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FROM GWOKA MODÈNN TO JAZZ KA:

MUSIC, NATIONALISM, AND CREOLIZATION IN GUADELOUPE

by

Jerome Camal

A dissertation presented to
the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of
Washington University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

May 2011

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May 2011

Abstract

My dissertation explores the development of new musical styles based on *gwoka*, a Guadeloupean drum-based music and dance tradition. During five visits to Guadeloupe between 2007 and 2009, I interviewed musicians, music professionals, and cultural and political activists. In addition, I attended numerous musical performances, learned to play and dance *gwoka*, and performed with several ensembles. I combine this ethnographic data with archival evidence to reveal how Guadeloupe's atypical path to decolonization and economic dependency has fueled the growth of nationalist sentiment on the island. Using transcriptions and analyses of musical recordings, I demonstrate how musicians have participated in Guadeloupe's political debates by deploying specific musical strategies in order to define and express their national cultural identities.

Following an ethnographic description of traditional *gwoka* as it is practiced in Guadeloupe today, I explore the music's historical roots. I demonstrate how, from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century, colonial social dynamics not only allowed for the creation of new creole musical practices but also determined the social capital of these new musical genres, resulting in the stigmatization of African-derived music. Next, I reveal how separatist middle-class activists turned to rural African-derived music to build a sense of national cultural unity in the late 1960s. In the process, these militants modified *gwoka* to fit their cosmopolitan modernist values, adapting a participatory music for stage performance and adding European and North American instruments. I then follow the evolution of instrumental *gwoka* through the 1970s and '80s, bringing to light the different musical strategies used to express Guadeloupean identity. Finally, I conclude by highlighting how a younger generation of Guadeloupean musicians have transformed both the form and meaning of instrumental *gwoka* in order to adapt to new economic and political conditions. These musicians, liberated from the weight of nationalist ideology, are able to embrace their creoleness and express transnational identities by mixing *gwoka* with other musical styles.

Through the study of music, this project brings to light the political and cultural impact of Guadeloupe's nationalist movement, thus offering a way to better understand contemporary Guadeloupean society. Using Guadeloupe as an example, this study contributes to our understanding of cultural nationalism in postcolonial societies. In particular, it reveals how music and discourse about music capture the tension between race and class solidarity as well as between national and diasporic consciousness. It demonstrates how nationalism, diasporic intimacy, and creolization restrict one another without being mutually exclusive. In response to the widespread use of creolization theories in globalization studies, this dissertation brings creolization home to the Caribbean to reveal its particular significance as a post-nationalist strategy.

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I want to thank all the people in Guadeloupe who have given so much of their time to teach me about their wonderful island, its culture, and its history. I have listed all of my collaborators at the end of this dissertation but I would like to take time to single out a few of them here, starting with Félix Cotellon who opened many doors for me. I hope that this work meets his expectations. Many warm thanks to Christian Dahomay and Jacky Jalème for teaching me how to play and dance gwoka and for the countless hours spent answering my questions. François Ladrezeau's musical talent is matched only by his kindness. I want to thank him for giving me so many opportunities to perform the music I was studying. The following pages do not do justice to his importance to this project and his contributions to Guadeloupean music. I also want to thank Olivier Vamur, Michel Sylvestre and the members of Horizon for letting me crash their rehearsals on a regular basis. Thank you also to Klod Kiavué, another great musical mind, for welcoming

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List of Organizations and their Acronyms

AGEG: Association Générale des Etudiants Guadeloupéens

ARC: Alliance Révolutionnaire Caraïbe

CASC: Comité d'Actions Sportives et Culturelles

CMDT: Centre des Musiques et Danses Traditionnelles Contemporaines et Populaires de la Guadeloupe, also known as *Rèpriz*.

CPNJG: Comité Populaire National de la Jeunesse Guadeloupéenne

FAG: Front Antillo-Guyanais, a.k.a. FAGA - Front Antillo-Guyanais pour l'Autonomie.

FLN: Front de Libération Nationale

FMJD: Fédération Mondiale de la Jeunesse Démocratique

GLA: Groupement de Libération Armé

GKM: Gwo Ka Modènn

GONG: Groupe d'Organisation Nationale de la Guadeloupe

LKP: Lyannaj Kont Pwofitasyon (Alliance against profiteering)

MPGI: Mouvement Populaire pour une Guadeloupe Indépendante

MRJC: Mouvement Rural de Jeunesse Chrétienne

MUFLNG: Mouvement pour l'Unification des Forces de Libération Nationale Guadeloupéenne

OJAM: Organisation de la Jeunesse Anticolonialiste de la Martinique

PCF: Parti Communiste Français

PCG: Parti Communiste Guadeloupéen

PPM: Parti Progressiste Martiniquais

PTG: Parti des Travailleurs Guadeloupéens

RFO: Réseau France Outremer

UGTG: Union Générale des Travailleurs Guadeloupéens

UIE: Union Internationale des Etudiants

UPG: Union des Paysans Pauvres de la Guadeloupe

UPLG: Union pour la Libération de la Guadeloupe

UTA: Union des Travailleurs Guadeloupéens

Introduction

Music, nationalism, and creolization in practice and theory

In July 2009, I attended a performance by singer-songwriter Dominik Coco during a music festival on the French Caribbean island of Guadeloupe. At the end of his concert, Coco performed “Mwen sé Gwadeloupéyen” (I am Guadeloupean), a song based on a poem by Guadeloupean separatist author Sonny Rupaïre. While performing it, Coco held the flag of the most famous pro-independence political organization on the island. As I sat on the grass in front of the stage, surrounded by several hundred people, I overheard a man virulently criticizing the performance. He was not ranting against the political message of the song, quite the opposite. Rather, he denounced the type of harmony and figuration that Coco was playing on guitar. To this man, Coco’s tonal setting of the poem—actually quite conventional by Western popular music standards—sounded like a betrayal of his national identity, an affront to Rupaïre’s nationalist message. Coco offered a musical portrait of the Guadeloupean people. Yet this audience member heard something that he almost certainly associated with Guadeloupe’s former colonial power, France.

This anecdote illustrates the very strong connection between musical style, politics, and identity in contemporary Guadeloupe. Between 2007 and 2010, I have traveled to Guadeloupe five times to study the links between separatist politics and the creation of new musical genres based on a local drumming tradition known as *gwoka*. Gwoka is an umbrella term that groups together various African-derived musical

practices. Most commonly, gwoka refers to the music and dance performed during outdoor events known as *swaré léwòz* (French, *soirée les roses*). Gwoka is typically performed by an ensemble of three drums that are themselves called *gwoka* or simply *ka*, a lead singer, and a chorus comprised of members of the audience. While gwoka was often denigrated in the 1950s and 1960s, things changed radically with the growth of the Guadeloupean separatist movement and the introduction of *gwoka modènn* (modern gwoka) by guitarist and ideologue Gérard Lockel in 1969. With *gwoka modènn*, Lockel proposed a way to adapt the melodies, scales, and rhythms of traditional gwoka in order to play them on new instruments such as guitar, trumpet, saxophone, or drum set.

This dissertation examines the evolution of instrumental gwoka from the 1960s to the present. The phrase “instrumental gwoka” may confuse people unfamiliar with the politics of naming musical styles in Guadeloupe. Indeed, all forms of gwoka, be they traditional or modern, are performed using musical instruments. Furthermore, many of the examples discussed in the following chapters feature vocalists and are therefore not, strictly speaking, instrumental. Nonetheless, in Guadeloupe, musicians draw a distinction between music performed solely with creole instruments (instruments that are created locally with more or less overt references to foreign models, such as the gwoka, the *chacha*, or the creole djembé) and music played using European or North American instruments. I use “instrumental gwoka” in opposition to traditional gwoka, by which I refer to music performed by singers accompanied by a drum ensemble. Instrumental gwoka comprises the many musical styles that mix gwoka drums and other creole instruments with Western instruments such as guitar, trumpet, saxophone, or drum set,

whether or not they also feature singers. The phrase “instrumental gwoka” allows me to avoid the more specific expressions “gwoka modènn” (modern gwoka), “gwoka évolutif” (progressive gwoka), “jazz ka,” or “*nouvelle chanson créole*,” each phrase being associated with specific musicians and, as I will demonstrate, specific ideologies.¹

My research illuminates how the Guadeloupean separatist movement in the late 1960s and '70s adopted gwoka as a national symbol and fostered the emergence of gwoka modènn. It explains how gwoka musicians have since used various musical



Figure 0.1: Map of Guadeloupe

¹ The distinction between creole and foreign instruments came up during my interviews with drum manufacturer Félix Flauzin, 20 and 21 December 2007. The creole djembé is a hour-glass shaped drum, like its African cousin, fitted with a goat skin head held by the tension system typical of Guadeloupean gwoka drums (see chapter 1).

strategies—such as choices of scales, rhythms, instrumentation, or harmony—to define their own artistic, cultural, and political identity. It also demonstrates how changing social and political conditions in Guadeloupe led to the development of new musical styles based on gwoka and forced a reexamination of the music's role as a national(ist) symbol.

This research represents the first major scholarly study of gwoka. Through the study of music, it reveals both the political and cultural impact of Guadeloupe's nationalist movement, thus offering a way to better understand contemporary Guadeloupean society. More broadly, using Guadeloupe as an example, this study contributes to our understanding of cultural nationalism in postcolonial societies. In particular, I reveal how music and discourse about music capture the tension between race and class solidarities as well as between national and diasporic consciousness. I demonstrate how nationalism, diasporic intimacy and creolization interact to define Guadeloupean identity in a field characterized by tensions between local specificity, hybridity, and universalism. In this context, I highlight the particular political significance of creolization in Caribbean societies at a moment when creolization theories are applied to the study of a broad range of phenomena around the world. In particular, I propose that creolization, as a postcolonial discourse, opens a creative space from which Caribbean artists can criticize both the neocolonial powers that continue to dominate their economy and the local political elites who have defined the local nationalist discourse.

I. Guadeloupe: A brief geographic and historical survey

Guadeloupe is a French Caribbean archipelago located between Dominica to its south and Montserrat to its north. If one ignores its northern dependencies St. Barthelemy and St. Martin, Guadeloupe comprises four distinct areas. Grande Terre and Basse Terre are the two largest land masses, separated by a narrow sea channel. These two islands are joined by two bridges that facilitate travel between them. To the south is Marie Galante. La Désirade is a narrow finger of land that extends eastward into the Atlantic ocean from Grande Terre. Finally, the small islands of Les Saintes dot the horizon to the south of Basse Terre (Figure 0.1).

I limited most of my research to recent and contemporary gwoka practices on the two main islands of Grande Terre and Basse Terre. Although there are some gwoka groups on Marie Galante, I spent very little time there. Also, while I detail the activities of a few gwoka groups in Paris in the 1980s, I focus only on those groups that have had a significant impact on music in Guadeloupe. This study does not fully engage the dynamic gwoka scene in metropolitan France.

As Francophone Studies scholar Richard Burton has commented, the political situation of the French overseas departments of Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane, and Réunion is rather unusual.² While many colonized nations around the world sought and achieved their independence after World War II, the so-called “old colonies” of France pushed for a different type of decolonization. Faced with the rapid decline of the sugar industry, Antillean politicians campaigned for full integration within the French political

² “The French West Indies à l’heure de l’Europe.”

system, hoping to benefit from France's social protection policies. As a result, the French national assembly voted in 1946 to transform its former American colonies plus Réunion into *départements*. Rather than fulfilling its promises, departmentalization accelerated the social and economic transformation of Antillean society. By the early 1960s, unemployment soared as the islands' economies became increasingly dependent on French subsidies. Resentment quickly built up, fueling the emergence of Marxist separatist movements in the *départements d'outre mer* (DOM, French overseas departments).³

The Guadeloupean separatist movement gained momentum following the deadly riots that shook the city of Pointe-à-Pitre in May 1967. The early 1970s saw the creation of a number of nationalist labor unions, followed rapidly by several separatist political parties. The separatist movement peaked in the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, its internal divisions and France's decentralization policies greatly weakened it during the latter decade.

Even if the Guadeloupean separatist movement never achieved its political goal, it nonetheless had a profound impact on contemporary Guadeloupean society, both in the political and cultural fields. Unfortunately, this impact remains understudied. None of the authors in Burton and Reno's *French and West Indian* or in Ramos and Rivera's *Islands at the Crossroads* acknowledge the nationalist movement fully, and neither do Guadeloupean historians Lucien Abenon or Jacques Adelaïde-Merlande.⁴ Ellen Schnepel

³ Similar separatist movements also emerged in Martinique and Guiana.

⁴ Abenon, *Petite histoire de la Guadeloupe*; Adelaïde-Merlande, *Histoire contemporaine de la Caraïbe et des Guyanes*.

deals with the nationalist movement's influence on language in her book *In Search of National Identity*, in which she reveals how nationalist activists successfully campaigned for the recognition and teaching of Creole in Guadeloupean schools. The present study builds on her analysis. I was fortunate to gain access to several key leaders of Guadeloupe's separatist movement who shared with me their life stories and some of their documents. These activists provided a broader perspective on the development of Guadeloupean nationalism in the second half of the twentieth century.

II. Guadeloupean music between nationalism and creolization

In "Narrating the Nation," Homi Bhabha proposed to "encounter the nation as it is written." Here, I want to encounter the nation as it is performed through music, and in doing so shift our attention away from the permanence of the written record. My goal nevertheless remains similar to Bhabha's, namely to reveal "the partial, overdetermined process by which [...] meaning is produced through the articulation of difference" and to

[investigate] the nation-space in the process of the articulation of elements: where meanings may be partial because they are in *media res*; and history may be half-made because it is in the process of being made; and the image of cultural authority may be ambivalent because it is caught, uncertainly, in the act of "composing" its powerful image.⁵

Bhabha describes the nation in a constant state of becoming. His words have a particularly strong resonance for Guadeloupe where the nation and the state are essentially two separate entities.⁶ Subaltern and postcolonial studies scholar Partha Chatterjee has proposed three nationalist moments leading to, and following, the creation

⁵ Bhabha, "Narrating the Nation," 306-308.

⁶ Puri, *The Caribbean Postcolonial*, 30.

of a new state. The moment of departure sees the emergence of a nationalist vanguard from a local elite that operates as a middle group between the colonial power and the masses. Cultural nationalism—what Chatterjee identified as “spiritual nationalism” in the case of India—is an essential aspect of the moment of departure since it allows for an initial effort to define the nation in cultural terms. During the moment of maneuver, nationalism is transformed from a predominantly cultural into a political—or military—effort to establish an independent state. Following the successful creation of a new state comes the moment of arrival during which nationalism serves to fashion national solidarity and to establish the legitimacy of the new ruling elite.⁷ In Guadeloupe, the moment of arrival remains an ever elusive goal as long as the archipelago remains a part of the French state.

Bhabha also draws attention to the dialogical nature of the nation:

The “locality” of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as “other” in relation to what is outside or beyond it. The boundary is Janus-faced and the problem of outside/inside must always itself be a process of hybridity, incorporating new “people” in relation to the body politic, generating other sites of meaning and, inevitably, in the political process, producing unmanned sites of political antagonism and unpredictable forces for political representation.⁸

The tension between the local and the global, the specific and the universal, the stable and the hybrid are central to my study of Guadeloupean music. Indeed, my research on gwoka led me to investigate the dialogic relation of nationalism and creolization, themselves conceived as dialogical processes.

⁷ Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought in the Colonial World*; Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragment*, 5-6; Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*, 162-163.

⁸ Bhabha, “Narrating the Nation,” 309.

Thinking of creolization and nationalism as processes enables us to emphasize the role of dialogues, exchanges, conflicts, negotiations, and compromises in shaping the significance and signification of these concepts. This seems natural for creolization since the term itself defines a process, as we shall see below. It is perhaps less obvious with nationalism. As I explain later, “nationalism” has proven difficult to circumscribe. Certainly, Stalin conceived of the nation as stable, antithetical to the idea of process.⁹ Renan, however, spoke of the nation as a “moral conscience.” The nation is rooted in the past, argued Renan, but it is dependent on the will of individuals to constantly renew their pledge to belong to its community.¹⁰ When American school children pledge allegiance to the flag or when their parents stand up for the national anthem at the beginning of baseball games, we see the process of nationalism at work. Robert Foster invites us to think of “nations as cultural products, and of nationalism as a cultural process of collective identity formation.” He concludes:

Nations, and national cultures are artifacts—continually imagined, invented, contested, and transformed by the agencies of individual persons, the state, and global flows of commodities. As an ideology, nationalism (as well as a set of correlated practices, the nation) is perhaps the most compelling and consequential artifact of modern times.¹¹

Conceptualizing nationalism and creolization as processes has two ramifications. First, it highlights that nationalism cannot simply be conceived as the product of a political elite. Nationalism involves a dialogue among separate social groups.¹² Second, it

⁹ Stalin, “The Nation.”

¹⁰ Renan, “Qu’est-ce-qu’une nation?”

¹¹ Foster, “Making National Cultures,” 235, 252.

¹² Dudley, *Music from beyond the Bridge*, 264-267; Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism*, 33.

invites us to recognize that the meaning of creolization can be strategically reinterpreted to mean different things to different people at different times.

A. Musical nationalism in the Caribbean and beyond

Considering nationalism as a process has implications for the definition of cultural—and *a fortiori* musical—nationalism. Thomas Turino uses the term musical nationalism “to refer specifically to musical styles, activities, and discourses that are explicitly part of nationalist political movements and programs,” that is to say to situations when music participates directly in a program aimed at the creation of a nation-state. Turino also draws a distinction between nationalism and national sentiment. The first is a political movement. The second is “the more general feelings of belonging to a nation,” a feeling that Benedict Anderson and Arjun Appadurai refer to as “patriotism.”¹³ This distinction allows Turino to distance his work on musical nationalism in Zimbabwe from “the standard musicological usage where musical nationalism is assumed when local ‘folk’ elements are incorporated into elite or cosmopolitan styles, or national sentiment is somehow evoked.”¹⁴

I adopt Turino’s definition of musical nationalism but I do not agree with his artificial distancing of nationalism and national consciousness. As Shannon Dudley points out, Turino’s distinction between nationalism and national sentiment tends to privilege the agency of politicians and intellectual elites in cultural matters. “The fact is,” argues Dudley, “that political nationalism invariably depends on nationalist sentiment,

¹³ Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*, 13; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Appadurai, *Modernity at large*, 158-177.

¹⁴ Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*, 13.

and so nationalist sentiment—whether or not it is congruent with politicians’ interests—contributes to the character and the course of nationalism.”¹⁵ In Guadeloupe, cultural nationalism was originally the product of an intellectual elite who selected gwoka as a national symbol. However, as John Hutchinson has demonstrated, nationalism is not constrained by elite control.¹⁶ Thus the significance of gwoka within what Kelly Askew calls the “national imaginary” is the product of a back and forth between the nationalist leadership and the musicians who appropriated and transformed the nationalist discourse.¹⁷

This study is very much concerned with the role of music within a nationalist political movement, which does not preclude the deployment of vernacular elements into elite or cosmopolitan styles of music.¹⁸ Guadeloupean separatist organizations’ use of gwoka inscribes the Guadeloupean nationalist movement within a broader pattern of postcolonial nationalism that Turino describes as “modernist reformism.” Modernist reform, explains Turino, involves the creation of a so-called “new culture” based on the “modernization” of local tradition through the adoption of cosmopolitan practices or technologies.¹⁹ Dudley, who studied this process in Trinidad, explains:

¹⁵ Dudley, *Music from beyond the Bridge*, 264.

¹⁶ Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism*, 30-40.

¹⁷ Askew, *Performing the Nation*, 273.

¹⁸ I follow Guthrie Ramsey’s lead in using “vernacular” rather than “folk” music. “Folk” has historically connoted visions of pure, stable culture uncontaminated by mass marketing. In addition, the “folk” has often indexed cultural expressions perceived not only to have a limited market value but also limited social capital. The term “vernacular,” in contrast, is more fluid, less tainted by negative historical associations. At the same time, it does not mask the social distinctions afforded by the “folk.” Ramsey, *Race Music*, 39-40; Lemelle and Kelley, *Imagining Home*, 9.

¹⁹ *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music*, 16.

Modernist reform is a process by which middle-class intellectuals seek to modernize lower-class performance traditions and to put them on display in ways that conform more closely to cosmopolitan conventions, such as stage presentation. This ideology has an especially strong appeal to Caribbean nationalists because of the newness and hybridity of their societies, a condition which they are never allowed to forget.²⁰

In Guadeloupe, under the leadership of Gérard Lockel, gwoka was transformed from a participatory music played outdoors to a presentational music played on stage with European and North American instruments.²¹

Partha Chatterjee explicates the particular quandary facing postcolonial nationalism:

Nationalist texts were addressed both to “the people” who were said to constitute the nation and to the colonial masters whose claim to rule nationalism questioned. To both, nationalism sought to demonstrate the falsity of the colonial claim that the backward peoples were culturally incapable of ruling themselves in the condition of the modern world. Nationalism denied the alleged inferiority of the colonized people; it also asserted that a backward nation could ‘modernize’ itself while retaining its cultural identity. It thus produced a discourse in which, even as it challenged the colonial claim to political domination, it also accepted the very intellectual premises of ‘modernity’ on which colonial domination was based.²²

Guadeloupean nationalists negotiated this paradoxical situation by adopting a scientific discourse inspired by the Enlightenment and socialism in order to legitimize their modernist reformist project. They asserted that the selection of gwoka and Creole as true expressions of Guadeloupean-ness resulted from a scientific study of Guadeloupean society.²³

²⁰ *Music from beyond the Bridge*, 16.

²¹ I borrow the concepts of participatory and presentational music from Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music*, 47-50.

²² *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, 30.

²³ AGEF, *Rapport culturel*.

Modernist reformism depends on the adoption, interpretation and transformation of cosmopolitan models. These models are often European. For example, Michael Largey describes how Haitian nationalist composers have infused symphonic works with vernacular elements. Guadeloupean nationalists, however, adopted a diasporic cosmopolitan model: avant-garde jazz. For Largey, diasporic cosmopolitanism refers to the process by which Caribbean or African American elites “adopt values associated with intellectuals from African, African American, and Caribbean cultures (as opposed to white cultural models).”²⁴ Diasporic cosmopolitanism gave Guadeloupean nationalists a way around the paradox described by Chatterjee. Avant-garde jazz had a strong connection with black nationalism in the late 1960s and ’70s but it was also a cosmopolitan music.²⁵ Thus, through avant-garde jazz, Guadeloupean nationalists were able to connect with North American black nationalism, especially that of the Marxist Black Panthers, and to participate in broader cosmopolitan networks.

I should make it clear that neither the leading separatist organizations nor Gérard Lockel ever embraced jazz as an explicit model. In fact, Lockel tried to distance his music from jazz. Jazz, like other cosmopolitan forms, has the capacity to absorb and obscure the local specificity of gwoka. As an example, guitarist Christian Lavis, who stands as Lockel’s heir in Guadeloupe and who is now starting to attract attention in the French jazz press, portrays himself as playing gwoka on guitar when he is in Guadeloupe. However, he does not hesitate to boost his jazz credentials when addressing French

²⁴ *Vodou Nation*, 18.

²⁵ Lewis, *A Power Stronger than Itself* elucidates both the links between avant-garde music and black nationalism and the music’s appeal to audiences outside of the African American community. The connections between black nationalism and the so-called “new thing” are best exemplified in the writings of Amiri Baraka. See Baraka, *Black Music*.

journalists.²⁶ This dissertation explores the various ways in which Guadeloupean musicians have attempted to assert their national specificity while also embracing cosmopolitanism, or foregrounding their position as members of the African diaspora.

1. Nationalism, race, and class

The tense relationship between jazz and gwoka modènn calls attention to the difficult balance between class and race solidarity in Guadeloupean nationalism. Other studies of Afro-diasporic musical nationalism have tended to focus on explicit efforts to “nationalize blackness,” to borrow Robin Moore’s phrase about *Afrocolonismo*.²⁷ Guadeloupe requires us to approach matters of race carefully. Gwoka may be an African-derived musical form but we should not assume that Guadeloupean separatists had a strong interest in ethnic nationalism. My understanding is that they initially focused on gwoka because it was associated with the Guadeloupean peasantry, who happened to be overwhelmingly of African descent. Guadeloupean nationalism was, at least originally, strongly influenced by Marxism and Maoism and more interested in a class-based socialist revolution than in promoting racial solidarity.

However, class and race are closely intertwined in many postcolonial societies, especially in the Caribbean. Studying the process of musical nationalism in Guadeloupe affords us an opportunity to explore the tension between race and class solidarities within the African diaspora. Guadeloupean musicians seeking both to express their national consciousness and to participate in cosmopolitan networks have at times invoked

²⁶ Denis, “Christian Lavisio.”

²⁷ Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness*.
See for example: Davis, *White Face, Black Mask*.

diasporic consciousness and at other times tried to downplay it. For example, Lockel celebrates gwoka modènn as an “Afro-Asian musical form” but while simultaneously claiming that “jazz and gwoka developed from different bases.”²⁸ Even if Guadeloupean nationalism was originally class-based, it quickly generated expressions of ethnic nationalism, as in Joslen Gabali’s book on gwoka, *Diadyée*. Since the 1970s, the role of ethnicity in Guadeloupean nationalism has never ceased to be debated.

The interplay between race, class, and national solidarities in Guadeloupe creates an opportunity to investigate the concept of “diasporic intimacy” that Paul Gilroy coined but left largely undefined.²⁹ Diasporic intimacy invites us to extend anthropologist Michael Herzfeld’s concept of “cultural intimacy,” defined as “the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their insurance of common sociality.”³⁰ By defining positions of insiders and outsiders, cultural intimacy is an especially powerful tool for the study of nationalism *qua* national consciousness. However, it can easily be applied to transnational social formations, including diasporic consciousness. Focusing on the interaction between jazz and gwoka in the last forty years will shed further light on the nature and scope of diasporic intimacy.

B. Creolization

As Dudley points out, postcolonial nationalisms face the difficult challenge of finding ways to unify heterogenous populations brought together from Europe, Africa,

²⁸ Liner notes to *Gwoka modèn; 1969-1989: Vingt ans de lutte*.

²⁹ Gilroy, “Cultural Studies and Ethnic Absolutism,” 193; Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 16.

³⁰ Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy*, 3.

the Middle East, India, and Southeast Asia by the whims (or whips) of European colonialism rather than cultural affinities.³¹ Since the seventeenth century, these people have interacted through a process that has become known as creolization and produced very diverse populations.

The exact meanings of creole and creolization have evolved over time. If the Portuguese “crioulo” and the Spanish “criollo” originally designated people of European-descent born in the Americas, the term was quickly extended to American-born slaves. Thus, creolization was originally not a process of hybridization but one of indigenization, as Stephan Palmié points out.³² This meaning dominated the use of “creole” in the social sciences until the 1960s.³³ It is to this meaning of the word that Benedict Anderson refers in his essay on Creole nationalisms.³⁴ The process described by Anderson has little in common with the focus of this dissertation.

It was only with mid-twentieth century linguistics that “creole” began to index hybridity, although linguists had been interested in the study of creole languages since the eighteenth century. From these concerns emerged the term “creolization.”³⁵ Soon, social scientists adopted the new lexicon and broadened its application to the study of cultural hybridization. In 1967, anthropologist Daniel Crowley explained that creolization describes what Melville Herskovits had “synthesized as retention, reinterpretation and syncretism” and that these concepts could be applied to any areas where cultures mixed

³¹ *Music from beyond the Bridge*, 18.

³² Palmié, “The ‘C-Word’ Again,” 67-68.

³³ Palmié, “Is There a Model in the Muddle?,” 178-179.

³⁴ *Imagined Communities*, 47-65.

³⁵ Palmié, “Is There a Model in the Muddle?,” 180-181.

and transformed one another, “which is to say, most of the world.”³⁶ Crowley thereby launched the debate over the transposability of creolization theories beyond the Caribbean.

In 1976, Sidney Mintz and Richard Price proposed an important reinterpretation of creolization theory when they argued that the creolization process should be analyzed as evidence of “the emergence of relatively stable *social relations* among—initially largely desocialized—collectivities of slaves under locally specific New World conditions.”³⁷ Mintz and Price managed to shift the attention of anthropologists away from the search for African retentions and towards the study of the development of new social institutions. This approach placed a new emphasis on the creativity of Afro-American slaves. I follow Mintz and Price’s lead in studying the emergence of African-derived music in Guadeloupe during the colonial period.

Crowley’s suggestion that creolization could be applied to “most of the world” found new resonance in the 1980s and ’90s with two different constituencies. Ulf Hannerz expanded the linguistic models developed by Lee Drummond about Guyana and Johannes Fabian about Zaire to propose a creolizing continuum that stretches from “First World metropolis to Third World villages.”³⁸ Hannerz concluded his famous essay by declaring that “we are all being creolised.” Yet he based his theory on a center-periphery model that allows for the creative interpretation and transformation of cosmopolitan practices in postcolonial societies while leaving little room for a cultural flow from the

³⁶ Quoted in Palmié, “Is There a Model in the Muddle?,” 184.

³⁷ Palmié, “Is There a Model in the Muddle?,” 184; Mintz and Price, “The Birth of American Culture.”

³⁸ Hannerz, “The World in Creolisation,” 555.

periphery to the center. We may all be creolized, but far from equalizing, the process is uneven and reproduces the power inequalities within the world system.

Around the same time, Martinican intellectual Edouard Glissant put forth a similar model from a postcolonial perspective. For Glissant, creolization creates a space where postcolonial societies can absorb cosmopolitan elements without losing their own specificity. This is a subversive space that undermines claims of purity or authenticity, especially those that have fueled the racializing discourse of colonial powers. Glissant's vision of creolization, his "poetics of relation," unlike Hannerz's theory, allows (post) colonial societies to transform the culture of their (former) metropole.³⁹ For Glissant, and other Caribbean writers in his wake, creolization becomes a counter-hegemonic strategy meant to subvert the cultural, political, and economic domination of the metropole. As I will explain in chapter five, it is also a response to the Marxist-Maoist doctrine of Antillean nationalist organizations.

Thus we see two models of creolization emerge in the last quarter of the twentieth century. In the work of linguists and anthropologists, creolization offers a model of cultural syncretization originally linked to colonialism and slavery, but that is now extended to globalization. In contrast, for many Caribbean intellectuals, creolization serves a strategic counter-hegemonic role. For example, Edward Brathwaite refers to colonial Jamaica as a creole society in order to emphasize the creation of a new national culture that unites both former slaves and former slave owners.⁴⁰ Brathwaite's model is,

³⁹ Glissant, *Discours antillais; Introduction à une poétique du divers; and Traité du Tout-monde*.

⁴⁰ Bolland, "Creolization and Creole Societies," 107-110; Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Slave Society in Jamaica*.

of course, a response to European colonial models that have negated the possibility of African retentions, refused to acknowledge slaves' capacity for creative adaptation to their new environment, and often decried the corruption of European culture amongst New World Creoles. As Aisha Khan has commented, these two models—one a model *of* syncretization, the other a model *for* a different type of (global) society—have too often been conflated in recent scholarly interest in creolization.⁴¹ As this dissertation will establish, while Guadeloupean gwoka is unquestionably the result of a historical process of creolization, its role in recent Guadeloupean ideological debates offers a particularly strong case for understanding creolization as a political strategy. In particular, I argue that creolization creates a post-nationalist space from which Caribbean artists can simultaneously attack their (former) colonial powers and criticize local nationalist leaderships.

1. Can creole be hyphenated? Creolization, race, and ethnicity

As Nigel Bolland points out, when Brathwaite—and later Rex Nettleford—wrote about creole society, they were trying to unify Jamaican society under an umbrella that would recognize the contributions of both African and European descendants. They were also attempting to account for the very strict social and racial stratification inherited from slavery and colonialism. Creolization is caught in this double bind: it has the power to unite but, at the same time, it can mask some of the inequalities from which it emerged. This forces us to carefully consider the terminology associated with creolization.

⁴¹ Kahn, "Creolization Moments."

Both Brathwaite and Nettleford recognized that, within creole societies, African-derived cultural productions carried less cultural capital than European-derived expressions. We see this at work in the history of Guadeloupean music and dance. During the colonial period, the European-derived quadrille was a tool of social ascendancy while the African-derived *calenda* was systematically stigmatized. Describing both dance genres as “creole” would essentially mask this difference in cultural capital.

To address this issue, Brathwaite and Nettleford hyphenated creoleness, coining the phrases “Afro-Creole” and “Euro-Creole.” Burton later adopted these terms.⁴² While intriguing, there are several problems with this terminology. First of all, it erases the contributions of East Indians and other migrants to the Caribbean who came neither from Europe nor Africa. Second, these expressions suggest a greater rift between African-derived and European-derived forms than historical and ethnographic observations warrant. For example, in Guadeloupe, the same musicians often played both quadrille and gwoka. Furthermore, most practitioners of the “Euro-creole” quadrille were themselves “Afro-Creoles.”

Inspired—like Hannerz—by the work of linguists, Kenneth Bilby proposes an alternative schema in the form of a creole continuum between purely European and “neo-African” forms.⁴³ Peter Manuel picks up the expression “neo-African” in his survey of Caribbean musics. He explains: “Some music traditions can be regarded as ‘neo-African’ in the sense that they reflect little Euro-American influence, although they may have changed and evolved in the Caribbean in ways that make them different from

⁴² Bolland, “Creolization and Creole Societies;” Burton, *Afro-Creole*.

⁴³ Bilby, “The Caribbean as a Musical Region,” 184.

anything in Africa.”⁴⁴ Like the polarity “Afro-” and “Euro-Creole,” Bilby and Manuel’s spectrum ignores the contributions of ethnic minorities in the Caribbean. Furthermore, the term “neo-African” reduces the creolization process to a mere geographic displacement and downplays the European elements of Caribbean musical genres in which, on the surface, African elements dominate. Compared to quadrille, gwoka could be qualified as “neo-African,” yet many of its melodies are unequivocally indebted to European tonality. Furthermore, the fixation on the polarity between European and African elements has had the effect of erasing the East-Indian contributions to the sound and dance of gwoka from most of the discourse about the music’s history. To this day, the contributions of the Hindu-Guadeloupean population to Guadeloupean music—and Guadeloupean culture in general—remains both understudied and under-appreciated.

