* Vol. 18, No. 1 (2014): 31.
[43] Emily Zobel Marshall, " 'Nothing but Pleasant Memories of the Disclipline of Slavery': The Trickster and the Dynamics of Racial Representation," *Marvels & Tales*, Volume 32, Number 1 (2018): 2.
[44] Cited in: ibidem, 3.

folklore implied that contemporary observers considered the Jamaican Anansi stories to be inextricably tied to the power structures of the colonial era.

However, Marshall's scholarship has been characterized by a reluctance to fully explore the cultural context her work seems to assert. From her reading of the late-nineteenth-century collections of Jamaican Anansi stories, she has concluded that "the desire and motivation to utilize the folk tales as a way of legitimizing slavery" was "clearly absent" in their texts - as was the habit of "bolstering racist stereotypes" as a component of their narratives. By contrast, she writes how those racist tendencies are "precisely what we find at the heart of white collections [of comparable trickster tales] in the American South."[45] In this fashion, Marshall's writing assumes a hard methodological barrier between the cultural-historical contexts of colonial Jamaica and the American South. At first glance, such an interpretation appears quite reasonable. Indeed, contemporary volumes of Anansi stories - like Mary Pamela Milne-Home's *Mama's Black Nurse Stories* (1890), Ada Wilson Trowbridge's journal article "Negro Customs and Folk-Stories of Jamaica" (1896), and Pamela Colman Smith's *Annancy Stories* (1899) - did not feature obvious glorification of the bygone slavery era like one would expect from an Joel Chandler Harris-authored collection of Uncle Remus tales.

But to draw too rigid a distinction between the institution of slavery in the United States and the colonial power structures of the Caribbean - as Marshall does - is to miss the bigger picture of the hierarchical worldview that tied these two together. As has been implied by Hall, the cultural justification for colonial rule flowed from a racialized conception of national identity - the implicit belief that Euro-Christian culture was inherently different and superior to the primitive culture of the "black" world. Historian Christer Petley has traced the contours of this mindset back to the era of Jamaican slavery by describing the slaveholding culture of the island as "a world defined by white privilege and general inequality." In such a world, even the poorest of white settlers were in a position to "act as petty rulers" - a notion that forged a strong sense of egalitarianism among the white residents of colonial Jamaica. Furthermore, Petley has recognized the similarities between the manners in which white solidarity was constructed in the Caribbean and the American South:

[45] Ibidem, 6.

for in both Jamaica and the southern United States, slaveholders of all classes could claim their identity as "freemen in a world of dependents."[46] Hence, the slaveholding cultures of the colonial Caribbean and the American South gave rise to similarly politicized conceptions of white identity.

The continued relevance of this hierarchical political culture to the discourse surrounding the Anansi tales of the late nineteenth century is best illustrated with a reading of Ada Wilson Trowbridge's article about the "Negro Customs and Folk-Stories of Jamaica" (*Journal of American Folk-Lore*, 1896). Even though Trowbridge's contribution was penned decades after the abolition of slavery in both Jamaica (1834) and the United States (1865), her writing was still rife with othering attitudes towards the peoples of color she described:

> Negroes are known to possess the elements of an extensive literature, and a mass of folk-tales and folk-songs, not inferior in interest to those of European races. *They* are passionately fond of music, and although as an art it has not been developed to any extent among *them* yet it forms a great feature in *their* lives. *They* are very fond of introducing songs into *their* stories, and these verses, sung by the storyteller, always form the crowning part of the tale for both listener and narrator. [All emphasis mine.][47]

In these lines, Trowbridge used language that was indicative of an othering narrative. As she began to list the features of the Jamaican traditions she had observed during her time on the island, her article hammered home an almost explicit distinction between her own cultural norms and those of the Jamaican locals. This perspective was expressed in the language she deployed: through the repeated use of the third-person plural, Trowbridge ensured that her audience was aware of the cultural distance between the "negro" subjects and the scholar who wrote about them.

In a later paragraph, Trowbridge expanded on this othering perspective in more detail. Following up on a section that detailed a local mourning ritual, the scholar wrote:

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[46] Christer Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture During the Era of Abolition* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 36-37.
[47] Ada Wilson Trowbridge, "Negro Customs and Folk-Stories of Jamaica," *Journal of American Folk-Lore* (1896): 279, https://archive.org/details/jstor-534116/page/n1/mode/2up (accessed: 6 December, 2020).

> When a negro becomes civilized and Christianized up to a certain point he considers himself above this heathenish custom, and looks with no small degree of scorn upon those of his brothers who still cling to it as a soul-saving rite. There are many most interesting phases in the character development of the civilized and Christianized negro, which make us smile at the substitution of one saving ceremony for another [...] and make us wonder if [...] the washed and dressed negro is any better off than his simpler brother who has not met with European refinements. Unless civilization go hand in hand with the simple and direct Christian "thou shalts" and "shalt nots", the negro is certainly the worse for it [...].[48]

As part of her line of thought, Trowbridge equated the Euro-Christian values she was familiar with to a universal notion of "civilization." This arbitrary definition of the term was then applied to the local rites of Jamaica, which were derided as a "heathenish" custom from outside the sphere of the civilized world. Furthermore, the scholar questioned the ability of what she described as "negroes" to fully commit themselves to the teachings of "European refinements" - that is, to internalize the cultural habits of their colonizers beyond the level of superficial observance. As a result, Trowbridge implicitly made a distinction between the realm of civilized European culture she and her readers belonged to and the "uncultured" customs of the black Jamaican locals she was describing.

Trowbridge further illustrated the normative contrast between the Jamaican and European cultural forms by comparing the body of the local Anansi stories to the myths of ancient Greece. While the scholar acknowledged the "significant fact that observation taught the African, as it did the Greek, to invest the spider with attributes and make a human creature of it," she described how "the superior intelligence of the Greeks gave rise to the beautiful little story of Arachne, and how the arts of weaving were taught to man by the cunningly woven fabric of the spider's web." By contrast, Trowbridge wrote how the trickster figure of Anansi did not compare to such splendor. "[T]he inferior perceptions of the African taught him," her article read, "to see only the wiles and craft of a poisonous creature he feared."[49] As a result,

[48] Ibidem, 280.
[49] Ibidem, 282.

Trowbridge concluded that the Anansi stories "in general favor with the natives are rambling and without point."[50]

Trowbridge's remarks recalled what fellow anthropologist Melville Herskovits described in 1941 as the "myth of the Negro past." According to Herskovits, this myth had long served "as one of the principal supports of race prejudice" in American society.[51] As part of this myth, Americans believed that peoples of color had left their African heritage behind on their voyage to the New World, in part due to the vastly "inferior" stature of the cultures in which they were raised:

> Even granting enough Negroes of a given tribe had the opportunity to live together, and that they had the will and ability to continue their customary modes of behavior, *the cultures of Africa were so savage and relatively so low in the scale of human civilization that the apparent superiority of European customs as observed in the behavior of their masters* [emphasis mine], would have caused and actually did cause them to give up such aboriginal traditions as they otherwise have desired to preserve.[52]

By emphasizing the superiority of European cultural forms, Trowbridge thus evoked the myth of the Negro past to pass judgment on the indigenous Anansi tales of the Jamaican population. At the time, this was not a particularly hard or controversial thing to do: for the general acceptance of Anglo-European superiority in the American imagination provided her with the language to legitimize such a view.

Comparable sentiment was expressed in Dutch-language source material about the Anansi tradition of Suriname. In his account for *Elsevier's Geïllustreerd Maandschrift* from 1904, geologist Herman van Capelle described how, on his research trip to Suriname, the black populace was unwilling to provide him with samples of local spiders. This reluctance, Van Capelle argued, was due to the special place spiders occupied in a local storytelling tradition:

> De groote [sic] eerbied, die de negers voor een spin koesteren, is zeker bij de buitengewone gevoelloosheid, waarvan de neger dikwijls blijk geeft, en bij de wreedheid, waaraan hij zich menigmaal tegenover een dier schuldig maakt,

[50] Ibidem, 282-283.
[51] Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1941), 1-2.
[52] Ibidem, 2.

> opvallend, en geen wonder is het dan ook, dat in de scheppingen der rijke negerphantasie [sic] de spin schering en inslag is; want ik overdrijf zeker niet, wanneer ik zeg, dat in zijne vertellingen tien tegen een de spin de heldenrol speelt.[53]

In the geologist's mind, the locals' reverence of spiders was quite surprising. After all, "the negro" had primarily been known for his cruelty towards animals, rather than his ability to appreciate the fine qualities of animal life. Van Capelle also mentioned how spiders played a major role in the "negro imagination", where they regularly appeared as heroic characters. However, these local *sprookjes*[54] (literally "fairy tales") were not comparable to the stories from the canon of European literature:

> Waar voor ons bij alle gebeurtenissen des levens, die voor den geest afleiding vragen, boeiende lectuur of inspannende studie eene [sic] zegening is, daar heeft de neger zijne lange spinverhalen, zijne anansitori, die hem na volbrachten arbeid aangenaam bezig houden, die hem gedurende de kwellingen van het lastige insectenheir [sic] in de oerwouden verlichting geven en die hem in oogenblikken van droefheid tot troost zijn.[55]

Hence, Van Capelle drew apart a distinction between two groups. On the one hand, he identified a category of "we", which presumably included the people that grew up and identified with the canon of Dutch-European literature. And on the other, the geologist described a separate category of people from African descent he called *negers* (or "negroes") who were presumed to exist outside of the "civilized" framework of European culture. In the quote cited above, Van Capelle described these two groups by focusing on the different ways in which their members chose to spend their free time. From his perspective, Europeans had cultivated a mentality where it was considered to be beneficial to engage in such stimulating activities like reading or studying, while the "the negro" only felt the need to relax by sharing *lange spinverhalen* (literally "tall spider stories") - which were held to be devoid of helpful narrative substance - with their peers.[56] In this fashion, Van Capelle's description of

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[53] "Surinaamse negervertellingen door dr. H. van Capelle," in: *Elsevier's Geïllustreerd Maandschrift*, volume 14 (1904), part XXVII: page 314, https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_els001190401_01/_els001190401_01_0082.php#125 (accessed: 5 December, 2020).
[54] Ibidem, 318.
[55] Ibidem, 315.
[56] Ibidem, 317.

the Surinamese Anansi tradition was undergirded by implicit assumptions about a racialized hierarchy of cultural forms.

Anansi Tales as Expressions of Imperial Culture

The implicit belief in a racialized hierarchy that undergirded Van Capelle and Trowbridge's normative accounts of the Anansi traditions of Suriname and Jamaica was indicative of their tacit endorsement of the colonial narrative. As a result, both Van Capelle and Trowbride effectively reinforced a particular story: that over the course of European history, Europeans had cultivated cultural and political forms that rose to such a level of excellence that European elites had rightfully ascended to a position of cultural and political dominance over "inferior" peoples. Sociologist Charles Tilly has argued that stories - like the story of European colonialism that was crucial to Van Capelle and Trowbridge's articles - have an important role to play in the manner in which human beings rationalize the world around them. As Tilly notes, "[s]tories provide simplified cause-effect accounts of puzzling, unexpected, dramatic, problematic, or exemplary events." By presenting a sequence of interrelated events as the logical outcome of complex processes centered on human actors, stories "[have helped] make the world intelligible."[57] Simply put, Tilly's work has suggested that stories of any kind function as logical tools for human beings to understand the complex processes that govern the world around them.