In an effort to navigate these troubled terminological currents, I have adopted the expressions “African-derived” to qualify creole cultural forms throughout this dissertation. These distinctions allow me to acknowledge the variations in cultural capital of African and European cultures as they interacted in the Caribbean, without reducing this interaction to a simple dualism. Recognizing gwoka as an African-derived creole musical practice recognizes the impact of European as well as East Indian culture on its present incarnation.

C. Creolization and nationalism

As I explained earlier, in Brathwaite and Nettleford we see creolization participate in nationalist ideology. Brathwaite’s creole society unites the various constituencies

⁴⁴ Manuel, *Caribbean Currents*, 7. Manuel also uses the term in *Creolizing the Countradance*.

within Jamaica and stands as culturally different from British society. As Shalini Puri writes, “invocations of cultural hybridity have been crucial to Caribbean nationalism.”⁴⁵

We should be careful, however, not to automatically group Glissant, or even the authors of the manifesto *Éloge de la créolité*, with Brathwaite and Nettleford. In the following pages, I will contrast the cultural platform of the Guadeloupean separatist movement in the 1970s with what I see as the post-nationalist writings developed since the 1980s by Glissant, Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant. Contrary to Puri’s declaration, Guadeloupean nationalism did not embrace hybridity as a defining cultural characteristic. Rather, influenced by Stalin’s definition of the nation, Marxist-Maoist separatist activists imagined a stable Guadeloupean culture rooted in the experience of black peasants. The figure of the *nèg mawon* (maroon slave) became emblematic both of resistance against French imperialism and of Guadeloupean authenticity, an authenticity expressed through the Creole language and gwoka music. I see Glissant’s and the Creolists’ embrace of hybridity as a post-nationalist strategy that allows them to simultaneously advocate for independence from France and criticize the shortcomings of the Marxist nationalist orthodoxy in Martinique and Guadeloupe.

I hear musical parallels to this transformation. Gérard Lockel’s gwoka modènn offers an uncompromising expression of Guadeloupean nationalism, a music that Guadeloupean separatists described as strictly endogenous, even if it is actually the product of modernist reformism and thus owes much to cosmopolitan models. The music of groups such as Soft, created at the dawn of the twentieth-first century, challenges some

⁴⁵ *The Caribbean Postcolonial*, 6.

of Lockel's precepts and inscribes Guadeloupean identity within a network of transnational relations with the Caribbean, the United States, Europe, and Africa. Thus, if Lockel offers an example of musical nationalism, Soft represents a type of musical post-nationalism.

For anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, post-nationalism "suggests that we are in the process of moving to a global order in which the nation-state has become obsolete and other formations for allegiance and identity have taken its place."⁴⁶ Like Puri, I do not fully subscribe to this view and continue to think that the nation and nationalism continue to be salient objects of analysis.⁴⁷ Certainly the position of the French Antilles within the French state continues to be hotly contested. I propose here a vision of post-nationalism that is not predicated on the demise of nationalism. In the 1970s, the centripetal pull of nationalism sought to define a Guadeloupean nation that was both geographically and culturally bounded. I argue that, in the new millennium, post-nationalism preserves the nation as a desirable, if imagined, community but submits it to centrifugal forces that inscribe it within regional, diasporic, and transnational networks.

D. The theory of practice and its terminology

Already throughout this discussion of nationalism and creolization, I have relied on vocabulary borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice. Before I continue to do so, I will define some of the key terms that recur throughout my discussion of music in Guadeloupe: habitus, field, capital (both social and cultural), class, and doxa.

⁴⁶ *Modernity at Large*, 169.

⁴⁷ *The Caribbean Postcolonial*, 6-7.

Habitus, together with field and capital, are central in answering Bourdieu's key question: "How can behavior be regulated without being the product of obedience to rules?"⁴⁸ According to sociologist Karl Maton, habitus is used to explain the mechanisms through which people make free-will decisions within a set of social predispositions and expectations.⁴⁹ All social agents possess habitus: individual, groups, and institutions.

Bourdieu explains:

The habitus is not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalization of the division into social classes.⁵⁰

In other words, the habitus is "'structured' by one's past and present circumstances, such as family upbringing and educational experiences. It is 'structuring' in that one's habitus helps to shape one's present and future experiences."⁵¹ Maton concludes:

Simply put, *habitus* focuses on our ways of acting, feeling, thinking and being. It captures how we carry within us our history, how we bring this history into our present circumstances, and how we make choices to act in certain ways and not others. This is an ongoing and active process — we are engaged in a continuous process of making history, but not under conditions entirely of our own making.⁵²

Indeed the actions (i.e., practices) of social agents result from the complex interplay between habitus, field, and capital.⁵³ Grossly summarized, the field (French *champ*) is a social space within which agents are positioned according to their relative

⁴⁸ Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, 65.

⁴⁹ Maton, "Habitus," 50.

⁵⁰ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 170. See also Bourdieu, *Outline of Theory of Practice*, 78.

⁵¹ Maton, "Habitus," 51.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 51.

amount of capital, both economic and symbolic. Each field (political, cultural, economic, etc.) has its own spoken and unspoken rules that regulate—but do not determine—the actions of social agents within the field. The field is not leveled. Agents with greater capital enter it with a definite advantage. In addition, one's habitus shapes the understanding one develops for social interactions within the field, what Bourdieu calls the “feel for the game.”⁵⁴

The game to which Bourdieu refers is a competition for the acquisition of greater amounts of capital. Here capital is not limited to its financial meaning. Education researcher Robert Moore explicates: “Bourdieu’s purpose is to extend the sense of the term ‘capital’ by employing it in a wider system of exchanges whereby assets of different kinds are transformed and exchanged within complex networks or circuits within and across different fields.” Thus, the meaning of capital is transposed from the economic field to all other social fields.⁵⁵ Bourdieu draws a primary distinction between economic and symbolic capitals. Symbolic capital is then divided into sub-categories according to the field in which it operates: cultural capital (style, manners, aesthetic taste), social capital (connections), educational capital (degrees), and political capital. From this expanded notion of capital follows an expanded notion of class in which social class is not only determined by one’s economic status but also by the various amounts of symbolic capital that one holds.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, 62-64; Maton, “Habitus,” 58-59; Thomson, “Field.”

⁵⁵ Moore, “Capital,” 102.

⁵⁶ Crossley, “Social class;” Moore, “Capital;” Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*, 121.

In the following chapters, I argue that Guadeloupean separatists have managed to increase the cultural capital attached to gwoka. Their actions have transformed the Guadeloupean cultural field even if their efforts to radically remake the political field have remained for the most part unsuccessful. As cultural activism transformed the Guadeloupean cultural field, musicians' habitus was also transformed and a new doxa emerged. As education specialist Cécile Deer points out, doxa "has a number of related meanings and types of understanding in Bourdieu's work."⁵⁷ I use it here in the sense outlined by Bourdieu in his *Pascalian Meditations*. Doxa, explained the sociologist, is "a set of fundamental beliefs which does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma."⁵⁸ In Guadeloupe, few people question the fact that gwoka is the fundamental musical expression of Guadeloupean identity, that it is based on a set of seven rhythms, that it was used by maroon slaves to communicate, or that its practice was prohibited by colonial authorities; all of this in spite of the abundant historical and ethnographic evidence that contradicts these claims.

III. Methodology

The bulk of my research in Guadeloupe involved participant-observant methodology and a large number of interviews with musicians, political and cultural activists, artists, music professionals, government officials, and audience members (see appendix 2). In addition, I conducted extensive archival research at the Archives Départementales and at LAMECA (Médiathèque Caraïbe Bettino Lara), whose staff granted me access to its collection of musical recordings and to many of the interviews

⁵⁷ Deer, "Doxa," 119.

⁵⁸ Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, 15.

that they have conducted with local musicians either for the *médiathèque*'s Disk La Si Do program or its oral history project. Finally, I have transcribed a number of gwoka recordings. I describe each methodological aspect in the following paragraphs.

A. Reconciling ethnomusicology's focus on social processes and musicology's focus on individual creativity

The basic methods outlined above are standard fare for ethnomusicological research. As Robin Moore explains, ethnomusicologists have, in the past, been reluctant to engage in historical research, favoring instead ethnographic approaches, thus ignoring cultural history as a worthy analytical focus.⁵⁹ In many ways, this dissertation is a work of cultural history, analyzing the changing social position of African-derived music in Guadeloupe over a period of roughly four centuries. I believe that only by approaching the study of music and society on the *longue durée* can we grasp the elements necessary to understand the present significance of gwoka, nationalism, and creolization in Guadeloupean society. On a smaller historical scale, my main preoccupation is to explain how events and strategies developed in the 1960s and '70s continue to shape cultural practices in contemporary Guadeloupe.

I have attempted to bridge the divide between ethno- and historical musicology in another way. Shannon Dudley points out that ethnomusicologists

are often less likely than historical musicologists or even writers on popular music to consider the idiosyncratic ways in which individual performers or composers [have contributed to the reinterpretation and transformation of musical systems]—the personal inspiration or genius, that is, that sparks collective musical change.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ *Nationalizing Blackness*, 8.

⁶⁰ *Music beyond the bridge*, 27.

The transformation of gwoka—both from a musical and a social standpoint—has been undeniably spurred by the vision and efforts of individuals. This dissertation is therefore organized largely around important figures, from Gérard Lockel to Fred Deshayes and Jacques Schwarz-Bart. However, these innovations took place in response to specific social and political contexts. This study, therefore, explores the creative responses of musicians to specific historical and social constraints. Conversely, it reveals how these musicians have tried to transform the society around them and influence local ideological debates. Both ethnographic and historical, this project presents music as a strategy within ideological processes, but it also highlights how individual actors have put this strategy in practice.

B. Historical documents

Conducting historical research in the Caribbean is difficult. We have few historical records describing life in the French Caribbean colonies between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. No slave narratives have survived from Guadeloupe. It follows that all of the documents to which we have access were written by European chroniclers who often had a personal stake in the colonial project. Naturally these documents reflect European colonial perspective and prejudices. As Ronald Radano underlines, these chroniclers' interest in the lives of African American slaves was circumscribed by their economic and social preoccupations. They paid little attention to slaves' musical practices, and when they did, their assessment was “cast in a racial language that, in the best circumstances, betrayed whites' conflicted sentiments toward

the persistent challenges of black national presence.”⁶¹ Therefore European chronicles offer but an incomplete and highly biased record of musical practices in the Americas.

Studying recent Guadeloupean history is equally challenging. As I have mentioned earlier, there are few secondary sources dealing with Guadeloupean history in the second half of the twentieth century. Most of these, such as François-Xavier Guillermin’s *(In)dépendance créole*, display such an obvious political agenda that they are better approached as primary documents illustrating current ideological debates. Fortunately, the newspapers, political pamphlets and reports kept in public and private archives, combined with multiple interviews with important political and cultural activists, have allowed me to (partially) reconstruct the history of the Guadeloupean separatist movement, the transformation of its leading ideologies, and its impact on Guadeloupean culture. I am particularly indebted to political activists Félix Cotellon and Roland Anduse who have shared many documents with me.

Historical documents only present one facet of Caribbean history. As the writings of Richard Price, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Édouard Glissant suggest in different ways, Antillean history needs to be teased out from memories, from the local lore, from objects, or from the landscape itself.⁶² This history of Guadeloupean music and politics is rooted as much as possible on the scholarly analysis of reliable documents but it is also shaped by my many encounters and conversations—formal and informal—with people in Guadeloupe, by the many hours I have spent criss-crossing the islands, and by the

⁶¹ *Lying Up a Nation*, 5.

⁶² Price, *The Convict and the Colonel*.

The themes of memory and history are central to many of the novels and essays of Glissant and Chamoiseau. For examples: Chamoiseau, *Ecrire en pays dominé*; Chamoiseau, *Texaco*; Chamoiseau, *Un dimanche au cachot*; Glissant, *Tout-monde*.

different types of foods I have tasted. All of these experiences offered as many “documents” that I filtered through my analytical sieve, producing a work that I hope is as rigorous as it is personal.

C. Fieldwork methodology

Archival research aside, most of my research centered on participant-observant fieldwork. While in Guadeloupe, I have attended concerts, participated in debates, rehearsed and performed with several groups, witnessed various social functions (such as Christmas celebrations and funeral wakes), taken drumming and dance lessons, and simply spent time “hanging out” with musicians, music professionals, cultural activists, and music aficionados. Many of these people have since become good friends.

In order to satisfy Clifford Geertz’s precept that ethnography be a “thick description” of culture, I have documented my observations in several complementary ways. I used fieldnotes to document my activities in the field, to work out kernels of analysis, but also to document my own feelings and reactions to my field experiences. I supplemented my fieldnotes with visual and audio documentation such as photographs, recordings, or film. Even though I tried as much as possible to get the consent of musicians before filming their performances, there have been a few situations, during large public events, when this was not possible. I have on several occasions made my films available to musicians who requested them. Far from seeking an illusive objective view, audio-visual material allows me to quickly capture details that would otherwise take too long to jot down in notes.

Interviews provide perhaps the most important source of ethnographic data in my study. Participants were recruited informally, from meetings during musical performances or following the recommendations of other participants. I have taken full advantage of the network that already exists among members of the gwoka community. In order to obtain multiple points of view, I interviewed people of various ages, genders, and professions. I did not advertise for participation in this study nor did I remunerate people who consented to an interview. Interviews were generally conducted in French but many people occasionally slipped into Creole. I made note of these linguistic shifts since they often participate in a certain performance of identity. Although I approached each interview with a general set of questions, I did not follow a strict script, preferring to let my interlocutor's answers shape the direction of the conversation.

Conducting interviews in Guadeloupe can be tricky, especially when one touches on the difficult topic of politics. Over time, I realized that many of my interlocutors tended to only give me enough information to appear to answer my questions but that they kept important facts to themselves or referred to them tangentially. I myself came to use information strategically in my interviews, dropping the names of people I had already met or mentioning underground organizations to signal that I already knew more about the topic than my interviewee may have assumed. I learned to mix open questions with very specific ones to tease out more information from my collaborators. Yet it sometimes took me months, if not years, to realize the full extent and import of some information I was given in interviews. Each separatist militant gave me some information about the movement but it was only when I compiled all of our conversations that the

broader picture emerged and that, in retrospect, I was able to make sense of the information provided by each person. Overall, the process was like putting together a puzzle. The image on an individual piece may look completely abstract. Its significance only emerges when it is joined with the pieces that surround it.

Secrecy became an issue as I dove deeper into my investigation of the Guadeloupean separatist movement. Many organizations functioned underground or were considered illegal by the French government. Even some of the visible organizations sometimes engaged in activities that they did not wish to publicize. Finally, some of the leadership of the movement spent much of the 1960s and '70s hiding from the French authorities. Before all of my interviews, I went through an oral consent script with my interlocutors, letting them know that they were at total liberty to ignore my questions or to ask me to stop recording our conversation. I also was very explicit about the exact scope of my research, explaining that I was mainly concerned with cultural matters. I can remember several interviews when my interlocutors asked me to stop recording while they explained a particularly sensitive point to me. Although this information was often vital in helping draw the big picture, I have not included it here. All quotes were collected and used with the express consent of the people involved.

I did not change any names in this dissertation. The practice would have made no sense in this particular instance. Musicians are public personalities: referring to them by a pseudonym would only be confusing. Furthermore, Guadeloupe is a small place. Had I changed people's names, specific biographical details or simple historical context would have allowed a reader familiar with the archipelago to identify the source of the

information. Finally, I have a great deal of respect and admiration for the musicians and activists presented in these pages. I think that they deserve the small amount of recognition that this dissertation may bring them.

D. Transcriptions

Transcriptions do not seem to play as important a role in current ethnomusicology as they once did, and for good reasons. As Charles Seeger commented, music notation is an imperfect tool that tries to accomplish too many things at once and that is often compromised by Eurocentric approaches.⁶³ In addition, transcription is a very subjective exercise, as the symposium on transcription organized by the Society for Ethnomusicology in 1964 already made amply clear.⁶⁴ Pushing aside issues of subjectivity, transcribers of musics issued from oral traditions face another quandary. It is impractical, if not impossible, to represent the multiple and discrepant performances of a single piece of music with which they are faced.⁶⁵

These problems certainly apply to the study of Guadeloupean vernacular music. Because gwoka is an improvisatory music, there is no definitive score of a gwoka song. Each performance of the same song will present significant variations. Moreover, within a single performance each member of the *répondè* will interpret the melody differently, contributing to the overall heterogenous aesthetic of the music. Transcribing gwoka therefore involves a synecdochic approach where one particular performance becomes representative of a multitude of possible variations.

⁶³ Seeger, "Prescriptive and Descriptive Music Writing."

⁶⁴ England and al. "Symposium on Transcription and Analysis: A hukwe Song with Musical Bow."

⁶⁵ Ellingson, "Transcription."

In addition, as I will demonstrate in chapter three, music notation in Guadeloupe participates in what Largey calls “music ideology.”⁶⁶ Indeed, in contemporary Guadeloupe, music notation plays a role in ideological debates about the nature of the Guadeloupean nation and its artistic representation. Since musical notation and analysis is such a hotly debated topic, adopting Western notation for gwoka is in itself an ideological act that will be interpreted as biased by some of my Guadeloupean interlocutors.

In spite of all these problems, I have chosen to include several transcriptions within this dissertation. I follow here the approach advocated by Erich Stockmann that transcriptions should “represent, precisely and in visually comprehensible form, musical factors essential to a piece and to the carrier of a music culture.”⁶⁷ With one exception, the examples transcribed were taken from commercially available recordings. I have used Western notation because, in spite of the ideological debates that surround its use, most Guadeloupean musicians with whom I have performed actually relied on Western notation if they used any notation at all. In addition, musicians rely on solfège syllables when discussing music with one another. The musical transcriptions provided in the following chapters are therefore meant to be illustrative of particular points in my argument. They are not intended to be representative of what gwoka actually sounds like.

E. My own position as a researcher

During my visits to Guadeloupe, I have come to appreciate my unique status there. As a man, it is easier for me to enter into a musical world that is heavily male-

⁶⁶ Largey, *Vodou Nation*, 212.
See chapter 3.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Ellingson, “Transcription,” 142.

dominated. Being a jazz musician, I was able to quickly integrate into the Guadeloupean musical community. I have been invited to participate in jam sessions, to join bands for rehearsals, and on a few occasions, to perform entire concerts with them.

My status as a French citizen could have been detrimental to my interaction with nationalist militants who often look to France with suspicion, if not outright animosity. However, I have found that this was generally counterbalanced by the fact that I live in the United States, and on many occasions, Guadeloupeans have introduced me as an American student. While I have often used this ambiguity to my advantage, I generally tried to clarify my background. However, it seems that often my interlocutors were less interested in my legal citizenship than in my current residence. In the eyes of many people, I remained an *étudiant américain*.

F. Gwoka or gro ka? A note on orthography

To this day, there is no standard spelling for Guadeloupean and Martinican Creoles. As much as possible, I have adopted throughout this dissertation the orthography proposed by Hector Pouillet and Sylvianne Telchid.⁶⁸ In several instances, I have also relied on the *Dictionnaire pratique du créole de Guadeloupe* by Henry Tourneux and Maurice Barbotin. When written sources existed, I have retained the spelling used in the original. This explains, for example, the often inconsistent spelling of the expression “gwoka modènn” (“gro ka modèn,” or “gwo ka modènn”) found throughout this volume.

⁶⁸ *Le Créole sans peine*.

IV. Outline

The dissertation is organized roughly chronologically, following the transformation of instrumental gwoka from the late 1960s to the first decade of the twenty-first century. I say roughly because chapter 1 actually offers a brief ethnographic overview of traditional gwoka as it is practiced today. Although a more extensive study of traditional gwoka exceeds the scope of my research, I use this chapter to briefly describe the musical characteristics of gwoka, and to shed light on the music's social significance in contemporary Guadeloupe.

We jump back to the seventeenth century and truly start our chronological journey with chapter 2. The chapter focuses on music in colonial Guadeloupe, from the arrival of African slaves to the 1946 law of departmentalization. This historical perspective allows me to describe the process of creolization as it played out on Guadeloupean plantations. I also discuss what I see as Guadeloupean nationalism's moment of departure when, in the twentieth century, black and mulatto Guadeloupeans started to organize against the dominance of the white plantocracy. These efforts found their cultural expression with *négritude* and directly led to the law of departmentalization, essentially a path to decolonization through political assimilation.

Chapter 3 explains how, following departmentalization, a disenchanted Guadeloupean middle class radicalized and organized to seek independence from France in the late 1960s. The separatist efforts in Guadeloupe were articulated through a cultural platform of modernist reform that focused on the Creole language and gwoka music as the sole expressions of Guadeloupean-ness. Within this socio-political context, I describe

how every aspect of Gérard Lockel's gwoka modènn, from his choice of scale to his system of musical notation, stemmed from his nationalist ideology and served to express this ideology.

Having established gwoka modènn as a central expression of musical nationalism, I complicate matters in chapter 4. Here I explore how musicians, dancers, and music educators in the 1970s and '80s took hold of the modernist-reformist project and contested some of Lockel's ideas while appropriating and reinterpreting others. I argue that these musical and ideological debates were instrumental (pun intended) in inscribing gwoka within the Guadeloupean national imaginary.

Finally, in chapter 5, we turn our attention to a generation of musicians born in the 1970s. I propose that these musicians have embraced what I see as a post-nationalist stance and I explain how their music echoes some of the theories of creolization and creoleness developed by Martinican intellectuals since the 1980s. I conclude by focusing on recent encounters of jazz and gwoka musicians to illustrate the significance and limits of creolization as a postcolonial strategy.

Chapter 1

“Gwoka, sé potomitan a mizik Gwadeloup”: Traditional gwoka in contemporary Guadeloupe

A tourist arriving at Guadeloupe’s only all-inclusive resort in Sainte-Anne cannot escape it. From tables shaped like drums at the popular beachside restaurant L’Americano to pictures of instruments, drummers, and dancers on billboards advertising other local venues, gwoka is everywhere. Walk through the streets of Pointe-à-Pitre on a Saturday morning and the sound of drums will attract you to the Rue Piétonne, a pedestrian alley where members of Akiyo Ka perform every week. If your ear is sufficiently discriminating, you will pick up its influence on a broad range of popular music groups, from such zouk superstars as Kassav’ to the rising stars of dancehall Admiral T, Starr J, and Exxos to the Creole songs of Soft and Dominik Coco. Once denigrated, gwoka is praised today as “potomitan a mizik Gwadeloup” (the central pillar of Guadeloupean music).

In chapters 2 and 3, I demonstrate how gwoka emerged from Guadeloupe’s colonial past to become a celebrated national symbol. This process is tangled in the complex historical interplay of political and social forces. But before confronting it, we need to ask a seemingly simple question: what is gwoka? In this chapter, I present gwoka as practiced today in Guadeloupe. I base this description on my ethnographic observations along with my personal experience as a budding *tanbouyé* (drummer) and *dansè* (dancer). Having revealed the fluid definition of the genre, I focus on the formal

characteristics of two of its most common expressions, the music and dance of the *swaré léwòz* and funeral wakes.

I. Definition

In July 2009, I was in Goyave, sitting in the house of radio host Alain Jean, a self-styled lover of “black music.” He is also a long-time host of a gwoka show on the separatist radio station Radyo Tanbou, and an avid collector of Caribbean music recordings. More important for my purpose, Jean has been filming gwoka performances in Guadeloupe for over twenty years. His private collection of films, recordings and press clippings constitute what is probably the most comprehensive archive of Guadeloupean music in general and gwoka in particular. Jean had invited me to his house to consult some of these documents and to do an interview. We sat in his study, surrounded by floor-to-ceiling shelves lined with albums, CDs, and video tapes. Jean was digitizing some of his old footage, which appeared simultaneously on a video monitor and on his computer screen. Another TV set to RFO showed images of African animals. A radio softly broadcasted Radyo Tanbou in the background, rounding off the audio-visual collage.¹

Jean is a man of strong opinions and I started the interview with a question that was as central as it was likely to trigger an impassioned explanation: “What is gwoka?” For Jean, the answer was simple: “If you have a *léwòz* in each *commune* [township] in Guadeloupe on the same night, there will be a complete group of musicians, singers, and

¹ RFO: Réseau France-Outre mer, a conglomerate of TV and radio stations controlled by the French government and broadcasted throughout the French overseas departments and territories.

dancers. There will be an audience. In all thirty-two *communes*. For me, that's what I call gwoka."² Not satisfied with this "simple" answer, I pressed on:

"So funeral wake songs are not gwoka?"

"Yes," countered Jean.

"But they are not part of the *léwòz*."

Then came the real answer. Jean explained: "The *léwòz* is the most direct expression of gwoka. Gwoka, for me, is everything that is part of Guadeloupean culture. There isn't one bit of culture in Guadeloupe that escapes gwoka."³

Defining a musical genre, any musical genre, is challenging. The previous conversation illustrates both the difficulty of delineating gwoka and some of the definitions commonly heard in Guadeloupe. In order to define gwoka, one must try to answer some of the following questions: Is the music characterized by its instrumentation, its formal attributes (structure, scales, rhythmic ostinati, etc.), or its social context? What musical practices can be grouped under the heading "gwoka"? What is the music's history and what place does it currently hold in Guadeloupean society?

Answers to such questions vary from the specific to the poetic. Thus, Guadeloupean ethnomusicologist Frederic Negrit writes that gwoka is "the ensemble of rhythmic musics, dances, and songs of Guadeloupean origins, based on percussions and

² Jean, personal interview with the author, Goyave, 7/22/2009.

"Le seul pays, le seul endroit où tu verras, il y a trente-deux communes. Tu peux faire une soirée de *léwòz* le même jour dans les trente-deux communes, à la même heure. Dans ces trente-deux communes, tu auras un groupe complet de gwoka, qui veut dire trois tambours au minimum, chanteurs, répondeurs. Tu auras une assistance importante, tu auras des gens qui dansent. Ouais. Dans les trente-deux communes. Moi, c'est ce que j'appelle le gwoka."

³ "Mais le *léwòz* c'est l'expression la plus immédiate du gwoka. Le gwoka pour moi, c'est tout ce qui forme la culture de la Guadeloupe. Et il n'y a pas une bride de la culture de la Guadeloupe qui échappe au gwoka."

orchestrated by a minimum of two drummers, each with a separate function.”⁴ In contrast, multi-instrumentalist, composer, and educator Christian Dahomay declares that gwoka is “what’s left when you have forgotten everything.”⁵

In Guadeloupe today, gwoka often designates a range of musical practices associated with a mostly rural, bygone way of life, in which perceived Africanisms eclipse European imports. These practices include the songs and dance of *swarè léwòz*, the songs and games performed during funeral wakes, and the music used during stick fighting known as *mayolè*. Some Guadeloupeans also include various work songs used in sugar cane fields, in paving streets, or making manioc flour. By extension, some people argue along with Alain Jean that gwoka is the core expression, or *potomitan* (central pillar), of Guadeloupean culture. Jean elaborates his definition in this way:

It is a lifestyle. For me, all of these things are gwoka: the way people drink, the way they walk. It’s all gwoka. I don’t know how to explain it. But, personally, I don’t think that gwoka is limited to music. It is a complete way of life, a style, customs. Yeah. And I think that all of Guadeloupe, whatever it is, lives to the rhythm of the gwoka.⁶

In its most restrictive definition, and its most common expression as Jean noted earlier, gwoka is a music and dance typically accompanied by an ensemble of at least two barrel-shaped, single-headed drums. The drums were once made by converting oak

⁴ Négrit, *Musique et immigration*, 193.

“Le gwoka (gro-ka) est l’ensemble de musiques, danses et chants rythmés, d’origine guadeloupéenne, à base de percussions, orchestré par deux batteurs au minimum, oeuvrant sur deux tambours de fonctions différentes.”

⁵ Dahomay, *Mètòd-Ka*, 18.

“Le gwoka, c’est ce qui reste quand on a tout oublié.”

⁶ “C’est un style de vie. Pour moi, tout ça, c’est du gwoka: la façon dont les gens boivent, la façon dont ils marchent. Pour moi, tout ça c’est du gwoka. Je ne sais pas comment t’expliquer ça. Mais, moi, je ne pense pas que le gwoka soit seulement la musique. Y a toute une façon de vivre, une allure, une manière. Ouais. Et je pense que toute la Guadeloupe, quelle qu’elle soit, vit au rythme gwoka.”

barrels used for rum or for transporting salted meat on ships. These barrels are called *quart de salaison* in French. A Euro-genetic etymology of “ka” proposes that the word is a Creole spelling of “quart.”⁷ The demand for gwoka since the 1970s has been such that Guadeloupean artisans have stopped recycling rum barrels and have learned how to make their own barrels from raw materials.

II. Drum manufacturing

Two techniques are currently used to manufacture drums. The first consists of carving the drums out of a solid section of wood. The inside of the cylinder can either be burned or carved with a chainsaw. The chainsaw is also used to give the outside of the drum its distinctive barrel shape.⁸ Daniel Losio may be the most adept representative of this practice, which tries to recreate the drums described by early European chroniclers. Besides Losio, few people make or use these drums.

Most commonly, barrels are assembled using wooden staves. Several types of domestic or imported woods are commonly used, such as oak, cedar, mahogany, or pear. Claudius Barbin—a renowned drum-maker in Gosier—explains that he starts with a rectangular block of wood of adequate length and thickness from which he saws individual slats (Creole: *dwél*) with the proper curvature. Some makers prefer to cut straight slats that are then soaked in water and bent to the appropriate curvature. The slats are then glued together using temporary metal hoops to ensure proper fit. Once the glue is

⁷ As the Uris and Dominique Cyrille have pointed out, “ka” is also used to designate drums throughout the Caribbean basin. “Gwo” is undeniably a creolization of the French “gros,” hence gwoka stands for “big drum.” Incidentally, “big drum” is the name of a related tradition on Carriacou in Saint Vincent. See Uri, *Musiques et musiciens de la Guadeloupe*. Cyrille, Gerstin, and Desroches, *The French Antilles*.

⁸ Daniel Losio, personal interview with the author, 7/15/2010.

dry, the temporary hoops are removed and the outside of the barrel is sanded down until it becomes perfectly smooth, after which permanent metal hoops are screwed into place. The drum-maker then drills a series of holes at the bottom of the barrel through which he will later weave the tension rope. The drum is now ready to be varnished.

Next, the artisan will manufacture the *zoban*, a large metal hoop that will press down on the head. He starts by soldering small hoops on a large metal ring. The ring's diameter must be a few centimeters wider than the top of the drum. The ring (Creole: *sèk*) is lapped with foam, then a hemp rope which is finally covered with marine rope. The *zoban* is a critical part of the drum. Not only does it maintain the tension of the head, it also provides a contact surface that the drummer will strike in order to create certain sounds on his/her instrument. Before the advent of metal *sèk*, drum-makers used a special vine called *zél a ravét* to mount the skin.

To mount the head, the artisan first cuts a large round circle from a goat skin. The wet skin is mounted onto a metal hoop and temporally held in place with twine. It is then placed on top of the drum and covered with the *zoban*. A long piece of rope is woven through the small hoops that protrude from the *zoban* and the holes at the bottom of the drum. The artisan then uses a mechanical press to push down on the *zoban* until the proper tension is obtained. He twists short pieces of wood between the tension rope. These sticks (Creole: *klé*) will serve to maintain and adjust the tension of the head. Once the tension has been properly adjusted, the drum is removed from the press, any excess skin is cut off from the head, and it is left out to dry in the sun.

III. Instrumentation

A typical gwoka ensemble will feature at least two drums with distinct functions.

The lowest of the two drums, called *boula*, maintains a steady rhythmic ostinato.

Generally, a gwoka group will have two *boula* playing in unison, but larger groups are fairly common. *Boula* players, known as *boularyen*, sit astride their instrument which is



Figure 1.1: A *makè* (left) and *boula* (right) manufactured by Claudius Barbin.

laid on its side on the ground. They hit the drumhead with their bare hands. A higher pitched drum, called *makè* (also spelled *mawkè* or *maké*), improvises above the rhythmic ostinato provided by the *boula* in response to the movements of the dancer in front

of him (or occasionally her). Unlike the *boularyen*, the *makè* sits on a small bench (Creole: *tiban*) and plays with the drum in front of him or her. Occasionally, some players like to stretch a snare made of a small metallic object, such as a paper clip, hung on a string across their drum's head. This practice, like that of placing a clay pot behind the drum to serve as a resonator, may have been common in the past, but it seems to have mostly disappeared.

There is little to distinguish the appearance of the *makè* from the *boula* (Figure 1.1). Although the *makè* may be slightly smaller than a typical *boula*, this is frequently not the case. The main difference between the two drums comes from the thickness of the

skin used on the head. *Boula* generally use skin from a male goat while *makè* use thinner female goat skin. Adjusting the tension of the head allows players to produce the desired tone for either *boula* or *makè*.

IV.Swaré léwòz

In contemporary Guadeloupe, gwoka is most often performed between June and September on Friday or Saturday nights during *swaré léwòz* or simply *léwòz* (French: *soirée les Roses*). The origin of the name *léwòz* is uncertain, although it seems to be a derivation of the French *Les Roses*. It is possible that the name originally referred to a mutual aid society, *Société La Rose*, that organized such events during the colonial period. However, there are no records of a La Rose society in Guadeloupe even though La Rose societies are still found on other Caribbean islands, most notably in Saint Lucia where they continue to play an important musical role.⁹ *Léwòz* used to be held on the day of the *kyenzènn*, when agricultural workers would get their paycheck.