Philosopher David Carr has provided further theoretical underpinnings to this constitutive notion of narrative structure for the human consciousness. As Carr notes, cause-effect relationships in the narrative sense are crucial to understanding the scope of human action. In rejecting fellow philosopher Lous Mink's famous proposition that "stories are not lived but told," Carr asserts:

> My point is simply that action seems to involve, indeed quite essentially, the adoption of anticipated future-retrospective point of view on the present. We know we are in the present and that the unforeseen can happen; but the very essence of action is to strive to overcome that limitation by foreseeing as much as possible. It is not only novelists and historians who view events in terms of their relations to later events, to

[57] Charles Tilly, *Why?* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 64.

> use Danto's formulation of the narrative point of view, we do it all the time, in everyday life. [...] We are after all, able to act.[58]

Carr's position, in other words, is that human action can only be understood in the context of the narrative cause-effect relationship that structures the coherence between past, present, and future events. Even if agents lack "the advantage of real hindsight," reasonable projections of the future - coupled with similar understanding of the past - constantly guide and inform prospective action in the present.[59] In this sense, stories are both lived *and* told.

Carr's conception of the relationship between narrative and consciousness can be made more accessible by applying his theoretical insights to a concrete example of human action. Consider, for instance, how a politician might deal with a problem of governance. In conceiving a solution to his problem, the politician will not merely respond to the problem as he perceives it in the present. Rather, his course of action will be equally informed by an historical understanding of how the problem has arisen in the past, and the insight of how his possible actions will affect the problem's resolution in the future. That is, our politician will depend on the narrative structure to bring past, present and future together in a story that structures his own agency. As a result, our politician's ability to tell a coherent story *to himself* prevents him from falling into a state of helplessness - he is, after all, able to act.

Both Tilly and Carr, then, enrich the theoretical frame through which we can understand the broad historical context surrounding the publication of Afro-Caribbean Anansi stories at the turn of the nineteenth century. As carriers of the colonial story, authors like Van Capelle and Trowbridge included implicit notions of past (the exceptional trajectory of European history), present (the political reality of colonial rule), and future (the continued legitimacy of the colonial project) into their narratives. As we will see, similar publications of Anansi tales - like Mary Pamela Milne-Home's *Mama's Black Nurse Stories* and Pamela Colman Smith's *Annancy Stories* - were also published and read within this context of imperial discourse. Hence, their collected volumes of Jamaican Anansi tales were historically tied to the story of Anglo-European colonialism.

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[58] David Carr, "Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity," *History and Theory* Vol. 25, No. 2 (May 1986): 125.
[59] Ibidem.

In the next chapter, we will analyze the writings of Trowbridge and Van Capelle's peers in further detail. By doing so, we will assess the presence of the colonial attitudes in contemporary collections of Jamaican Anansi tales. In this way, we will gauge the impact of the colonial narrative on the manner in which storytellers have transmitted the substance of the Jamaican Anansi tales.

II: The Substance and Reproduction of Afro-Caribbean Anansi Stories

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the collections of Anansi stories published by the historical peers of Ada Wilson Trowbridge and Herman van Capelle. Specifically, I examine the works of two authors: Mary Pamela Milne-Home's *Mama's Black Nurse Stories* from 1890, and Pamela Colman Smith's *Annancy Stories* from 1899. I do so by focusing on the ways in which both authors have recorded the same tale: "Tiger as Riding Horse." In order to illuminate the historical development of the collection of Anansi tales, we also discuss a version of this fable recorded by American anthropologist Martha Warren Beckwith in her 1924 collection *Jamaican Anansi Stories.*

Methodologically, the focus of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, I have scanned the writings of Milne-Home, Smith and Beckwith specifically for remarks that revealed the frames they inserted into their collections of folk tales. Such an approach has resulted in the close reading of a collection's introduction for passages that could be construed as indicative of having transmitted colonial attitudes. Secondly, this chapter intends to bring the actual substance and reproduction of the Anansi tradition into view. It does so by analyzing multiple iterations of the same Anansi tale that appeared in all three of the aforementioned collections: "Tiger as Riding Horse." This story has been chosen because of the way in which it combined the three most important elements of the Afro-Caribbean Anansi mythos. Furthermore, "Tiger as Riding Horse" stands as one of the most reproduced Anansi tales, with similar fables appearing in Surinamese, Surinamese-Dutch and Antillean contexts.[60] In this fashion, the story is representative of the broader Anansi tradition in more ways than one: therefore, I have deemed its text suitable for historiographical comparison.

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[60] Three historic Surinamese version of "Tiger as Riding Horse" can be found in: Herskovits and Herskovits, "Suriname Folk-Lore," 199-207. For two modern Surinamese-Dutch versions of "Tiger as Riding Horse" available on the internet, see: "Anansi berijdt Tijger," *Nederlandse Volksverhalenbank*, taken from: "Verhalen uit de Surinaamse Verteltraditie," in *Dieren: volksverhalen uit kleurrijk Nederland* (Rotterdam: Lemniscaat, 1990,) 167-168, http://www.verhalenbank.nl/items/show/46696 (accessed: 22 October 2020); and "Hoe een Spin een Tijger berijd als een paard," published on YouTube by *channel48* on December 6, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9uczZOtAuG8 (accessed: November 3, 2020). For an Antillean version of the story recorded in Curaçao, see: "Nanzi and Tiger," published on YouTube by *Anansi Stories* on October 11, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jM0U5fIrdRs (accessed: 16 January, 2021).

In order to narrate the substance and reproduction of "Tiger as Riding Horse," I deploy the language of monumentality and mobility originally developed by the literary scholar Ann Rigney to study the so-called "afterlives" of literary heritage. Rigney's approach, and its applicability for our present purposes, will be briefly laid out in the opening paragraphs of this chapter. Afterwards, Mary Pamela Milne-Home's 1890 retelling of "Tiger as Riding Horse" will be discussed, before giving way to an overview of Pamela Colman Smith's 1899 recording of the same tale. We will then round out the chapter with Martha Warren Beckwith's interpretation of that story, and assess how the mobile elements of the Anansi mythos fit into the historiographical framework of slave agency.

The Concepts of Monumentality and Mobility

As was made evident in the introduction, the Anansi stories underwent significant mutations as a result of the colonial slave trade. However, such an assumption also presupposes a sizable degree of continuity. After all, the tales about the spider trickster have been continuously recognizable as Anansi stories to the people that have told and consumed them. In order to map the extent to which continuity and change have been important to the reproduction of the Anansi fables, we can turn to the work of literary scholar Ann Rigney. In her study of the "afterlives" of British literature, the memory of British writer Walter Scott's work is characterized by twofold notions of fixed monumentality and fluid mobility.[61] In her research, these two notions are tied to the concept of the memory site, which was originally defined by Pierre Nora as a closed-off public site where "memory crystallizes and secrets itself," thereby giving rise to remembrance narratives in industrialized societies.[62] But while Nora's conception of the term defined these sites as fixed "memory bubbles" in a given culture, Rigney's work challenged scholars to rethink memory sites as fluid, contested spaces that produce ongoing memory narratives.

For Rigney, the narratives (or "afterlives") produced by memory sites are shaped by two crucial factors: the fixed monumentality of the site of memory in question, and the fluid mobility of the subject being remembered. In her own case

[61] Ann Rigney, *The Afterlives of Walter Scott: Memory on the Move* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 13.
[62] Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations* No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring, 1989): 7.

study of the remembrance and subsequent appropriation of Walter Scott's books, Rigney positions the characters and general setting of Scott's stories as constituent components of his work's monumentality, while citing the transformations - or "migrations" - of Scott's books across time and space as evidence of their mobility. As such, Rigney argues that memory sites should not be considered 'fixed entities or finished products," but rather "imaginative resources for generating new meanings and contesting old ones."[63]

If Rigney's framework were to be applied to the context of the Anansi stories, we can establish the tales' three most notable characteristics as monumental elements: Anansi's regular engagements with overwhelming foes like the menacing Tiger, the spider's witty antics, and the trickster's anthropomorphic and secular disposition. As monumental elements, these three characteristics were indistinguishable from the Afro-Caribbean folk tradition, and ensured that the tales about the arachnid trickster remained recognizable. Hence, they were almost always incorporated into the events of an Anansi fable. The mobility of the spider's stories, on the other hand, was expressed through the relatively minor details of the tales: things like the details of the plot, or the inclusion of specific characters. Over the course of this chapter, the language of monumentality and mobility will be thus used to describe specific elements of the spider trickster's stories.

The Story of Anansi and Tiger

In 1890, British writer Mary Pamela Milne-Home published her book on the folklore and oral storytelling traditions of Jamaica. As we have seen, the implied link between the structures of colonialism and the oral traditions of the Caribbean region was an essential part of the contemporary discourse on West Indian folklore. In her collection *Mama's Black Nurse Stories*, Milne-Home appeared to reinforce this tacit assumption. As she introduced the body of her text, the British writer offered some contextual notes on the Jamaican folk tales she had recorded for her audience. In doing so, Milne-Home mentioned how the Jamaican folk tales were marked by a "woful [sic] want of scenic description."[64] She then tried to explain this perceived flaw

[63] Rigney, *Afterlives of Walter Scott*, 19.
[64] Mary Pamela Milne-Home, *Mama's Black Nurse Stories: West Indian Folklore* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1890), 24,

by seeking a connection between the local storytelling traditions and the nature of colonial rule:

> The want of grace and description about these Folk-tales seems to be less striking wherever the Frenchman or Spaniard has had dominion: in Martinique, for instance, there seems to be more romance and graceful sentiment about the negro and Creole superstitions than in Jamaica, *the ghost stories are more weird and powerful* [emphasis mine], and the expressions used are happier and more refined.[65]

As Milne-Home saw it, there was a possible connection between the Mediterranean disposition of southern European colonial regimes and the manner in which local folklore was expressed and appreciated. The "romantic" and "graceful" sentiment of Catholic colonial elites - which in Jamaica had been "overgrown by the hard common sense of the British" - was held to be a defining cultural influence "not to be lost on any West Indian."[66] As a result, Milne-Home's narrative implied that it was possible Afro-Caribbeans had adapted: adjusting their behavior to the "civilizing" presence of their European governors, locals tuned their ghost stories and other folk tales to match the sentiments of their colonial rulers. In this fashion, the introduction of *Mama's Black Nurse Stories* relied on the narrative theme of European dominance to recast the cultural history of the ethno-African population as a European-led process.

Although it is hard to reconstrue the personal experiences that inspired Milne-Home to write *Mama's Black Nurse Stories*, we can find some hints that inform us about the author's life and work. Marshall has described Milne-Home as an "Englishwoman from a military family whose father was stationed in Jamaica."[67] Online photographs of her gravestone have indicated that the Englishwoman was born in 1860, died in 1936, and was subsequently buried near Saint Mary's Anglican Church in the Tunapuna-Piarco region of Trinidad and Tobago. The inscription on her headstone provided some further biographical details: Milne-Home was born the daughter of one "Major Ellis," and was the "widow of Col. David Milne-Home."[68] In

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https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=saNDAQAAMAAJ&hl=en_GB&pg=GBS.PA24(accessed: 10 December 2020).