Today, not-for-profit organizations, trade unions, or city governments organize *léwòz* throughout the archipelago. *Léwòz* are not only celebrations, they are also good fundraisers, as participants will buy food and drinks throughout the evening. *Léwòz* are most commonly advertised by word-of-mouth and by large banners hung at major intersections (see Figure 1.2). Over the past two years, I have also been able to observe the impact of new electronic media as various organizations have started to use cellphone text-messages and email newsletters to inform the public about upcoming events. If the new media offer ways to precisely indicate the location of a *léwòz*, it is nonetheless often

⁹ Guilbault, "Saint Lucia," *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*. 946.

still the case that directions are rather vague, frequently limited to the name of a district. Thus finding a *léwòz* involves driving with one's windows down, trying to pick up the sound of drums while looking for large numbers of cars parked on the side of the road.



Figure 1.2: Banner advertising a *léwòz* near Gourbeyre, summer 2010.

In Guadeloupe, *léwòz* are outdoor events and can be held in various locations.¹⁰ I have attended *léwòz* in open fields, on beaches, in schoolyards, in open-air markets, and on city squares. While a *swaré léwòz* can start as early as 8:00 p.m., it is well-known that the best singers, *tanbouyé* (drummers), and *dansè* (dancers) will not show up until much later in the evening. A very successful *léwòz* will last all night, sometimes past sunrise, although many end earlier than that.

¹⁰ *Léwòz* are also organized in metropolitan France, where they are generally held indoors.

Upon arriving at a *léwòz*, one will usually find musicians and audience members arranged in a large circle. The *makè* usually sit between the two *boula*. Behind them stand the chorus of singers (Creole: *répondè*) from which emerges a succession of lead singers (Creole: *chantè*). Among the *répondè*, a few people play *chacha*, a large rattle made from a hollowed gourd containing grains. *Boula*, *chacha* and *répondè* form what composer Olly Wilson—in reference to West African musical ensembles—has called the “fixed rhythmic section” while *makè* and *chantè* constitute the “variable rhythmic section,” performers whose playing varies in contrast to the steady pulse provided by the rest of the group.¹¹

V. Aesthetics and Function of Participatory Music

The musics associated with traditional gwoka, be they the songs of the *léwòz* or of funeral wakes, adhere fairly strictly to the category of participatory music defined by Thomas Turino in his seminal work on music and nationalism in Zimbabwe. Turino argues that participatory music’s primary goal is to encourage the fullest sonic and kinesic participation possible and, thus, to avoid distinctions and mediation between musicians and audiences. However, the absence of distinction between artists and audience does not imply an absence of distinctive roles and levels of specialization among participants.¹² Indeed, while *swaré léwòz* and funeral wakes are designed to encourage participation, it is clear that participants assume different roles throughout the duration of an event and that these roles are largely determined by their relative

¹¹ Wilson, “The Significance of the Relationship Between Afro-American Music and West African Music,” 9.

¹² Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*, 47-54; Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 28-51.

knowledge of the tradition and their skill level. For example, while the same person may go from singing with the *répondè* to dancing to playing *boula*, only the most skilled *tanbouyé* will be allowed to play *makè*.

To guarantee the presence of skilled musicians, *léwòz* organizers hire professional groups. During the *léwòz*, as in most participatory musical contexts, professional musicians' main responsibility is to inspire greater participation rather than provide entertainment for a passive audience. Turino explains:

The notion of *responsibility* for fulfilling a musical role in such a way that it allows and, ideally, inspires others to participate enables a clear understanding of aesthetics as part of a broader system of participatory ethics. Participation has to do with expressing a level of social commitment to the event and to the other participants through sonic and kinesic contributions. Greater responsibility accompanies specialized core roles.¹³

The professionalization of the *léwòz*, which guaranteed the involvement of a core of skilled musicians and dancers, promoted gwoka's capacity to express and reinforce social solidarity. This phenomenon is closely linked with the gwoka revival of the 1970s and has great political significance, as I will explain in greater detail in chapter 3.

However, the professionalization of gwoka has the potential to reinforce separations in several ways. First of all, it deepens distinctions between those who have been initiated into the tradition and those who have not. Musicians who experienced *swaré léwòz* around Sainte-Rose in the 1960s and 1970s, before nationalist politics fueled a gwoka revival, insist that novices used to be accepted into a *léwòz* only after undergoing a long period of observation and apprenticeship. Yet their accounts testify to the fact that novices could participate, albeit in a limited way, in a *swaré léwòz*. Today, a

¹³ *Nationalists, Cosmopolitians, and Popular Music*, 53.

network of schools (see chapter 4) has supplanted this system of apprenticeship. During contemporary *léwòz*, anyone with the proper skills can, in theory, join the *répondè*, become lead singer, ask to play *boula* or *makè*, or enter the ring and dance. In practice, one is seldom welcome to join the *répondè* unless he or she knows some of the people in the group. Those learning to play the drum can sometimes play either early on in the evening or at the very end of the night if they know one of the musicians. If a *boularyen* struggles to properly match the rhythm and phrasing of the other drummers, he or she may be reprimanded by the lead singer. Occasionally, the *makè* will cut a song short and ask a fledgling drummer to cede his or her instrument. And while anyone can enter the ring and dance, *makè* will show their disdain for dancers who do not respect traditional performance structures by literally turning their heads in order to avoid eyecontact, symbolically excluding the inexperienced or unskilled dancer from full involvement in the event.

As a result, it is fairly common to see two rings at a *léwòz*: a tighter one composed of people who have some familiarity with the tradition and who are participating in the event, and a looser group of people who sit or stand at a distance from the main proceeding and who consume the event more passively. On some unfortunate occasions, musicians never manage to close the ring (Creole: *fèmé lawond*), that is to say that the audience never aggregates into a full circle. As Samuel Floyd explains, the ring focuses the activities of the participants towards a common objective.¹⁴ If musicians cannot close the ring, the *léwòz* evolves from a participatory to a presentational event, that is to say, an

¹⁴ *The Power of Black Music*, 26.

event in which there is a clear distinction between them and the audience. Because of it, the *léwòz* is unable to serve its social function of reinforcing communal ties.

Gender also largely determines restrictions as to who can participate in a *léwòz* and what role they can assume. Men normally perform all three main functions during a *léwòz*: singer, percussionist, and dancer. Women's roles are much more circumscribed. Although women are encouraged to dance, it is very rare to see them playing drums during a *léwòz*, even though there are several ensembles of female gwoka musicians in Guadeloupe.¹⁵ Discussions with gwoka musicians of both genders suggest that the gendering of performing roles has increased since the 1960s. Although I have no empirical evidence to confirm this, this timing suggests that the phenomena may be related to the influence of the male-dominated nationalist movement of the 1970s.¹⁶

A corollary aspect of the professionalization of gwoka is the obligatory recourse to a large sound system. Although the sound system could, in theory, increase participation by making it possible for a large group of people to easily hear the *chantè*, *répondè* and *tanbouyè*, it often has the opposite effect. For one thing, it limits the participation of potential *répondè* since only those singers standing by microphones can be heard. I have often stood in a ring where most of the people did not contribute sonically or kinesically to the event. Furthermore, the presence of a sound system also reorganizes the space in a way that can discourage participation. For example, in July 2010, I attended a *léwòz* in Calvaire (Baie Mahault) in which the musicians performed

¹⁵ For further discussion of women and gwoka, see Cyrille, "Léwoz a fanm Women's Léwoz: Notions of Gender and Sexuality in a Guadeloupean Traditional Dance Form" and Managhan, "Guadeloupean Women Performing Gwoka."

¹⁶ Much work remains to be done of the gendering of roles during the *léwòz*.

between two large speaker sets. The speakers created a clear demarcation between the artists, in this instance the group Akiyo Ka, and the audience. In addition, the volume was such that no one could stand close enough to actually create a ring. Many people in attendance stood or sat at a distance, and some even retreated behind the speakers. In spite of the energy of Akiyo's musicians, no one joined in the singing and no one danced.

Finally, the professionalization of gwoka has also affected the very meaning of community. *Léwòz*, funeral wakes, or various forms of communal work used to involve mainly people from a limited community—people who lived in the same *quartier* (district) or who worked on the same plantation—since transportation across the island was limited.¹⁷ Modernization of the infrastructure along with the rapid increase in personal car ownership means that gwoka groups can be hired to perform at a *léwòz* anywhere across the archipelago. While this does not threaten the sense of community per se, it redefines it from a circumscribed locality to the archipelago as a whole, another important factor when we consider the role of gwoka within the nationalist ideological process.

VI. Musical Structure of Traditional Gwoka

Both singing and dancing dictate the structure of a song during a *léwòz*. The structure of gwoka songs is closely linked with the participatory nature of the music. The forms are open-ended, based on the repetition of a responsorial exchange between a *chantè* and the *répondè*. While the *chantè* varies his lines, the *répondè* repeat the same

¹⁷ Many of the people I have spoken with in Guadeloupe have shared stories of gwoka musicians who would walk or hitch-hike their way to a *léwòz* across great distances, finding their way back home on the following morning with equal difficulty. However, these anecdotes in all likelihood illustrate the exceptional dedication of a few practitioners rather than a widespread practice.

response, making it possible for anyone to join in the singing. However, contrary to the general model of participatory music proposed by Turino, beginnings and endings of gwoka songs are not “feathered,” that is to say that instead of participants drifting in and out of a piece, gwoka musicians have devised clear ways to start and end songs as a group.¹⁸

The *chantè* introduces the song by singing either a verse or a refrain by himself. The *répondè* usually join the *chantè* as soon as they have had a chance either to recognize or to memorize the response to the song. However, it is also common for the *chantè* to invite them in by singing: “*Répondè, lèvé la vwa ban mwen*” (Chorus, sing for me) or a similar line. *Tanbouyé* are able to recognize the appropriate rhythm for a song based on its melodic structure, tempo, type of response, and overall *santiman*. The *makè* is responsible for starting the drums at the right tempo. He may do so either of his own accord, or wait for an oral signal from the *chantè*. Either way, the drums ideally enter at a structural point in the song, on the first downbeat of either the verse or the refrain, although it is common for the *makè* to enter at such a point and for the two *boula* to join him after a few cycles through the ostinato, once the tempo and the feeling of the pattern are clearly established. Certain rhythms like the *toumblak*, the *graj*, or the *léwòz* also feature specific calls played by the *makè* in order to establish the tempo before the entrance of the two *boula*.

Gwoka songs are based based on a single rhythmic ostinato, also called *boula*, with the exception of some songs that start with a *kaladja* only to switch to a more

¹⁸ Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 38.

intense *toumblak chiré* (fast *toumblak*) in mid-performance. Gwoka musicians insist that there are seven different rhythms played during a *léwòz*: *toumblak*, *kaladja*, *graj*, *léwòz*, *pajanbél* (or *granjanbél*), *woulé*, and *menndé*.¹⁹ In reality, some of these rhythms are performed much more frequently than others, especially the *toumblak*, *léwòz*, and *graj*. I have been to some *léwòz* where no *menndé* were ever played during the course of the evening. In addition, several of these rhythms have variants. There are, for example, two common versions of the *léwòz* rhythm: *léwòz indestwas* (meaning academic, played according to strict rules, especially concerning the performance of the *rèpriz*) and *léwòz Jabrun* (named after the district of Jabrun near the city of Lamentin). While some musicians use the term *pajanbél* and *granjanbél* interchangeably, several experienced *tanbouyè* have confirmed that they are indeed two separate rhythms. The *pajanbél* suggests a simple triple meter while the *granjanbél* is a compound duple meter. However, the two rhythms can be used interchangeably and, as two *tanbouyè* demonstrated for me once, could even be played simultaneously (Figure 1.3). Finally, one frequently hears other rhythms that are rarely performed during *léwòz*, such as the *sobo*, performed during

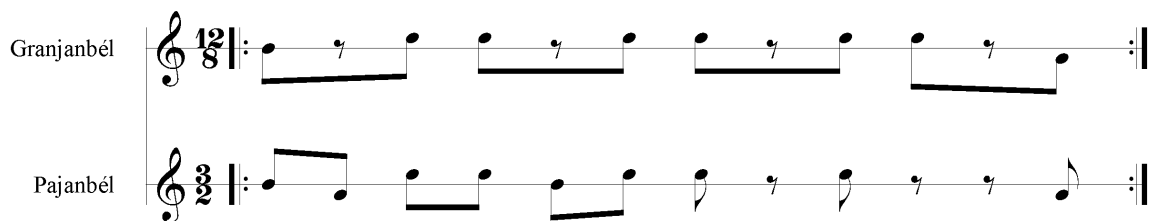


Figure 1.3: Granjanbél and pajanbél rhythms. The notation represents the three pitches produced by the boula: low (Creole *fonsyè*), medium, and high (Creole *zoban*). It would probably be more accurate to notate the pajanbél in 3/4 using sixteenth notes. However, I have retained the 3/2 notation here for ease of comparison with the granjanbél.

¹⁹ See appendix 1 for musical notation of these rhythms.

concerts or on recordings. I have heard musicians explain that these rhythms are more recent creations than the traditional *léwòz* rhythms. Indeed, gwoka musicians continue to come up with new, original *boula*, as I witnessed during a rehearsal of the group Kannida in August 2009.

Gwoka musicians commonly offer specific descriptions of the *santiman* (feeling) of each rhythm. They often characterize *graj* as the music that accompanied the shredding of manioc roots, *toumblak* as a dance of love, *menndé* as a rhythm of rebellion or carnival, *léwòz* as a rhythm of incantation or struggle, and *kaladja* as the rhythm used for cutting down sugar cane or to express sadness.²⁰

These descriptions are often inconsistent and it is not clear whether they apply to the music, the lyrics, or the dance steps associated with each rhythm. They seem to have little connection with the topics of the song lyrics they accompany. Gwoka songs are often topical, making references to past or present events in the community. For example, the *kaladja-toumblak* “O Léonso” concerns a young man sent to fight in France during World War I. Many songs, especially many *graj*, deal with romantic relationships, whether happy or unsuccessful. The lyrics to the following *graj* illustrate this point: “*Sé vou menm ki fè mwen enmé w. Sé vou menm ki fè mwen kontan. Sé vou menm ki rand mwen jalou. Gadé léta w mète mwen*” (You make me love you. You make me happy. You make me jealous. Look what state you put me in.)

In addition, these descriptions do not seem to reflect the type of dance steps or the attitude of dancers for each rhythm. As we will see below, each rhythm defines a range of

²⁰ Uri, *Musiques et musiciens de la Guadeloupe*, 51; Gabali, *Diadyéé*, 104-129.

acceptable gestures. However, these gestures do not straightforwardly represent the feelings or emotions listed above. For example, dancer and choreographer Max Diakok uses the Creole expressions “*bay adan*” (be energetic), “*kontantman*” (happiness, joy), and “*lagé gidon*” (abandon, letting go) to describe the *toumblak*, expressions that do not necessarily register a feeling of love.²¹

Diakok proposes that the signification of some rhythms has been transformed in the past thirty years, due to their association with popular songs by nationalist artists.

Asked to define the *kaladja*, he wrote:

It is often said that this dance expresses sadness. I don't think that is its original meaning. I have often heard people in Northern Basse-Terre play *kaladja* at a fast pace, as a prelude to a *toumblak* [...]. I believe that the rhythm has been interpreted as sad with the rise of political and identity consciousness, as for example with tunes like “Afriken pa pléra!” or “Tiré chenn-la an kou an mwen” on Eric Cosaque's *Kunta Kinté*. The *kaladja* is then significantly slowed down. This is the living proof that tradition can be reinterpreted without losing its essence. It is the same thing with the *menndé*, which is now often used to express revolt.²²

Each rhythm defines not only a *boula* ostinato and tempo range but also a song's melodic contour and the length of its response. Moreover, each rhythm calls for specific dance steps. Thus, as is the case for other musics of the African diaspora, singing, drumming and dancing are completely integrated within gwoka and should not be

²¹ Diakok, personal communication, 23 September 2010.

“Le *toumblak*, pour moi se caractérise par deux mots créoles ‘*bay adan*’ (dans le sens de tout donner, donner de l'énergie), ‘*kontantman*’ (joie) et ‘*lagé gidon*’ (lâcher-prise).”

²² Ibid.

“on dit de cette danse qu'elle exprime la tristesse. A mon avis ce n'est pas le sens originel. Souvent j'ai entendu, en région nord Basse-Terre des *kaladja* qui se jouaient à une vitesse assez rapide et qui pouvaient être le prélude à un *toumblak* [...]. A mon avis il a pris son orientation de rythme triste avec la montée de la prise de conscience identitaire ou politique (cf des morceaux comme “Afriken pa pléra ! Awaya waya waya...”, “Tiré chenn-la an kou an-mwen” d'Eric Cosaque sur *Kunta Kinté*...). Il est alors fortement ralenti. C'est la preuve vivante de la réinterprétation de la tradition sans perte de l'essentiel. C'est peut-être le même phénomène que pour le *menndé* qui est souvent utilisé, de nos jours, pour exprimer la révolte.”

considered independently of one another.²³ As noted above, many gwoka musicians can play drum, dance or sing, and thus are able to perform all three main functions at a *léwòz*, even if they may specialize in one.

Let us examine a few representative melodies. Like many forms of African diasporic musics, gwoka involves a fair amount of improvisation. *Chantè* usually invents new word variations based on the theme of the song each time they perform it. In addition, what composer Olly Wilson calls the “heterogenous sound-ideal” is also central to gwoka performances.²⁴ For Wilson, ensembles that combine instruments and/or singers of contrasting timbre are typical of music of the African diaspora, allowing listeners to easily distinguish the sound of individual members of the ensemble. On a basic level in gwoka, this is expressed by the contrasting timbre of the *boula*, *makè* and *chacha*. Furthermore, each *répondè* interprets the response with subtle personal rhythmic and melodic variations, creating a heterophonic texture that adds to gwoka’s heterogenous sound-ideal. For these reasons, the transcriptions presented below do not represent a definitive version of the composition, in the Western European sense of the term. Neither do they offer a detailed representation of each performance. Western musical notation is ill-equipped to represent microtonal pitch variations or timbral manipulations. These transcriptions, therefore, present a simplified and somewhat idealized version of each composition, and are solely meant to illustrate certain properties of gwoka melodies.

I have chosen to use standard Western notation because, in my personal experience and on the recordings consulted for this project, gwoka singers do not depart

²³ For a basic introduction to this idea, see Ruth Brown “African Music in a Constellation of Arts,” 7.

²⁴ Wilson, “The Heterogenous Sound Ideal in African-American Music.”

significantly from standard European tuning. I have performed on several occasions with unaccompanied singers and have never experienced great difficulty in tuning my saxophone to their singing or in picking up a melody. Likewise, Christian Lavis—a guitarist who is today’s most prominent proponent of *gwoka modènn*—has informed me that he uses a standard guitar tuning.

The first transcription, “Eloi” is based on a field recording I made in July 2009. In addition, I have provided in *ossia* measures some variations on this melody that I have heard during my field work. The second transcription, “Chat ka tété rat,” is based on a 1972 recording by Robert Loyson (1928-1989), a well-known singer from Le Moule on the windward coast of Grande-Terre.²⁵ Along with Germain Calixte (a.k.a. Chabin, 1922-1987), Loyson was one of the few gwoka singers to make commercial recordings before the gwoka revival of the 1970s and ‘80s. Many gwoka musicians I spoke with remember Loyson as a great singer of funeral wake songs, a genre that demands strong improvisational skills. It is unlikely that he would ever have performed the song presented here quite this way on another occasion.

The song “Eloi” is quite possibly the best-known gwoka song in Guadeloupe. Although it is occasionally performed over a *léwòz* rhythm, the song is normally played over a *graj* and the melodic form of its response is typical of many *graj gramatikal*: sixteen measures divided into four equal phrases of four bars each (Figure 1.4). *Graj* responses adhere to the same general contour, with half of the song moving up (although not always to scale degree 6) and the other half descending back down to the tonic pitch.

²⁵ Robert Loyson, *Robert Loyson accompagné par le tandem Vélo/Boisbant*. Disques Célini 5524.2.



Figure 1.4: “Eloi,” response. Transcription based on field recordings. *Ossia* measures present common variations on the original melody that highlight some of its tonal properties.

Here again “Eloi” is representative of this template. We notice that *graj* melodies such as “Eloi” have strong tonal implications through their emphasis of scale degrees 1, 3, 4 and 5 along with melodic gestures based on arpeggios of the tonic, subdominant and dominant triads. Thus *graj* melodies highlight the influence of Western tonality on gwoka. *Graj* responses share these melodic and structural characteristics with some *woulé* and *pajanbél* melodies. *Graj* responses rarely have lyrics other than vocables, making “Eloi” rather unusual. Some gwoka musicians like to explain that the length and complexity of *graj* melodies make them hard enough to remember without having to worry about also memorizing lyrics. This comment points back to the ideal of

participatory music: long responses with lyrics might be too difficult to memorize and thus would discourage participation by people with limited skills or experience.

The length of the response distinguishes *graj* from *toumblak* responses. The latter are generally short, usually between two and four measures (four to eight beats) but sometimes as short as one bar.²⁶ Robert Loyson’s “Chat ka tété rat” exemplifies many

0'20" ♩ = ca. 104

Loyson

O! Chat ka té - té rat. Rat ka té - té

5 chat an ba kouch an mwen.

5 An pa té sa - vé chat é - pi rat an kon-plo-si -

10 O! Chat ka té - té rat.

10 té an kaz an mwen.

15 Rat ka té - té chat an kaz an mwen.

15 An pa té sa - vé chat é - pi

Figure 1.5: Robert Loyson, “Chat ka tété rat,” my transcription.

²⁶ The concept of measure is somewhat arbitrary when applied to gwoka, a music which is traditionally not notated. Throughout this dissertation, both in the text and in my notated examples, I have defined a measure as a single utterance of the pattern of the *boula*. Hence, for example, a measure of *toumblak* contains two beats.

Figure 1.5 cont.

60
L. 
An ? ? si - zé pa tél-man kon - tan. Chat ka man-jé

65
L. 
rat, é ka si - sé zò a rat. An ré-pran son - mey.

70
L. 
Mwen dò - mi, an dò - mi, an dò - mi, an dò - mi, an dò -

75
L. 
mi, an dò - mi. Wo - - - y!

80
L. 
Son-mey la vin ____ kou-pé. An-tann menm tren ____ la, an ba kouch an _

85
L. 
_ mwen. Swit swit swit swit swit swit swit swit

90
L. 
swit! Woy! An lé - vé si - zé. An prann za-limét an

95
L. 
mwen, li - mé lanp an mwen ka klér ____ an ba kouch an ____ mwen.

Figure 1.5 cont.

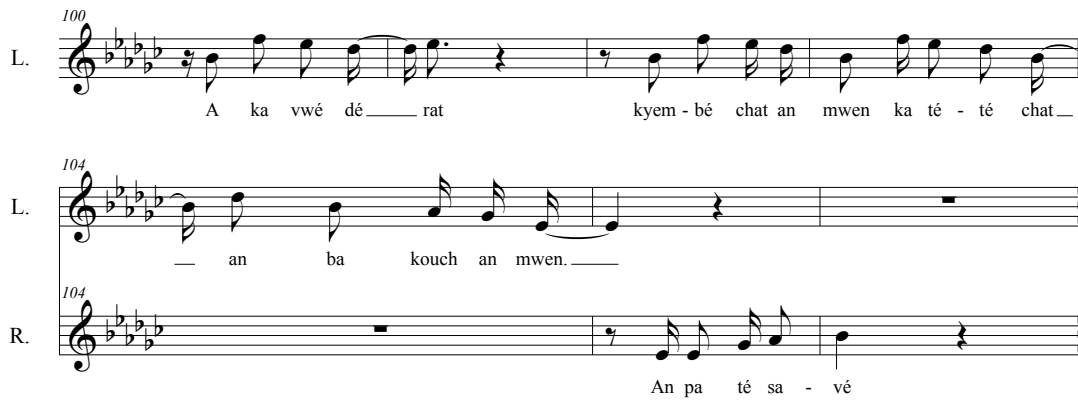


Figure 1.5 cont.

typical characteristics of *toumblak* melodies (Figure 1.5). It features a short response of six bars. The response is based on the melodic cell [1, \flat 3, 4, 5] typical of minor pentatonic scales. Indeed we notice that Loyson himself uses the minor pentatonic scale extensively with the addition of an occasional \flat 6 used either as a passing tone on the way down from 7 to 5 or as a neighbor tone to 5.²⁷ The addition of \flat 6 to the minor pentatonic fills out a natural minor scale. It is also remarkable that Loyson retains the cell [1, \flat 3, 4, 5] as he jumps up a fifth for added intensity at the end of his long recitation (measure 100). Transposing the cell from E-flat to B-flat does not threaten E-flat as a tonal center since the transposition does not introduce any notes foreign to E-flat minor and it is immediately followed by a descent down to E-flat through the minor pentatonic scale. In fact, we notice that Loyson's extended recitation (measures 23 through 105) hovers around 5 with the singer only returning to 1 as a way to bring the *répondè* back in.

²⁷ As Olly Wilson has discussed, in many musical styles within the African diaspora, singers tend to perform on a continuum between speech and music. Indeed, in this particular performance of "Chat ka tété rat," the line between Loyson's singing and reciting is occasionally blurred. The timbral and slight pitch variations that occur repeatedly throughout his recitation occasionally suggest a shift from B-flat to C-flat. However, it is not clear that this is actually what the singer intended. In addition, Western musical notation is ill-equipped to render such subtle variations.

This practice is consistent with conventional Western European tonal relationships between tonic and dominant pitches, and it is found on other gwoka recordings. For example, on “Robertine,” Chabin builds a long improvisatory section on a melody that alternates between an arpeggio of a major triad and a diatonic descent back to the tonic.²⁸

In spite of the evidence presented above, gwoka musicians and aficionados often insist that gwoka is an “atonal” or “atonal-modal” music. As chapter 3 will reveal, these claims participate in a music ideological process rooted in separatist activism. For this reason, it is important here to elucidate some of the meanings of the concepts of modality, tonality, and atonality. All three terms hold evolving, overlapping, and often contradictory meanings for musicologists. “Modality” is arguably the most ambiguous of the three terms, having the broadest range of possible meanings. Its meaning has shifted significantly since its introduction to describe medieval and Renaissance music. Today, modes designate both major and minor scales as well as the so-called “church modes” (e.g. dorian, mixolydian, etc.). In addition, musicologists have expanded the meaning of “mode” to discuss non-Western musical systems. When applied to Indian and Middle-Eastern music, “modes” describe not only the arrangement of intervals within a scale but also particular melodic and cadential gestures as well as the final note of a melody.²⁹

In their broadest sense, the terms “tonal” and “modal” have very similar meanings since music scholars have conventionally understood “tonal” to describe any systematic organization of pitches in both Western and non-Western musics. As such, musics as

²⁸ Chabin, *Germain Calixte accompagné par le tandem Vélo et Arthème Boibant*. Disques Célini 019-2.

²⁹ Powers et al. “Mode.”

diverse as Gregorian chant, Indian ragas, music of the European common practice, or serial compositions could be described as “tonal.” In its most restrictive meaning, however, “tonality” refers specifically to European music composed during the common-practice era, in which, on one hand, melodies and harmonies are organized around a referential pitch class and, on the other hand, pitches are heard in relation to one another rather than as random successions of independent frequencies.³⁰

The concept of “atonality” only makes sense in opposition to tonality and, as such, its usage in music scholarship has been limited to discussions of European art music or non-European musics influenced by European modernist aesthetics.³¹ Indeed, musicologists generally employ “atonality” to describe a limited body of compositions that cannot easily be analyzed with other systems such as tonality, modality, or serialism. The concept of “atonality” holds little descriptive value when applied to non-Western musics, since it does not offer any clue as to the organization of pitches.

While presenting gwoka as an “atonal-modal” music makes sense from an ideological standpoint (see chapter 3), from a music-theoretical perspective, it is an oxymoron. Much research remains to be done on traditional Guadeloupean scale systems. Moreover, gwoka melodies use a variety of scale systems, diatonic and pentatonic scales being the most common. However, I have never encountered a gwoka melody in which a tonic pitch could not be identified clearly. Furthermore, as stated earlier, even when singing melodies based on pentatonic scales, gwoka singers tend to emphasize relationships between the dominant and tonic scale degrees. I therefore conclude that

³⁰ Hyer, “Tonality.”

³¹ Lansky, “Atonality.”

gwoka is a modal music with strong tonal characteristics. As my many conversations with Guadeloupean musicians indicate, this opinion remains controversial but it is nonetheless shared by some Guadeloupean musicians. For example, Christian Dahomay often repeats his opinion that gwoka is not defined by a particular scale. Dahomay argues that major, minor, and pentatonic scales are all common in traditional gwoka. Meanwhile Fred Deshayes—the lead singer and composer of the popular group Soft—defies nationalist rhetoric and argues for a greater recognition of European elements in gwoka.³² However, others, such as saxophonist Jean-Fred Castry, continue to argue that contemporary performances of gwoka using tonal structures are expressions of European enculturation and lack historical authenticity. They insist that older singers did not sing this way and that gwoka melodies used to be atonal. Given that the oldest gwoka recordings date from 1962 and that few field recordings have been made since then, it is impossible to verify this claim.³³

VII.Dance

Once the *chantè* has performed a few refrains of the song with the *tanbouyé*, dancers are welcome to enter the circle. Gwoka is danced individually, and two dancers only pass each other inside the circle briefly as one comes in and the other exits. Gwoka dancing for all rhythms is organized around a tripartite structure: step, *déboulé*, *rèpriz*. A dancer executes a step and repeats it a few times. While some steps are common to every

³² Christian Dahomay, interview with the author, 12 December 2007; Fred Deshayes, interview with the author, 12 August 2008.

³³ The oldest gwoka recording available is a collection of pieces recorded in Lasserre (Grande-Terre) by Alan Lomax. They have been reissued under the titles *French Antilles: We Will Play Love Tonight* as part of the collection *Caribbean Voyage* by Rounder Records.



Figure 1.6: Dancer and musicians at the *léwòz* organized by the Festival Gwoka in Sainte Anne, July 2010.

rhythm, others are specific. Dance steps are always coordinated with the rhythmic pattern of the *boula* and designed to emphasize its accents. Experienced dancers can also improvise their dance steps, as long as they stick to the structure and *santiman* of the *boula*, meaning that the dancer's gestures should fall within the commonly accepted expressive register, or theatricality, of each *boula* ostinato. For example, Diakok points out that the *graj* should elicit elegance and fluidity while the *léwòz* calls for more emphasis on leg work and privileges pauses and imbalance.³⁴

Gender also determines dance attitudes. Diakok explains:

³⁴ Personal communication, 23 September 2010.

There is a difference between men and women's gestures, not so much in the codes (which remain the same) but in their execution. Take the *toumblak* and the *menndé*. Both rely on hip movements but, because of anatomical differences, these movements are more pronounced with female dancers. Women have developed a whole range of pelvic movements: swaying or jerky lateral motions, rotations either slow and sensual or accelerating, tremulous, bouncing the hips forward and back. Moreover, in all the dances, women can play with their skirt or their dress. Men play with their hat or with a stick if they have one, especially when dancing the *léwòz indèstwas*. Women's gestures are also characterized by subtler arm and hand movements, as well as by their head posture. There are some typically feminine stances, like putting your hands on your hips, whereas men pull their pants' legs up by holding the fabric above the thighs.³⁵

Once the dancer has repeated his or her step a few times, (s)he performs a *déboulé*, a series of steps moving towards the *makè* that are more or less improvised and more or less complex depending on the dancer's skills. The *déboulé* generally ends with a spin. The dancer then awaits an aural signal from the *makè* before he or she can start the next step. This is called the *rèpriz*. Each rhythm has its own *rèpriz* and it is essential for dancers to know how to recognize these.

Each dancer will go through the entire cycle several times before either exiting the circle on his/her own or being replaced by another dancer. One can only enter or leave the circle at the *rèpriz*. If a dancer wants to step in while someone is already dancing, he or she has to do so during the *déboulé* and dance the *rèpriz* with the person already in the circle.

³⁵ Ibid.

“Il y a bien une différence entre la gestuelle masculine et la gestuelle féminine, non pas tant dans les codes (qui sont les mêmes pour tous) que dans l'exécution. C'est ainsi que la différence d'anatomie fait que pour le *toumblak* et le *menndé*, même si tous les deux mobilisent le bassin, les mouvements de la femme sont beaucoup plus amples. Il y a toute une gamme de mouvements pelviens développés par les femmes : mobilisation du bassin de façon latérale chaloupée ou saccadée, en arc de cercle, en tours lents et sensuels, en tours accélérés, en trémulation, en antéversion et en rétroversion saccadées. De plus alors que les femmes, dans toutes les danses, peuvent jouer avec leur jupe ample ou leur robe. Les hommes jouent avec leur chapeau quand ils en ont un ou avec un bâton dans la danse du *léwòz indèstwas*. Ce qui caractérise également la gestuelle féminine c'est le travail plus subtil des bras et des poignets. Egalement les ports de tête. Il y a des attitudes typiquement féminines telles que les mains sur la taille (le dos de la main). Pour les hommes c'est les mains qui accrochent le haut du pantalon au niveau des cuisses.”

The *makè* watches dancers intently. It is his job to “mark” every movement of the dancers. A good marker will translate musically not only the footsteps of a dancer but also his or her hip movements, hand gestures, and head turns. At best, dancer and *makè* engage in a conversation where they mimic and try to anticipate each other’s movements. A good dancer is not necessarily one who displays flashy moves but rather one who can, even through limited movement, elicit great musical complexity from the *makè*. Gwoka dancers often look as if they are permanently slightly off-balance, something Guadeloupean choreographer Lena Blou calls the *bigidi*.³⁶ The *bigidi* is the gestural equivalent of the syncopations of the *makè*. The *déboulé* increases the tension of the *bigidi* while the *rèpriz* releases it.

From the previous observations, we notice that gwoka performances are structured both by musical elements and by the interaction between drummers and dancers. Both of these aspects are linked by their common reference to the *boula* but they remain largely independent of one another: the structure of the dance is not a reflection of the structure of a song.

During a *léwòz*, songs can be quite lengthy, easily lasting more than ten minutes. Several factors can impact the duration of a song. First, lead singers are only limited by their imagination as to how long they can keep adding new verses to a song. In addition, it is common for more than one singer to perform on a given song. Finally, even if the lead singer decides to drop out, he can call for a “solo,” essentially bringing the focus on the exchange between *makè* and dancer, and thus allowing the performance to continue.

³⁶ Blou, *Technika*.

Max Diakok explains that the *biguidi* is primarily a characteristic of the *léwòz* dance that has come to permeate other rhythms (personal communication, 23 September 2010).

Dancers, like singers, have an impact of the length of the overall performance. *Toumblak* tend to attract large strings of dancers, making for lengthy performances. In contrast, less common or more challenging rhythms such as the *léwòz* generally do not last as long since they tend to attract only more experienced dancers. A gwoka song will not stop as long as new dancers are entering the ring. This can push the endurance of the *tanbouyè*, who need the stamina to sustain a rhythm for extended periods of time. On the other hand, a dancer can decide to end a song by putting his or her hands on the *makè* at the *rèpriz*. This move is generally used by experienced dancers to end a performance that tends to drag on.

If no one is singing or dancing, the *makè* is free to solo. He or she will conclude the song by playing a *koda* (coda): a simple rhythmic figure that signals the end of the song. Figure 1.7 shows a standard coda for the *toumblak* rhythm. The same coda is also used, with small variations, for the *graj* and *menndé*.

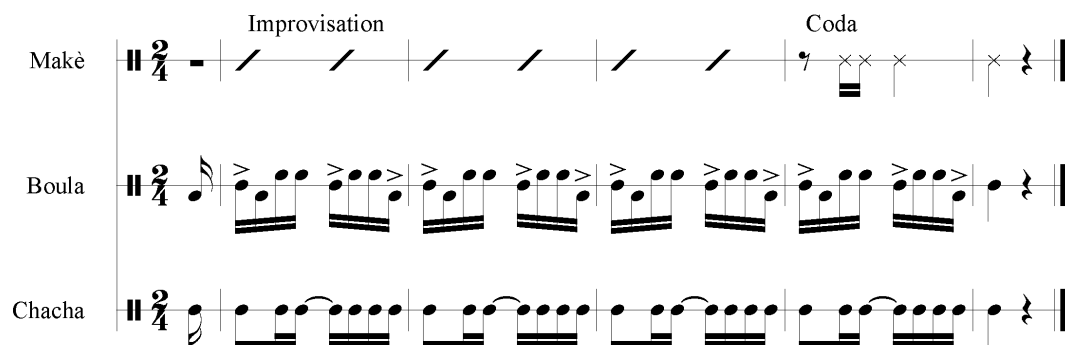


Figure 1.7: Standard *koda* (coda) for the *toumblak* rhythm.

VIII. Boulagyèl

In addition to the song and dance of the *léwòz*, musical practices associated with funeral wakes, and particularly funeral wakes on Grande-Terre, have become an important part of gwoka today. The funeral wake (Creole: *véyé*) remains an important tradition in most of the Caribbean.³⁷ On Grande-Terre, especially in the hilly area north of Sainte-Anne known as “les Grands Fonds,” friends and relatives gather at the house of the deceased on the night prior to the funeral. (Today, funeral wakes in urban areas are generally held at funeral parlors.) While women gather inside to sing prayers around the body, men stand outside and entertain themselves and the family of the deceased with traditional story-telling, games, and singing.

Music at a funeral wake differs from that of the *léwòz* in several important ways. Most noticeably, no drums are used. In addition, while music can be used to accompany games, there is traditionally no dancing at funeral wakes. Finally, more so than during *swaré léwòz*, singing at funeral wakes is competitive. All of these elements generate musical structures that are similar to but distinct from those of the *léwòz*.

Like that performed for the *léwòz*, music during funeral wakes is highly participatory. Participants can serve one of three functions depending on their knowledge of the tradition and their ability. Most people sing the response and clap hands to the basic pulse of the performance, while a few people may interject various rhythmic variations. Another group performs the *boulagyèl* (also called *banjogita*), percussive vocal sounds produced while inhaling and exhaling. While some general rhythmic

³⁷ Cyrille, Gerstin and Desroches, “The French Antilles: We Will Play Love Tonight.”

patterns serve as a basis for the *boulagyèl*'s pulse and accents, singers weave different variations together into a complex texture. In other words, while *boularyen* at a *léwòz* are expected to perform in near unison, *boulagyèl* singers are free to perform different variations as long they match the overall pulse and pattern of accentuation. Most funeral wake songs feature a succession of lead singers, with each singer trying to outdo the previous by singing a little higher and by demonstrating his wit as he improvises new lyrics. Talented wake singers have powerful voices and sing in tune, qualities described as *lokans* in Creole.

While they share some characteristics with *toumblak* songs, wake songs actually form a distinct repertoire. Like the songs of the *léwòz*, they are responsorial. Their responses are very brief and the calls also tend to be relatively short. Like songs of the *léwòz*, funeral wake melodies use a variety of scales but remain anchored to a tonic. However, due to the competitive nature of funeral wake singing, the tonic pitch tends to creep upwards as successive singers try to outdo one another by singing higher than the person who preceded them.

IX. History and Memory

A common historical narrative has emerged from my many conversations with gwoka musicians and from reading the limited Guadeloupean literature on the subject. Most people believe that gwoka is a creation of African slaves in Guadeloupe.³⁸ These humble beginnings along with the music's African roots fuel its mystique. Many musicians and writers are quick to associate the music with the *nèg mawon*, the marooned

³⁸ Labeca, *I ka i pa ka*, 9; Uri, *Le Chant de Karukera*, 32.

slave, and present gwoka as a music of rebellion against the plantation system.³⁹ By extension, these same musicians and writers mobilize gwoka as a music of resistance against French colonialism. In fact, in spite of the lack of historical evidence to support it, the association between gwoka and resistance has become part of the music's doxa. According to the popular narrative, gwoka suffered greatly under France's assimilationist pressures but was kept alive by a handful of masters, most notably Marcel Lollia, a.k.a. Vélo (1931-1984), a *tanbouyé* of extraordinary talent from Pointe-à-Pitre, and Kristen Aigle (1929-1985), a master singer and *makè* from the area near Sainte-Rose. In the 1970s and '80s, the popular account concludes, in another act of resistance against the colonial oppressor, the music was (miraculously) resurrected, although few people are willing to discuss how and by whom.

This historical narrative was constructed within the past thirty years or so by people who, for the most part, discovered gwoka in the 1970s when they were high-school or university students. Most of these musicians and activists were involved in Guadeloupe's separatist movement. For these activists, gwoka served to create a sentiment of national unity and to inspire resistance against dominant French culture. Furthermore, as chapter 3 will demonstrate, this historical narrative was developed in resistance against French imperialism by a certain Guadeloupean intellectual elite who has since managed to achieve what James Scott calls a "paper-thin" political and cultural hegemony.⁴⁰ Until recently, there have been very few efforts to study the music's history in a rigorous manner, either through archival research or by interviewing tradition

³⁹ Canneval and Martial, *Almanaka 2007*; Gabali, *Diadyéé*, 18-19.

⁴⁰ *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 82-85.

bearers.⁴¹ I address this lacuna in the next chapter which explores the evolution of music and society during the colonial period in Guadeloupe. Chapter 3 will reveal the social and political conditions in the second half of the twentieth century that led to the emergence of the nationalist narrative presented above.

⁴¹ Notable efforts in this direction include the work of historian Jean Barfleur and the oral history project of the Médiathèque Caraïbe Bettino Lara under the leadership of Marie Line Dahomay. In addition, since its creation in 2007, Rèpriz, the center for traditional and popular music and dance, has also been involved in the collection and study of traditional repertoires in Guadeloupe.

Chapter 2

“Nou rivé an léwòz a yo la”: Music in a creolizing society from colonization to departmentalization

The song resonates across Guadeloupe on most summer weekends: “*Nou rivé an léwòz a yo la*” (we’ve arrived at their léwòz). Its meaning is quite literal, a celebration of the gathering of people who have traveled to dance, sing, and play together. The song, however, does not reveal the several centuries it took for Guadeloupeans to arrive at the léwòz as it is experienced today. The concept of traditional gwoka is in itself a recent creation. Until nationalist militants encouraged Guadeloupean musicians to modernize gwoka by adding European instruments to its performance, there had been no need for a concept such as “traditional” gwoka. Moreover, I argue that gwoka as a homogenous musical genre probably did not exist before the late 1960s. Instead, Guadeloupe offered a patchwork of varied African-derived drum-based musics and dances. These practices resulted from over three hundred years of colonial history. The interplay of European, African and Native American cultures, with East Indian elements entering the mix in the nineteenth century, not only resulted in the creation of new creolized musical forms but also shaped their place in the Guadeloupean imaginary.

In this chapter, we turn our attention to the historical evolution of Guadeloupean music and society through the colonial period, up to the 1946 law of departmentalization. The focus here is as much on the concepts of creolization, assimilation, and nationalism as it is on music. Indeed, I will explore how creolization and assimilation contributed to

the creation of new cultural expressions and determined their relative social capital. If this story may seem at times to take us away from the strictly musical, it is important to remember that gwoka's significance in contemporary Guadeloupean society results from the complex interplay of exogenous and endogenous political and social forces. Understanding the interplay of these forces over the *long durée* is key if one wishes to make sense of the political and musical developments in Guadeloupe in the late twentieth century.

The chapter is divided into two broad sections. In the first, I explain how creolization on colonial plantations resulted in the creation of new musics and new social institutions during the colonial period. Although creolization has had many meanings since its introduction in the social sciences, this study of music allows me to focus on those usages that seem the most relevant to the Guadeloupean context. In the second section, I untangle the various social and political events that led to the law of departmentalization of 1946. I argue that Antillean nationalism was born during the Third Republic with the emergence of black union leaders. In the first half of the twentieth century, this unusual form of nationalism balanced cultural expressions of racial pride—captured in the aesthetic movement of *négritude*—with demands for political assimilation and social protection.

I. Music, race and cultural capital during the colonial period

We know very little about musical practices in Guadeloupe during the colonial period. As Ronald Radano and Peter Manuel have each pointed out, several factors complicate the historical study of music in the Americas, especially the study of African-

influenced genres.¹ First, there is a dearth of historical documents. Second, because Guadeloupean slaves did not leave any narratives, all extant documents were written by European chroniclers who often had a personal stake in the colonial project, and reflect their own perspectives and prejudices. These chroniclers only paid attention to the lives of Afro-American slaves to the extent that they had economic and social impacts on the lives of European and Euro-American colonists. They paid little attention to slaves' musical practices, and when they did, the racial language of their assessment reveals European colonists' conflicted feelings towards the black labor force on which they depended, as Radano points out.²

For this reason, these writings offer unreliable descriptions of the ways that music was played and danced. Not only are we left to imagine what the music sounded like, we also have to guess its social significance based on partial—in the dual sense of incomplete and biased—evidence. European observers easily confused slaves' secular entertainment with their religious rituals, for example. In addition, in Guadeloupe, there is a total absence of documents reflecting the perspectives of subalterns, either black slaves or free mulattos, during the slavery era.

Finally, historians confront confusing inconsistencies in terminology. In particular, various writers have used terms such as “calenda” or “bamboula” to describe discrepant musical practices in different places and at different times.³ This issue is symptomatic of European chroniclers' propensity for over-generalization. Europeans

¹ Radano, *Lying Up a Nation*, xiv-xv, 5-6; Manuel, *Creolizing the Contradance*, 9.

² *Lying Up a Nation*, 5.

³ Manuel, *Creolizing the Contradance*, 9.

reporting about their West Indian travels tended to conflate observations from different locales. It is tempting but problematic to apply their general observations to specific locations. For example, the fact that Lafcadio Hearn mentioned the word “ka” for the first time in 1890 to describe drums in Martinique does not necessarily mean that the word was also used in Guadeloupe at the same time, even if “ka” has come to designate drums throughout the Caribbean.⁴ Nonetheless, drawing from historical sources and recent scholarship, the following pages explicate the connections between musical developments and the emergence of a new social order in the colonial French Antilles.

A. Historical overview of the settlement of the island

Although the first Europeans to arrive in Guadeloupe were Spaniards, the island’s colonization began in earnest when France claimed the archipelago from Spain in 1635. In order to populate the new French Caribbean colonies, landowners relied on the services of poor white contract laborers. These *engagés* agreed to work on a plantation for three years to pay for their relocation to the Caribbean. The system amounted to little more than temporary slavery. Landowners were free to dictate the nature and the amount of labor expected from their *engagés*. *Engagés* could also be sold to other owners. Once the thirty-six months’ contract was over, each *engagé* received enough money to finance a trip back to France. If he chose to do so, he could instead decide to buy a parcel of land of his own or continue working as a wage laborer.⁵ Those who stayed in Guadeloupe joined the ranks of a white lower class, or *petits blancs*: clerks, plantation administrative

⁴ Hearn, *Two Years in the French West Indies*, 143; Cyrille, Gerstin and Desroches, *The French West Indies*; Uri, *Le Chant de Karukera*, 32.

⁵ Abenon, *Petite Histoire*, 49-50; Régent, *La France et ses esclaves*, 21-22.

personnel, subsistence farmers, but also soldiers, sailors, and some members of the clergy.⁶

The relationship between European settlers and Karibs oscillated between cooperation and armed conflict, the latter becoming more frequent as the number of European settlers increased. In 1660, following several years of war, Karib, British and French leaders signed a truce which left the island of Dominica and Saint Vincent to the Native Americans while the Europeans claimed full possession of the rest of the Lesser Antilles.⁷ War, disease and forced labor decimated the Karib population. Very little is known about Native American music in Guadeloupe, yet Françoise and Alex Uri propose that the use of gourd rattles (later known as *chacha*) and conch shells in Guadeloupean music originated in Karib practices.⁸

In the first few years of French occupation, the *Compagnie des Amériques*, which controlled the colonization of the French Antilles and their commercial relationship with the metropole, encouraged settlers to cultivate tobacco and cotton. By the early 1640s, things changed as the Compagnie realized that the cultivation of sugar cane and the production of sugar promised much higher profits than either cotton or tobacco. The new crop required a larger workforce than the *engagés* could provide and planters turned to the massive importation of African slaves.⁹ Within roughly thirty years, Martinique and

⁶ Cyrille, "Creole Quadrilles," 199.

⁷ Abenon, *Petite Histoire*, 22-30; Régent, *La France et ses esclaves*, 18-19. The truce was of course short-lived and European powers soon resumed colonization of Dominica. Nonetheless, Dominica is the only island in the Lesser Antilles with a remaining Native American community.

⁸ Uri, *Le Chant de Karukera*, 28. The Uris do not offer much evidence for their claim and it has not been corroborated by other scholars.

⁹ Abenon, *Petite histoire*, 32; Régent, *La France et ses esclaves*, 25.

Guadeloupe experienced a dramatic demographic shift. In Guadeloupe, Europeans made up 80% of the total population in 1654, with two-thirds of these contract laborers. By 1664, Europeans constituted only half of the overall population and that number dropped to 39% by 1684. Meanwhile, Europeans made up 67% of the servile population in Guadeloupe in 1654. The rise of African slave labor pushed that percentage down to 13% by 1671.¹⁰

B. The French slave trade

In order to better understand the process of creolization and the emergence of new musical practices in the French Antilles, we need to turn our attention to the history of the slave trade in the French colonies. Rather than considering African slaves as a homogenous group, it is necessary to investigate their diverse ethnic origins because enslaved Africans brought heterogeneous aesthetic values and musical practices with them from various regions.

Even though no precise historical records survive for the seventeenth century, chroniclers' testimonies suggest that French traders brought to the Americas slaves from an area reaching from contemporary Senegal to Angola.¹¹ Such an incredibly wide range offers little specific insight into the ethnic origins of slaves in the French Antilles. In his excellent study of French slavery, Régent points out that records become more precise after 1715.¹² They establish that, early in the eighteenth century, slave traders relied mainly on two trading-posts in Senegal, from which they gradually extended their

¹⁰ Régent, *La France et ses esclaves*, 25.

¹¹ Du Tertre, *Histoire générale*, 474; Labat, *Voyages*, 179; Régent, *La France et ses esclaves*, 45.

¹² *La France et ses esclaves*, 45.

activities southward towards present-day Togo and Benin. By the end of the eighteenth century, commerce with Senegambia had declined as traders of all nations increased their activities around the Congo and Angola, some even pushing around the Cape of Good Hope to Mozambique.¹³ After France abolished slavery in 1848, indentured laborers from the Congo continued to be brought to Guadeloupe until 1861.¹⁴

Throughout the eighteenth century, most French slave ships sailed toward Martinique and Saint Domingue (present day Haiti). While some slaves were brought directly to Guadeloupe, most ships stopped first in Martinique, which was then the seat of the French colonial government in the Antilles, before sailing north to the sister island. In order to compensate for the low number of slaves brought directly to the archipelago, plantation owners in Guadeloupe relied heavily on trade with other islands, making it more difficult to determine with much certainty the ethnic origins of slaves brought there.¹⁵

Nonetheless, Régent establishes that, around the French Revolution, the majority of slaves in Guadeloupe came from the Bay of Biafra (present-day Gulf of Bonny, Nigeria), followed by groups coming from an area stretching from Senegambia, through the Gulf of Benin, and all the way to what is now northern Angola. Nicole Vanony-Frisch proposes that most Guadeloupean slaves were Igbo, with Kongo constituting the second

¹³ Vanony-Frisch, “L’Origine des esclaves de la Guadeloupe,” 47-54; Régent, *La France et ses esclaves*, 45-55; Lanoir-L’Etang, *Réseaux de solidarité*, 64. Régent explains that slave traders used the term “Congo” to designate slaves from Central Africa, specifically from the coast of Cameroon, Gabon, and northern Angola.

¹⁴ Abenon, *Petite Histoire*, 140-141.

¹⁵ Régent, *La France et ses esclaves*, 51-52.

largest group.¹⁶ However, Afrocentric linguist Marie-Josée Cérol (a.k.a. Ama Mazama) argues that, in the nineteenth century, Kongo actually represented the largest ethnicity, followed by the Bantu who were among the last contract laborers brought from Africa.¹⁷ Unfortunately, in all these descriptions, the term “Congo” is rather imprecise.¹⁸ Vanony-Frisch and Régent agree that the term was used broadly to designate slaves from an area stretching from what is now Cameroon to northern Angola. However, Cérol seems to restrict the term to the Kongo (a.k.a. Bakongo) ethnicity.

C. From *nations* to *associations*: music and social activism in black organizations

At the end of the eighteenth century, Léonard—a French poet born in Guadeloupe—observed a wedding during which slaves from different nations assembled around their respective flags.¹⁹ Other writings by European chroniclers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries confirm that enslaved Africans tended to recreate ethnic ties in the New World and congregate according to their “nation” or ethnic background. These nations laid the foundation for the concomitant emergence of new social structures and new cultural forms in West Indian colonial societies.

Historians agree that slaves would congregate whenever possible, either with or without their owners’ permission. In order to speed the enculturation of newly arrived slaves, some plantation owners systematically broke up ethnic and family groups when

¹⁶ Régent, *op. cit.*, 48; Vanony Frisch, “L’Origine des esclaves de la Guadeloupe,” 47.

¹⁷ Quoted in Lanoir L’Etang, *Réseaux de solidarité*, 63.

¹⁸ Most French sources use this spell the word with a “C,” “Congo” instead of “Kongo.”

¹⁹ Léonard, *Oeuvres de Léonard*, 212.

purchasing new slaves. Furthermore, on the plantation, slaves belonging to the same nation were assigned different functions in order to further discourage solidarity along ethnic lines. Under these conditions, slaves belonging to the same nation nevertheless managed to gather clandestinely, either at night or on Sunday if they had the day off. These meetings generally took place away from the plantation and could gather slaves from several estates.²⁰ By contrast, some plantation owners actually favored buying slaves from a single ethnicity that had proven particularly productive on their estate. These owners even encouraged slave gatherings with the idea that giving slaves controlled liberties could actually lessen chances of rebellion.²¹

Regardless of the conditions, slaves' gatherings and their organization into nations served two goals according to anthropologist Luciani Lanoir L'Etang. First, through these gatherings, slaves resisted acculturation by recreating ethnic ties across plantations. It seems that through this practice, enslaved Africans were able to maintain ethnically specific dances after their arrival in the New World. For example, R.P. Labat—a French Dominican priest who traveled extensively throughout the West Indies, owned a plantation in Martinique, and periodically resided in Guadeloupe—contrasted dance practices of Congolese and Guinean slaves. If Labat can be believed, slaves from Guinea danced in a double line formation, men and women facing each other, while enslaved Congo danced in a circle by shuffling their feet.²²

²⁰ Lanoir L'étang, *Réseaux de solidarité*, 64-69.

²¹ Lanoir L'Etang, *Réseaux de solidarité*, 69-78.

²² Labat, *Voyages du Père Labat*, 195-196.

Slaves nations also functioned as solidarity networks, especially in the event of death. Over time, Lanoir L'Etang suggests, these nations developed beyond ethnic boundaries and became the seeds from which mutual aid societies emerged.²³ These societies in turn provided the foundation for social and political activism among Guadeloupe's black working class. Following emancipation in 1848, mutual aid societies became a template on which black socialist union organizers—who emerged in reaction to the difficult living conditions of the black proletariat and the growing crisis facing the sugar industry in the nineteenth century—could build their organizations.²⁴ As we will see in the next chapter, this tradition of association-based social and political activism stretches all the way into the second half of the twentieth century. From the emergence of slave nations in the seventeenth century to the advent of mutual aid societies and unions in the nineteenth century, music played an important role in the life of creole social organizations. We now turn our attention to the impact slave socialization had on musical practices.

D. Creolization

By stating that slaves managed to maintain specific dances in the early colonial period, I do not intend to suggest that these dances merely reproduced West African practices in the Americas. Indeed, as Sidney Mintz and Richard Price warn us, the quest for direct morphological correspondences between African-derived cultural practices in the New World and their African antecedents often leads scholars to reduce the

²³ *Réseaux de solidarité*, 77-78.

²⁴ Lanoir L'Etang, *Réseaux de solidarité*, 299-313; Boutin, *Vivre ensemble*, 121-135.

complexity of African cultures to that of a single ethnicity.²⁵ For example, Melville Herskovits privileged the retention of Yoruba cultural elements in the Americas while, in contemporary Guadeloupe, I have observed a tendency to highlight Kongo heritage.²⁶ Moreover, a focus on African retentions risks obscuring slaves' creativity. For these reasons, Mintz and Price argue that it is more fruitful to look for philosophical and psychological correspondences. Enslaved Africans did not bring their drums with them to the Americas. Rather they managed to preserve aesthetic values and some technological knowledge, such as drum manufacturing techniques. In the Western hemisphere, slaves had to adapt these values and these techniques to a new geographic and social context.

Furthermore, upon contact with European music, Caribbean slaves adopted and adapted some of its elements. Through this process, musical practices of both European and African origins were transformed. In order to theorize this transformation, anthropologists have borrowed the concept of creolization from linguists for whom, as Peter Manuel explains, "the term 'creolization' originally denotes the process by which speakers of two or more distinct tongues, who met on neutral territory that is the homeland of neither, create a pidgin lingua franca, which then becomes a first language for subsequent generations."²⁷

²⁵ "The Birth of American Culture," 40-44.

²⁶ Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*.

In particular, the "grapakongo," a music often described as the last surviving Kongo musical practice on the island, seem to occupy a special place in the world of traditional music.

N'Sondé, "Kongo des Amériques" offers an example of scholarly writing dedicated to highlighting Kongo influence on Caribbean cultures.

²⁷ *Creolizing the Contradance*, 32.

The emergence of new musical styles in Guadeloupe resulted from the meeting of a relatively culturally homogenous group of European (largely French) settlers and a culturally heterogenous group of captive Africans.²⁸ To qualify the French colonists as a homogenous group does not negate the fact that French culture has been and continues to be the product of cultural encounters and syncretism rather than a pure and stable unit. The same is of course also true of West African culture, which leads Peter Manuel to conclude that “the formative elements in creolization may themselves be creolized rather than primordial pure entities.”²⁹ Because enslaved Africans formed a heterogenous group, a theory of creolization in the Caribbean needs to account for the continued transformative influence of African culture on creole practices. Indeed, throughout the colonial period, the arrival of new slaves from different African regions and their integration into existing nations or societies played an important role in the evolution of creole music and dance.

Creolization is a transformative and creative process that has the ability to obscure the original cultural elements that it combines.³⁰ The emergence of Guadeloupean gwoka (drum) illustrates this process. It is impossible to know if the drums’ characteristic tension system originated in Europe, Africa, or in the Americas. Many musicians in

²⁸ Robin Moore makes a similar argument regarding the Hispanic Caribbean. See *Music in the Hispanic Caribbean*, 21.

²⁹ *Creolizing the Contradance*, 32.

³⁰ Many recent creolization theorists have made this points. See for example, Hall, “Créolité and the Process of Creolization.”

Guadeloupe favor a Euro-genetic theory, based on linguistic evidence. Because the word *zoban* designating the rope-covered hoop around the drum's head is a creolization of the French *hauban* (shroud), they argue that the tension system is an adaptation of nautical technology. However, the same tension system is found not only on drums elsewhere in the Caribbean basin, most notably the *garawoun* of Belize, but also in Africa, for example on the *soboun* of Benin (Figure 2.1). An Afro-genetic theory therefore seems equally valid.³¹ Unfortunately, while the writings of European chroniclers offer some clue as to the gradual transformation of drums in Guadeloupe, they do not allow us to date the appearance of the ka's tension system nor the passage from drums made from *bwa foyé* (hollowed out trunk section) to drums built from barrels.³² In the absence of precise historical records, creolization makes it rather futile and hazardous to look at direct morphological similarities as a way to identify gwoka's African origins.



Figure 2.1: *Soboun* from Bénin. Courtesy of the Musée du Quai Branly, Paris.

The development of new musical styles in Guadeloupe and the rest of the Caribbean is closely linked with the emergence of new social institutions among enslaved Africans. In their landmark 1976 paper “The Birth of American Culture,” Sidney Mintz and Richard Price highlight the close links between the processes of socialization and creolization. Enslavement, they argue, created a need for new communities and

³¹ Greene, “Bélize,” 671. Greene describes the *garawoun* tension system as characteristically African. I borrow the terms “Euro-” and “Afro-genetic” from Richard Burton, *Afro-Creole*, 2.

³² For European descriptions of drumming practices in pre-emancipation Guadeloupe, see Du Tertre (1654); de Rochefort (1665); Labat (ca. 1693-1705); Léonard (1787); de Cassagnac (1842); Dugoujon (1845); Longuin (1848).

institutions which, in the context of a heterogeneous group of people, required a process of cultural exchanges.³³ For slaves in the Caribbean, engaging in participatory musical activities thus became an important way of forging social ties within the nations or mutual aid societies. This process of socialization underscores the fact that, in its original Caribbean colonial context, creolization emerged out of the necessity felt by slaves to adapt to and mitigate the violent inequalities inherent in plantation societies built around the institution of slavery. In fact Régent explains that, in the seventeenth century, slaves were considered “creole” once they had adapted to the rules of the plantation, were able to accomplish their work, and understood Creole well-enough to follow orders.³⁴ Stuart Hall concludes:

Creolization always entails inequality, hierarchization, issues of domination and subalternity, mastery and servitude, control and resistance. Questions of power, as well as issues of entanglements, are always at stake. It is essential to keep these contradictory tendencies together, rather than singling out their celebratory aspects.³⁵

E. A three-tiered society, and the hierarchy within

The emergence of slave nations in the Americas and their transformation into mutual aid societies partook of the broader development of a colonial social order. As mentioned earlier, by 1660, African slaves outnumbered Europeans in Guadeloupe.³⁶ In order to regulate slavery, the French monarchy issued the first draft of the *Code Noir* in 1685. Originally only thirty-eight pages, the *Code Noir* continued to grow through the

³³ “The Birth of American Culture,” 46.

³⁴ *La France et ses esclaves*, 146.

³⁵ Hall, “Créolité and the Process of Creolization,” 29.

³⁶ Abenon, *Petite Histoire*, 51.

eighteenth century. Rather than enacting new legal rules, the edict institutionalized and homogenized existing colonial practices.³⁷ According to historian Lucien Abenon, the *Code Noir* offered the legal basis for the emergence of a new colonial socio-racial order which lasted until the nineteenth century, with whites on top, free people of color (mulattos and freed slaves) in the middle, and black slaves at the bottom.³⁸

Dominique Cyrille proposes a slightly more complicated model of eighteenth-century French Antillean colonial society. Reminding us that the *Code Noir* considered slaves as disposable goods and therefore excluded them from the colonial social order, Cyrille explains:

Officially, and from the Europeans' point of view, there were three classes in the colony. At the top of the social ladder were the planters, rich merchants, and high administrators. The second social class comprised artisans, clerks, soldiers, and clergy people of European origin. All the free people of color—free-born mulattos as well as newly freed blacks—were placed together at the bottom of the social ladder. They had to show deference to all whites at all times as a general rule.³⁹

In addition to this official hierarchy, within the enslaved population, important social distinctions were found between newly arrived slaves and creole (American-born) slaves on one hand, or between field hands, *nègres à talent* (skilled slaves), and house slaves on the other.⁴⁰ To further complicate matters, free-born mulattos were often wealthier and better educated than lower class whites and therefore saw themselves as closer to the plantocracy than to newly freed slaves.⁴¹

³⁷ Régent, *La France et ses esclaves*, 64-69.

³⁸ *Petite Histoire*, 51-52.

³⁹ "Creole Quadrilles of Guadeloupe, Dominica, Martinique, and Saint Lucia," 199.

⁴⁰ Lanoir L'Etang, *Réseaux de solidarité*, 62.

⁴¹ Cyrille, "Creole Quadrilles," 198.

F. Performing and challenging social hierarchy through music

Music played an important role in expressing, reproducing and challenging the complex, but relatively stable, colonial social hierarchy. Description of African-derived dances was one of the ways by which Europeans could reinforce negative perceptions of blackness and thus justify the cruelty of slavery.⁴² In the seventeenth century, Du Tertre and César de Rochefort described the great solace slaves found in music and dance, “as if they were the happiest people in the world.”⁴³ A century later, Léonard echoed the same ideas while also mocking the dances as grotesque.⁴⁴ For Labat, slave dances were “lascivious” and “dishonest” and generally lacked decency. In addition, the monk and plantation owner couldn’t hide his disdain for the “noise” of the drums and seemed puzzled by the Spanish colonists’ apparent embrace of the calenda.⁴⁵ Even the abolitionist abbot Dugoujon, writing in 1845 about his stay in Les Saintes, expressed his frustration with the “barbarous singing, dancing, and orgies” that accompanied local funeral wakes.⁴⁶ Yet the most unabashedly racist descriptions of people of African descent belong to Gagnier de Cassagnac who, in 1842, wrote at length about a supposed African

⁴² Cyrille, “Creoles Quadrilles,” 201.

⁴³ Du Tertre, *Histoire générale*, 476-477; Rochefort, *Histoire naturelle et morale*, 342.

⁴⁴ Léonard, *Oeuvre*, 187-188; 206-207.

⁴⁵ Labat, *Voyages*, 195-196.

According to Labat, the calenda had become the favorite form of entertainment for “Creole Spanish” colonists (meaning white Spaniards born in the Americas) who had even incorporated it within their liturgical celebrations. Labat, however, offers few details about the dance and none about the music. We are therefore left wondering what this “calenda” was like and if it had any true relation to African-derived dances. It is entirely possible that this anecdote was meant above all else to denounce the degeneracy of creole colonists whose morals, in the eyes of many Europeans, had been corrupted by their environment, making them less than white.

⁴⁶ Dugoujon, *Lettres sur l’esclavage*, 73.

propensity for laziness, described African slaves as ugly, and painted slave dances as “horrible,” “scary,” and “hideous” affairs.⁴⁷

Colonists’ contempt for African-derived dances was rooted, in part, in the great distance between African and European aesthetic values. Chroniclers accustomed to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European dances that sought to express self-control, moderation and rationality were puzzled by dances that—on the surface and from a European perspective—seemed antithetical to these ideals. To European slave-owners and clergy, the fact that slaves danced outside, barefooted, with bent knees and emphasized hip movements, reinforced their perception of enslaved Africans as uncivilized.⁴⁸

Faced with musical practices they could neither comprehend nor appreciate, plantation owners and colonial officials tried to suppress African-derived dances and alter slaves’ habitus. Colonists were in a position that allowed them to do so. They controlled all colonial institutions, including education, religion, and the justicial system. To a very large extent, they also controlled the slaves’ physical space and time. They could restrict slaves’ movements both on and off the plantation. The *Code Noir* prohibited slaves from circulating without their owner’s authorization.⁴⁹ Even though laws also ensured that slaves would not be forced to work on Sundays and holidays, on the plantation, the rhythm of life was almost totally dictated by the need to maximize production and left slaves with almost no personal time.

⁴⁷ Granier de Cassagnac, *Voyage aux Antilles*, 211-224.

⁴⁸ Cyrille, *op. cit.*, 201.

⁴⁹ Régent, *La France et ses esclaves*, 66.