[65] Ibidem, 26-27.

[66] Ibidem, 26-29.

[67] Marshall, "Nothing but Pleasant Memories," 2.

[68] "Mary Pamela *Ellis* Milne-Home," Find a Grave, added: 19 March, 2015, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/143919144/mary-pamela-milne_hom (accessed: 18 December, 2020).

1901, she published another book, titled *Stray Leaves From a Border Garden* - a "home notebook" filled with essays about gardening, and advertised as being written by "the author of *Mama's Black Nurse Stories*."[69] And in the introduction to her collection of Anansi stories, Milne-Home hinted at a detailed and intimate familiarity with the Jamaican storytelling tradition:

> As will have been seen, I have endeavoured to show the local setting of these [Anansi] tales, but alas! They lose much by not being told by Edith or Desdemona, Quasheba or Queenie, who, with smiling black countenance and gleaming white teeth, will drop down before you on the floor as polished at her face, and sitting crossed-legged with her ample starched petticoats stiffly spread out, will spin you the prime favourites of the Creole nursery or kitchen, differing slightly according to a more or less lively imagination.[70]

Even though it remains difficult to pierce together the precise influences behind *Mama's Black Nurse Stories*, we can use the information outlined above to paint a rough picture of Milne-Home's personal background. Firstly, Milne-Home's birth year of 1860 suggests that she was likely exposed over the course of her life to older generations of Britons that either consciously lived through the abolition of slavery in the British Empire, or had first-hand experiences with the institution of Jamaican slavery themselves. Furthermore, Milne-Home's historical record suggests that the author was a woman of means: she was born into a British military family, and likely lived a life of relative luxury as a white resident of colonial Jamaica - where she was probably exposed to the local Anansi stories by her servants. Moreover, we can infer from her publishing record that Milne-Home had some success as a writer: after all, her experience as the author of *Mama's Black Nurse Stories* was credited to her as a matter of professional success. Consequently, it appears quite reasonable to assert that Mary Pamela Milne-Home lived her life as a member of the higher social classes of the British Empire. As such, her time in Jamaica would have been characterized by some level of access to what Petley has described as "[the social advantages] derived from being part of the only fully free group in a society of disenfranchised

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[69] Mary Pamela Milne-Home, *Stray Leaves From a Border Garden* (London and New York: John Lane, 1901), title page and preface, https://library.si.edu/digital-library/book/strayleavesfromb00miln (accessed: 18 December, 2020).
[70] Milne-Home, "Mama's Black Nurse Stories," 29-30.

and dispossessed others."[71] As such, Milne-Home would have been endowed with at least some benefits of white privilege during her stay in the Jamaican colony.

Regardless of its author's privileged background, *Mama's Black Nurse Stories* offered a large collection of Jamaican folk stories. Among these was a version of "Tiger as Riding Horse," which was labeled as "The story of Anansi and Tiger." In this recording of the tale, Anansi and Tiger were portrayed as visitors to an unnamed town:

> There was a certain house in a town dat Anansi and Tiger wan' to visit. When Anansi go, him tell de fambly ob de house [sic], say dat Tiger was his fader fus' riding-horse. So when Tiger go back, de people den tell Tiger what Anansi say. Well, Tiger say he must har from Anansi, so Tiger go an' ask Anansi. Anansi say dat 'im neber say so. Tiger say: "Come, let us go to justice."[72]

As Milne-Home's version of the story went, Anansi and Tiger both visited the same house in an unnamed town. When the spider came to visit, he mentioned to the family of the house that Tiger was his father's riding horse. After Tiger had returned, he heard about what Anansi had said. The predator refused to believe what he was told, and decided to hear from the trickster in person. When asked, Anansi denied having spread rumours about Tiger, and joined the big cat in pursuing "justice" for what had happened to him.

When it was time to go, however, Anansi claimed he had fallen sick. Since Tiger was unwilling to leave the spider behind, he offered to carry the trickster on his back. Anansi obliged on one condition: that the predator mounted a saddle on himself:

> "Brar Tiger, you mus' put that dat lill' something dem call saddle, dat when me gwine to fall down me can ketch [sic] up."[73]

Anansi was, in other words, only willing to accept Tiger's help if the predator would grant his request for a saddle. The spider had other wishes as well: in addition to the saddle, he asked for a bridle and a pair of spurs, to which Tiger also consented.

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[71] Petley, "Slaveholders in Jamaica," 11.
[72] Milne-Home, "Mama's Black Nurse Stories,", 51-53, https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00077423/00001/65j (accessed: 19 November 2020).
[73] Ibidem.

Lastly, the trickster demanded he could use a horsewhip, so he was capable of fending off any flies that might have bothered him along the way.[74]

With Tiger having acceded to all requests, Anansi was finally able to embark on the journey back to town. Anansi kept up his ruse along the way, repeatedly telling Tiger he was weak to the point of almost falling down.[75] However, when the duo had almost reached the town where their friends lived, things began to change:

> [Anansi] put in whip an' pur to Tiger an' sing out, "What me tell you? Me no tell you, say Tiger is me fader's fus' riding-horse?" an' 'im des ride up to the door an' tell a a boy to tek 'is horse, an' as 'im gane inside Tiger tek 'is walk 'trate way ter de wood. End ob [sic] 'story.[76]

Thus, the endgame of Anansi's scheme was revealed. In order to embarrass the feline predator, he planned to stage a public spectacle wherein the residents of the town would witness Tiger being ridden like Anansi's personal riding horse. And to add insult to injury, the spider asked a nearby boy to attend to Tiger like he would attend to a horse after its rider had been dismounted. The last lines of the story dealt with Tiger's response to his humiliation: due to the embarrassment he had to endure, the predator fled straight into the woods.[77]

In this fashion, "The story of Anansi and Tiger" combined the three monumental elements of the Jamaican Anansi tradition. Most prominently, the story revolved around the central conflict between Anansi and Tiger, which drove the spider towards action and informed his actions throughout the narrative. This animosity was especially pronounced in the story's ending, which featured an embarrassing rejection of the threat formerly posed by Tiger. Such a climax drove home a crucial point: that despite wielding a vast surplus of power over a tiny spider, the feline predator found himself disgraced at the hands of a smaller foe. The conclusion of "The story of Anansi and Tiger" thus featured a subversion of expectations: rather than showcasing the manner in which the powerful exert control over the powerless, the story climaxed with the surprising triumph of the underdog.

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[74] Ibidem.
[75] Ibidem.
[76] Ibidem.
[77] Ibidem.

For the black storytellers and audiences that originally conceived the tale, these subversive elements likely resonated due to the routine injustices they experienced under the Jamaican slavery regime. As Christer Petley has written, the conduct of Jamaican slaveholders relied on "a variety of terror tactics [designed to] remind victims and onlookers of white domination." Thus, submission of the majority-black population was enforced by violent means such as whipping, confinement in stocks, and even the use of dedicated plantation dungeons.[78] As Lawrence Levine has argued in the context of the American slave plantations, subversive storytelling traditions allowed for the "psychological release" of enslaved Afro-Caribbeans from such arbitrary deployments of force.[79] In other words: by reproducing a story about a powerless spider that triumphed over a mighty tiger *in public*, enslaved Africans not only found an intellectual escape from the cruelty inflicted upon them - they developed the language to imagine the overthrow of violent authority as well. For them, telling an Anansi story was more than just a matter of social convention: it was an act of radical resistance against the unequal power structure in which they were trapped.

In addition to the subversion of normal power relations, "The story of Anansi and Tiger" incorporated two other distinctive components of the Jamaican Anansi tradition: Anansi's signature wits and his secular disposition. The former shone through over the course of the entire story, as the spider cleverly schemed his way towards victory: trapping Tiger into accepting the conditions that ultimately led to his own humiliating demise. Anansi's secular disposition was similarly implied in the narrative: after all, the spider's initial motivation to scheme against Tiger originated in conventional notions of boastful, machismo-like behavior. Taken together, these three elements demonstrated how the substance of "The story of Anansi and Tiger" was rooted in the broad monumentality of the Jamaican Anansi mythos.

Illustrations of the Jamaican Anansi

An Americanized version of "Tiger as Riding Horse" was published in the United States by Pamela Colman Smith. In her 1899 collection *Annancy Stories*, Smith bundled a large number of Jamaican folk tales for the American market, coupled

[78] Petley, "Slaveholders in Jamaica," 7.
[79] Levine, "Black Culture and Black Consciousness," 102.

with black-and-white illustrations meant to bring the substance of the Anansi stories to life. The Americanized character of the book was made clear in the opening lines of the collection's introduction. As part of the introductory remarks, the Jamaican Anansi stories were compared to the Uncle Remus tales of the American South:

> The "Annancy Stories," by Miss Pamela Colman Smith, a young lady who has recently come from Jamaica to live in this country, are perhaps the most original contribution to negro folk-lore literature since the day when "Uncle Remus" gave us his imperishable record of "Brer Rabbit."[80]

In these lines, the introduction's American author - who was identified by Marshall as Lost Cause sympathizer and Woodrow Wilson ally Thomas Nelson Page - reinforced a particular connection in the minds of US readers. By comparing *Annancy Stories* to the nostalgic works of Joel Chandler Harris, Page evoked the romantic representations of the slaveholding South associated with the popular Uncle Remus books. As Marshall has noted, authors like Harris and Page "clearly made great efforts to couch [their] stories in plantation nostalgia to strengthen the stereotype and [their] fantasy of the contented slave."[81] In this capacity, Page's attempt to place the Anansi stories in the same context as the Uncle Remus tales primed readers to associate Smith's collection with an implicit belief in the justness of white rule over colored peoples. As a result, it became easier for American readers to square the substance of *Annancy Stories* with the contemporary consensus around the legitimacy of European dominance.

Substantially, Smith's collection incorporated numerous Jamaican folk tales. Among these was a version of "Tiger as Riding Horse." In the story recorded by Smith, the origin of Tiger and Anansi's conflict flowed from their desire to simultaneously court "de same young lady."[82] In order to thwart Tiger and win the unnamed woman's favor, Anansi concocted a bold claim:

> So one day Annancy him go to de young lady house, an' him say:

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[80] Pamela Colman Smith, *Annancy Stories* (New York: R.H.R. Russel, 1899), 5, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=coo1.ark:/13960/t08w40p54&view=1up&seq=25 (accessed: 11 December 2020).
[81] Marshall, "Nothing but Pleasant Memories," 7 and 8.
[82] Smith, "Annancy an' Tiger Ridin' Horse," in: *Annancy Stories*, 17-19.