As Régent points out, planters did not wield absolute control over their slaves. The need to both maximize productivity and minimize chances of rebellion meant that plantation owners had to strike a delicate balance between treatments that would inspire enough fear to intimidate slaves and punishments that could limit slaves' ability to perform their work or that could build enough resentment to instigate rebellion.⁵⁰ Consequently, resistance and opposition played a part in shaping both the development of new cultural forms and a colonial habitus. Building on the work of Michel de Certeau, Richard Burton describes "resistance" as a form of contestation of the colonial system from outside and "opposition" as contestation from within the system. However, Burton points out the paradoxical limits of opposition in slave societies. He explains:

I see cultural opposition in the Caribbean as double edged to the extent that an (Afro-)creole culture cannot, by dint of its very creoleness, get entirely outside the dominant system in order to *resist* it and so tends unconsciously to reproduce its underlying structures even as it consciously challenges its visible dominance.⁵¹

An exploration of what Cyrille calls the "shifting meaning" of European court dances in the French Antilles illustrates this point.⁵² As early as the eighteenth century, plantation owners attempted to replace African-derived dances with European court dances. Labat apparently endeavored to teach his slaves how to dance the minuet, the courante and the passe-pied. While some of them managed to execute these dances well enough to satisfy their master, Labat was forced to admit that most slaves seemed to prefer dancing the calenda. Other slaves were taught to play European instruments in

⁵⁰ *La France et ses esclaves*, 74-79.

⁵¹ *Afro-Creole*, 8.

⁵² "Creole Quadrilles," 199.

order to entertain their owners, a custom imported from France where servants frequently provided musical entertainment.⁵³

In spite of the colonists' efforts, seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century European court dances do not appear to have had much of an impact on musical development in the French Antilles. Things changed dramatically with the introduction of the *contredanse* and *quadrille* in the late eighteenth century. As Peter Manuel points out, the spread of the contradance from England to France and the rest of Europe was closely linked with the rise of a bourgeois middle class. This new middle class adopted the contradance in reaction against the rigidity of the aristocratic minuet. However, the contradance's popularity in Europe soon cut across all social classes.⁵⁴ Therefore, from its inception, the contradance established itself as a cosmopolitan symbol of social ascendancy.

Once introduced in the French Antilles, the *contredanse* and its nineteenth-century derivative the quadrille likewise spread quickly through all social strata. The plantocracy and educated mulattos learned these dances from French dance masters. Freed blacks learned them by being in close proximity with whites. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, even house slaves had started to appropriate the *contredanse*.⁵⁵

To the chagrin of the plantocracy, all socioracial groups in the French Antilles soon adopted the quadrille in their effort to transcend their social category. Planters proudly danced the quadrille to reinforce their connection with the French aristocracy and

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁵⁴ Manuel, *Creolizing the Contradance*, 3-4.

⁵⁵ Cyrille, "The Creole Quadrilles," 199-200.

distance themselves from people of color and from poor whites who could not afford dance lessons. Poor whites adopted it to reinforce their connection to the plantocracy and to distance themselves from free people of color. Mulattos embraced it to reinforce their claim for social recognition. Freed blacks saw in it an opportunity to distance themselves from house slaves. Finally, house slaves appropriated it to distance themselves from field slaves who danced the bamboula or calenda.⁵⁶ Thus, the widespread adoption of the cosmopolitan contradance resulted from the social stigma associated with African-derived cultural practices and further lowered the cultural capital associated with African-derived dances.

In this context, participation in calenda or bamboula can be read as an act of cultural resistance. Creole dances reinforced social ties within the slave community and provided a counter-hegemonic cultural model. It would be a mistake, however, to see the adoption of European dances such as the quadrille as a simple sign of assimilation. Indeed, as Cyrille makes clear, slaves appropriated and transformed the quadrille by infusing it with African-derived musical elements. In addition, by performing and creolizing the quadrille, slaves were actually engaging in an act of opposition that asserted their humanity within a colonial society that viewed them as disposable goods.⁵⁷

As mentioned earlier, gwoka is often associated in contemporary Guadeloupean imagination with the *nèg mawon*, the maroon slave, and thus is presented as a form of resistance against colonial oppression. However, this assertion is problematic.

Marooning, the act of escaping the plantation, was very limited in Guadeloupe compared

⁵⁶ Cyrille, "The Creole Quadrilles," 202-203.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 203.

to other colonies, hovering around one percent of the overall slave population for much of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Geography may partially explain this Guadeloupean specificity: only the mountainous region of Basse-Terre offers areas remote enough to hide maroon camps. It is therefore not surprising that only one longstanding maroon community has been documented in Guadeloupe.⁵⁸ While it is entirely possible that maroons practiced some forms of African-derived dances or joined with other slaves in clandestine gatherings, there is no evidence that maroons used drums as a communication tool as the contemporary characterization of gwoka as “*téléfonn a nèg mawon*” (maroon’s phone) suggests.

As France and its colonies approached the Revolution, a century and a half of colonialism had produced Antillean societies stratified along class and racial lines. As European and African cultures interacted in the New World, creolization produced new cultural expressions. However, because of great power inequalities and violence—symbolic and physical—inherent in slave societies, cultural expressions quickly became an important way to both demonstrate and acquire social capital. As *les philosophes* in France discussed ideas of liberty and equality, colonialism in the Caribbean produced a society that systematically stigmatized African-derived musics while European dances became tools of social ascendancy. In the following section, we will explore how the long assimilationist path, from 1789 to 1946, reinforced these differences in social capital.

⁵⁸ Régent, *La France et ses esclaves*, 163-166.

II. Assimilation and transformation of the colonial order

Josette Fallope reminds us that the assimilation of former colonial subjects into their metropole requires a double process. On one hand, those being assimilated have to absorb the social practices and expectations dictated by the metropole. In other words, in order to assimilate, former colonial subjects have to absorb the metropolitan habitus. On the other hand, the metropole has to agree to overlook differences and accept newly assimilated parties as full citizens. Fallope rightly concludes that this ideal cannot be fulfilled.⁵⁹ While the following pages focus on assimilationist pressures stemming from political and social movements in the French Antilles, it is important to remember that these changes resulted from institutional evolution in France. On one hand, as France moved to realize the democratic ideals of the Revolution, it allowed for a gradual increase in representation of the colonies in state institutions. Most notably, in two laws from 1875 and 1881, the Third Republic entitled the *vieilles colonies* to send representatives to the parliament and senate in Paris, thus tightening the political integration of the Caribbean colonies within the French state.⁶⁰ On the other hand, policies decided in Paris, such as education reform, also promoted the growth of assimilationist ideology in the Caribbean colonies. In addition, they had the unintended effect of facilitating the emergence of nationalist sentiments in the French Antilles.

⁵⁹ Fallope, "Assimilation," 36.

⁶⁰ Mériion, "La France et ses Antilles."

A. Social and ideological impact of the French revolution

At the end of the eighteenth century, the socio-racial categories in France's Caribbean colonies were not a simple extension of metropolitan social hierarchy. The French islands lacked a significant bourgeoisie and their nobility did not benefit from the privileges of its metropolitan counterpart. Therefore, the French Revolution had a very different impact in the Caribbean than it did in Europe.⁶¹ Nevertheless it presented the first real challenge to the eighteenth-century colonial order.

Revolutionary unrest in the Antillean colonies started soon after the news of the fall of the Bastille reached the colonies. The British seized on this instability to invade Martinique, Saint Lucia, and Tobago in 1793 before reaching the shores of Guadeloupe. While Martinican *békés* (plantation owners) remained under British protection until 1802, things played out very differently in Guadeloupe. In 1794, the Convention in Paris dispatched Victor Hugues to reclaim Guadeloupe. Besides a contingent of soldiers, Hugues brought with him two additional weapons: a guillotine and a newly signed decree abolishing slavery. Upon landing on Grande Terre, Hugues wielded the decree to rally the black population against the British and thus managed to take over the island. His tenure lasted until 1798 and proved particularly brutal. Hugues arrested and executed hundreds of plantation owners and mulattos sympathetic to the crown. He also took over management of most plantations and forced slaves to return to work.⁶² Thus, when Napoleon ascended to power in 1802, the Guadeloupean plantocracy was seriously weakened compared to the Martinican *békés*.

⁶¹ Abenon, *Petite histoire*, 84.

⁶² Abenon, *Petite histoire*, 89-92; Régent, *La France et ses esclaves*, 249-255.

While the white colonists in the Caribbean had already lived with constant fear of slave uprisings, revolutionary and pre-revolutionary events in the French Antilles helped focus that anxiety. As Dominique Cyrille explains, even before the start of the French Revolution, “it seems that in Saint-Domingue, as in Martinique and Guadeloupe, many of the uprisings were led by mulattos. Consequently, most administrators and rich merchants viewed mulattos as a threat and did all they could to restrict their sociopolitical rights.”⁶³ When Napoleon seized power in 1802 and pushed to restore slavery, colored army officers, in Saint Domingue and in Guadeloupe, resisted the return of the old colonial order.⁶⁴ These events undoubtedly further accentuated the tensions between the resurgent white plantocracy and the rising colored elite.

Beyond the social changes described above, the French Revolution also had a major ideological impact. Jacobinical philosophy, born out of the Enlightenment, emphasized “the individual civic conscience, the collective will to form a state and national pride.”⁶⁵ Jacobinism forms the basis of French republican nationalism and has gone on to inform most of the French state’s relationship to its now former colonies in the Americas. Yet as Helen Hitjens explains, in the early nineteenth century, “the most influential strand of French Jacobin nationalism was the doctrine of radical egalitarianism, which in the Caribbean colonial context appeared to provide a way out of the sheer oppression and injustice of the plantation system.”⁶⁶ Thus, Jacobinism fed the

⁶³ “Creole Quadrilles,” 198.

⁶⁴ Régent, *La France et ses esclaves*, 258-261.

⁶⁵ J. F. Bluntschli, *The Theory of the State* quoted in Hintjens, “Constitutional and political change,” 21.

⁶⁶ “Constitutional and Political change,” 22.

development of assimilationist ideologies and policies both in France and in its Antillean colonies. It is also worth noting that it was this radical nationalist doctrine which became a model for the emergence of Antillean nationalism in the twentieth century.

B. The staggered abolition of slavery and the birth of a pluri-ethnic society.

The French Revolution failed to transform French society overnight, whether in France or in the Americas, and it would take nearly a century for some of the most radical proposals of the Enlightenment to truly take hold. For example, the Revolution did not end slavery once and for all. Victor Hugues had quickly reestablished slavery in every aspect but name. In 1802, Napoleon officially reinstated slavery in the French Caribbean colonies. By 1848, economic evolution in the French Caribbean colonies had rendered slavery all but obsolete and a new revolution in France finally brought the system to its end. The Second Republic set the groundwork for a slow but profound transformation of French colonial society, and thus for the growth of assimilationist ideologies.

In the mid-nineteenth century, growing competition from European beet growers threatened the French Caribbean sugar industry, and with it the old plantation system. French investors moved in to build steam-powered factories to process sugar cane. They also bought plantations and started to consolidate estates. The *usines centrales* (plants processing sugar cane cultivated on several estates) replaced the old windmills in the Guadeloupean landscape. The new industrial production system did not require as large a workforce as the plantations. In addition, some industrialists started to propose that wage laborers might prove more productive than enslaved workers and thus more profitable.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Abenon, *Petite histoire*, 123-127.

This economic argument strengthened the moral arguments of the French abolitionist movement. In 1848, shortly following its inception, the Second Republic decreed the end of slavery and established universal male suffrage both in the metropole and in the colonies.⁶⁸ However, the civic gains of the Second Republic were short-lived. The conservative backlash that accompanied the political ascension of Napoleon III in 1851 quickly reestablished the old colonial order, even if slavery was not formally reinstated.

In order to compensate for the loss of slave labor, plantation owners turned to indentured workers from West Africa (the so-called “Congo”) and India. In fact, African workers continued to arrive in Guadeloupe until 1861 and about 42,000 East Indians immigrated to the archipelago between 1854 and 1889.⁶⁹ West Africans and Indians were not the only newcomers. They were joined by people from French colonies in the Middle East and East Asia in addition to an influx of French investors and migrant workers from poorer Caribbean islands. As Josette Fallope concludes, at the end of the nineteenth century, Guadeloupe was becoming a pluri-ethnic society.⁷⁰

These new migrants transformed the archipelago’s socio-racial hierarchy. Metropolitan investors’ increased control over the sugar industry threatened to displace the *békés* at the top of the social ladder. Meanwhile, the growing political and social influence of the colored middle class unsettled the plantocracy’s status from below. New indentured workers, be they from Africa or India, replaced the former slaves at the bottom of the socio-racial hierarchy. Among the population of African descent, a

⁶⁸ Burton, “The French West Indies à l’heure de l’Europe,” 2; Abenon, *Petite histoire*, 127-128.

⁶⁹ Abenon, *Petite histoire*, 161; Fallope, “Société en mutation,” 80.

⁷⁰ “Société en mutation,” 78-80.

distinction emerged between those who were free before 1848 and the newly emancipated. Overall, at the turn of the twentieth century, the colored bourgeoisie occupied a key middle ground between the white oligarchy and the black masses.⁷¹

C. The Third Republic and the rise of the colored middle class

The rise of the colored middle class in the French Antilles is in large part attributable to changes brought forth by the Third Republic. Indeed, nearly a century after the beginning of the French Revolution, many revolutionary ideals finally became social and political realities between 1870 and 1914. Universal suffrage allowed the colored bourgeoisie to gain access to local and national political appointments. Meanwhile, governmental institutions multiplied in the colonies. These new agencies generated the sudden growth of the *fonctionnariat* (government employment), a new economic sector in which the mulatto middle class thrived. As *fonctionnaires*, the mulatto elite positioned themselves as the liaison between the Republic and the Antillean masses.⁷²

Educational reform played an important role in the Third Republic nation-building program that posited that free, secular and mandatory education would boost republican consciousness and form citizens.⁷³ This nation-building program was of course not limited to the French colonies. In fact, education reforms designed for the metropole were subjected to the vagaries of the Guadeloupean economy. If the colony originally could afford to support free education, the reform was dramatically scaled back

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 81-82.

⁷² Fallope, "Politique d'assimilation," 37-39.

⁷³ Pasler, *Composing the Citizen*, 314-324; Abou, "L'école et ses débats."

as the economy collapsed around the turn of the twentieth century.⁷⁴ Because the local government found itself unable to finance education reforms dictated from the metropole, the clergy continued to play an important role in Guadeloupean public education and universal free education remained an unachieved goal. Yet thanks to the availability of scholarships, children of the mulatto middle class benefited the most from these limited reforms.⁷⁵ Through public education, these children were socialized in the French republican habitus. In time, they formed a new intellectual elite who had fully absorbed assimilationist ideology and were therefore more likely to keep pushing for its realization.

The reforms of the Third Republic benefitted the mulatto bourgeoisie the most of all the socio-racial categories in Guadeloupe. Through its participation in these reforms, this group was able to join what Turino calls the modernist-capitalist cosmopolitan formation, albeit with a particular French jacobinical twist. By cosmopolitan formation, Turino denotes “aggregates of tendencies and resources for living and conceptualizing the world which are used variably by people engaged with that formation (‘the culture group’) to inform thought and practice,” a definition reminiscent of Bourdieu’s habitus. Unlike other cultural formations, cosmopolitan habitus is not geographically bounded. Rather, it connects people from various locales through “different forms of media, contacts and interchanges.”⁷⁶ Jacobinism was a key characteristic of the French

⁷⁴ Abou, “L’école et ses débats,” 59-60.

⁷⁵ Fallope, “Politique d’assimilation,” 38-39.

⁷⁶ Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music*, 7-8.

I see a correlation between Turino’s definition of cosmopolitanism and Wallerstein’s world-system. I would venture that Turino’s “cosmopolitan loops” are in fact cultural expression of particular world-systems. Likewise, Turino’s “modernist-capitalist formation” roughly equates the current capitalist world-system.

expression of the modernist-capitalist formation. Its promise of radical egalitarianism swayed the Guadeloupean bourgeoisie to assimilate the republican habitus as a tool for greater freedom within its anti-colonial struggle. More specifically, assimilation allowed the mulatto bourgeoisie to undermine the plantocracy's social status and political power.⁷⁷ Yet we are reminded here of Burton's remark about opposition in Caribbean societies. Jacobinism presented the mulatto middle class with an oppositional tool. However, assimilation trapped this middle class in French political and economic structures, encouraged them to reproduce assimilationist habitus, and ensured that opposition never developed into full-fledged resistance.

The mulatto bourgeoisie's assimilationist claims were expressed both politically and culturally. French values and practices—such as code of dress, religion and nuclear families—became markers of cultural assimilation, served to distance the mulatto bourgeoisie from the colored masses, and facilitated social ascendancy.⁷⁸ As Ellen Schnepel writes, republican education reform contributed greatly to language becoming an especially potent indicator of social status:

The expansion of education [...] led to profound cultural changes as well, not the least of which was the further penetration of the French language and culture. French—as the agent of French assimilation and its ideology—was the acceptable language of discourse in formal or public institutional settings, such as the government, school, church, court system, and the media. Creole remained the local vernacular for daily communication in the informal or private sector, particularly among the lower strata who did not have access to French or had received little schooling and thus spoke French poorly. Nonetheless, Creole was the primary vehicle of local culture and an indicator of local sentiment, values, and norms that were generally held in low esteem. Frequently Creole was also the language used in situations of unequal relations: for example, a boss to a worker,

⁷⁷ Fallope, "Politique d'assimilation," 40-41; "Société en mutation," 83.

⁷⁸ Fallope, "Politique d'assimilation," 41.

a proprietor to a servant, grandparents to children. [...] Whereas Creole had negative evaluation, French received positive reinforcement.⁷⁹

Thus assimilation reinforced the socio-cultural stratification inherited from the plantation colonial system, privileging European and European-derived over creole and African-derived cultural practices. In this way, assimilation fueled alienation among the Guadeloupean population of African descent.

The black elite joined the assimilationist wave for different reasons than the mulatto bourgeoisie. Their social and political activism was closely linked with the development of trade unions around the turn of the century. More so than the mulatto bourgeoisie, black leaders remained close to the proletariat. Therefore, while mulattos embraced a moderate form of republicanism, the black elite favored socialism. For them, assimilation offered the promise of French social protection, higher wages and access to education.⁸⁰

Because of their dependence on popular support, the black leadership could not shed local cultural expressions as easily as the mulatto bourgeoisie. On the contrary, by the early twentieth century, the black elite started to embrace its local cultural specificity and, taking advantage of the new freedom of the press, published newspapers in Creole. While creole popular culture had previously been perceived as impeding assimilation, around the turn of the century, the black leadership adopted the seemingly paradoxical

⁷⁹ *In Search of a National Identity*, 69.

In following pages, Schnepel goes on to illustrate the symbolic violence used in schools to socialize children into the French republican habitus.

⁸⁰ Fallope, "Politique d'assimilation," 41.

position of making assimilationist social demands while simultaneously expressing its racial pride by foregrounding its cultural specificity.⁸¹

I see the emergence of this black leadership and its awareness of its cultural specificity as the first manifestation of Antillean nationalism. Partha Chatterjee explains:

By my reading, anticolonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before it begins its political battle with the imperial power. It does this by dividing the world of social institutions into two domains—the material and the spiritual. The material is the domain of the ‘outside,’ of the economy and of state-craft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proved its superiority and the East has succumbed. In this domain, then, Western superiority had to be acknowledged and its accomplishments carefully studied and replicated. The spiritual, on the other hand, is an ‘inner’ domain bearing the ‘essential’ marks of cultural identity. The greater one’s success in imitating the Western skills in the material domain, therefore, the greater the need to preserve the distinctiveness of one’s spiritual culture. The formula is, I think, a fundamental feature of anticolonial nationalisms in Asia and Africa.⁸²

I argue that this basic separation between the cultural and the political fields explains what I see as the first nationalist wave in Guadeloupe and Martinique. The emergence of *négriste* politicians anticipates the cultural nationalism of *négritude* but both are expressions of ethnic nationalism. The split between political and cultural nationalism that Chatterjee describes helps us understand how someone like Aimé Césaire could both promote racial solidarity in the arts and seek political assimilation.

Although tensions existed between all social strata, Guadeloupean politics during the Third Republic was dominated by conflicts between the colored bourgeoisie and the white plantocracy supported by newly arrived metropolitan capitalists.⁸³ Whites reacted

⁸¹ Fallope, “Politique d’assimilation,” 47-48.

⁸² *The Nation and its Fragments*, 6.

⁸³ Fallope, “Société en mutation,” 82-83.

to the growing political and social clout of the mulattos by reviving racialized discourses and exacerbating racial conflicts. Based on cosmopolitan Eurocentric ideas about race and evolution, this racializing discourse sought to undermine the social status of the colored middle class by reinforcing perceived prejudices against African and African-derived cultural expressions. As a result, socio-racial categories hardened as the dominant racializing discourse was internalized by all sectors of society. Whites discriminated against mulattos who discriminated against blacks who discriminated against Congo who, in turn, discriminated against East Indians. Thus, white reaction against assimilation fueled further alienation among colored segments of the population, especially among the upwardly mobile middle class.⁸⁴

D. The social capital of creole musics in the nineteenth century

However, in spite of this alienating trend, creole culture continued to evolve and to affirm itself, in part because the black masses were not fully involved in the assimilationist debate.⁸⁵ Around the turn of the twentieth century, as French Caribbean societies were undergoing rapid industrialization and urbanization, new creole musical forms crystallized. Although the genesis of *biguine* is contested, Cyrille proposes that the urbanization of the former slave population in the second half of the nineteenth century facilitated the emergence of a new musical style based on older African-derived musics. The term *biguine* may have first appeared in Saint Pierre in Martinique in the late nineteenth century to designate a popular dance style and a type of satirical songs accompanied by ensembles of three to five instruments featuring trombones, clarinets,

⁸⁴ Fallope “Politique d’assimilation,” 42-44; Fallope, “Société en mutation,” 86-88.

⁸⁵ Fallope, “Politique d’assimilation,” 45-46.

accordions, or violins along with varying percussion instruments.⁸⁶ As it traveled to Paris in the 1920s, further adapted to cosmopolitan aesthetics and gained widespread popularity on both sides of the Atlantic, the *biguine* became a musical symbol of the tenuous balance between assimilation and alienation required of the Antillean colored middle class.⁸⁷

It also seems that African-derived drum-based music coalesced into something resembling contemporary gwoka during the Third Republic. A 1918 report in the newspaper *Le Colonial* describes a bamboula at which the audience was arranged in a circle around a group of three drums. A succession of solo dancers entered the circle to perform either “grage” or “towmblack” (sic). One of the three drummers, placed in between the other two, improvised to accompany the moves of the dancers.⁸⁸ It seems, however, that until the mid-twentieth century, gwoka practices were not unified around the archipelago. Conversations with older tradition bearers suggest that through the 1950s, *soirée léwòz*, with their suite of distinct rhythms, were mainly limited to areas around Sainte Rose and the leeward coast of Basse-Terre. Meanwhile people in Grande Terre, especially in the *faubourgs* of Pointe-à-Pitre, mainly danced the toumblak. The use of the *boulagyèl* during funeral wakes seems to have been limited to Grande-Terre, especially around *les Grands Fonds*, Le Moule and Port Louis. Finally, the communities

⁸⁶ “Biguine” in *Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*.

⁸⁷ I disagree here with Edouard Glissant who argues that biguine entered into a steady decline towards obsolescence following the 1902 explosion of Mount Pélée and the destruction of Saint Pierre. See Glissant, *Discours Antillais*, 383-384.

⁸⁸ *Le Colonial* (12 February 1918) reproduced in Uri, *Le Chant de Karukera*. The spelling of “toumblak” found in this article hints that the word may derive from the English phrase “town black.”

around Gosier and Mare-Gaillard on the southern coast of Grande-Terre maintained a tradition known as the *léwòz o komandman*, a dance performed in quadrille accompanied by a caller and gwoka.

Not only did African-derived creole musical forms started to coalesce into their present form around the turn of twentieth century but, by this time, the European quadrille in the French Antilles had been so thoroughly creolized that it became a distinct style. Just as there were multiple regional variants of drum-based music around the archipelago, Guadeloupeans danced, and to some degree continue to dance, different forms of quadrille depending on where they resided.⁸⁹ Contrary to later claims by Guadeloupean nationalist activists (see chapter 3), ethnographer Marie-Céline Lafontaine insists that quadrille, gwoka, and biguine belonged to the same social field and were often practiced by the same musicians.⁹⁰ Her work however does not indicate whether or not these musics benefitted from the same amount of cultural capital.

The Third Republic saw a dramatic transformation of Guadeloupean society. As the sugar industry began a long decline and forced a painful mutation of the archipelago's economy, the arrival of new migrants from France, Africa and Asia unsettled the colonial socio-racial order. In this mutating society, the colored middle class assimilated the French republican habitus in order to challenge the white oligarchy. While assimilation facilitated the rise of a colored elite, it also generated feelings of alienation. The ascendancy of a colored elite threatened the hegemony of the *békés* whose reactionary

⁸⁹ Cyrille, "Creole Quadrille," 193-194.

⁹⁰ Marie-Céline Lafontaine, "Unité et diversité des musiques traditionnelles guadeloupéennes," 78-85; Carnot. *Alors ma chère, moi...*, ed. Lafontaine.

racializing discourse hardened socio-racial categories. Although European and European-derived cultural practices continued to enjoy greater social capital in Antillean societies at the turn of twentieth century, new creole musical genres emerged while the black elite increasingly embraced creole culture to express its racial pride. The social, political and cultural dynamics set forth between 1870 and 1914 continued to influence Antillean society through the first half of the twentieth century.

III. Decolonization through assimilation

The first world war did not significantly impact Guadeloupean society even if many Antillean men demonstrated their attachment to the French nation by paying the “blood tax” in the trenches of north-eastern France. The war did have an effect on music though, as many Antillean musicians came to Paris, bringing the biguine with them. By the 1930s, biguine’s popularity was at its peak in the French capital.

Liberal economic policies in the interwar period proved devastating and further accentuated the crisis in the sugar industry. Meanwhile, in Paris, Antillean and African students engaged in a common reflection about their identity and the cultural alienation that defined their experience as colonial subjects.⁹¹ The resulting artistic movement of *négritude* was an extension of the *négriste* attitude of the black elite and challenged the Jacobin tradition by turning on its head the dominant negrophobic discourse. In order to articulate their specificity along “racial-ontological rather than historical-dialectical terms,” writers associated with *négritude*, most famously Martinican Aimé Césaire and Senegalese Léopold Senghor, espoused a counter-hegemonic universalism rooted in an

⁹¹ Abenon, *Petite histoire*, 179.

essentialized Africanness.⁹² *Négritude*, like the Harlem Renaissance, was an expression of what Anton Allahaar calls “timid nationalism.” For Allahaar, timid black nationalism “was a combination of pluralist and integrationist ideas, which were basically reformist and targeted integration or assimilation into the wider society as the solution to the problems that beset black people in America.”⁹³ However, I depart from Allahaar’s historical scope. The sociologist applies this “timid nationalism” to the non-violent civil rights strategy of Martin Luther King. Based on Chatterjee’s model of “spiritual nationalism,” I propose that this form of nationalism found its cultural manifestation in *négritude* and the Harlem Renaissance before it ever expressed political demands.

The second world war was a difficult period in the French Caribbean colonies. Military governors sent by the Pétain government imposed the reactionary and undemocratic politics of the Vichy regime—captured in the new national motto “*travail, famille, patrie*” (work, family, fatherland)—on the population. To make matters worse, the British and American navies subjected the islands to a blockade that threatened to starve the local population. As supply shipments from Europe became sparse, Guadeloupeans and Martinicans were torn between supporting the official government of Pétain or rallying around De Gaulle. However, as Abenon observes, Antillean attachment to France was such that the difficulties of the war did not foster separatist movements. If Antillean populations appeared to have originally thrown their support behind the official government in Vichy, things changed once the United States entered the war. In

⁹² Burton, “The Idea of Difference in French West Indian Thought,” 141; Giraud, “De la *négritude* à la *créolité*,” 378-79.

⁹³ “Black Power and Black Nationalism,” 132.

increasing numbers, Guadeloupeans left their islands to join the *Forces Françaises Libres* by traveling clandestinely to Dominica.⁹⁴

Following the war, conditions were right for the assimilationist movement to come to fruition. Political scientist Helen Hintjens explains:

Immediately after the war, the right was discredited because of its alliance with Vichy [...], and the experience of occupation had temporarily weakened the top administrations in Paris. The National Assembly was completely dominated by the left, including the Communist Party, and by the Gaullists.⁹⁵

When Antillean representatives headed by Aimé Césaire of Martinique and Paul Valentino of Guadeloupe introduced a bill to the French parliament to transform the *vieilles colonies* into full fledged *départements*, the proposal only faced opposition from the *békés*, who feared a loss of local control. It was adopted by a unanimous vote in March 1946.⁹⁶

The law of departmentalization was a natural extension of the assimilationist trends that had defined the relationship between France and its Caribbean colonies since the Revolution. This unusual path to decolonization is a testimony of the strength of Jacobin ideology in French politics. For the Gaullists, the full integration of the French Antilles into the Republic asserted French presence in the Western hemisphere, an especially salient issue given growing American influence on the region during the Cold War. For socialist and communist Antillean politicians, the 1946 law not only represented a victory against the white oligarchy, it also promised to bring greater social protection to

⁹⁴ *Petite histoire*, 186-187.

⁹⁵ "Constitutional and Political Change," 25.

⁹⁶ Burton, "The French West Indies à l'heure de l'Europe," 4; Hintjens, "Constitutional and Political Change," 24-25; Adelaïde-Merlande, *Histoire contemporaine*, 80-82.

the islands along with higher wages as French legislation was extended to the new *départements*. In addition, socialist politicians hoped that the French government would move to save the ailing sugar industry by nationalizing it.⁹⁷

Although support for departmentalization was originally high among the Antillean population, discontent grew very rapidly. Far from bringing social and economic parity between the new *départements* and the metropole, the 1946 law created a culture of economic dependency. The new institutional status meant that the metropolitan standard of living became the norm in the *départements d'outre mer* (DOM), creating new expectations for better social protection, higher wages, and greater access to material goods. Meanwhile, many of the decisions that had been made locally by colonial authorities were now subject to direct rule from Paris, resulting in a loss of local power.⁹⁸ The French state never moved to nationalize the sugar industry, which continued its steady decline to near annihilation by the mid-1970s.⁹⁹ As unemployment rose to nearly 25 percent by the early 1960s, an influx of subsidies from France, and later from the European Union, artificially maintained economic growth while accentuating dependency.¹⁰⁰ These subsidies were accompanied by an influx of French government employees and an exodus of Antillean workers through BUMIDOM (Bureau pour le Développement des Migrations des Départements d'Outre-Mer), an agency created at the onset of the Fifth Republic with the dual goal of facilitating the importation of cheap

⁹⁷ Adelaide-Merlande, *Histoire contemporaine*, 80-82; Hintjens, "Constitutional and Political Change," 24-25.

⁹⁸ Burton, "The French West Indies à l'heure de l'Europe," 4; Hintjens, "Constitutional and Political Change," 24-27.

⁹⁹ Abenon, *Petite histoire*, 191; Anselin, "West Indians in France," 113.

¹⁰⁰ Daniel, "The Construction of Dependency," 62-63.

labor into France and of combating demographic explosion in the DOM.¹⁰¹ The modernization of Antillean society, which had started in the nineteenth century with industrialization, accelerated. The construction of roads was accompanied by a massive import of cars.¹⁰² As consumer goods flooded Martinique and Guadeloupe, local and national governments encouraged consumption as a way to generate revenue through tariffs and sales tax.¹⁰³ Since 1946, economic development policies that have prioritized the service sector over agricultural or industrial production have transformed the DOM into societies of consumption. I argue, along with Edouard Glissant and many others, that instead of putting an end to colonialism, departmentalization has created a neocolonial society in which government subsidies are converted into private capital through mass consumption.¹⁰⁴

Departmentalization did not resolve the tension between political assimilation and affirmation of local cultural specificity. In the words of Richard Burton, the assimilationist push during the Third Republic had reinforced the “split between a valorized French status to which members of the middle classes aspired (without forsaking every aspect of the creole culture) and a devalorized creole stratum to which the vast majority of the islands’ population remained confined (without, however, remaining wholly immune to aspects of the dominant culture).” Burton concludes: “Political assimilation has been accompanied, in a way that its instigators surely did not

¹⁰¹ Berrian, *Awakening Spaces*, 3; Burton, “The French West Indies à l’heure de l’Europe,” 5; Anselin “West Indians in France,” 112-115.

¹⁰² Anselin, “West Indians in France,” 113.

¹⁰³ Daniel, “The Construction of Dependency,” 67-68.

¹⁰⁴ Glissant, *Discours antillais*, 22-23; Burton quoted in Miles “Fifty Years of Assimilation,” 58.

intend, by a massive assimilation not of French culture (or selected aspects of it) but by French culture as an undifferentiated totality.”¹⁰⁵

Differences in social capital between French and creole culture perdured well into the second half of the twentieth century. The socio-linguistic stratification described by Schnepel continued to regulate the use of French and Creole in Guadeloupean society through the twentieth century. For example choreographer Max Diakok recalls how his father, a school principal affiliated with the Communist Party, forced his children to address him and his wife in French even though he would talk to them in Creole.¹⁰⁶ Likewise, many of my interlocutors reported that their parents discouraged them from attending gwoka performances in the 1950s and ‘60s.

Musical entertainment in Guadeloupe in the 1940s, ‘50s, and early ‘60s, was contingent on class and geographic location. In urban areas, mainly in Pointe-à-Pitre and Basse-Terre, the musical scene was dominated by dance bands who performed a mixed repertoire of tango, waltzes, mambos, and American jazz along with local biguine and *valse créole*. These groups, known as *orchestres de bal*, performed in ballrooms for formal occasions but also around the archipelago for the *fêtes patronales*, school fairs, or private parties. Their performances were in line with cosmopolitan values that favor presentational music: the musicians played on stage and used music stands to read stock arrangements published in France or in the United States. In the 1960s and ‘70s, the repertoire of such orchestras evolved in response to the growing popularity of *konpa* from

¹⁰⁵ Burton, “The idea of difference,” 138-139.

¹⁰⁶ Diakok, interview with the author, 27 July 2008.

Haiti and *cadence-lypso* from Dominica. Until the advent of *zouk* in the 1980s, these “foreign” styles dominated music in Guadeloupe and Martinique.¹⁰⁷

Meanwhile, the quadrille and the diverse drumming traditions were marginalized even if they continued to play an important role in the life of many agricultural and industrial workers living in the *faubourgs*. The dances of the *léwòz* were also choreographed and performed by several folkloric groups—such as *La Briscante* led by Madame Adeline—for the benefit of tourists. Overall, the *léwòz* of Basse-Terre, the *bèlè* (bel air) of Grande-Terre or the *kout tanbou* (informal drum performance) heard around the islands on market day were denigrated as *mizik a vyè nèg* (literally, music of old blacks). While there doesn’t seem to be a consensus as to the exact meaning of the expression “*vyè nèg*,” the people I spoke with agreed on its negative connotation. For percussionist Michel Halley, a *vyè nèg* is a liar, a delinquent, maybe a bit of a con artist. For gwoka singer René Geoffroy, the *vyè nèg* were a little bit like hobos, groups of people who did not have steady employment and who travelled in search of small jobs (Creole *djob*). Geoffroy puts a positive twist on the *vyè nèg*, whom he presents as a keeper of tradition.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, the *vyè nèg* existed on the margin of society and his image betrays middle-class disdain for African-derived music and dance.

By the mid-1960s, nearly two centuries of assimilationist pressures had significantly lowered the cultural capital of African-derived cultural expressions in the French Antilles. Children were prohibited from speaking Creole at school or with their

¹⁰⁷ Edouard Benoit, “Biguine: Popular Music of Guadeloupe, 1940-1960” in Jocelyn Guilbault and al. *Zouk: World Music in the West Indies*, 53-67.

¹⁰⁸ Michel Halley, interview with the author, 11 August 2008; René Geoffroy, interview with the author, 25 June 2009.

elders and they were discouraged from attending *léwòz* or *kout tanbou*. If the biguine managed to adapt to cosmopolitan expectations and thus enjoyed a certain prestige among the Antillean middle class, it eventually lost favor with the general public and was supplanted by newer musical styles coming from Haiti and Dominica. Thus, for a large portion of the Antillean population, assimilation had led to alienation and a dismissal of local culture.

Politically, assimilation did not significantly alter power relations between the metropole and its overseas territories. The colored middle class is left in a difficult situation. While it has reached its political goal through departmentalization and achieved a measure of hegemonic control of the lower class population, the DOM's economic apparatus remains for the most part in the control of the *békés* and French entrepreneurs. Thus the French Antillean colored elite remains subordinated within the capitalist world-system and within the French political system.¹⁰⁹ This situation parallels in the Antillean neocolonial system the position of the middle class in colonial Bengal described by Partha Chatterjee. "The colonial middle class," writes Chatterjee, "was simultaneously placed in a position of subordination in one relation and a position of dominance in another."¹¹⁰

As the benefits of departmentalization failed to materialize and were replaced by a growing dependency, resentment against the 1946 law built up and led to a renewed reflection on the institutional situation of the French DOM. In the next chapter, we turn

¹⁰⁹ Wallerstein defines a world-system as "a spatial/temporal zone which cuts across many political and cultural units, one that represents an integrated zone of activity and institutions which obey certain systemic rules." Note that a world-system does not necessarily encompass the entire world. *World-System Analysis*, 16-17.

¹¹⁰ *The Nation and its Fragments*, 36.

our attention to a group of Guadeloupean students who, informed by Marxist-Maoist ideology, rose in the 1960s and '70s to become the leaders of a new anti-colonialist movement. In their opposition to French domination, these militants turned to African-derived culture, especially the Creole language and gwoka, in order to promote a sense of national unity. Before Guadeloupeans could arrive at the contemporary *léwòz*, they had to engage in a sometimes violent struggle to challenge assimilationist doxa and redefine their identity.

Chapter 3

“Une nouvelle culture”: Gwoka modènn and nationalism

As the previous chapter explained, by the late 1950s, assimilationist pressures on Guadeloupean society had managed to stigmatize the most visible expressions of creole culture, namely language and music. Children were prohibited from speaking Creole at school and often discouraged from addressing their parents in Creole at home. The same was true of music. Gwoka was commonly vilified as “*mizik a vyé nèg*,” that is to say a music associated with poverty and social deviancy. It only survived in lower-class urban neighborhoods and among agricultural workers on sugar cane plantations. In other social strata, biguine and a steady diet of French popular music reigned supreme.

Today, things are drastically different. While biguine’s popularity has long been supplanted by other forms of popular music, gwoka has enjoyed a successful revival. Large crowds flock to *léwòz*, and gwoka’s style and rhythms have influenced most popular music to come out of the archipelago since the advent of zouk in the 1980s. Guadeloupeans now often celebrate the music as “*poto mitan a mizik an nou*,” the central pillar of our music. What effected this radical transformation?

The answer to this question is partially a story of resistance in which neocolonial citizens asserted their cultural specificity to distance themselves from the dominant metropolitan culture. On a local level, this is also a case of a group at the center of society (in this case, the colored middle class) co-opting a cultural form created by another group at its periphery (the black proletariat) in order to promote a sense of national

consciousness throughout all segments of the population. A number of ethnomusicologists have already shed light on what Robin Moore calls the “nationalization of subaltern expressions.”¹ Whether in Cuba, Trinidad, Haiti, or Zimbabwe, colored elites fully socialized within the cosmopolitan values of a colonial or occupying power have appropriated musical expressions from the lower class as part of an anti-colonialist or anti-imperialist campaign.² As both Turino and Moore demonstrate, this process of co-optation or appropriation involves a transformation of the subaltern expression. As Turino demonstrates, this transformation is both informed by and justified through “modernist reformism,” a process in which a middle-class elite seeks to adapt local “traditional” cultural practices to “modern” cosmopolitan conventions. As recent works by Dudley, Largey, and Timothy Rommen demonstrates, modernist reformism has been particularly attractive to Caribbean nationalists.³

In Guadeloupe, modernist reform originated principally with current and former members of the Association Générale des Etudiants Guadeloupéens (AGEG), the association of Guadeloupean students in France. In this chapter, I will focus on the role of the AGEG in developing a nationalist project in response to growing dissatisfaction with the assimilationist policies of the mid-twentieth century. Following a brief survey of the gradual politicization of the AGEG, I will show how, in a climate of economic and social tensions, violent repression at the hand of the French authorities prompted former AGEG

¹ *Nationalizing Blackness*, 5-8.

See also Dudley, *Music from Behind the Bridge*; Largey, *Vodou Nation*; and Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*.

² See Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness*; Dudley, *Music Beyond the Bridge*; Largey, *Vodou Nation*; Turino, *Nationalism, Cosmopolitan and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*.

³ *Music from behind the Bridge*, 16; Largey, *Vodou Nation*; Rommen, “Localize It.”

members to initiate a “democratic and popular revolution” on a Marxist-Maoist model. In order to enlist the support of agricultural workers, these nationalist militants created new unions and endeavored to valorize African-derived cultural expressions. In the domain of music, Guadeloupean nationalist militants collaborated with guitarist Gérard Lockel in a project to modernize gwoka. Even if these efforts never managed to transform Guadeloupe into an independent state, the work of nationalist militants in the 1960s, ’70s, and ’80s radically elevated the social capital of African-derived cultural expressions, essentially putting an end to socio-cultural hierarchies inherited from the colonial period.

The following pages explore the starting point of musical nationalism in Guadeloupe. I borrow Turino’s narrow definition of musical nationalism as “the conscious use of any preexisting or newly created music in the service of a political nationalist movement.” For Turino, this definition contrasts with a broader definition of musical nationalism commonly used in historical musicology to discuss the incorporation of vernacular stylistic elements into cosmopolitan musical genres, often to express patriotic feelings, regardless of whether or not the music is used for explicit political purposes. While Turino’s views do not do justice to the varied and nuanced studies of nationalism in historical musicology, Turino’s definition interests me because it stresses the importance of context over stylistic traits.⁴ In this chapter, I reveal the ways in which the musical and the political informed one another in Guadeloupe in the late 1960s. By focusing on music, we can grasp the operation of Guadeloupe’s nationalist movement and

⁴ Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*, 190-191. For an overview of musicological studies of nationalism, see Taruskin, “Nationalism.”

its long-term impact on Guadeloupean culture. Moreover, music allows us to analyze how Guadeloupean nationalists constructed their identity and imagined their community.

A. Historical research and clandestinity

As I mentioned in the introduction, most of the books about Guadeloupean history only skim the period following the 1946 law of assimilation. The separatist movement of the late twentieth century is often treated as a brief side note, if not obscured completely. Historians are not necessarily to blame for this. Investigating this period is remarkably difficult. There are few public documents and *France Antilles*, the local newspaper, was so involved in downplaying and obscuring the separatist threat that it offers an extremely distorted picture of the events that shook Guadeloupe in the 1970s and '80s. In addition, many separatist organizations continued the culture of clandestinity they had inherited from nineteenth century secret societies. The threat of imprisonment that many separatist leaders faced only intensified the need for secrecy. I was lucky to start this investigation at a time when many activists were starting to reflect on their own actions and achievements. Still, it took two years and three visits to Guadeloupe before respected nationalist militants agreed to meet me to share their stories and documents.

Most of the information for this chapter was collected in the summer of 2009. Until then, Félix Cotellon—the president of *Répriz*, the Center for Traditional Music and Dance (CMDT) and a former president of the AGEG—had been the only nationalist leader who had agreed to help me with my research. Everything changed on July 12, during the gwoka festival in Sainte Anne. A few days earlier, I had made contact with Thierry Césaire, who almost became the AGEG's last president before it was dissolved in

the late 1980s. After exchanging several phone calls, we agreed to meet on the festival's ground on the *plage Galbas* that evening. I was to call him once I got there. Because of the large crowd and the noise from the concerts, it took a few phone exchanges before Thierry and I managed to find each other.

Immediately upon meeting me, Thierry told me that there was someone I needed to meet. He guided me to a tall, elderly gentleman, whom he started to introduce before mumbling that this was someone who really did not need an introduction and whom I had probably already heard about. Unfortunately, I had not heard about this person and all I got from Thierry's awkward introduction was that this was Mr. Jasor who had been one of the AGEG's presidents. Thierry let me introduce myself. I did so and gave Jasor a quick outline of my research. The noise from the ongoing concert made it difficult for us to hear each other and Jasor guided the three of us away from the stage, towards the sea. We stood in a dark space between the bar and the restaurant, cut off from the crowd and the noise.

Not knowing how much time I would have with these men, I immediately told them that I was trying to understand how the AGEG managed to promote gwoka. I asked why pro-independence militants focused on gwoka. Jasor recited what I knew was the AGEG's official line on the subject: plantation owners imposed quadrille on their slaves, biguine is the musical expression of assimilation, and thus only gwoka truly expresses Guadeloupean identity. I told him that I was aware of these arguments but that I was curious to know whether or not there had been any debates leading up to the decision to focus on gwoka. Jasor told me that there indeed had been long debates about this but he

did not offer any more details. He turned toward Thierry who had been listening carefully to our exchange and told him that I should meet Rozan Mounien who was in attendance that night. Thierry did not manage to hide his surprise and discomfort. He asked if Jasor could come over with us since he did not know Mr. Mounien very well. Jasor told him not to worry about it, to simply remind Mounien of who he was and to introduce me.

We walked through the crowd to a man who was sporting a dark green, yellow and red baseball hat with the word “Gwadeloup” stretching from the tip to the bill to the top of the hat.⁵ Once Thierry introduced us, I told Mounien about my dissertation. He immediately told me that it would be best to meet some other time, gave me his phone number and asked me to call him.

As we walked away, Thierry told me that I had just met some of the most important people in the movement and that they should be able to answer my questions. I thanked him and asked if he would also be available to do an interview. He replied that he wasn’t sure what he could contribute since he had joined the movement late in its history. I explained that I hoped he could help me understand why the independence movement eventually petered out. Having nearly presided over the AGEF during that period, he felt comfortable with my request and invited me to call him again to schedule an appointment. We shook hands and Thierry walked back to his family. I returned to filming the festival performances, feeling as if I had finally cracked open the door to the citadel.

⁵ These colors often appear on flags and logos of several nationalist organizations such as the UGTG.

I. The rise of separatist activism

A. The AGEG

As Ellen Schnepel points out in her book *In Search of a National Identity*, departmentalization not only accelerated the decline of the agricultural sector of the economy, it also sharply accentuated the migration out of Guadeloupe and towards the metropole. Among these emigrants were many students who were forced to attend college in France by the lack of a university campus in the DOM.⁶ Guadeloupe was then attached to the Académie de Bordeaux and most Antillean students ended up pursuing a degree in that Southwestern port town. Many others attended school in Paris.

The Association Générale des Étudiants Guadeloupéens (AGEG) was born in Paris in 1928. Originally, the AGEG mainly served to provide support for newly arrived students and facilitate the transition to life in the French capital. In Bordeaux and other university towns around France, Guadeloupeans often joined students from Martinique and French Guiana in broader associations.

Two major changes took place following the 1946 law of Assimilation. First, while in Paris, Guadeloupean students met and engaged in political discussions with students who came from other parts of the French colonial empire, especially Africa and Southeast Asia. The onset of the Algerian war in 1954 and the Bandung Conference in 1955 precipitated the rise of political awareness among some Guadeloupean students. Informal discussions led to the organization of a seminar on assimilation in Paris in

⁶ Schnepel, *In Search of a National Identity*, 47-54. See also Anselin, “West Indian in France.”

1956.⁷ The meeting marked the first formal challenge to assimilation policies. When I met nationalist leader Louis Théodore, he explained:

Guadeloupean students became aware that assimilation [...] was not a system that could solve the problems that faced us. Because, not only were there economic problems but there were also social problems, there was an identity problem, there was a cultural problem. [During the 1956 meeting in Paris,] they came to radically question the entire system, on all levels: on the economic level, on the social level, etcetera. But most of all, they questioned the system as oppressive on the cultural and identity level.⁸

While Théodore and others are often prone to emphasize the revolutionary nature of their ideas, it is noteworthy that the AGEF officially endorsed an autonomist platform the same year Aimé Césaire decided to break from the Parti Communiste Français (PCF). The Law of Assimilation had proved disappointing in Martinique as in Guadeloupe. As a result, the Communist party—which had campaigned heavily for the status change in the late 1940s—came under increased criticism. The PCF also suffered from its association with Stalinism and with the USSR’s intervention in Hungary. Domestically, many in the DOM further resented French communists’ apparent lack of understanding of the particular situation of Martinique and Guadeloupe.⁹ In 1958, as Césaire heralded the Parti Progressiste Martiniquais, the communist parties of both Martinique and Guadeloupe broke from their French counterpart and became autonomous. Immediately following its

⁷ AGEF, *Nou toujou doubout*, 81.

⁸ Louis Théodore, interview with the author, 3 August 2009.

“Y a une prise de conscience qui se produit dans cette jeunesse estudiantine guadeloupéenne, c’est le fait que l’assimilation [...] n’est pas un système qui pourra résoudre les problèmes qui se posent chez nous. Parce que, non seulement, il y a des problèmes économiques chez nous mais il y a des problèmes sociaux, mais il y a un problème d’identité, un problème culturel qui se pose. [...] Discussion après discussion, [...] cette association va de plus en plus loin dans l’analyse et va organiser en 1956, à Paris, un séminaire sur l’assimilation. [...] Au cours de cette rencontre, ils vont carrément remettre en cause ce système, sur tous les plans: sur le plan économique, sur le plan social, etc.... Et surtout sur ce que ce système a d’oppressif en matière culturelle et en matière identitaire.”

⁹ Adelaïde-Merlande, *Histoire Contemporaine*, 84.

creation, the Parti Communiste Guadeloupéen (PCG) adopted an autonomist platform, demanding greater local control without breaking from the French state.¹⁰ In a way, the students of the AGEG, many of whom had ties to the communist party at home, participated in the same backlash against the PCF. However, criticism of the PCF did not amount to an outright rejection of communist ideology. Théodore explained that around this time, the AGEG formed strong ties with two international communist student organizations: the Union Internationale des Etudiants and the Fédération Mondiale de la Jeunesse Démocratique.

In 1958, the AGEG expanded to attract Guadeloupean students outside the French capital. Sections were created in every university town and the Bordeaux section quickly became one of the most important, in terms of both its size and level of political activism. In August 1960, the AGEG organized the Conférence de la Jeunesse Guadeloupéenne in Pointe-à-Pitre, which resulted in an official declaration against assimilation.¹¹ According to Théodore, the conference further underscored the rift between the AGEG and what he called “orthodox communists.”¹²

As many students faced being drafted to fight in Algeria, the AGEG accentuated its support for the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale (FLN). In this regard, the writings of Franz Fanon proved very influential. Some of the students who served in the French military during this time went as far as to organize formally in support of the

¹⁰ “Déclaration des 18 patriotes guadeloupéens à Messieurs les présidents et conseillers composant la cour de sureté” in *Mai 1967*, 40.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 41.

¹² Théodore, interview with the author, 3 August 2009

Algerian cause.¹³ As Félix Cotellon points out, Algeria became an important model for Guadeloupean anti-colonialist militants. Algeria had been a French department since the Third Republic. If it could gain independence, it would create a precedent to push for statutory change in Guadeloupe.¹⁴

B. The GONG

By 1963, the AGEF had further radicalized its position and started advocating for complete independence from France. Having completed their studies in France, some of its former members joined the GONG (Groupe d'Organisation Nationale de Guadeloupe), a newly created separatist organization.¹⁵ By that time, the AGEF had started training activists to become leaders in other anti-colonialist organizations. For example, the ties between the GONG and the AGEF were particularly strong. "The GONG was born out of the AGEF," explained Théodore who was one of the group's original members. "Anyway, we shouldn't fool ourselves. That is to say, the GONG comprised three groups: intellectuals trained within the AGEF, young people who had links with the Algerian war, and the third, very important group, were workers issued from the migration [to France]."¹⁶

¹³ Théodore, interview with the author, 3 August 2009; Anduse, interview with the author, 3 August 2009; Mounien, interview with the author, 15 July 2009; Cotellon, interview with the author, 29 July 2008.

¹⁴ Cotellon. Interview with the author, 29 July 2008.

¹⁵ Théodore, interview with the author, 3 August 2009; Anduse, interview with the author, 3 August 2009; Thierry Césaire, interview with the author, 23 July 2009; Abenon, *Petite Histoire*, 197.

¹⁶ Théodore, interview with the author, 3 August 2009
"Le GONG est issu de l'AGEF de toutes façons, il faut pas se faire d'illusions. C'est à dire [...] les trois composantes du GONG se sera: les intellectuels qui sortent de l'AGEF; ce sera des jeunes qui seront lié avec [...] la guerre d'Algérie, les anciens du contingent; et troisième contingent très important, c'est les travailleurs [...] qui sont arrivés avec toute la vague de l'immigration."

By then the political activities of the AGEg were well-known even in Guadeloupe. When I asked Roland Anduse if he knew about the AGEg's political activities when he arrived in Bordeaux in 1964, he explained:

Yes, yes, I knew about it. I had known about it in Guadeloupe because my big brother had told me: "Beware of that 'GEG'. [The brother was confused and thought the name of the association was "*la GEG*" instead of "*l'AGEg*".] They say that they are a bunch of politicians who don't do anything." When I arrived in Paris, I went to a friend of my brother's who, unfortunately for my brother, was deeply involved in the AGEg. [...] He tried to recruit me as soon as I got off the plane but it didn't work."¹⁷

By 1964, the AGEg had become the central training ground of the Guadeloupean nationalist movement. Roland Anduse's trajectory from reluctant new recruit to one of the leading intellectuals in the Guadeloupean nationalist movement illustrates the association's recruiting method. After a brief stay in Paris, Anduse boarded a train to Bordeaux where he was to start medical school. He arrived there on a Sunday morning and caught a cab to the university campus in Talence. Back then, the AGEg fulfilled its social function by pairing each new student with a peer-mentor, someone from the student's hometown whenever possible. Anduse remembers that his peer-mentor helped him navigate all the bureaucratic formalities that faced new students, showed him around town, and introduced him to a few people. "And three days later, he dumped me. He told me: '*Débrouyé w!*' [Fend for yourself!]," Anduse recalled.¹⁸

¹⁷ Anduse, interview with the author, 3 August 2009.

"Oui, oui, je le savais. Je le savais depuis la Guadeloupe. Parce que mon grand frère m'a dit: « Méfie toi de cette GEG! [...] Il paraît que ce sont des politiciens qui ne font rien [...] » [En arrivant à Paris,] je suis allé chez un ami de mon frère qui, malheureusement pour lui, était profondément à l'AGEg. [...] Il a essayé de me recruter dès que j'ai descendu la passerelle de l'avion mais ça n'a pas marché."

¹⁸ Anduse, interview with the author, 4 August 2009.

"Et trois jours après, il m'a largué. Il m'a dit: « Débrouyé w! »"

The AGEG's social activities were not limited to peer mentoring. Anduse joined other Guadeloupean students in excursions during Easter and Christmas breaks. In addition, the AGEG had its own soccer and basketball teams which it also used to attract students.¹⁹ Following Easter break, the association supervised all the students and made sure that they would be prepared for their exams. Even within its role as a social organization, the AGEG insisted that students successfully complete their studies in order to better serve their nation. To that effect, students were also encouraged to research and write about topics related to their native islands.²⁰ Finally, Anduse remembers attending meetings and debates on various topics. He so enjoyed these social activities that he ran for secretary of the Bordeaux section in 1966.²¹

As Benedict Anderson and other scholars have pointed out, education plays a large role in diffusing the concept of nationalism around the world.²² However, it would be a mistake to think that Guadeloupean students merely assimilated a French conception of nationalism. Indeed, within the AGEG, student activists were socialized into seemingly conflicting systems. On one hand, as students in French universities, they absorbed the dominant, capitalist and republican cosmopolitan aesthetics and values. On the other hand, through their contact with communist organizations around the world and their rigorous training in Marxist ideology, these students also joined what Turino calls the "modernist-socialist" cosmopolitan formation and its Stalinist definition of the nation.²³

¹⁹ Cotellon, interview with the author, 29 July 2008.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Anduse, interview with the author, 4 August 2009.

²² Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

²³ *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans and Popular Music*, 9-10.

Although these two cosmopolitan formations differ in their basic political orientation, they nonetheless embraced similar aesthetics and shared a similar approach to cultural nationalism. These modernist aesthetic values would influence the development of a nationalist cultural agenda in Guadeloupe in the early 1970s, as we will see later.

By 1964, the nature and basic organization of the nascent Guadeloupean nationalist movement was starting to change. Militants like Théodore who had presided over the politicization of the AGEF in the mid-1950s had graduated to other organizations like the GONG. Many of them moved back to Guadeloupe in order to develop anti-colonialist actions there. The leadership of the *camp patriotique*, as the ensemble of pro-independence organizations would come to be called, was shifting from Bordeaux and Paris back to Guadeloupe.

C. *Mé 67* (May 1967)

The social tension in the French DOM grew throughout the 1950s and '60s as the agricultural economy continued its collapse and unemployment rose to nearly 25%. In February 1952, the French *Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité* (CRS) killed four protesters from the Gardel factory near Le Moule, on the windward coast of Grande-Terre. Violent confrontations between black Martinicans and white *métros* (recent French immigrants) rattled Fort-de-France in December 1959.²⁴

Tensions between Antillean populations and newly arrived French migrants grew worse in the following decades due to new migration policies set by the government in Paris. In order to combat the recent demographic boom and high unemployment in the Antilles, the French government inaugurated the *Bureau pour le développement des*

²⁴ Burton, "The French West Indies à l'heure de l'Europe," 5.

migrations dans les départements d'outre-mer (BUMIDOM) in 1963. BUMIDOM was designed to facilitate the migration of five thousand people from the DOM a year to fill low-paying positions in the Metropole, primarily in the service industry. In the meantime, a large contingent of French government workers relocated to the DOM, prompting Aimé Césaire to speak of a threat of “genocide by substitution.”²⁵ This situation contributed to a further deterioration of social relations on the islands.

Antillean society was undergoing a massive urbanization at the same time as it was developing an economy based on the consumption of French goods and the absorption of French subsidies. Between 1965 and 1975, about 55,000 cars were imported into Martinique while 50,000 people left the island to seek work in France, a shocking illustration of the fast pace of economic and social transformation in the DOM.²⁶

Social tensions in Guadeloupe were so high that an incident that should never have amounted to more than a few lines on the crime page of *France-Antilles* managed to provoke two days of rioting in Basse-Terre. In March 1967, following several weeks of harassment, a white shoe store owner with close ties to the *béké* community unleashed a dog on a black cobbler who had set up his workbench near his store in Basse-Terre. In response, a mob destroyed the store owner’s car and burned down his shop. The violence did not stop there and confrontations between protesters and the police lasted through the

²⁵ Burton, “The French West Indies à l’heure de l’Europe,” 5. BUMIDOM was plagued with scandals. I will return to some of its traumatic effects on Antillean populations in the next chapter.

²⁶ Abenon, *Petite Histoire*, 196; Adelaïde-Merlande, *Histoire contemporaine*, 83; Anselin “West Indians in France,” in *French and West Indians*, ed. Burton and Reno, 112-114; Daniel, “The Construction of Dependency,” in *Islands at the Crossroads*, ed. Gamaliel Ramos and Israel Rivera, 62-63; “Une Interview de M. Jean Vie (Secrétaire d’Etat au DOM),” *France-Antilles*, 7 February 1972, 11.

night. According to Laurent Faruggia, by the next day, muggers started to target white residents, especially *métro*. It took the police another twenty four hours to restore calm in the Guadeloupean capital. Two days later, a store owned by the same person was bombed in Pointe-à-Pitre. The events in Fort de France and Basse-Terre highlight the racial aspects of social struggles in the DOM. They also illustrate a shift. Whereas there had historically been some tensions between the *béké* and the population of African descent in Martinique and Guadeloupe, the events of 1959 and March '67 suggest anger directed at white residents of metropolitan origins.²⁷

In May 1967, construction workers went on strike in Guadeloupe, demanding higher pay. On May 26, a large group of protesters gathered in front the Chamber of Commerce in Pointe-à-Pitre where they faced a contingent of French police newly arrived from the metropole via Martinique. According to some sources, some of the protesters may have thrown stones at the police who then responded by opening fire on the crowd, officially killing seven people. That number is now widely considered a gross underestimation. Several days of rioting ensued as students from the Baimbridge high school joined protesters on the streets of Pointe-à-Pitre. The French authorities used the event to strike against the GONG and prosecute most of its known leaders for crimes against the integrity of the territory. On June 13, 1967, *France-Antille*'s headline read: "The GONG has been beheaded."²⁸ Those left within the organization were divided. A

²⁷ Abenon, *Petite histoire*, 198; Adelaide-Merlande, *Histoire contemporaine*, 190; Farrugia, *Le Fait national guadeloupéen*, 39-50; "Il avait lancé son chien sur un cordonnier infirme," *France-Antilles*, 23 March 1967.

²⁸ The trials took place the following year. Most of the accused were either acquitted or convicted with light sentences as French prosecutors were unable to prove that the riots were indeed the result of a separatist conspiracy. The trials were fairly widely covered in the French metropolitan press but received little attention from France-Antilles.

small group resigned and rallied around Louis Théodore who had gone into hiding to avoid arrest after the events of May '67.²⁹

Mai 67 was a turning point. Some members of the AGEF who, like Roland Anduse or pianist Yvan Juraver, had shied away from political activism, promptly joined the anti-colonialist cause. Following the events, the PCG issued flyers denouncing not only the French state but also the lack of organization of the unions which allowed the protests to degenerate into riots. According to Cotellon, the response of the PCG seemed weak to many within the pro-independence camp and further aggravated the rift between mainstream communist politicians and more radical nationalist organizations. From then on, nationalist militants started to refer to the PCG as the P“C”G, questioning the party’s ideological legitimacy. The conflict between the PCG and political activists issued from the AGEF and the GONG also reflected wider tensions between the Soviet Union and the Republic of China where Mao Zedong had just initiated the Cultural Revolution.³⁰

D. The new unions

From 1967 to 1970, the “*démissionnaires du GONG*” (GONG resigners)—as the group who had rallied around Théodore called itself—engaged in a period of reflection and came to the conclusion that Guadeloupe’s lack of a sizable industrial proletariat made it better suited to a “democratic and popular national revolution” on a Maoist rather Soviet model. Following the example of black socialist organizers of the late nineteenth century such as Hégésippe Légitimus and capitalizing on the unrelenting crisis of the

²⁹ Abenon, *Petite histoire*, 198; Adelaïde-Merlande, *Histoire contemporaine*, 190; Faruggia, *Le Fait national*, 50-54; “Le GONG décapité: dix-neuf arrestations à Paris et en Guadeloupe pour atteinte à l’intégrité du territoire par la Cour de Sureté de l’Etat,” *France-Antilles*, 13 June 1967, 1.

³⁰ Anduse, interview with the author, 4 August 2009; Cotellon, interview with the author, 29 August 2008; Faruggia, *Le Fait national*; Juraver, interview with the author, 22 July 2008.

sugar industry, the militants tied their political demand for independence with social activism rooted in the experience of agricultural workers. They selected the area around Sainte-Rose and Lamentin in the north of Basse-Terre where they investigated and slowly infiltrated the local rural community.³¹

Several factors influenced this choice of location. The area around Sainte-Rose was an important center of sugar cane production but also housed a few sugar factories. Théodore explained that this provided the militants with an opportunity to study the relation between the main segments of Guadeloupean society: agricultural and factory workers on one hand, landowners and industrial companies based in France on the other. He further insisted that this was a community where creole culture was still vibrant.³² This gave the militants, many of whom were enculturated into the dominant cosmopolitan cultural formation, a chance to rediscover aspects of Guadeloupean rural culture that they had never experienced first-hand.

On the cultural front, the militants focused on language and music. Like their nineteenth-century predecessors, they strategically used Creole to recruit and organize workers. Since the end of World War II, Guadeloupean unions had been branches of French organizations and strictly conducted their business in French, even if many of their members had a limited command of that language. In 1970, the GONG resigners launched the UTA (Union of Agricultural Workers), the first union organized from Guadeloupe and the first to conduct meetings in Creole. This proved a very efficient recruiting tool and several similar unions soon emerged, such as the UPG (Union of Poor

³¹ Mounien, interview with the author, 15 July 2009; Théodore, interview with the author, 3 August 2009.

³² Théodore, interview with the author, 3 August 2009.

Peasants of Guadeloupe) in 1972 or the UGTG (General Union of Guadeloupean Workers) in 1973. Today, the UGTG is the biggest union in Guadeloupe and remains by far the most active, having instigated 70 per cent of all strikes in Guadeloupe in 2003.³³

Traditional musical forms were still very much alive among rural communities in northern Basse-Terre, where people enjoyed listening to biguine as well as attending *balakadri* (quadrille balls) or *léwòz*. In spite of the popularity of this range of Creole musics, nationalist militants chose to reject quadrille and developed a discourse that glorified gwoka as the only true form of national music. Why this focus on gwoka? If the answers to this question lay partially with the fortuitous encounter of specific individuals, they nonetheless shed light on the ideological processes that shaped Guadeloupean nationalism. For anthropologist Katherine Verdery, “ideological processes are contests in which alternative conceptions of the world enter into conflict and, through their encounter, acceptance of or resistance to the existing order of domination is furthered.”³⁴ Studying these processes as they relate to music helps us better understand Guadeloupean separatists’ conception of their national identity.

E. The AGEG’s cultural report

In 1970, after the AGEG’s ninth Congress, a group of students met in the south of France to outline the association’s stand on cultural issues. The resulting document offers great insight into the AGEG’s nationalist project (Figure 3.1). Through their discussions of what constitutes Guadeloupean culture, and what should be excluded from

³³ Braflan-Trobo, *Conflits Sociaux en Guadeloupe*, 13; Bebel-Gislert, *Défi culturel guadeloupéen*, 120-124; Mounien, interview with the author, 15 July 2009; Théodore, interview with the author, 3 August 2009; “Pour mieux connaître l’UGTG,” http://ugtg.org/article_59.html. Accessed 12/7/09.

³⁴ *National Ideology Under Communism*, 9-10.



Figure 3.1: AGEG, *Rapport Culturel*, 9eme Congrès (cover). Note the presence of the gwoka drum leading the Guadeloupean proletarian revolution.

it, the members of the AGEG imagine a blueprint for an independent Guadeloupean nation.

Their reflection is deeply rooted in communist doctrine. They borrow from Stalin's definition of nation: "A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture."³⁵ This definition is highly problematic for a modern community born out of the massive migration, voluntary or forced, of people from Europe, Africa and Asia. Although the *Rapport culturel* deals with oral traditions, the Creole language and literature in addition to music, a focus on the latter perfectly illustrates the types of choices made by the AGEG in imagining a nation that would adhere to Stalin's definition along with the ideological processes involved in justifying these choices.

Following a Marxist analysis of the role of culture in Guadeloupean colonial society, the students advocate for the creation of a "new culture" that has to be "national, popular, and scientific." "National" in this case was defined in opposition to French imperialism. As an anti-colonialist weapon, a new national culture would "praise national Guadeloupean virtues" and would be used to educate the masses, spread revolutionary ideas, and mobilize the population. The new culture was conceived as "popular" because artists were called upon to serve the masses and create new works based on their lives and experiences. Finally it was "scientific" because these artists had to study popular culture in order to identify those expressions that would best serve the revolution. Among

³⁵ AGEG, *Rapport culturel*, 5; Stalin, "The Nation," 20.

other things, they were instructed to criticize reactionary popular expressions and combat popular beliefs and superstitions.³⁶

Taken together, the plea for cultural production to be “national, popular, and scientific” inscribes the AGEF’s program within a cosmopolitan modernist-socialist formation. In particular, the appeal to create a “new culture” puts the Guadeloupean nationalist movement squarely within the cosmopolitan logic of modernist-reformism.