"You know Breda Tiger is not'ing else dan an old ridin' horse?"[83]

When Tiger came to visit the young woman afterwards, she was unpleasantly surprised. After all, the lady had been told that Tiger was "no'ting but an old ridin' horse." Baffled by this claim, the feline predator asked where she had heard this "one great big lie,", and was informed about its source: Anansi. Seeking his reputation restored, Tiger vowed to return with Anansi to disprove the spider's disreputable notion. Before he could arrive at Anansi house, however, the trickster caught a glimpse of the feline through the window, and quickly moved to "get 'pon de bed an' play him was sick." Tiger bought it: convinced about Anansi's illness, he suggested that the spider be seated on his back, so he would not have to walk.[84] Anansi was happy to oblige:

> So Annancy say all yite! An him get up, an' take him saddle down from de rafter, an' put it 'pon Tiger back, an' Tiger say:
>
> "Wha' dat for?"
>
> An' Annancy say:
>
> "Dat is so I can go sof'ly 'pon you' back, fe me heaed hurt me so!"[85]

Anansi claimed, in other words, that he felt himself to be so sick that he required a saddle for protection. The spider also used a "ridin' whip" and mounted a bridle and reins, so when Tiger would walk too fast, Anansi could "pull [him] back."[86]

After these "protections" were implemented, Anansi gave Tiger the go-ahead. As the pair rode off, the spider was quick to strike Tiger with the whip:

> "Warra! Wa' dat?"
>
> An' den Annancy say:
>
> "Oh, me Breda, de fly dey boder you so, I is lickin' dem off!"[87]

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[83] Ibidem.
[84] Ibidem.
[85] Ibidem.
[86] Ibidem.
[87] Ibidem.

Thus, the spider managed to trick Tiger a second time. Not only did the feline predator fall for Anansi's faked sickness, but he also bought the spider's excuse for hitting him with the riding whip - that is, due to flies that were supposedly landing on his pelt. This process repeated itself one more time, before the pair arrived at the young woman's house. When the spider saw the lady in the doorway, he knew his moment had come:

> An' when dey get there, Annancy see de young lady standin' in de door mouth, an' him stan' up in him stirrup, like how jocky [sic] do, a' Kin'ston race cou'se. An' him lash Tiger, an' use him spur till Tiger gallop! When dey get to de door where de young lady was standin' Annancy take off him hat an' wave it, an' him bawl out:
>
> "Me no tell you so, Missus! Dat dis old Tiger was not'ing but me fader's old long-ear jackass ridin' horse?"[88]

In order to deliver on the claim he had made to the young woman, Anansi used the tools Tiger had consented to him using - the saddle, spur, bridle, and riding whip - to create a spectacle wherein Tiger was actually being ridden as a riding horse. Embarrassed about being seen in such a situation, Tiger quickly ran off into the bushes, and the story ends with the assertion that he was never seen again.

Smith's recording of the tale was accompanied by a trio of black-and-white illustrations. In all three illustrations, both Anansi and Tiger were rendered in humanoid form. The first illustration depicted the scene where Tiger found Anansi on his bed as the spider claimed to be too sick to walk. The second image featured a small depiction of Anansi riding Tiger, with the trickster being equipped with a whip and a pair of spurs. The third illustration revolved around a scene from the beginning of the story. The image was captioned with a line from the opening of the tale, when Tiger first visited the lady and was scorned for being "no'ting but an old ridin' horse."[89] As a whole, these three illustrations served to bolster the accessibility of the story by visualizing the most dramatic events from the text. In this capacity Smith's version of "Tiger as Riding Horse" was designed to be accessible in both a written and visual format.

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[88] Ibidem.
[89] Ibidem.

Jamaican Anansi Stories in 1924

Another version of “Tiger as Riding Horse” was collected by the American folklorist Martha Warren Beckwith. As we have seen in the introduction, Beckwith made four research trips to Jamaica, where she collected numerous Anansi stories from the local residents, which she recorded and published in her 1924 work *Jamaican Anansi Stories*. As fellow folklorist Katharine Luomala wrote in a 1962 commemorative essay on Beckwith’s career, Beckwith’s scholarship was known for the large quantities of data she provided about informants and the field situation in which those were consulted, alongside a wealth of “quotations of informants' personal views.”[90] True to Luomala’s description, each tale in *Jamaican Anansi Stories* was accompanied by the name of the storyteller who shared the story with its author, along with the place in which it was recorded. Furthermore, Beckwith’s book contained detailed notes on each story in the collection, providing readers with detailed background information on the local legends.

It has been reasonably suggested that works like *Jamaican Anansi Stories* played an important role in the development of expertise on the Jamaican Anansi tradition. Marshall writes how white American readers of the late nineteenth century generally failed to “recognize the ambiguities, veiled criticisms, double meanings, metaphors, symbolism, jokes and illusions" of the Caribbean Anansi stories they consumed. As she explains, it took white audiences until the early twentieth century to “unravel their coded and defiant messages,” as anthropologists and collectors alike began to expand their knowledge about the Jamaican folk tales.[91] As such, publications like Beckwith’s *Jamaican Anansi Stories* played an important role in the development of expertise on the cultural significance of the Anansi stories, and helped improve the way in which scholars and readers came to understand them.

Even though Beckwith still referred to the Jamaican locals as “negro story-tellers,” her introduction was characterized by a relative lack of a Eurocentric perspective on the cultural history of the island. Rather, she described Anansi as a “culture hero” of the Gold Coast, and gave an overview of the African origins of the

[90] Katharine Luomala, “Martha Warren Beckwith: A Commemorative Essay,” in *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 75, No. 298 (Oct. - Dec., 1962): 342 and 347.
[91] Marshall, “Nothing but Pleasant Memories,” 4.

local “riddling” habits.[92] As a result, Beckwith’s preface featured a much more muted endorsement of the colonial story relative to Milne-Home’s introductory text or Page’s explicit connection with white supremacist literature, and offered a more detached analytical take.

In terms of substance, *Jamaican Anansi Stories* bundled countless Anansi tales: in the table of contents, Beckwith promised her audience access to such stories like “Tiger’s Bone-hole,” “Tying Tiger,” and “Eating Tiger’s Guts.” If her readers flicked to her recording of “Tiger as Riding Horse,” they would have encountered some similarities relative to the iterations previously collected by Milne-Home and Smith. For according to the “negro story-teller” Beckwith cited - which was identified as William Forbes from Dry River - Anansi once managed to trick two young women into believing that Tiger was his personal riding horse.[93]

Beckwith’s recording of “Tiger as Riding Horse” began with an encounter between Anansi and two “young misses” that were being courted by the spider:

> Tiger was walking to a yard an' see two young misses, an' he was courting one of de young misses. An' as Anansi hear, Anansi go up to yard where de young misses is; an' dey ax him said, "Mr. Anansi, you see Mr. Tiger?" An' said, "O yes! I see Mr. Tiger, but I tell you, missus, Tiger is me fader ol' ridin'-horse." An' when Tiger come to misses, dem tell him. An' said him gwine Anansi, mak him come an' prove witness befo' him face how he is fader ol' ridin'-horse![94]

During the exchange, Anansi mentioned to the girls that Tiger was his father’s old riding horse. The young women demanded the spider prove his story by showing them he could actually ride the feline as his horse. Anansi approved these terms, and sought out Tiger, telling him he needed his help to “come prove dis t'ing you say 'fore de misses.” Normally, the spider said, he would have been able to accomplish this feat alone, but since he was currently unable to “walk at all,” Anansi now required assistance.[95]

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[92] Martha Warren Beckwith, *Jamaican Anansi Stories* (New York: The American Society of Folk-Lore, 1924), preface, https://www.sacred-texts.com/afr/jas/jas_02.htm (accessed: 12 December 2020).
[93] *3. Tiger as Riding Horse*, in: ibidem 5-6, https://www.sacred-texts.com/afr/jas/jas003.htm (accessed: 3 September 2020).
[94] Ibidem.
[95] Ibidem.

Tiger agreed to help. Before they could return to the girls, however, Anansi requested some additional equipment. First, he asked for a saddle, “To put me foot down in de stirrup so when I gwine fall down, I weak, I can catch up." Second, the spider asked for a bridle to be put in Tiger’s mouth, so “when [he was] gwine to fa' down [he could] catch up."[96] And lastly, Anansi asked for a horsewhip and a pair of spurs:

> An' him go back an' tak horse-whip. An' say, "Wha' you gwine do wid de horsewhip?" An' say, "Fe when de fly come, fan de fly." An' put on two pair of 'pur. An' say, "Wha' you gwine do wid 'pur?" An' say, "if I don' put on de 'pur, me foot wi' cramp."[97]

With all these items in place, Anansi returned to the girls. Since Tiger was now equipped with a saddle and bridle, and Anansi was holding a horsewhip and wearing a pair of spurs, the “young misses” saw enough to believe that the spider was indeed able to use Tiger as a riding horse. Embarrassed, Tiger fled into the woods, prompting Anansi to sing a song after him. The story concluded with a recitation of the lyrics to this song, called “Po’ Tiger dead an’ gone!” coupled with a musical notation of the song’s melody:

> Si-lay-na, Si-lay-na, Si-lay-na bom, Eb-ry-bod-y (?)
>
> Si-lay-na, Si-lay-na, Si-lay-na bom, (?) Si-lay-na, Si-lay-na.
>
> Po' Ti-ger dead and gone, Si-lay-na, Si-lay-na, Si-lay-na,
>
> Eb-ry-bod-y go look fo' dem wife, Si-lay-na, Si-lay-na,
>
> Eb-ry-bod-y go look fo' dem wife, Si-lay-na, Si-lay-na, Si-lay-na bom.[98]

In addition to preserving the monumental elements of “Tiger as Riding Horse,” Beckwith’s recording also demonstrated how an Anansi story could reproduce itself in such a way as to allow for the tale’s mobility. This mobility was expressed in the details of the plot. For example, even though Anansi always ended up making the claim that Tiger was his personal riding horse, his motivations for doing so could differ. In Beckwith’s and Smith’s recordings, the spider’s assertion was portrayed as

[96] Ibidem.
[97] Ibidem.
[98] Ibidem.

an instance of machismo-like behavior meant to impress female characters. But this boastful aspect of the character was diminished in the version collected by Milne-Home, which identified Anansi's claim as what is best described as a slanderous rumour. And even when comparing the iterations of Beckwith and Smith, some small differences stood out: in the former, Anansi was shown to be courting a group of young women, while the latter account mentioned how the spider and Tiger were both trying to gain the attention of the same, singular female character. Other elements that contributed to the story's mobility similarly pertained to minor details of the narrative, such as the inclusion of the musical elements in the text, the environment in which the scenes took place, the nature of the dialogue that was used, and the descriptions that were offered by the narrator. As a result, each version of "Tiger as Riding Horse" differed slightly from the iterations that came before, but did not alter the defining characteristics that made the story identifiable to begin with.

As such, the notion of individual agency was important to the cultural reproduction of the Anansi tales: after all, each storyteller had the freedom to tinker with the mobile elements of the Anansi mythos, regardless of whether they were enslaved or not. As historian Damian Pargas has written, slave agency is an important concept for historians to illuminate "the nature and extent" to which enslaved people exerted "influence over their lives and domestic arrangements."[99] The importance of cultural forms to notions of slave agency has been particularly underlined by the historian Walter Johnson, who has argued that it was through "shared cultural forms - arguments, prayers, fables, etc. - that enslaved people flourished even in their slavery, and set about forming the alliances through which they helped one another to resist it."[100] In the context of the Jamaican plantation system where the modern Anansi tales originated, the concept of slave agency thus appears in the literature as a feasible concept for understanding the cultural reproduction of the spider's stories. The fluid character of the Anansi tradition allowed enslaved Afro-Caribbeans to exercise a degree of agency in how they crafted the stories that inspired them: awarding them the power to shape their own

[99] Damian Alan Pargas, "The Gathering Storm: Slave Responses to the Threat of Interregional Migration in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Early American History* Vol. 2 (2012): 290.
[100] Johnson, "On Agency," 119.

imaginations, even as they were stripped of political power by the slaveholders that owned them. In this sense, reproducing the subversive Anansi tales was both a cultural *and* a political act worthy of historiographical recognition.

Monumentality and Mobility of the Jamaican Anansi Story

This chapter has examined three Jamaican versions of “Tiger as Riding Horse.” I have examined the cultural reproduction of this particular Anansi story by examining the monumentality that was expressed in each iteration of the folk tale. As a result, we have seen how the Caribbean versions of “Tiger as Riding Horse” managed to take on slightly different guises as they passed through the hands of different storytellers. In each of these versions, authors labored to leave the narrative core of the fable intact, and associated the tale with the themes of the colonial story.

In the next chapter, we will examine the decline of the colonial story. We will do so by bringing the historical context of decolonization into view, and assessing how the decline of European dominance was reflected in the emergence of postcolonial narratives about the Anansi tradition.

III: Anansi Stories in the Postcolonial Period

Introduction

In the decades after Martha Warren Beckwith published her *Jamaican Anansi Stories*, the legitimacy of white supremacy crumbled. As European prestige dissipated after the Second World War and the subsequent process of decolonization took the world by storm, radical transformations changed the way in which people came to understand Anansi stories. In this chapter, we explore these changes in further detail. As such, we will examine the manner in which the cultural aftermath of decolonization altered the reception of Jamaican and Surinamese Anansi tales. I argue that the collapse of modern imperialism after 1945 - and the subsequent implosion of the colonial story that depended on its survival - paved the way for residents of postcolonial societies to articulate a historic perspective of the Anansi tradition that decentered the effects of slavery and colonialism. In its stead emerged a new vision of Anansi's origins that focused on the Afro-Caribbean experience, and underlined the spider's trickster manifest blackness. As a consequence, the Anansi tradition came to be regarded as a marker of Afro-Caribbean cultural identity.

I chart Anansi's transformation by first offering a brief overview of the historical context of decolonization in the European and American contexts. We will see how the decolonization of imperial cultures was a gradual process: after all, colonial attitudes did not transform overnight after the Second World War, and locally-published Anansi tales did not suddenly appear only after Afro-Caribbean countries became formally independent. I then turn towards the postcolonial societies of Jamaica and Suriname, and establish that the Anansi tradition flourished as a meaningful feature of Caribbean political culture, before examining the contribution of Jamaican writer James Berry towards the ultimate endorsement of Anansi as a Caribbean trickster hero. Lastly, I examine how the emergence of the postcolonial narrative changed the Anglo-European perspective on the Anansi tales, and analyze the substance and reach of the transformed Anansi narrative.

The Collapse of Modern Imperialism

In the decades after 1945, the geopolitical status quo underwent dramatic transformations. Due to the collapse of Europe's colonial empires after the Second World War - a violent and tumultuous historical process known as decolonization - it became less viable for Europeans to maintain the hierarchical worldview at the heart of their colonial story. In his blockbuster history of the European twentieth century *Dark Continent*, Mark Mazower has described the demise of Europe's colonial empires as part of the wider ideological and economic transformations that swept the Old Continent after 1945:

> The glamour of [European empires] looked increasingly tarnished, [their] morality and rationality thrown into question in a continent which operated not according to global imperial rivalries and the possession of territory, but through transnational economic cooperation.[101]

Hence, the political realignments of the Cold War era forced European states to gradually reject their imperial possessions. In 1949 and 1975, the Dutch government officially recognized the independence of Indonesia and Suriname, respectively, while Britain formally granted sovereign status to Jamaica in 1964. The French Empire dissolved similarly, although not always in a peaceful way: French presence in Indochina was not terminated until the bloody Battle of Dien Bien Phu of 1954, and Algeria did not sever its ties to France after a War of independence was concluded in 1962. This loss of political prestige - which was compounded by the rise of Soviet-American hegemony during the Cold War - has led historian Stefan Berger to note that Europeans in the post-war decades "turned [their] historical attention inwards and marginalised the experience of empire."[102] As a result, the narrative foundations of the European colonial story crumbled.

Although the United States emerged from the Second World War as a global superpower, American culture also faced its own reckoning with the discourse of white superiority. As historian Stephen Tuck has noted in his history of the black freedom struggle, the country's nationwide mobilization during World War II resulted

[101] Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 383.
[102] Stefan Berger, *The Past as History: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Modern Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 350.

in the enhancement of black power. Since the Roosevelt administration had to "mobilize all its people, including the black tenth of the population," American elites found it harder to brush aside black interests when wartime hostilities were ended.[103] At the same time, the geopolitical conflict of the Cold War created an imperative for Americans to critically assess the nation's internal power relations: as legal historian Micheal Klarman has written, the Soviet-American power struggle for the non-white Third World imbued the issue of race relations with political and ideological connotations. "In the ideological contest with communism," Klarman wrote, "U.S. democracy was on trial, and southern white supremacy was its greatest vulnerability."[104]

The combined effect of these two developments was profound. "Popular opinion on race undertook," Tuck has argued, "one of the most dramatic shifts of opinion on any issue in modern times." While only less than half of polled Americans in 1944 agreed with the statement that "Negroes are as intelligent as white people," that number had risen to eighty percent when respondents were asked the same question twelve years later.[105] In the political and legal realm, too, American race relations changed: in 1946, the United States government formally recognized the independence of its Philippine colony. In 1954, the country's Supreme Court legally denounced segregation, and in 1964 and 1965, president Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts into law, formally abolishing state-sanctioned racism in the United States.

In the international realm, the ideological decline of white supremacy was expressed in a 1960 resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. In the resolution, which was styled as a Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, the General Assembly affirmed its "faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, [and] in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small," before committing itself towards the promotion of "social progress and better standards of life in larger

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[103] Stephen Tuck, *We Ain't What We Ought To Be: The Black Freedom Struggle From Emancipation to Obama* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 209.
[104] Micheal J. Klarman, *Brown v. Board of Education and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 30.
[105] Tuck, "We Ain't What We Ought To Be," 285.

freedom."[106] Furthermore, the Assembly explicitly recognized that "the peoples of the world ardently desire the end of colonialism in all its manifestations." For, in addition to militating "the United Nations ideal of universal peace," the continued existence of colonialism prevented "the development of international economic cooperation," and impeded "the social, cultural and economic development of dependant peoples." Hence, the member states of the General Assembly expressed their belief that the "process of liberation is irresistible and irreversible and that, in order to avoid serious crises, and end must be put to colonialism and all practices of segregation and discrimination associated therewith."[107]

Surinamese Anansi Tales

Despite the historical developments outlined above, it should be emphasized that the decolonization of imperial cultures was a slow and gradual process. As Miel Groten has noted, Dutch missionaries in the 1950's "still wrote that Christianity equalled civilization, that 'wild tribes' were a threat to missionaries abroad, and that black Africans were superstitious." Groten persuasively argues that the changing world order did not lead to the sudden removal of notions of European superiority from Anglo-European discourse after the Second World War. Hence, Dutch missionary exhibit booklets still echoed white supremacist notions as late as 1948, when one text used the term *losgeslagen negers* ("unhinged negroes") to describe the ongoing development of the African continent.[108]

At the same time, Surinamese storytellers did not wait passively until the formal recognition of the country's independence to record their own versions of the Anansi fables. A survey of Surinamese newspapers reveals at least three confirmed instances of locally-published Anansi tales between 1917 and 1941. The earliest of these stories appeared in the *De West* newspaper in 1917, and featured a story that was previously published in an American magazine.[109] The fable was called "Anansi

[106] "Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples," United Nations General Assembly - Fifteenth Session, 14 December, 1960, http://undocs.org/A/RES/1514(XV) (accessed: 6 January, 2021).
[107] Ibidem.
[108] Groten, "Difference Between the Self and the Heathen," 502.
[109] "Surinaamsche Folklore: Anansi Eet Schapenvleesch," in: *De West: nieuwsblad uit en voor Suriname*," 19 October (1917), issue 846, ninth year of publication, https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/view?query=Anansi&facets[spatial][]=Suriname&page=2&coll=ddd&i

eet schapenvleesch", or "Anansi Eats Sheep Meat," and depicted Anansi as a gluttonous trickster. The plot revolved around the spider and his wife, who had bred "a beautiful sheep all by herself."[110] Anansi had repeatedly asked his wife to slaughter the sheep for dinner, but she had refused to do so every time. As a result, the spider set out to take matters into his own hands:

> "Ik zal mijn vrouw leren niet zoo (sic) gierig te zijn," mompelde Anansi op een avond bij het naar bed gaan.

When he woke up the next morning, Anansi pretended to be sick. When his wife found him, he told her to seek out a local healer (a so-called "loekoeman"). After his spouse had left, the spider quickly disguised himself a *lokoeman*, and hurried towards the spot where his wife was due to meet the healer.[111]

When Anansi's wife showed up, she was greeted by the healer, who was actually Anansi in disguise. The woman turned to the *lokoeman* for help:

> *Ke, mi papa*, sprak de vrouw, masra Anansi is erg ziek. Hij krijgt schokken en heeft vreselijke maagpijn. Daarom heeft hij mij gezonden om U een geneesmiddel te verzoeken.[112]

The healer then "consulted the ghosts and shook his head pensively,"[113] before addressing Anansi wife:

> Beste vrouw, uw echtvriend is een goede vriend van mij; daarom zal ik u een probaat geneesmiddel opgeven, en U niets rekenen voor mijn advies. Mijn vriend Anansi is werkelijk zeer ziek; zijn geest verlangt naar schaapenvleesch, en de arme man is stervende van verlangen daarnaar. Gij moet hem een lekker, vet schaap voorzetten, goed gekookt, en hij alleen moet er van eten.[114]

Consequently, by disguising himself as a *lokoeman*, Anansi had finally managed to convince his wife to slaughter their sheep. The story concluded in the spider's family house, when his wife and children prepared the sheep's meat for him to eat, with

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dentifier=ddd:011091185:mpeg21:a0024&resultsidentifier=ddd:011091185:mpeg21:a0024 (accessed: 27 May, 2020).

[110] "Een mooi schaap, door haar zelve gekweekt".

[111] "Anansi Eet Schapenvleesch," *De West: nieuwsblad uit en voor Suriname*.

[112] Ibidem.

[113] "De lokoeman raadpleegde de geesten, [en] schudde het hoofd bedenkelijk".

[114] "Anansi eet schapenvleesch," *De West: nieuwsblad uit en voor Suriname*.