Turino explains:

Modernist reformism refers to projects based on the idea that “a new culture,” or new genres, styles, and practices, should be forged as a synthesis of the “best” or “most valuable” aspects of local “traditional” culture and “the best” of foreign “modern” lifeways and technologies. Although theoretically “reform” could go either way, what typically happens is that distinctive local arts and lifeways are reformed, or “developed,” in light of cosmopolitan ethics, aesthetics, and worldview because of the cultural positions of the reformers.³⁷

The emergence of gwoka modènn offers of a perfect illustration of the process described by Turino. However, before diving into that subject, we should note that by using the word “scientific,” the AGEF sought to legitimize its conclusions. Speaking about the ideological debates surrounding the standardization of spelling for Haitian Creole, socio-linguists Bambi Schieffelin and Rachel Doucet note that proponents of competing systems often claimed a form of scientific logic in defense of their proposal. However, Schieffelin and Doucet remark, this scientific discourse only served to mask that these proposals were in fact “culturally constructed and represent[ed] particular political social interests.”³⁸ In the AGEF report, the ideological bias was hidden in plain

³⁶ AGEF, *Rapport culturel*, 1, 55-61.

³⁷ *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans and Popular Music*, 16.

³⁸ Quoted in Largey, *Vodou Nation*, 212.

sight. The association was very selective about what popular cultural expressions were suitable to its national project. In the domain of religion and beliefs, it seems that communist dogma trumped ethnographic observation as the AGEG wished to combat what it saw as reactionary superstitions. Thus, the cultural report makes no mention of the *gadéd zafè* (healer or sorcerer), a central character in Antillean lore.

In Guadeloupe, the “reformers” inherited several centuries of socio-racial hierarchy that confined rural African-derived cultural expressions to the bottom of the socio-cultural ladder. Rather than truly challenging this classification, Guadeloupean nationalists simply inverted it, infusing rural African-derived expressions with the greatest “Guadeloupeanness” and reducing those forms that had previously enjoyed the greatest social capital to mere expressions of assimilation. In the domain of music, the AGEG’s report described quadrille and mazurka as the products of “cultural repression.” For the AGEG, the quadrille resulted from the adoption of European dance forms by mulattos and free blacks, that is, populations desiring to integrate colonial society. According to this (admittedly flawed) logic, the quadrille’s European origins and link with forced assimilation precluded it from inclusion within the new culture.³⁹

Gwoka, on the other hand, was described as a local syncretism of various African musical practices. Gwoka enabled the report’s authors to root Guadeloupean culture in the experience of slavery and to evoke the memory of the *nèg mawon*, the escaped slave. In her book analyzing recent labor movements in Guadeloupe, Patricia Braflan-Trobo explains how the UGTG often invokes the memory of what she calls

³⁹ AGEG, *Rapport culturel*, 12-13.

Dominique Cyrille offers a good history of French West Indian quadrilles in “Creole Quadrilles of Guadeloupe, Dominica, Martinique, and Saint Lucia.”

“ancestors/heroes” as a way to mobilize and energize its members during strikes, putting contemporary labor struggles in a tradition harking back to resistance against slavery.⁴⁰

The AGEF applied the same strategy to its discussion of gwoka. Citing several European chroniclers, the report highlighted the various efforts taken to prohibit slaves from practicing “calenda” or “bamboula.”⁴¹ It argued: “Far from destroying Calenda, its repression strengthened it and gave it the character of revolutionary music. Maroon slaves used its rhythmic variations as a mode of communication. Calenda became the indispensable element of slave meetings.”⁴² By invoking the memory of the maroon slave, an archetype that to this day embodies resistance against imperialism, the AGEF sought to equate its struggle against French domination with resistance against slavery. In this anti-colonialist logic, gwoka was praised as the “purest” and “most original” musical form in Guadeloupe: of African origin, it had resisted the imperialist oppression of French colonists and flourished among the island’s rural populations.⁴³

As a musical practice that had long been stigmatized in Guadeloupean society, gwoka participated in what Michael Herzfeld calls “cultural intimacy,” or “the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common

⁴⁰ Braflan-Trobo, *Conflits sociaux en Guadeloupe*, 111-137.

⁴¹ Several scholars have come to question these drum bans in the Americas, arguing that these laws were rare, often weak, and actually rarely enforced. See Radano, *Lying Up a Nation*, 101-102.

⁴² *Rapport culturel*, 12.

“La répression loin de détruire le Calenda va contribuer à son renforcement et lui donner un caractère de musique de révolte. Les esclaves marons [sic] vont utiliser les variations de rythme comme moyen de communication. Le Calenda deviendra l’indispensable élément des grandes réunions d’esclaves.”

⁴³ AGEF, *Rapport culturel*, 10-14.

sociality.”⁴⁴ None of the other musical practices in Guadeloupe in the early twentieth century—neither quadrille nor biguine—could generate the kind of “rueful self-recognition” associated with gwoka. Gwoka was stigmatized mainly because of its perceived lack of universalism, that is to say its distance from cosmopolitan aesthetics. Gwoka provided a unique locus where lower- and middle-class Guadeloupeans could symbolically debate the nature of their nationality. In contrast, the biguine, because its performance aesthetics were more in line with cosmopolitan values and because its popularity cut across class distinctions, did not articulate Guadeloupe’s social conflicts.

Nevertheless, the members of the AGEG could not reject biguine as easily as they had quadrille. They were forced to recognize biguine as a local creation enjoyed throughout Guadeloupean society.⁴⁵ While they accepted it as belonging within the Guadeloupean cultural field, they criticized it as a “bastardized music” that mixed European phrasing with a rhythmic pattern derived from the *boula*. They also argued that biguine had been co-opted by colonialist powers in order to paint an essentialized and gentrified vision of Antillean exoticism, an aesthetic often derogatorily described as *doudouiste*.⁴⁶ Biguine was also guilty of this all-important anti-patriotic crime: it was tonal music.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy*, 3.

⁴⁵ AGEG, *Rapport culturel*, 14-15.

“La biguine n’est pas une musique importée. Elle est le résultat de circonstances historiques spécifiquement Guadeloupéennes. De plus, elle est connue, jouée, dansée dans toutes les couches du peuple.”

⁴⁶ From the Creole word “*doudou*” meaning “darling,” *doudouisme* refers to a body of literature, poetry and song texts that promoted the Antilles as a carefree tropical paradise.

⁴⁷ AGEG, *Rapport culturel*, 14-15.

Nationalist ideology regarded tonality as a marker of European culture. Gwoka, the AGEG argued, “did not follow the laws of European forms composed from a succession of 8 notes: C-D-E-F-G-A-B-C. It is atonal music, that is to say that it does not have a tonal center of gravity.”⁴⁸ While the analysis of traditional gwoka melodies presented in chapter 1 belies this statement, I would like for now to focus on its origin. Roland Anduse, who was then president of the AGEG section in Bordeaux and who participated in the conception of the cultural report, admitted he knew almost nothing about gwoka at the time and that the same was true of most nationalist leaders.⁴⁹ Where then did this musical analysis come from?

II. Gérard Lockel and gwoka modènn

A. Lockel and the musical ideological process

Before they met to work on the cultural report, Louis Théodore organized a meeting to introduce members of the AGEG to a guitar player by the name of Gérard Lockel.⁵⁰ Born in northern Basse-Terre, Lockel had been a successful jazz guitarist in France before moving back to Guadeloupe in 1969. There, he connected with Théodore and other activists.⁵¹ He also quickly gathered around him some of the island’s best musicians and started to work on a new musical concept which he called *gwoka modènn*,

⁴⁸ AGEG, *Rapport culturel*, 13.

“Cette musique ne suit pas les lois des formes européennes composée [sic] d’une succession de 8 notes “DO, RE, MI, FA, SOL, LA, SI, DO. C’est une musique atonale c’est-à-dire qu’elle n’a aucun centre de gravité tonal : elle ne se rattache jamais à une tonalité précise.”

⁴⁹ Anduse, interview with the author, 4 August 2009.

⁵⁰ Anduse, interview with the author, 4 August 2009; Cotellon, interview with the author, 29 July 2008; Lockel, *Gwo ka modènn 1969-1989: Vingt ans de lutte sur le front de la culture guadeloupéenne*, Chapter 2.

⁵¹ Lockel, *Vingt ans de lutte*.

or modern gwoka.⁵² Based on the premise of adding European instruments to traditional gwoka, gwoka modènn mixed long improvisations based on composed melodies with the rhythmic foundation of traditional gwoka. All evidence indicates that Lockel was, and to some extent continues to be, a major influence on Guadeloupean nationalist thinking about music.

I insist on Lockel's importance as a major ideologue even if his precise role within the overall nationalist movement is elusive. Rosan Mounien, former secretary general of the UGTG, explained that Lockel brought his expertise to discussions in the early seventies. However, he qualified his remarks by explaining that Lockel remained very discreet. He would rarely intervene during meetings but would rather talk to people individually, behind the scene.⁵³ For example, Lockel paid a visit to several musicians who performed in dance orchestras and convinced them to stop playing *konpa*, the then popular Haitian dance form. According to Félix Cotellon, Lockel played an important role in defining cultural policies within the UPLG, the separatist political party created in 1978.⁵⁴ I asked Roland Anduse if the AGEG had adopted Lockel's views in its 1970 report. He quickly denied it. "We did not let him influence us," he insisted. As evidence, he pointed to the section about biguine and explained that it infuriated Lockel who refused to admit the genre as Guadeloupean. Indeed, the guitarist published an article in 1978 in which he laid out his own socio-historical analysis of Guadeloupean culture. He concluded that there were three distinct cultures on the island: a French culture, a colonial

⁵² Chomereau-Lamotte, interview with the author, 9 July 2009

⁵³ Mounien, interview with the author, 15 July 2009.

⁵⁴ Cotellon, interview with the author, 29 July 2008.

culture, and a Guadeloupean culture. Biguine stemmed from colonial culture, while gwoka was the only truly Guadeloupean music.⁵⁵ However, Anduse did recall how Lockel convinced the UTA and the UPLG to substitute gwoka recordings for the recordings of Soviet, Cuban or French communist songs they had been playing during their rallies.⁵⁶

As we consider Lockel's influence on the Guadeloupean nationalist ideological process, we must keep two things in mind. First, all of the organizations within the anti-colonialist movement maintained a certain level of independence from one another, even if they had often been created by the same group of people and even if some militants were active in more than one of them. This being said, these organizations were also in constant contact, especially after the GONG resigners organized the underground *Parti des Travailleurs Guadeloupéens* (PTG) that became the central organizing committee for the patriotic camp. For these reasons, even if it was composed in France, the AGEG's 1970 cultural report is partially a reflection of the ideological process taking place in Guadeloupe. As an instance of the back-and-forth taking place between nationalist organizations in France and Guadeloupe, the AGEG's conclusions were diffused through the patriotic camp's network of organizations and thus played an important role in defining its cultural platform.

Nationalist ideology not only informed Lockel's discourse, it also guided many of his musical choices. In his study of music and nationalism in Haiti, Michael Largey

⁵⁵ Lockel, "Lolo Camphrin: Un des derniers grands danseurs de Gro-Ka," *Ja Ka Ta*, February 1978, 14.

⁵⁶ Anduse, interview with the author, 4 August 2009; Lockel, *Vingt ans de lutte*.

adapts Schieffelin and Doucet's concept of "language ideology" to music. According to the socio-linguists,

Language ideology often determines which linguistic features get selected for cultural attention and for social marking, that is which ones are important and which ones are not. In countries where 'nation-ness' is being negotiated, every aspect of language—from its phonological features to lexical items to stylistic alternatives to multilingualism—can be contested, and often is.⁵⁷

Based on Largey's concept of "music ideology" and Verdery's focus on ideological processes, I argue that Lockel's choice of scale and notational system participates in a music ideological process and reflects his personal conception of Guadeloupean nationality. In other words, within the historical and political context of post-departmentalization Guadeloupe, the selection of musical scales and notational systems participate in wider political debates about Guadeloupean identity. More than a mere artistic creation, Lockel's musical concept is infused with political meaning.

B. The gwoka scale

Lockel insisted that gwoka was "atonal modal music" and explained in the liner notes for his first album (1976):

Like traditional gro ka from which it evolved, gro ka modên is an atonal modal music that utilizes one scale: the gro ka scale. That is to say that this music has no connection with the fundamental laws of Occidental classical music. Rather, its characteristics are reminiscent of Afro-Asian musical forms. It is an improvised music that is developed from a mode. The mode gives birth to a kind of melody that expresses the musical feeling of the Guadeloupean people. Furthermore, the gro ka scale can be compared to that which the Italian monk Guido of Arezzo created in the early 11th century. That's the famous 'do, ré, mi,

⁵⁷ Schieffelin and Doucet quoted in Largey, *Vodou Nation*, 212.

fa, sol, la, si” that Guadeloupeans know so well from being forced to learn it at school.⁵⁸

Not only does the comparison with Guido of Arezzo give us a good sense of Lockel’s perception of his own historical importance, it also illustrates how far Guadeloupean nationalists had assimilated cosmopolitan references and how, in spite of a counter-hegemonic discourse, they continued to measure the value of their own artistic creations in relation to European references.

Lockel has never offered any ethnographic evidence to back up his description of the gwoka “atonal-modal” scale. However, if we accept that Lockel’s scale actually expresses a music ideological process, its authenticity matters only to the extent that it participates in a legitimizing process. Music scholars in the past few years have exposed “authenticity” as a constructed system of valuation often imposed on performances of traditional musics by song collectors and music historians with the unfortunate consequence of denying “folk” performers’ creative or innovative powers.⁵⁹ Therefore, while gwoka musicians debate the merit of Lockel’s scale, it is important to note that Lockel’s scientific discourse serves to legitimize his expertise. In his writings, Lockel often highlights his childhood spent on a plantation in Northern Basse-Terre and claims a

⁵⁸ Lockel, Liner notes to *Gro Ka Modèn*.

“Comme le ‘GRO KA’ TRADITIONNEL dont il est issu, le ‘GRO KA MODÈN’ est une musique atonale, modale et qui se pratique dans une gamme : LA GAMME ‘GRO KA’. C’est-à-dire que cette musique n’a rien à voir avec les lois fondamentales de la science musicale classique occidentale. Elle rappelle beaucoup plus de par ces caractéristiques, les formes musicales, afro-asiatiques. C’est une musique d’improvisation, qui se développe à partir d’un mode, mode qui donne naissance à une forme de mélodie, qui exprime le sentiment musical du peuple guadeloupéen. D’autre part, la gamme ‘GRO KA’ dont nous parlons, peut être comparée à celle créée, par le moine italien Guy d’Arezzo au début du XI^e siècle de l’ère chrétienne, pour le développement de la musique occidentale. C’est le fameux ‘do, ré, mi, fa, sol, la, si’ que le Guadeloupéen connaît bien pour l’avoir rabâché sur les bancs de l’école.” It should be noted that Guido of Arezzo did not include “si” in his system.

⁵⁹ See for example, Filene, *Romancing the Folk*; Porter, “‘Bring Me The Head of James Macpherson.’”

long-lasting connection with the music of Guadeloupean peasants.⁶⁰ Furthermore, he presents his monumental treatise, published in 1981, as the fruit of many years of “theoretical research, investigations, concerts, debates, and *pratique sur le terrain*,” an ambiguous phrase that can as easily signal fieldwork in an ethnographic sense as public concerts in rural settings.⁶¹ This discourse has managed to give Lockel more than an aura of legitimacy. As Katherine Verdery reminds us, legitimacy “does not mean that all major groups in a society accept the system of domination; it means only the assent of a part of the population, with the remainder *not* adhering to some alternative image of a possible social order.”⁶² In Guadeloupe, Lockel’s views were never embraced by the majority of the population but, until very recently, no one had managed to successfully challenge his affirmations.

The guitarist described the gwoka scale in detail in his *Traité de gro ka modèn*. The scale is based around a succession of whole-steps and minor thirds, and takes no less than five octaves to loop upon itself. This range must have seemed excessive to Lockel himself because he instructs musicians to limit themselves to the first nine notes of the cycle. Why nine notes? Analysis reveals that the first nine notes of the gwoka scale comprise three overlapping pentatonic scales (Figure 3.2). The first five notes of the

⁶⁰ Lockel, Liner notes to *Gro Ka Modèn*.

⁶¹ Lockel, *Vingt ans de lutte*.

“Après ces nombreuses années de recherche théorique, d’enquêtes, de concert-débats, de pratique sur le terrain, il fallait codifier tout cela et donner au peuple Guadeloupéen un moyen de pratiquer sa musique.”

⁶² Verdery, National Ideology under Communism,” 10.

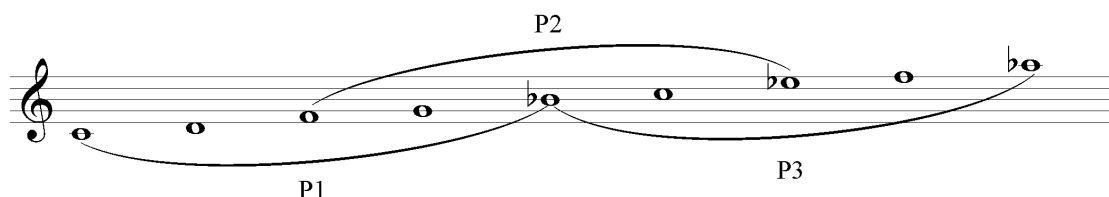


Figure 3.2: Lockel's gwoka scale. P1: B-flat pentatonic; P2: E-flat pentatonic; P3: A-flat pentatonic.

sequence comprise the second mode of a major pentatonic scale (P1). The pattern repeats a fourth higher (P2), then a second time another fourth higher (P3) to end precisely on the ninth note of the sequence. When I asked Gérard Lockel if he had constructed his gwoka scale based on intertwined pentatonics, he vehemently denied it.⁶³ However, Alza Bordin—a trumpet and trombone player who played with Lockel from 1978 to 1983—explained in an interview that Lockel never told him about the gwoka scale. Rather Bordin claimed to have learned to play with the guitarist strictly aurally. Emulating the other musicians in the band, Bordin developed a melodic vocabulary based on pentatonic scales.⁶⁴ In addition, many of the exercises in Lockel's treatise emphasize pentatonic patterns, such as exercise 48 which works through twelve transpositions of the ascending cell D-F-G-B flat-C.⁶⁵

C. Notation

Besides the choice of scale, Lockel also abandoned standard Western musical notation. All the exercises in his treatise are notated using large squares divided into nine parts, with each section representing a scale degree (see Figure 3.3). Surprisingly, given the guitarist's anti-Western bias, pitches are written in using conventional French names

⁶³ Personal communication, 27 July 2009.

⁶⁴ Bordin, interview with the author, 25 July 2009

⁶⁵ Lockel, *Traité de Gro Ka Modên*, 132.

Exercice n°48


	RE ⑤	FA ②
SOL ③	SIB ④	DO ①

	MID ⑤	FA# ②
LA♭ ③	SI ④	DO# ①

	MI ⑤	SOL ②
LA ③	DO ④	RE ①

	FA ⑤	LA ^b ②
SI ^b ③	DO [#] ④	MI ^b ①

	FAH ⑤	LA ②
SI ③	RE ④	MI ①

	SOL ⑤	SIB ②
DO ③	MID ④	FA ①

	LA \uparrow ⑤	SI ②
DO \uparrow ③	MI ④	FA \uparrow ①

	LA ⑤	DO ②
RE ③	FA ④	SOL ①

	SI \flat ⑤	DO \sharp ②
MID \flat ③	FA \sharp ④	LA \flat ①

	SI ⑤	RE ②
MI ③	SOL ④	LA ①

	DO ⑤	mi ^b ②
FA ③	LA ^b ④	si ^b ①

	DO# ⑤	MI ②
FA# ③	LA ④	SI ①

Figure 3.3: Lockel, Exercise 48, *Traité de gwo ka modên*.

(*do, ré, fa, sol, si bémol...*) and red numbers indicate the order in which the pitches are to be played. Thus Lockel's notation only prescribes the relative position of each pitch and their proper sequence. Without rhythmic notation, musicians must decide for themselves how to properly phrase each exercise to fit the rhythms of the boula. According to Lockel, the system was intended to help people learn music without having to learn to read staff notation. During a phone conversation, the guitarist acknowledged that he purposely avoided using standard European staff notation, preferring a system which he argued better captured gwoka's African elements and therefore was better suited to improvised music.⁶⁶

roulé

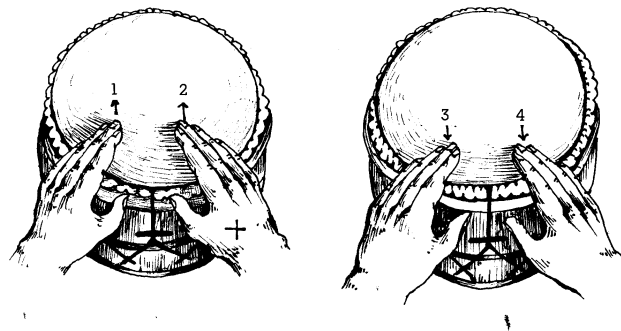


Figure 3.4: Lockel's notation of the *woulé*.

⁶⁶ Lockel, Private phone conversation with the author, 27 July 2009.

Mr. Lockel is a notably difficult person to work with. I have met him informally on two occasions and he is aware of the research I am conducting about his music. However, he has refused to let me interview him. Nevertheless, he has volunteered much information during private conversations that we have had. I have decided to include some of this information in this chapter in order to better represent his artistic vision.

Finally, Lockel was the first to develop a prescriptive notational system for what he describes as the seven rhythms of traditional gwoka: “*toumblak*,” “*léroz*,” “*roulé*,” “*mindé*,” “*kaladjia*,” “*granjanbel*,” and “*grage*.”⁶⁷ The guitarist does not mention the *padjanbél*, a rhythm in simple triple meter which is much more common than its relative in compound double meter, the *granjanbél*. His notation uses diagrams to show the sequence of strokes on the drum for each rhythm but does not account for the varying amount of space that musicians must leave between strokes (see Figure 3.4).

Bordin’s testimony above highlights the importance of music notation not as a practical tool for music performance but as an instrument of legitimization within a modernist-reformist project. Turino writes:

An emphasis on music notation has often accompanied peoples’ internalization of a modernist position in many parts of the world—regardless of whether this technique was necessary for learning and transmitting music or not. [...] The importance of music notation derives from the modernist-capitalist tendency to base the legitimacy and, indeed, the reality of a practice on its transformation into an objectified form.

In addition, music notation was an important first step in unifying drumming practices across the Guadeloupean archipelago. As established in chapter 2, prior to the 1970s, Guadeloupe maintained a number of differing local drumming traditions such as the *léwòz o komandman* in southern Grande Terre or the *bélè* in the Grands Fonds. However, nationalist logic did not allow for such disparity. As Kai Nielsen remarks: “A nation must have a pervasive public culture [...]. Without such a pervasive encompassing culture, something there in the public domain of a society, it would not be a nation.”⁶⁸

⁶⁷ See appendix 1 for musical notation of the most common rhythms in gwoka.

⁶⁸ Nielsen, “Cultural Nationalism, Neither Ethnic nor Civic,” 124.

Since the publication of Anderson's seminal book on nationalism, most scholars have embraced the idea of nations as "imagined communities," even if some like Chatterjee have cautioned against Anderson's modular and determinist theory.⁶⁹ By grouping an array of African-derived musical practices under the umbrella term "gwoka," nationalist militants were able not only to bridge class divisions as discussed earlier, but also to unify cultural practices across the Guadeloupean archipelago and link the power of resistance of the past (the narrative of the *nèg mawon*) with the needs of the present. The process of unifying cultural practices across the archipelago necessitated a codification of those practices, and Lockel's writings, especially his treatise/method, offered the first significant step in that direction. Thus, gwoka exemplifies what Raymond Williams calls a "selective tradition," a careful selection of "meanings and practices" emphasized in order to serve "the interest of the dominance of a specific class."⁷⁰

In light of my field observations, I have tried to uncover the origin of Lockel's claim that there are seven rhythms in gwoka but I have been unable to locate any source prior to the publication of his treatise/method. Even the liner notes to his first album, which predates the treatise by six years, make no mention of a finite number of gwoka rhythms. Regardless, several publications have since relayed the idea that gwoka is defined by its seven rhythms.⁷¹ It is a testament to Lockel's legitimacy that, until the

⁶⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, 19-22.

⁷⁰ *Marxism and Literature*, 115-116.

⁷¹ See Uri, *Musiques et musiciens de la Guadeloupe*; Gabali, *Diadyéé*.

publication of Gustave Labeca's method book in 2008, no one ever challenged that claim.⁷²

The choice of the number seven is both arbitrary and symbolic. As such, it is part of an ideological process to link gwoka, a historically secular practice, with spirituality. In her ideologically driven exposé on Guadeloupean culture, ethnolinguist Dany Bébel-Gislert insists on the symbolic importance of the number seven in Guadeloupean society. Explaining how some peasants used the numbers three and seven in order to do simple arithmetic, she writes: "Seven and three, key numbers that add up to ten, like the ten fingers of our hands. Seven and three, numerals of 'perfection' according to the majority of the comrades I interviewed, and charged with particular meanings: three stones make a fire, the seven days of the week, the seven pillars of wisdom."⁷³ This concern with claiming a spiritual symbolic for gwoka has endured. In May 2009, I attended a memorial ceremony at the slave cemetery of Anse Sainte Marguerite, on the windward coast. The ceremonial ground had been delineated by seven wooden poles from which hung white banners. A gwoka drummer sat at the foot of each pole. The ceremony included playing through the set of seven gwoka rhythms and seven minutes of silence. It combined these symbols with other spiritual rituals borrowed from African-diasporic traditions, such as offering flowers to the ocean, a clear parallel with Yemanjá celebrations in Brazilian candomblé, a Yoruba-influenced religion. It is important to note here that such rituals are recent creations in Guadeloupe where no syncretic religions equivalent to Cuban Santería

⁷² Labeca, *I ka i pa ka*.

Labeca doesn't so much as openly challenge Lockel. He simply ignores the issue altogether and goes on to describe eight "conventional" rhythms and seven additional rhythms. See chapter 4.

⁷³ Bébel-Gislert, *Le Défi culturel guadeloupéen*, 63.

or Haitian Vodou have been documented, even if there exists an African-derived magical tradition embodied by the *gadéd zafè*.

D. Jazz, gwoka modènn, and diasporic cosmopolitanism

During a short feature on Lockel's 1997 performance at the Banlieues Bleues festival in Paris, an audience member explained to the RFO reporter interviewing him that, to his ears, gwoka modènn sounded like jazz. To which Lockel promptly countered: "But it isn't jazz. Jazz's got nothing to do with it... It is its own feeling, a melodic feeling that is particular to Guadeloupeans."⁷⁴ The relationship between jazz and gwoka modènn is complex, full of ambiguities. In the following paragraphs, we turn our attention to the influence of jazz on the development of gwoka modènn.

In a 1989 report assessing his activities over the past twenty years, Lockel conceded that jazz and *gwoka modènn* were two musical expressions of the African diaspora in the New World, that both were based on improvisation and that both were virtuosic. However, Lockel argues this was where the resemblance stopped because "gwoka and jazz developed from different bases," an ambiguous statement typical of many of Lockel's declarations. I interpret this statement to mean that jazz and gwoka modènn evolved from different musical traditions that reflect different socio-historical backgrounds. Indeed, judging by Lockel's writings, what seemed to matter most to him was that Guadeloupean agricultural workers would recognize *gwoka modènn* as a new

⁷⁴ Pillal, "Le Gwo Ka entre tradition et modernity" <http://guadeloupe.rfo.fr/article185.html#>. Accessed 29 November 2006.

"Mais c'est pas du jazz. Ça n'a rien à voir. . . C'est un sentiment propre, un sentiment mélodique qui est propre aux Guadeloupéens."

expression of their musical tradition, even if others insisted on comparing the new music to jazz.⁷⁵

The relationship between jazz and *gwoka modènn* is more complicated than the ideological discourse about the new Guadeloupean culture would allow. On one hand, we should heed the warning formulated by Guadeloupean multi-instrumentalist and composer Jacky Dahomay: improvisation is a trait shared by many improvised Afro-American musics and jazz has only influenced some of them.⁷⁶ Therefore, we should be careful not to equate *gwoka modènn* and jazz simply because both are improvised instrumental musics. However, the Guadeloupean nationalist discourse, in its most radical expression, can be somewhat disingenuous when it comes to recognizing outside influences on local cultural forms. In an extreme example, a particularly vehement cultural activist once criticized me for suggesting that Guadeloupean biguine saxophonist Emilien Antile had been influenced by Charlie Parker and went as far as to insinuate that maybe the influence ran the other way around. In an effort to untangle the discursive knots that constitute the Guadeloupean nationalist ideological process, we should not take Lockel at his word. Because he distances his music from jazz does not mean that we should not explore the links between the two music.

As mentioned earlier, Lockel had been a successful jazz musician in Paris in the 1950s and '60s. How successful exactly is difficult to assess since most of the

⁷⁵ Lockel, *Vingt ans de lutte*.

“Mais là s'arrêtent les ressemblances, ces deux uniques, le GWO KA et le JAZZ reposent sur des bases différentes.”

⁷⁶ Dahomay, interview with the author, 26 December 2007

Throughout this dissertation, I use the term “Afro-American” to designate elements of the African diaspora in the Western hemisphere. I limit the phrase “African American” to discussion of these elements in the United States of America.

information on this subject seemingly comes from the guitarist himself. Jacques Césaire, a Martinican musician who met Lockel in Guadeloupe at the end of the 1950s, remembers Lockel's playing at the time as being influenced by Charlie Christian and bebop. He also remembers that the guitarist was interested in finding new harmonic progressions.⁷⁷ Lockel did record at least once when he lived in France, with the *Orchestre Del's Jazz Biguine*, under the leadership of Eugène Delouche, in 1951. The group also featured famed clarinetist and saxophonist Robert Mavounzy.⁷⁸ The side, a samba sung in French, is typical of many such Parisian recordings by Antillean outfits from that period. Unfortunately Lockel is limited to playing rhythm while Claude Martial performs the guitar solo. This recording nevertheless suggests that Lockel was not only active in jazz circles but also found employment with Antillean biguine musicians in the French capital, a point that the guitarist has kept out of his autobiographical writing.

In 1969, when Lockel decided to move back to Guadeloupe, many nationalist militants had developed a taste for modern jazz in general and the avant-garde in particular. John Coltrane, Pharaoh Sanders, Miles Davis, Chick Corea, and Archie Shepp were especially popular.⁷⁹ This interest in avant-garde jazz paralleled the impact that the ideology of Black Power had on young Guadeloupean nationalist militants. It is hard to know exactly how much of an influence modern jazz musicians had on Lockel but they did influence the people who played in his band, such as percussionist Charlie

⁷⁷ Jacques Césaire, phone interview with the author, 28 July 2009.

⁷⁸ Orchestre Del's Jazz Biguine. "Viens donc danser," n.p. Part 13650-21, M3-132857. Recorded ca. 1951. Many thanks to Jean-Pierre Meunier who shared this recording with me.

⁷⁹ Chomereau-Lamotte, interview with the author, 9 July 2009; Dahomay, interview with the author, 26 December 2007; Juraver, interview with the author, 22 July 2008; Oumaou, interview with the author, 1 August 2008.

Chomereau-Lamotte or trumpeter Alza Bordin. The percussionist also explained that Lockel called on him and drummer Fred Gatibelza to join his group because the two men were already performing modern jazz, along with advanced forms of Latin jazz and biguine, in both Guadeloupe and Martinique. Furthermore, Chomereau-Lamotte claimed that while he played in Lockel's band in 1969 and 1970, the band would generally play free jazz during the first set and *gwoka modènn* during the second.⁸⁰ While I have been unable to confirm this information with other band members, it is significant that the *France-Antilles* article announcing Lockel's first concert at the Plaza on December 11, 1969 was entitled: "Gros Ka and Free Jazz Concert with the Great Guitarist Gérard Lockel." In the article, Jean Chomereau-Lamotte quotes the French jazz magazine *Jazz Hot* which apparently praised Lockel as "the best French guitarist capable of expressing the subtleties of free jazz." The journalist goes on to write that, while in France, Lockel "had a revelation that there was a great relationship between free jazz and our *gros ka* tradition" and that Lockel identified himself with North American free jazz musicians. Free jazz is defined here as the music initiated by Charlie Parker after the latter reacted against "melodic jazz that anyone could write or play [and that] no longer suited the mood of the American negro." The article suggests that for Lockel, both free jazz and

⁸⁰ Chomereau-Lamotte, interview with the author, 9 July 2009

gwoka modènn musicians used modality and atonality in order to distance themselves from European musical traditions and reclaim their African heritage.⁸¹

The instrumentation of the GKM, as Lockel called his group, recalls typical small jazz ensembles. The front line features brass and woodwinds while the rhythm section combines Lockel's guitar with a piano, a drum set, a boula, a makè and two percussion instruments invented by Lockel, the *gwadlouka* and the *yakalok*. The first is a set of three idiophones shaped like flattened round bells mounted on a stand and struck with short bamboo sticks. The second is a set of three *syak*, scrapers commonly used in quadrille. Even though one of Lockel's sons plays bass, the live recording at Banlieues Bleues is the only GKM album to feature that instrument.⁸²

If the GKM's instrumentation is reminiscent of jazz ensembles, instruments within the group functioned somewhat differently than they commonly do in modern jazz groups. The drum set has gained a second hi-hat but has been stripped of its bass drum in order not to interfere with the sound of the boula. Lockel's treatise instructs piano players to avoid playing chords. Instead they are to develop contrapuntal improvisations based on the *gwoka* scale. If they are not soloing, the piano and the guitar drop out rather than accompany the soloists. When a bass is present, it functions mainly as a solo instrument, limiting itself to a very discreet accompaniment behind other soloists. Because *gwoka*

⁸¹ Jean Chomereau-Lamotte, "Concert de gros-ka et de Free-Jazz du grand guitariste Gérard Lockel." "le meilleur guitariste français qui a su exprimer toutes les subtilités du free-jazz. [...] Lockel ... avait eu la révélation qu'il y avait une grande relation entre le free-jazz et notre tradition gros ka. [...] Le free-jazz on le sait est l'oeuvre de Charlie Parker qui prenait ainsi à sa manière parti contre le jazz mélodique que jouait par exemple Duke Ellington pour marquer ainsi une prise de conscience contre le fait que ce jazz mélodique que n'importe qui pouvait écrire ou jouer ne correspondait pas aux véritables états d'âme du nègre américain."