Anansi telling his children to learn from this experience by "never being stingy again."[115]

The second tale was published in a November 1947 issue of the Suriname newspaper *Het Nieuws: Algemeen Dagblad*. The story was called "Hoe Dagoe Anansi Fopte," or "How Dagoe Fooled Anansi," and was printed in the paper's children's section.[116] Besides Anansi, the story featured two other speaking characters: Dagoe en Granman (a title associated with Surinamese authority figures). The fable started when Anansi and Dagoe decided to go pay Granman a visit. The relationship between Anansi and Granman was succinctly laid out in the second paragraph:

> Anansie was een gulzigaard en de Granman wilde hem van zijn gulzigheid afleren en een lesje leren.[117]

The relationship between the gluttonous Anansie (Anansi) and the corrective Granman was quickly established as being antagonistic in nature. The story then detailed how Granman tied up two cows in his cowshed: a fat one and a lean one. He bound the ropes through a hole in the wall, and allowed the visiting Anansi to pick the cow tied to one of the ropes. Being the glutton that he was, Anansi immediately went for the thickest of the two ropes. But to his dismay and Granman's delight, the spider trickster was only awarded with the lean cow rather than the fat one:

> Anansi vloog zonder aarzelen naar de wand en ging aan het dikke touw hangen. Hij dacht dat aan een dik touw natuurlijk een grote, vette koe zou zitten. Zijn teleurstelling was niet klein toen hij ontdekte hoe hij was beetgenomen.
>
> De Granman glunderde natuurlijk dat hij Heer Spin zo goed te pakken had. [118]

As Anansi and Dagoe walked back to their homes, the spider decided to slaughter his cow, and gave its liver to Dagoe, who had received the fat animal back at Granman's place. But Anansi quickly developed second thoughts on handing over his liver:

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[115] Ibidem; "Toen hij den laatsen hap verzwolg [...] gaf hij zijn kinderen den raad om het goede voorbeeld van hun moeder te volgen en nimmer gierig te zijn."
[116] "Hoe Dagoe Anansi fopte," in: *Het Nieuws: algemeen dagblad*, 29 November (1947), page 6, https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/view?query=Anansi&coll=ddd&identifier=ddd:010480032:mpeg21:a0059&resultsidentifier=ddd:010480032:mpeg21:a0059 (accessed: 27 May, 2020).
[117] Ibidem.
[118] Ibidem.

> Nadat ze een tijdje hadden gelopen wilde Anansi de lever terug. Maar Dagoe had de lever allang ingeslikt.
>
> "Ik wil mijn lever terug," zanikte Anansi.[119]

Because Dagoe had long since eaten the lean liver, he had no choice but to give Anansi the liver of the fat cow instead. As a consequence, Anansi had found a clever way to gain not one, but two cow livers, even though he was initially fooled by Granman's trickery back at the cowshed.

The final Anansi story was published in *Het Nieuws* on March 21, 1951. That fable - titled "Hoe Anansi zijn schuldeisers betaalde", or "How Anansi paid his creditors" - revolved around the characters of Anansi and Tigri (Tiger).[120] The tale began when Anansi opened the door for Tiger, who claimed he had been smelling chicken meat in the spider's home. After Tiger hunted down the chicken, he was warned by Anansi, who noticed the imminent arrival of a hunter named Ontieman. Tiger was then told to go and hide in the tree behind Anansi's house:

> "Verberg me vlug," zei Tigri tegen Anansi. "Je weet dat als Ontieman me ziet, hij me oogenblikkelijk (sic) doodschiet".
>
> "Goed", zei Anansi. "Klim in de boom achter het huis." Tigri deed dat met gezwinde spoed.[121]

When Ontieman finally arrived at the door, he was greeted by Anansi. In a show of feigned compassion, the spider remarked how "tired" the hunter looked, before sending him to a bucket of water near the tree that Tiger was hiding in. When Ontieman bent himself over the bucket to drink from it, he quickly identified Tiger's reflection on the water's surface. As a result, the beast was shot and killed.[122]

In the story's ending, it was revealed that Ontieman had come to Anansi's house to collect an outstanding debt. But when he intended to collect, Anansi told the hunter that he had already received payment in the form of Tiger's corpse. Hence,

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[119] Ibidem.
[120] "Surinaamse vertelling: "Hoe Anansi zijn schuldeisers betaalde," in: *Het Nieuws: algemeen dagblad*, 21 March (1951), page 6, https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/view?query=Anansi&coll=ddd&identifier=ddd:010665759:mpeg21:a0064&resultsidentifier=ddd:010665759:mpeg21:a0064 (accessed: 27 May, 2020).
[121] Ibidem.
[122] Ibidem.

the spider had managed to cleverly escape from his obligation to pay what he was owed:

> Toen ging [Ontieman] naar Anansie om zijn geld. Op tafel lag nog een pakje bankbiljetten van [20 gulden] dat [voor Ontieman] bestemd geweest (sic).
>
> "Hier is twintig gulden," zei Anansi. "Je moet mij meer betalen dan twintig," merkte Ontieman op. "Ik weet het," zei Anansi. "Maar de rest heb je in de vorm van Tigri."[123]

"How Anansi paid his creditos" concluded with an observation that tied the story's ending to a phenomenon in the real world. In the text of "How Anansi paid his creditors", the narrator remarked how Ontieman chased down Anansi in fury, forcing the spider to hide behind *een plank en een post van zijn woning*, where Ontieman was unable to reach the arachnid. And to this day, the story read, "can Anansi be found there."[124] A similar outcome was found in "How Dagoe Fooled Anansi."[125] The tale culminates in a confrontation between Granman and Anansi, as the former feels ridiculed by Anansi's antics. When the spider tried to escape, he was forced to hide behind "the small space between two wooden planks in the house."[126] Anansi was said to hide in the crevices of Suriname houses "to this day."[127]

Thus, Surinamese Anansi stories were more than sources of children's entertainment: they were explanatory tales as well. They offered explanations on observable spider behavior in domestic contexts, and helped children to understand the world around them in a playful manner. As such, it was possible to absorb the "lessons" of the Anansi stories into the fabric of lived experience.

Anansi Tales in Postcolonial Afro-Caribbean Culture

The history of the publication of Anansi tales took a new turn after the formal recognition of the independence of Afro-Caribbean countries in the decades after the Second World War. Specifically, residents of newly-liberated countries began to embrace indigenous cultural forms as markers of regional identity. As theologist Rachele Vernon has suggested in the context of Jamaican history, the emergence of

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[123] Ibidem.
[124] Ibidem; "Tot op de dag van vandaag kun je Anansi daar vinden."
[125] "Hoe Dagoe Anansi fopte," *Het Nieuws: algemeen dagblad*.
[126] "Hij vluchtte weg in een reet tussen twee planken van een huis."
[127] "Sedertdien houdt Ba Anansi zich verborgen in de reten en beslagruimten van onze huizen."

the Pan-Africanist ideas of activist Marcus Garvey (1887-1940), the Patois poems of Louise Bennett-Coverley (1919-2006), and the publications of leading folklore scholar Philip Sherlock (1902-2000), inspired Jamaicans to embrace the Anansi tradition as a "celebrated part of Jamaican culture."[128]

Vernon has also argued that this cultural absorption of the Anansi mythos greatly influenced the realm of the political imagination. For in her analysis, Cuban leader Fidel Castro's popularity among the Jamaican populace was best explained through the lens of Jamaica's cultural appreciation of Anansi-like figures. As she put it, Jamaicans appreciated leaders like Castro because they viewed him "as an Anansi character, the small trickster who defeated the big power, repeatedly, by guile," and because he miraculously survived no less than 638 assassination attempts from the powerful American government.[129] Fidel Castro was, in other words, recognized for possessing two of Anansi's monumental traits: his regular interactions with overwhelming forces of antagonism, and his penchant for trickery. Consequently, Castro was rewarded with popular appeal.

This profound success of Castro's political style has led Vernon to identify the "Anansi ethic" in Caribbean political culture. According to the Anansi ethic, politicians have to use "Anansi-craft to spin the system to benefit the poor." That is, the lingering consequences of colonial inequalities in the region have forced politicians to respond in kind to the unfair situations with which they were faced. As a result, the nature of political action in the Caribbean "slides away from conventional morality" in valuing politicians "who can compensate for the uneven playing field and still go on to win against teams that are far better equipped."[130] In other words, Vernon's conception of the Anansi ethic understood morally compromised political action as the result of the great challenges faced by the region's political class. Consider, for instance, how she narrated Castro's most notable political feats:

> Fidel [entered] Cuba in 1956 with a small group of 80 revolutionaries. He gained support and was able to defeat Batista in 1959. Those who admired him point out how he nationalised assets and provided education, health, and employment for all. Those who do not like him point to the same things but emphasise how he used

[128] Vernon, "Fidel and the Spirit of Anansi," 127.
[129] Ibidem, 129-130.
[130] Ibidem, 130.

> brutal measures to enforce this "equality". Ordinary people raise their eyebrows and wonder how else he was expected to turn a backward elitist society around.
>
> In 1960, Fidel promised to eliminate illiteracy in Cuba in one year. Well, he came very near, reducing illiteracy from 23% to 4%. His detractors point out that he used propaganda materials as part of the literacy texts, thus cementing his ideology in the minds of the people. Ordinary people mutter, "What do you expect from Anansi?"[131]

Vernon's concept of the Anansi ethic thus relied on the spider's monumental elements of powerful antagonisms and trickster antics to understand the unconventional behavior of political leaders in the Caribbean region. As such, her writing suggests that the character of Anansi was more than just a feature of Caribbean culture: he functioned as a powerful narrative figure to legitimize resourceful approaches to governance in a postcolonial context.

There is reason to believe a similar cultural frame to local politics existed in nearby Suriname. In 1977, Surinamese newspaper *Vrije Stem* published a fable titled *Ba Anansi op oorlogspad*, or "Anansi on the Warpath," in its weekly issue.[132] In the story - which was part of an opinion piece commenting on the state of Surinamese politics - Anansi was portrayed as a well-known union leader. The spider was elected to lead his union after his predecessor, Ba Sekrepatoe, was deemed to have been too friendly towards Ba Tigri (Tiger), who appeared as an abusive employer. Under the leadership of Anansi, Tiger's workers decided to mobilize against their boss. With his trademark charisma, the spider had convinced his fellow union members that armed struggle was the only viable course of action capable of upsetting the status quo in the workplace:

> De arbeiders waren onder de indruk gekomen van de woorden van Ba Anansi dat alleen een zwaargewicht onder de mannetjes zoals hijzelf instaat [sic] is om tegen Ba Tigri te kunnen vechten.

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[131] Ibidem, 129.
[132] "Derde Front Onstuitbaar," in: *Vrije Stem: onafhankelijk weekblad voor Suriname*, 20 January, 1977, https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/view?query=Anansi&facets%5Bspatial%5D%5B%5D=Surinamesee&page=1&coll=ddd&identifier=ddd:011186821:mpeg21:a0032&resultsidentifier=ddd:011186821:mpeg21:a0031 (accessed: 5 January, 2021).

> Toen de strijd begonnen was en het punt bereikt was dat de Bond haar kracht moest tonen, sloeg Ba Anansi zich met zijn acht vuisten op de borst en brulde dat de tijd aangebroken was dat hij de maskers van alle zogenaamde vrienden zou afrukken.[133]

But rather than leading the workers to victory, Ba Anansi was unable to deliver on his promise to effect meaningful change. Even his efforts to "unmask" the union's enemies failed to deliver: despite the workers' initial enthusiasm in following their leader, their willingness to follow Anansi faded when the spider proved unable to unmask would-be adversaries. As a result, some union members decided to turn on Anansi:

> Een aantal arbeiders vertrouwde het zaakje niet meer.
>
> Zij baanden zich een weg naar voren en draaiden Ba Anansi om. Tot hun grote schrik zagen zij toen dat hun eigen leider een masker aan bleek te hebben.[134]

It was revealed that the man who had pretended to be Ba Anansi, was actually an enemy of the union in disguise called Takroe Anansi. The story concluded with the remark that Tiger proved to be the ultimate beneficiary of the ensuing chaos, as he was now free to feast on his laborers "one by one."[135]

Since *Anansi op oorlogspad* was published as part of an opinion piece on populist politics, the author of the tale - who was identified as H.R.A Malmberg - gave a few notes on how to interpret this particular Anansi story's message. Their remarks argued how more and more Surinamese citizens followed the leadership of so-called "Takroe Anansi" like the deceptive union leader from the story - that is, would-be leaders that promised to fight back against powerful and malevolent interest groups, but failed to mount a meaningful challenge in the end. Ultimately, Takroe Anansies wore "masks" to hide their true faces, and relied on confusion and deceit to consolidate their authority:

> Om het volk in de war te brengen en te misleiden draagt de Takroe Anansi altijd en [sic] masker waardoor hij sprekend lijkt op de werkelijke Ba Anansi.

[133] Ibidem.
[134] Ibidem.
[135] Ibidem.

> Het volk is over de Takroe Anansi gaan praten omdat zij merkt dat zij konstant [sic] wordt bedrogen door bepaalde leiders die zich voordoen als vrijheidsstrijders maar naderhand doodgewoon misleiders te zijn geweest.[136]

As such, the author of *Anansi op oorlogspad* employed the storytelling device of the Anansi story to comment on a perceived populist trend in contemporary Surinamese politics. In doing so, he or she also deployed the monumental elements of the Anansi mythos to make their point: after all, Takroe Anansies cleverly took advantage of the power discrepancies in Surinamese society to deceive those that had trusted them.

Both Vernon's concept of the Anansi ethic and the politicized substance of *Anansi op oorlogspad* reveal the extent to which the Anansi mythos was capable of assuming political connotations beyond the cultural-historical frame of the colonial story. Rather than being imbued with the style and themes of white supremacy, *Anansi op oorlogspad* articulated a political argument steeped in the cultural form of the Anansi tradition. As a result, the story's author effectively contributed towards the construction of a political culture sensitive to the context of the local Anansi tales. When viewed in tandem with Vernon's description of the Caribbean Anansi ethic, the story from the *Vrije Stem* thus appeared to suggest that the Anansi stories could become a unique feature of the political consciousness in the postcolonial Afro-Caribbean societies that reproduced them.

_____Parallel to the political penetration of the Anansi figure, Caribbean writers sought to cement the spider's stories as indigenous cultural heritage of the region. For instance, in 1988, Jamaican writer James Berry published his own children's book of Anansi tales. As a Jamaican-born British resident, Berry had been troubled about the lack of representation of authentic Caribbean culture in UK children's books. As a result, the writer decided to publish his own work of children's literature that focused on the Anansi stories he had heard "in moonlight or in dim paraffin lamplight, during rain and storm winds" as part of his Jamaican childhood.[137] The subsequent work was titled *Anancy-Spiderman: 20 Caribbean Folk Tales*, and was

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[136] Ibidem.

[137] "*Anancy-Spiderman* by James Berry: corrected proofs, illustration and book jacket illustrated by Joseph Olubo," Digital collection of the British Library, item page, https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/anancy-spiderman-by-james-berry (accessed: 24 January, 2021).

ultimately published by the London publisher Walker Books, who marketed it to British audiences.

In this capacity, *Annancy-Spiderman* had some superficial similarity to publications like Mary Pamela Milne-Home's *Mama's Black Nurse Stories* from 1890 and Pamela Colman Smith's *Annancy Stories* from 1899. After all, these three works were all published in Anglo-European markets as collections of Jamaican Anansi stories. And in terms of substance, Berry's stories featured the same traditional monumental elements of the Anansi mythos found in those nineteenth-century works: the spider was animated by conventional human emotions, lived in an apartment, faced off with powerful opponents, and had to rely on his wits to survive.[138] At first glance, *Anansi-Spiderman* thus suggests more reason to assume continuity than change in the evolution of Anansi stories.

However, it was not necessarily the substance that set Berry's collection apart from older volumes. Instead, it was the intent behind the book that distinguished it from previous publications. As Berry wrote in his instructional notes to the future illustrator of *Annancy-Spiderman*, the author imagined the spider as a quintessentially Jamaican hero:

> Anancy is the Ashanti Spider god of tales that came to the Caribbean. He has taken on local characteristics in the Caribbean, and has become the spider hero of Westindian [sic] folk tales.[139]

In terms of behavior, Berry placed an emphasis on Anansi's witty antics. The trickster's "stock-in-trade [was] cunning, which is somehow never suspected." On the surface level, Anansi had "nothing to cope with the superiority of his opponents." As a consequence, the spider had to "rely on his wits," since he knew he had to win "without ever an engagement in physical combat if that is remotely possible."[140]

Berry also offered detailed remarks on Anansi's appearance. In describing the trickster, the Jamaican writer emphasized the character's humanity. "In his Caribbean context," the Jamaican writer noted, Anansi was considered to be "more man than

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[138] Ibidem, see stories 1-4.
[139] "A Note on Anancy for Illustrators," by James Berry (c. 1988), https://www.bl.uk/britishlibrary/~/media/bl/global/dl%20childrens%20literature/collection%20items/anancy-spiderman-by-james_berry_note_on_anancy.jpg (accessed: 16 January, 2021). At link provided in footnote #17, see image #7.
[140] Ibidem.

spider." Because his form had thus evolved into a human one, storytellers imagined him as "more man than anything else."[141] Berry's notes then linked this endorsement of Anansi's humanity with the character's unequivocal blackness:

> Anansi does not have "negro" stereotyped features or European ones. Basically, Anansi is beautifully African in his way.[142]

While "Anansi [was] African" in origin, he expressed the "basics of the Afro-Caribbean history and culture." In this fashion, Berry's conception of Anansi underlined a powerful theme: that Anansi, as a champion of black West-Indians, symbolized the strengths of the human beings he represented. Like the citizens of Jamaica, the spider "could be anything from a loveable rogue to artful prince," and like the formerly enslaved and colonized Jamaicans, Anansi had struggled to fight back against the overwhelming force of his opponents. And yet, as a human being of color, Anansi had used his "wily and cunning" to "save himself" from disaster.[143] As a consequence, Berry's intended conception of the spider trickster underlined the centrality of the black West-Indian experience as a feature of the Anansi mythos.

Berry's instructions echoed the narrative recorded 32 years prior by the Jamaican scholar Philip Sherlock. In the introduction to his illustrated children's collection *Anansi the Spider Man*, Sherlock offered a brief history of the spider's origins:

> Anansi's home was in the villages and forests of West Africa. From there long years ago thousands of men and women came to the islands of the Caribbean. They brought with them the stories that they loved, the stories about clever Br'er Anansi, and his friends Tiger and Crow and Moos-Moos and Kisander the cat.
>
> Today the people of the islands still tell these stories to each other. So, in some country village in Jamaica when the sun goes down the children gather round an old woman and listen to the stories of Anansi.[144]

Even though Sherlock's words lacked the explicit endorsement of Anansi's blackness found in Berry's notes, the scholar's remarks still presented the story of the spider's

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[141] Ibidem.
[142] Ibidem.
[143] Ibidem.
[144] Philip M. Sherlock, *Anansi the Spider Man: Jamaican Folk Tales* (Macmillan: London, 1956), 1-2.

emergence by centering the Afro-Caribbean experience - the journey undertaken by kidnapped Africans across the Atlantic Ocean, the mythical tales from their imaginations, the sharing of fables in intimate settings - rather than the history of European slavery and colonialism. Simply put, Sherlock described how Afro-Caribbeans chose to reproduce the stories they cherished instead of wondering how the presence of European colonizers had influenced the style and substance of those folk tales. As a result, both Sherlock and Berry offered a quintessential postcolonial narrative of the history of the Jamaican Anansi tales.

Emergence of the Postcolonial Anansi

Postcolonial narratives on the origins of the Anansi stories ultimately influenced the manner in which European elites came to understand the history of the folk tales. In her twenty-first century collection of Anansi stories, for example, American literary scholar Laura Gibbs introduced the origin of the trickster tales as follows:

> Anansi the Spider is an African trickster. Enslaved African storytellers brought Anansi's stories to the Americas, and the Anansi stories in this book come from the Caribbean: from Jamaica, Antigua, Grenada, and more.[145]

Contrary to the introductions of such authors like Milne-Home and Smith from the previous chapter, Gibbs' remarks centered Anansi's origins in the story of African cultural history. She then proceeded to link the presence of the character to the institution of slavery - which had, in the context of Gibbs' cultural-historical moment, lost its romantic connotations - and made it clear that the Anansi tradition was tied to the injustices of forced migrations of enslaved Africans. As such, Gibbs's introduction decoupled the substance of the Anansi tales from the colonial story of the nineteenth century, and presented the trickster as the local hero of trapped Africans in the New World.

But despite the different introductory frame she employed, Gibbs' *Tiny Tales of Anansi* retained the monumental elements historically attributed to the Caribbean Anansi tradition. In her book, the University of Oklahoma academic offered numerous 100-word rewritings of historical Anansi stories. By drawing on tales like "Anansi and

[145] Laura Gibbs, *Tiny Tales of Anansi*: *A Book of Two Hundred 100-Word Stories* (published digitally), 1, http://anansi.lauragibbs.net/Anansi.pdf (accessed: 12 December 2020).

Tiger in the Pit,"[146] "Anansi and his Grandmother,"[147] and "Anansi and the Coconut,"[148] Gibbs still presented the spider as a worthy adversary of the mighty Tiger, a witty but cruel trickster, and a resident of an anthropomorphic world of animal characters. Even though the way in which Anansi's context was presented had thus changed, the monumentality of his adventures remained unchanged.

Gibbs' portrayal of Anansi's monumental characteristics is best illustrated with a reading of her version of "Tiger as Riding Horse." As part of her methodology, Gibbs explained that she was primarily inspired by Beckwith's "original" recording of the story. Furthermore, her notes acknowledged the illustrations from Pamela Colman Smith's version of the tale, and provided an image of the drawings as visual reference materials.[149] Substantially, Gibbs' iteration featured a reimagined origin of the conflict that sparked Anansi's trickery:

> Anansi kept telling everybody, "Tiger was my father's riding-horse."
>
> This made Tiger angry![150]

Rather than having Anansi and Tiger fight for the courtship of a group of young women, Gibbs imagined Anansi as a generic spreader of derogatory rumors. However, the rumour stayed the same: in both Gibbs' iteration and the "original" versions, Anansi claimed that Tiger was his "father's riding horse." Her text specified that Tiger heard about the rumours being spread about him, and then "went to Anansi's house." Having arrived there, the feline predator demanded compliance from the spider. "Come with me," he commanded. "You're going to take back your words." Anansi replied by saying he was sick, and thus unable to walk.[151] Tiger replied by allowing the spider to ride on his back:

> "I'm sick!" groaned Anansi. "I'm too weak to walk."
>
> "Well, you can get on my back."

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[146] Ibidem, 4.
[147] Ibidem, 6.
[148] Ibidem, 7.
[149] Laura Gibbs, "Anansi's Riding Horse: Inspired By & Notes," *Drabbles: Tiny Traditional Stories in 100 Words*, 15 June, 2020, https://microfables.blogspot.com/2020/06/anansis-riding-horse.html (accessed: 10 December 2020).
[150] Gibbs, "Tiny Tales of Anansi," 5.
[151] Ibidem.

> Anansi fetched his saddle and bridle and spurs.
>
> "What do you need all that for?" asked Tiger.
>
> "To keep from falling off," Anansi said. "I'm feeling so weak!"
>
> Then when Anansi was in the saddle, he spurred Tiger, who ran.
>
> "Like I said: Tiger was my father's riding-horse" Anansi shouted. "And now he's mine!"[152]

Just like in the folk tales recorded by Milne-Home, Smith, and Beckwith, Anansi was able to outsmart Tiger by pretending to be sick. In all four versions of the story, the essence of Anansi's trick was the same: he convinced the large cat to carry him on his back due to a non-existent illness, and leverage the optics of that situation to embarrass the feline predator. In that sense, Gibbs' rewriting of "Tiger as Riding Horse" maintained the narrative core of the stories it took inspiration from. However, the musical components of the story - which featured prominently in the version recorded by Beckwith - did not carry over to Gibbs' version, as did the illustrations that accompanied the tale in Smith's collection. This was likely a reflection of different contexts in which the texts were intended to be consumed. While the folk tale was primarily rooted in the oral Anansi tradition, its 100-word adaptation was designed to be consumed in written form. As a result, communal elements like songs and illustrations, which had become a central feature of the Anansi tales as long as they were orally transmitted, proved to be relatively meaningless in written form.

The importance of oral transmission to the Anansi tradition was already recognized by Van Capelle in 1904. In his article, the geologist gave a first-hand account of the manner in which Anansi stories were shared in a Surinamese community:

> Meermalen [sic] schepte ik er genoegen in, het primitief kampement onzer negers, op korten [sic] afstand van onze hut, te gaan bezoeken, wanneer zij na het nuttigen van hun eenvoudig doch overvloedig maal aan het vertellen waren.

[152] Ibidem.

> Bij de flikkerende vlammen van het houtvuur vond ik dan een onzer arbeiders in zijn hangmat gezeten, omringd door een aantal toehoorders, op wier gelaat de grootste aandacht en een innig genoegen te lezen was. De verteller sprak gemakkelijk, met mooie accentuatie en met bewonderenswaardige stembuiging, soms fluisterend om daarna met langzame stemverheffing zijne [sic] woorden met kracht uit te stooten.[153]

Van Capelle's remarks gave a vivid description of the oral tradition that accompanied the Surinamese Anansi tales in 1904. His text mentioned how storytellers used inflections in their voice to convey the substance of their tales as they enthralled the crowd that had gathered around them. The details given highlighted the warmth of the gathering: the room was lit by candlelight, listeners were lying in hammocks, and great joy and satisfaction was visible on the faces of people that had gathered there. In such an intimate context, communal elements like singing and the sharing of illustrations - like those elements provided in Beckwith's and Smith's Anansi tales and alluded to in Sherlock's remarks - would be able to receive an enthusiastic response from the audience in a way that was hardly emulatable during literary transmission. Hence, it may come as no surprise that a writer like Gibbs would choose to omit or tone down those components in her abridged version of "Tiger as Riding Horse." In such a way, expressions of mobility could also reflect the medium used for the transmission of a tale.

Anansi Tales as Recognized Cultural Heritage

The influence of the postcolonial narrative about Anansi's origins can also be illustrated in the cultural context of the Netherlands. On May 16, 2016, the spider's stories became a big deal in the western European country. As the Dutch public broadcaster *NOS* noted in an online news story posted on that day, the Netherlands had just been enriched with new cultural heritage: the Surinamese Anansi fables.[154] In its article, the news outlet explained how the history of this Afro-Caribbean folk tradition was rooted in West African culture, and shaped by some of history's most far-reaching processes:

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[153] "Surinaamse negervertellingen door dr. H. van Capelle," 315.
[154] "Verhalen over spin Anansi op erfgoedlijst," *NOS*, 16 May, 2016, https://nos.nl/artikel/2104918-verhalen-over-spin-anansi-op-erfgoedlijst.html (accessed: 19 January, 2021).

> De verhalen over [de spin] Anansi worden al eeuwen verteld in West-Afrika. Door de slavenhandel verspreidden ze zich tot Suriname en de Antillen. Door de naoorlogse migratie kwamen ze ook in Nederland terecht.[155]

In only a handful of lines, the *NOS* report caught the essence of Anansi's historic journey across the Atlantic Ocean. As a character with African origins, the spider Anansi was uprooted from his native continent, and forcibly transported to the slave plantations of the Caribbean. During the era of decolonization, the Anansi fables migrated again - this time to Suriname's former mother country of the Netherlands, where they had now established themselves as formally recognized cultural heritage. As contemporary coverage from the Dutch press agency *ANP* noted, these historical developments reflected the challenges faced by the country's Afro-Caribbean community:

> De Anansi verteltraditie is heel nauw verbonden met de identiteit van de Afro-Surinaamse en de Afro-Caribische mensen in Nederland. De traditie draagt bij aan het versterken van de bewustwording en trots over afkomst en cultuur. De traditie staat voor hoop, trots en humor en kent een positieve connotatie ondanks het donkere verleden waarin het erfgoed over de wereld is verspreid.[156]

As the proud heritage of the African continent, Anansi stories had survived the hardships of forced migration, slavery, and colonialism to emerge as beacons of Afro-Caribbean culture in the postcolonial world. Dutch Afro-Caribbeans had therefore taken pride in the recitation of these fables, for doing so had served as a celebration of their resilience, humanity, and survival in the face of overwhelming antagonism and oppression. In this fashion, the *ANP* and *NOS* reports recognized the Anansi character not just as an expression of indigenous Surinamese cultural forms, but equally praised the spider trickster as a constitutive element of postcolonial *Dutch* society. Anansi was, in other words, no longer imagined as part of the "dark heathen world," but embraced as a cherished part of metropolitan Dutch culture.

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[155] Ibidem.
[156] "Anansi verteltraditie erkend als immaterieel erfgoed," *ANP Pers Support*, 13 May, 2016, https://www.perssupport.nl/persbericht/99299/anansi-verteltraditie-erkend-als-immaterieel-erfgoed (accessed: 19 January, 2021).

Anansi's Postcolonial Transformation

This chapter has explored the relationship between decolonization and the reception of Anansi tales. We have seen how the collapse of colonialism after the Second World War led to the decline of the colonial story, and coincided with the emergence of postcolonial perspectives on the origins of the Anansi tradition. As a result, the substance of the Anansi stories was absorbed in the cultural contexts of postcolonial societies like Jamaica and Suriname, and ultimately, also recognized as such in the former imperial cultures of the Anglo-European world. In this fashion, collections of Anansi fables gradually completed their transformation from signifiers of colonial supremacy to markers of indigenous Afro-Caribbean identity.

Closing Remarks

This thesis has asked whether and how changes in cultural-historical circumstances have affected the Jamaican and Surinamese Anansi stories between 1890 and 2020. Given the diverse contexts in which the folk tales were distributed and the enormous upheavals commonly associated with that time period - the two World Wars, decolonization and the Cold War come to mind in this regard - one would perhaps expect to see many transformations in the evolution of the spider's fables. But that did not happen. Instead, the substance of the Anansi tales remained relatively unchanged over the course of those 130 years. From the late nineteenth century all the way to the twenty-first century, Anansi's antics were defined by the same three core characteristics: the spider's regular engagements with powerful forces of antagonism, the trickster's witty antics, and the character's secular and anthropomorphic disposition. For this reason, the actual text of the Anansi stories remained mostly the same.

What did change over time, however, were the attitudes and ideas held *about* the spider. At the turn of the nineteenth century, colonial attitudes dominated Anglo-American discourse about the Surinamese and Jamaican Anansi tales. By drawing on the themes of European supremacy to narrate collections of Anansi stories, European and American authors not only explored the substance of Jamaican or Surinamese folklore, but also implicitly worked out a normative contrast between the "black" sphere of Afro-Caribbean culture and the "white" world of European civilization. As a result, collectors of Anansi stories effectively legitimized the idea of Anglo-European superiority, and thus, colonial rule.

But again, the historical relevance of imperial attitudes to the actual *substance* of the Afro-Caribbean Anansi tradition should not be overstated. For in the decades after the Second World War - the time period when the colonial empires of the Anglo-European world collapsed due to the process of decolonization - the spider trickster's defining elements remained more or less stable. For all intents and purposes, decolonization did not result in major changes to the Anansi mythos as far as the fables' monumentality was concerned: before and after the fall of European rule in the Caribbean region, Anansi stories were told in ways that were more or less similar to each other. Hence, the history of these Afro-Caribbean folk tales suggests

that large-scale historical shifts were not always translated in changes to day-to-day cultural engagements.

The changes that were noticeable during the decolonization period related primarily to the historical perspective the spider was placed in. As the credibility of overt Anglo-European superiority evaporated, Europeans and Americans vacated the discourse surrounding Anansi's reception. This historical development provided an opportunity for citizens of newly-independent Caribbean countries like Jamaica and Suriname to present the trickster character as a champion of indigenous Afro-Caribbean culture rather than a product of colonial power relations. Consequently, Anansi left his colonial past behind to emerge as a symbol of the postcolonial Caribbean world.

The rearticulation of the spider's origins had a profound effect. Not only was the spider recognized as an indigenous icon of Afro-Caribbean culture in Surinamese and Jamaican contexts, but by the twenty-first century, Anglo-Europeans had also detached the spider from notions of European superiority, and came to accept the trickster as an important representative of Afro-Caribbean cultural forms in their own western societies. In this sense, the reception of the Anansi tradition has mirrored the postcolonial shift in attitudes towards the Afro-Caribbean communities of the west in general. As a result, Anansi crossed the Atlantic Ocean not once, but twice: first as a stowaway on the slave ships that sailed from Africa towards the New World, and again as the cultural envoy of the formerly enslaved populations of the Americas in the Anglo-European societies that had once dominated them. The Anansi stories, therefore, continue to travel the Atlantic world.

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