⁸² Gérard Lockel, *Gwo Ka Modènn en concert*.

modènn is atonal, the bass is not responsible for providing the harmonic structure of the composition. Instead, in his treatise, Lockel describes the role of the bass as a cross between that of the makè and other melodic instruments.⁸³

The structures of most compositions recorded by the GKM differ both from common jazz practices and from traditional gwoka models. Most compositions start with either one of two schemes. In the first, Lockel introduces the melody by himself before being answered by the other melodic instruments. This scheme follows traditional models where a *chantè* introduces the melody of a song which is then repeated by the *répondè*. In the second scheme, all the melodic instruments come in together, including the guitar. Often this statement of the melody is preceded by a short introduction in which the percussion instruments set up the rhythm and tempo of the piece. Generally, Lockel's compositions do not have sung lyrics but there are a few exceptions, most notably Lockel's anthem *Lindepandans* (Independence). Following the statement of the theme, each musician takes a solo. The other melodic instruments reprise the theme between each solo. Thus gwoka modènn structures offer a compromise of sorts between jazz and gwoka structures. Like modern jazz, they feature extended instrumental performances. Unlike typical jazz practices in which statements of the theme bookend an uninterrupted string of solos, the theme is here restated in between each soloist. This practice is reminiscent of the response of traditional gwoka. However, gwoka modènn does not adhere strictly to the responsorial nature of its traditional model. Gwoka modènn, like

⁸³ Lockel, *Traité de Gro Ka Modèn*, 11-13.

jazz, reconciles the structural preferences of presentational music—well-defined beginnings and endings—with an open form inherited from participatory traditions.

The complex relationship between avant-garde jazz and gwoka modènn suggests that the former may have offered the latter a model of diasporic cosmopolitanism. Turino introduced the concept of diasporic cosmopolitanism in his study of musical nationalism in Zimbabwe to refer to the appropriation of cosmopolitan African-derived musics from the Americas—mainly North American jazz but also Cuban *son*—by Zimbabwean musicians.⁸⁴ Drawing on Turino, Michael Largey defines diasporic cosmopolitanism as “the process by which Haitian and African American elites deliberately adopt values associated with intellectuals from African, African American, and Caribbean cultures (as opposed to white cultural models).”⁸⁵ Largey proposes the use of Haitian themes and folk-inspired melodies in African American operas as a particularly pertinent expression of this process. For Guadeloupean nationalists, avant-garde jazz offered not only a model of cosmopolitan values associated with presentational aesthetics, it also inscribed gwoka modènn and Guadeloupean nationalism within the cosmopolitan network of black nationalism. As such, gwoka modènn not only appropriated discourses and ideologies associated with black nationalism, it also contributed to the diffusion of these discourses and ideologies outside of the United States, where many of them originated, and thus reinforced their cosmopolitan status.

However, Lockel’s efforts to distance his music from North American jazz remind us that North American black nationalism only mapped imperfectly onto Guadeloupean

⁸⁴ *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*, 135-141.

⁸⁵ *Vodou Nation*, 18.

nationalism. As Anton Allahar points out, the United States and the Caribbean have very different demographics. In the US, African Americans are a minority that is under-represented in positions of economic or political leadership. In contrast, Caribbean populations are overwhelmingly of African descent and Afro-Caribbeans run local businesses and governments. Like the AGEG and UPLG, the Black Panther Party was strongly influenced by Maoism and the writings of Franz Fanon. However, racial oppression and racial solidarity were central to the Black Panthers' ideology whereas the AGEG focused squarely on class solidarity. The Black Panthers saw racial solidarity and empowerment as an initial step in a broader socialist revolution. This step made little sense for an organization like the AGEG that defined itself not only in opposition to white European colonialism but also to the Afro-Guadeloupean political establishment.⁸⁶ When Lockel tried to distinguish his music from avant-garde jazz, he revealed his fear that the cosmopolitanism of North American-styled black nationalism could eclipse the local specificity of the Guadeloupean nationalist struggle.

III. Promoting the “new culture”

A. Diffusion of nationalist music: Concerts, radio, publications

Lockel's music and ideas were diffused through several media: concerts, publications, and radio broadcasts. The GKM's inaugural concert took place in Pointe-à-Pitre on December 11, 1969 at the theater *Le Plaza*. Lockel's group included flutist Claude Miraculeux, drummer Fred Gatibelza and conguero Charlie Chomereau-Lamotte. It seems surprising that the group did not feature a *boularyen*. Could it be that Lockel

⁸⁶ Allahar, “Black Power and Black Nationalism,” 140-143; Self, *American Babylon*, 224-225.

couldn't find gwoka drummers with enough professional experience to meet the demands of gwoka modènn? This seems unlikely since there were a number of *tanbouyè*, Vélo most famously among them, who performed regularly in professional folkloric groups like *La Briscante* and who occasionally recorded for local labels. However, as mentioned earlier, it could be that Lockel was more interested in recruiting musicians who had musical credentials beyond traditional gwoka and who would be open-minded enough to embrace the new music and its corollary ideology.

The group stayed together for two years during which they performed ten times around Guadeloupe. In addition to touring small towns, the group performed regularly in a restaurant owned by Lockel and his wife in Baie-Mahault. The GKM's concerts were free and therefore the restaurant provided a source of income for the guitarist and his group. According to Charlie Chomereau-Lamotte, most of the patrons were members of the *camp patriotique* who made a point of dining there in order to support Lockel's endeavor. A few years later, the restaurant relocated to Lockel's family house in Baie-Mahault but eventually closed down when the guitarist and his wife divorced.⁸⁷

Lockel's groups proved relatively stable. Some members, like flautist Claude Miraculeux or percussionist Bernier Locatin, stayed with the group for over ten years. Trumpeter Lucien Martial stayed with the guitarist until Martial's death in 1997. The guitarist went on a second tour of Guadeloupe in 1973 and 1974 with a group that featured Martial, Miraculeux, Locatin on *makè* and Délice Zénon on *boula*. A "third generation" of the GKM toured from 1978 to 1983. In addition to the musicians

⁸⁷ Chomereau-Lamotte, interview with the author, 9 July 2009; Mounien, interview with the author, 15 July 2009; Théodore, interview with the author, 3 August 2009.

mentioned above, the group welcomed Alza Bordin on trombone and Jérôme Gatibelza on *gwadlouka*. Claudy Cancelier replaced Zenon on boula before ceding his seat to Bertillon Casimir. Fred Gatibelza rejoined the group on drums.⁸⁸

Both the second and third generation groups engaged in what Lockel called “concerts-debates.” Trombonist Alza Bordin recalls: “A family would host the event. We invited people from the neighborhood or some people from the outside, friends, supporters. We would play and then we would explain our choice.”⁸⁹ Lockel writes that the discussions focused on the following topics: “Why gwoka modènn rather than traditional gwoka? Can every instrument be used? Why does the music resemble jazz? Why doesn’t the group rely more on the media or other means of mass propaganda? Why do artists spend so much time talking about politics?” Lockel also addressed these questions in meetings with students and members of the UTA and UPG following the release of his first album in 1976.⁹⁰ Questions about the diffusion of the music or its perceived authenticity betray the tension between nationalist militants’ desire to promote the new music and their anxieties over preserving the specificity of their culture. However, the first of these questions also hints that the very audience the music was supposed to serve, the Guadeloupean proletariat, may have felt disconnected from Lockel’s creation.

⁸⁸ Lockel, *Vingt ans de lutte*.

⁸⁹ Bordin, interview with the author, 25 July 2009.

“On était dans une famille qui nous accueillait. On invitait le quartier ou alors des gens de l’extérieur, les amis, les sympathisants. On jouait et on leur expliquait pourquoi ce choix.”

⁹⁰ Lockel, *Vingt ans de lutte*.

“Pourquoi le Gwo Ka Modènn et pas le Gwo Ka Traditionnel? Tous les instruments modernes peuvent-ils être employés? Pourquoi une ressemblance avec le JAZZ? Pourquoi une non-utilisation des médias et autres grands moyens de propagande? Pourquoi un langage aussi politique pour des artistes?”

As Rozan Mounien points out, the patriotic camp's embrace of gwoka had an immediate effect: gwoka became politicized.⁹¹ The folkloric groups that had once entertained tourists disappeared. Media outlets controlled by the French government that had never broadcasted much gwoka music, became even less inclined to put it on the air, Lockel's recordings least of all.

Nonetheless, radio played an important role in the promotion of the new music. Anderson has argued about the importance of the advent of print media in creating national communities.⁹² Since then, other scholars of nationalism have extended his analysis to include other media. Mass media, writes Turino, contribute to the creation of the "translocal cultural homogeneity necessary for the very existence of nations."⁹³ Guadeloupean nationalist organizations understood this principle well. In 1981, several separatist groups took advantage of the French government deregulation of FM airwaves to launch their own radio stations. The short-lived *Radyo Init  * (Radio Unity) was born that year under the auspices of Luc Reinette, a radical activist involved in the MPGI (*Mouvement Populaire pour une Guadeloupe Ind  pendante*) and its armed corollary, the ARC (*Alliance R  volutionnaire Cara  be*). In September 1982, the UPLG launched *Radyo Tanbou* (Radio Drum) in Pointe-  -Pitre, followed by *Radyo Banbou* (Radio Bamboo) created the following year in Basse-Terre. All three stations were created with the express

⁹¹ Interview with the author, 15 July 2009.

⁹² *Imagined Communities*, 37-46.

⁹³ *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*, 198.

purpose of facilitating the broadcast of nationalist programming and to promote gwoka, both traditional and modern. Lockel's music was featured extensively.⁹⁴

B. Léwòz renaissance

The efforts of the patriotic camp had another effect. Around 1973 or 1974, according to Mounien and Théodore, the UTA and UGTG decided to use the léwòz as a way to foster greater solidarity among union organizers, young militants, and agricultural and industrial workers.⁹⁵ Mounien remembers that the first great léwòz was organized in 1974 near the Grosse Montagne factory in Lamentin (section Bergnolles). The union organizers hired Kristen to lead the gwoka ensemble that evening, possibly the first instance of the professionalization of traditional gwoka. Kristen was, and remains, a legend in the gwoka community. For the union leaders, he was everything they were looking for: an excellent singer from Sainte Rose with a deep knowledge of the tradition but also a socially conscious agricultural worker who joined the UTA early on. Kristen brought with him some of his usual team: Vincent Blancus and master boulayen Délos. According to Mounien, that evening was also marked by the first ever meeting between Kristen and the great makè from Pointe-à-Pitre, Vélo.⁹⁶

The léwòz, with its participatory aesthetics, was an ideal vehicle to promote national consciousness. As Turino explained about *chimurenga* songs in Zimbabwe, participatory musical practices create a “direct, concrete sense of social synchrony—of singing together and being together.” Elsewhere he notes: “Music and dance [...], during

⁹⁴ Mounien, interview with the author, 15 July 2009; “Radyo Tanbou, Radyo a lendepondans,” *JaKaTa*, September 1982, 5; Anduse, interview with the author, 4 August 2009.

⁹⁵ Mounien, interview with the author, 15 July 2009; Théodore, interview with the author, 3 August 2009.

⁹⁶ Mounien, interview with the author, 15 July 2009.

nationalist rallies, allow people to begin not only to *imagine* the nation, but to have the experience of being part of it.”⁹⁷ Union-sponsored léwòz attracted audiences that extended beyond the immediate local community. By joining in the ring at a léwòz, by singing, clapping hands, and dancing, Guadeloupeans performed their national community and had the visceral experience of being part of it.

These union-sponsored léwòz had several consequences. First, they would greatly accelerate the homogenization of gwoka practices around Guadeloupe. Because nationalist activists desired to unify cultural practices around the island and because they had first elected to focus their attention on the area in northern Basse-Terre, the léwòz of Sainte Rose became the model for union-sponsored léwòz and then for most traditional gwoka manifestations in Guadeloupe and in metropolitan France. Furthermore, Mounien revealed that members of the patriotic camp deliberately invited singers from Grande-Terre to come and participate in léwòz in northern Basse-Terre, thus greatly accelerating the exchange of musical practices between various regions.

Second, the union-sponsored léwòz allowed young militants to discover many great gwoka dancers among the agricultural workers. Many of these dancers, such as Lolo Canfrin, who had only been recognized in their own communities, saw their national status rise quickly. The léwòz attracted many young people who had grown up in urban environments in middle-class families and who had no first-hand knowledge of Guadeloupe’s rural culture. In an interview, dancer Max Diakok, who was raised in

⁹⁷ *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*, 217, 174.

Pointe-à-Pitre by middle-class parents, vividly recalled how he and his friend Patrick

Telchid discovered Kristen when they attended their first léwòz at age 19:

There was a power in the drum, a kind of connection between the marker who never took his eyes off the dancer. The theatricality of the dancers, truly strong characters. And the rhythms! Rhythms that I had never heard! All of this gave me goose bumps! [...] I could feel that this was a universe that appealed to me from inside. There was a strength there! [...] I thought that this was extremely strong. No one was kidding around, no one was pretending. And people were into a total expression of their being. [...] These were characters that I found beautiful.⁹⁸

This was such a powerful experience for Diakok that he decided to dedicate his life to gwoka dancing and has since become a successful professional dancer and choreographer in Paris.

Finally, as the léwòz grew in size, the music was also affected. Both Diakok and Christian Dahomay remember attending very intimate léwòz in the 1970s, with only between 20 and 40 people in attendance. In contrast, according to Mounien, union-sponsored events gathered hundreds if not thousands of people, forcing musicians and organizers to rely on sound systems. In July 2009, I witnessed a discussion between gwoka singer and percussionist André Broussillon and Alain Jean, a nationalist militant and radio personality with a weekly show on Radio Tanbou. Jean took a conservative stance, arguing that the use of amplification had a negative impact on the atmosphere of most léwòz. Broussillon responded that, with large crowds, amplification was a necessity. Over thirty years after the inception of the large scale léwòz, the use of amplification is

⁹⁸ Diakok and Telchid, interview with the author, 27 July 2008.

“Et où, il y avait une puissance dans le tambour, une sorte de connexion entre le marqueur qui quittait pas des yeux le danseur; le danseur qui avait un côté très théâtral, vraiment des personnages très forts. [...] Et les rythmes! Des rythmes que je ne connaissais pas... La chair de poule, tout ça! [...] Je sentais qu'il y avait un univers là qui m'interpellait de l'intérieur. Il y avait une force là! [...] Moi, j'ai trouvé ça très fort et j'ai trouvé qu'il n'y avait pas de rigolade, qu'il n'y avait pas de faire semblant. Et que les gens étaient dans une expression total de leur être. [...] C'étaient des personnages que je trouvais très beaux.”

still a source of contention. Nevertheless, as demonstrated in chapter 1, it now seems almost inconceivable to organize a *léwòz*—no matter how small—without a sizable battery of microphones, speakers and monitors. Not only is the use of electric amplification symptomatic of the professionalization of gwoka, it also brings this participatory music closer to the performance practices associated with cosmopolitan presentational ideals.

IV.A New national consciousness

Ten years after the publication of the AGEF's cultural report, the patriotic camp had managed to significantly impact Guadeloupean culture. Over time, the nationalist motto to think and act as a Guadeloupean ("*penser et agir en Guadeloupéen*"), successfully challenged assimilationist doxa as nationalist ideas spread through the population. As outlined above, these ideas forced a reevaluation of creole culture in Guadeloupean society.

Nationalist efforts were perhaps most successful in the domain of language and education. In her book, Ellen Schnepel documents the debates and political struggles that have surrounded the use of the Creole language in Guadeloupe. Having demonstrated French colonists' contempt for Creole up to the middle of the twentieth century, Schnepel establishes the centrality of the Guadeloupean anti-colonialist movement of the 1960s and '70s in shaping the fight for the institutional recognition of Creole on the island. While groups such as the UTA and UPLG were the first to see Creole both as a strategic tool and as an object of political demands, Schnepel clearly articulates that the struggle for the institutional recognition of that language was shaped by internal debates between

a number of Guadeloupean and Martinican organizations and by often strong confrontations between these organizations and the French state. Nevertheless, the success of the anti-colonialist movement in the domain of language is undeniable. The French *Éducation nationale*, which once promoted physical punishment against students who dared to speak Creole at school, instituted a CAPES (*Certificat d'Aptitude au Professorat de l'Enseignement du Second Degré*) in Creole in 2002. This official certificate opened the door for the integration of Creole language and culture classes in secondary schools' curricula.⁹⁹ It is undeniable that the Creole now occupies a place in Guadeloupean society which would have been hard to imagine in 1946. Not only is Creole taught in schools, teachers in primary schools, no matter their specialty, have the option of teaching in Creole. Furthermore, Creole-language entertainment, once exclusive to nationalist radio stations, has now spread to the state-sponsored RFO. In addition to music sung in Creole, it is now possible to watch TV programs in Creole, go to the theater to see plays in Creole or watch DVDs of the most successful of these plays at home.

Nationalist ideology and militancy likewise managed to transform the Guadeloupean musical field. As chapter 2 illustrated, up to the 1960s, gwoka was performed in three limited contexts. First, it remained a popular form of entertainment among the lower-class population. This was especially true among agricultural workers in rural areas but also among industrial workers and dockers in urban centers such as Pointe-à-Pitre. Second, the music was frequently performed by small groups of musicians

⁹⁹ Schnepel, *In Search of a National Identity*, 233-240.

on market day in most municipalities. These performances were often met with indifference if not outright contempt by middle-class shoppers and the musicians were marginalized. Finally, a number of folkloric ballets performed gwoka for tourists. In this context, the music was divorced from its socio-historical roots.

Today, things are radically different. Over twenty *léwòz* were held in Guadeloupe in July and August 2009 alone. On average, on any given Friday night during the summer, there are at least two or three *léwòz* held concurrently on the island. Many of these events attract hundreds of people. Some, like the *léwòz* organized yearly by retired football star Lilian Thuram, draw thousands of people. This is not to suggest that gwoka can compete with other forms of music for the hearts and euros of the Guadeloupean population. Indeed, most Guadeloupeans would rather go dancing to dancehall, salsa, zouk, konpa, or the latest hits from the US and Europe rather than attend a *léwòz* on a Saturday night. Nonetheless, the *léwòz* has become an obligatory event for any sort of large community celebration such as the *fête municipale* (municipal festival).

As gwoka was brought from the margins of Guadeloupean culture to its center, the claims formulated in nationalist literature went relatively unchallenged, since any challenge faced potential accusations of anti-patriotism. Thus nationalist assertions were allowed to circulate and gradually became articles of faith. I have already outlined and questioned some of these assumptions. They include the idea that gwoka was created by African slaves in the early colonial period, that marooned slaves used drums to communicate, or that gwoka is an atonal music based on a limited set of seven rhythms, each with its own specific meaning.

The following example illustrates how nationalist ideas were allowed to circulate until they became part of a new cultural doxa. In their novel *Un Plat de porc aux bananes vertes*, novelists André and Simone Schwarz-Bart adopted the unconventional spelling “n’goka” to designate the Guadeloupean (and Martinican) drum. They justified this spelling in an endnote:

We were made aware that “N’goka” designates, in the Sango dialect of the shores of the Oubangui, the same sort of instrument, with a similar shape and a similar practice [to the “G’oka”]. Considering the history of the slave trade, it seems lucky to find there an unusual example of total filiation: the object, its technique and its name. We bowed to the ancestral truth of the “*gros tambour*” [big drum] of the French Antilles and thus adopted this orthography for this heir, distant and yet so faithful, to the old “N’goka” drums from Central Africa.¹⁰⁰

The Schwarz-Barts offer no evidence for their statement and, while the word “n’goma” designates drums in several Bantu languages, I have found no evidence of drums called “n’goka” in Central Africa. In addition, as chapter 2 demonstrated, it is impossible to establish direct and unequivocal morphological correspondences between African-derived cultural practices in the New World and their African antecedents. This did not stop Joslen Gabali from citing the Schwarz-Barts’ etymology in his book on gwoka.¹⁰¹ By 2007, the reference to N’Goka had traveled to North America and appeared

¹⁰⁰ Simone et André Schwarz-Bart, *Un plat de porc au bananes vertes*, 222.

“Nous avons pris la liberté de transcrire ainsi le terme désignant le “G’oka” des Antilles (“Bélai” de Martinique). En effet, il nous est parvenu que “N’goka” recouvre, en dialecte Sango des rives de l’Oubangui, le même instrument et de forme identique, d’interprétation voisine. Y ayant chance — considérée l’histoire de la traite — que nous nous trouvions là devant un cas peu commun de filiation totale — l’objet, sa technique, son nom — nous avons cru devoir nous soumettre à la vérité ancestrale du “gros tambour” des Antilles françaises, en orthographiant, de la sorte, l’héritier si lointain et pourtant si fidèle des vieux tambours “N’goka” de l’Afrique centrale.”

¹⁰¹ Gabali, *Diadyéé*, 89-90. Gabali also echoes Lockel’s claims about gwoka’s atonality, 34.

in a *DownBeat* interview with saxophonist Jacques Schwarz-Bart, André and Simone Schwarz-Bart's son.¹⁰²

Beyond a simple matter of etymology, the Schwarz-Barts' claim also illustrates another important aspect of nationalist doxa: the importance of race in the new Guadeloupean identity. If we accept Anderson's postulate that nations are imagined communities along with Chatterjee's advice to pay attention to the specificities of local manifestations of nationalism, we need to ask ourselves what kind of community Guadeloupean nationalists imagined.¹⁰³

The answer to this question is rather elusive. As Burton points out, political organizations in the French West Indies sought national unity by balancing racial and class solidarities. In Martinique, Aimé Césaire's *négritude*, an ideology based on race unity, directly challenged the Communist party's class solidarity. However, Césaire never had the same kind of influence in Guadeloupe as in Martinique. The PCG, and the unions associated with it, based their ideology on an imagined class solidarity between Guadeloupean and metropolitan workers.¹⁰⁴ The AGEF found itself in the difficult situation of seeking to distance itself from the PCG without straying too far from the communist discourse of class struggle. As discussed earlier, the AGEF's new culture, and by extension the new Guadeloupean identity, was centered on an embrace of peasant cultural expressions: language and music. On the surface, this was a class-based national

¹⁰² Murph, "Players: Jacques Schwarz-Bart: Gwoka Bridge," *DownBeat*, 24.

¹⁰³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and The Nation and Its Fragment*.

¹⁰⁴ Burton, "The Idea of Difference in Contemporary French West Indian Thought," 150.

model and the cultural report actually criticized *négritude* for approaching the Antillean cultural question from a race angle rather than a class angle.

Yet the details of the AGEG's proposal and the way it became translated on the ground suggest a different interpretation. For the AGEG, Guadeloupean culture arose from slave resistance to colonial oppression.¹⁰⁵ In this context, slavery was interpreted as a class, rather than a racial, struggle. Yet because the AGEG's report all but ignores indentured laborers (be they French or Indian) and focuses instead on black chattel slavery, its analysis of Guadeloupean culture privileges African-derived elements. Stated bluntly, the AGEG's cultural report suggests that only Afro-Guadeloupean cultural expressions are truly Guadeloupean. Burton rightly states:

For Guadeloupean nationalists, the African-ness that is believed to constitute the core of Guadeloupeanité is expressed most fully through Creole and the the *gros-ka*, the African derived style of drumming which is systematically opposed in much nationalist discourse to the allegedly 'French', 'assimilated' or 'doudouiste' music of the *biguine*.¹⁰⁶

Even if the AGEG tried to preserve class solidarity over racial unity, the ideas about race presented in the report were soon echoed and amplified in other writings. Most noticeably, Joslen Gabali repeated Lockel's claim that *gwoka* is atonal but added that this was a characteristic shared with African musics. In addition to embracing the Schwarz-Barts' African etymology of "gwoka," Gabali also argued that *gwoka* was a music developed by the *nèg mawon* based on retentions of Guinean musical practices. He went on to criticize *biguine* because of its European elements and denounced quadrille as

¹⁰⁵ *Rapport culturel*, 8; Théodore, interview with the author, 3 August 2009.

¹⁰⁶ Burton, "The Idea of Difference," 151

assimilationist.¹⁰⁷ More broadly, several people quoted in Bébel-Gislert's *Devenir ce que nous sommes* celebrated blackness and the Creole language as essential characteristics of their Guadeloupeanness.¹⁰⁸

By establishing Creole and the gwoka as the cornerstones of Guadeloupean culture, nationalist organizations subsumed other cultural expressions, most importantly those of the archipelago's important East Indian population. The AGEG's cultural report devotes a meager paragraph to Indian music in which they recognize the survival of musical forms in Indian religious ceremonies such as the *mayémin*. However, they immediately dismiss the importance of these practices by asserting that Indo-Guadeloupeans play gwoka outside of these ceremonies. Burton offers the following conclusions:

Though the language of class has certainly not been jettisoned, it is clear that for GONG and for later independentist groups such as the [UPLG] and the [MPGI], "blackness" or "African-ness" are seen as essential components of "Guadeloupéanité", raising obvious problems as far as the department's substantial Indian minority (not to mention its significant "petit blanc" population) is concerned.¹⁰⁹

I argue that, caught between race unity and class solidarity, Guadeloupean nationalists associated with the AGEG suggested a national model based on a strategic over-simplification of the Guadeloupean social structure. While it is true that, as in many other Caribbean societies, there is much overlap between racial and class categories, the presence in Guadeloupe of an important East-Indian population and a historically poor

¹⁰⁷ Gabali, *Diadyéé*, 35, 90-94, 136.

¹⁰⁸ *Devenir ce qui nous sommes*, 204-205.

¹⁰⁹ Burton, "The Idea of Difference," 150.

white population (*blancs matignons*) complicates matters greatly. Rather than foster national unity, the Afro-Creole national community imagined by the AGEF, the GONG or the UPLG invited the emergence of divisive discourses, discourses that would explode in 2009, as Guadeloupeans involved in the general strike marched through the streets of Pointe à Pitre singing: “*La gwadloup sé tan nou, la Gwadeloup sé pa ta yo!*” (Guadeloupe is ours, Guadeloupe is not theirs). As the LKP (Lyannaj Kont Pwofitasyon, Alliance against profiteering) leaders, many of them with ties to the UGTG, attempted to define the “*nou*” and the “*yo*” along class lines, the racial politics of the 1960s and ‘70s led some in the white and Indian communities to feel particularly excluded if not altogether threatened.¹¹⁰

Not only did nationalist organizations fail to reconcile class and racial identities, they insisted on presenting French and Guadeloupean culture as opposite rather than complementary or enmeshed. The Guadeloupean situation belies Shalini Puri’s statement that Caribbean nationalisms embraced hybridity as a defining characteristic.¹¹¹ Dany Bébel-Gislert’s analysis of a televised debate that, in 1980, opposed a representative of the French ministry of culture and several Guadeloupean intellectuals is revealing. In her book, Bébel-Gislert attacks the position defended by Laurent Farrugia—a communist philosophy teacher sympathetic to the independence movement—that Guadeloupean culture is the result of three hundred years of evolution and that it is both French and “profoundly Guadeloupean.”¹¹² Bébel-Gislert responds: “We need to put an end to this

¹¹⁰ “*Lagwadeloup ant nou é yo*” Problématiques et enjeux de la questions identitaire” (debate, Festival Gwoka, Sainte Anne, 11 July 2009).

¹¹¹ Puri, *The Caribbean Postcolonial*, 43-46.

¹¹² Farrugia cited in Bébel-Gislert, *Le Défi culturel guadeloupéen*, 189.

pseudo-theory of parcelization, this image of the Antillean composed of several juxtaposed pieces.”¹¹³ She goes on to denounce Farrugia’s ideas as racist, explaining that splitting Guadeloupean culture into several parts threatens to destroy it altogether. This reasoning echoes Gérard Lockel’s rejection of biguine, a hybridized form of music, as colonial rather than truly Guadeloupean.

We should certainly not confuse parcelization (the idea that cultural elements coexist without interacting) with syncretism. However, it is undeniable that, at least early on, Guadeloupean nationalists presented their culture as resulting from a struggle between colonial French and African-derived elements, an opposition that left no room for hybridity. Alex Nabis’s testimony in *Devenir ce que nous sommes* is enlightening in this regard.

To be Guadeloupean is to accept to struggle against yourself in order to realize your identity. When someone tells me “you are not Guadeloupean,” or “this is Guadeloupean,” he repeats a political slogan. Me, I do not seek to lean on political slogans on my own quest. I say: “We are in a country, Guadeloupe. We live a conflict between two cultures, a dominating French culture and creole culture, which has been crushed. Since I find myself in creole culture, I am engaged in a struggle against myself so that it can go from being dominated to being equal and, possibly, become dominant.”¹¹⁴

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 190.

“Il faut en finir avec cette pseudo-théorie des parts : cette image de l’Antillais composé de plusieurs morceaux juxtaposés.”

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 196-197.

“Est Guadeloupéen celui qui accepte de lutter contre lui-même pour le devenir. Quand quelqu’un vient me dire ‘tu n’es pas guadeloupéen’ et ‘ça c’est guadeloupéen,’ il répète un slogan politique. Moi, dans ce que je fais, je ne cherche pas à m’appuyer sur des slogans politiques. Je dis: nous sommes dans un pays, la Guadeloupe. Nous vivons un conflit entre deux cultures, la culture française qui domine, la culture créole qui est écrasée. Comme moi je me reconnais dans la culture créole, je mène un combat avec moi-même pour que celle-ci passe du stade de dominée au stade égalitaire pour, à la limite, devenir dominante elle-même.”

Even as Nabis tries to distance himself from nationalist political discourse, he defines Guadeloupean/creole culture in a quasi-neurotic opposition to French culture. It seems clear that Nabis's conception of "creole" makes little room for syncretization or hybridity.

In addition, the desire for national specificity led many in Guadeloupe to distance themselves from other Caribbean cultures, especially those of Martinique and Haiti. For example, Bébel-Gislert cites a young Guadeloupean woman who admits to seeing similarities between herself and people from Dominica or Haiti but not with Martinicans because "their ways are different than ours."¹¹⁵ On the other hand, Jocelyn Guilbault points out that *zouk*, the popular music style that emerged in the French West Indies in the 1980s, was created in reaction to a perceived invasion by Haitian *konpa* and it is not surprising that originally this new music put the gwoka (drum) at the center of its rhythmic foundation.¹¹⁶

I would argue that Guadeloupean nationalism's desire for a specific identity rooted in a unified and unique culture failed to create a united community for several reasons. It significantly limited Guadeloupean cultural imagination, excluding some important cultural expressions while exaggerating tensions between others. For example, this nationalist model does not make room for someone to enjoy both gwoka and European art music. Furthermore, its rejection of hybridity not only made cultural, and by extension national, reconciliation impossible, it also curtailed potential exchanges and

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 204.

"Un Guadeloupéen est quelqu'un né ici, quelle que soit sa race. C'est ma langue, le créole, qui montre que je suis guadeloupéenne. Un Haïtien, un Dominicain, ne sont pas des étrangers pour moi. Les Martiniquais oui. Leurs manières sont différentes des nôtres."

¹¹⁶ Guilbault, *Zouk*, 20-37.

bridges with other Caribbean nations. As we will see later, it took a new generation to successfully challenge these limitations.

V. Unfulfilled dreams of independence

A. A movement divided

In order to understand the evolution of Guadeloupean attitudes towards gwoka and gwoka-based musics at the turn of the twenty-first century, we need to consider the gradual weakening of nationalist politics in the 1980s and '90s. In an article printed in *Les Temps Modernes* in 1983, representatives from the UPLG declared that the election of the socialist François Mitterrand to the French presidency in 1981 did not alter the political situation of Guadeloupe in any significant way. In the eyes of the UPLG, the island remained a French colony and the new government made it clear that its support for anti-imperialist movements in Africa and Asia did not apply to the “old colonies.”¹¹⁷

Greater historical distance reveals a very different situation. Mitterrand understood the importance of culture to nationalist movements in Brittany, Corsica, and the French Antilles. Cyrille explains: “Mitterrand proclaimed that the nation was made out of regions —among which the overseas departments — and each had its specificity. He therefore encouraged the use of regional cultural expressions. These new, and highly effective, cultural politics were part of the socialist project to protect the integrity of the nation and silence discrepant voices.”¹¹⁸ Mitterrand’s *politique des régions* opened the door for the promotion and institutionalization of regional cultural forms.

Regionalization, in turn, deprived the Guadeloupean nationalist movement of its most

¹¹⁷ “La Situation Politique en Guadeloupe,” *Les Temps Modernes*, 1961-1967.

¹¹⁸ “Black Music Diaspora: A French-Caribbean Perspective.”

important foil.¹¹⁹ With the French government subsidizing many cultural events and welcoming the study of regional cultures and languages within its schools, it was difficult for anyone to continue arguing that creole culture was being oppressed.

In December 1981, the patriotic camp, which had previously been loosely united under the leadership of the underground PTG, formerly came together within the MUFLNG (*Mouvement pour l'Unification des Forces de Libération Nationale Guadeloupéenne*).¹²⁰ Yet the movement faced important internal divisions. Thierry Césaire's carefully chosen words are revealing: "When you organize something to form a front, once everything is organized, decisions need to be made. And in the 1980s, these were very difficult decisions to make. The movement splintered at that moment."¹²¹ The decisions alluded to here are twofold. Should the patriotic camp expand its participation in local or national elections? Conversely, should it escalate its armed campaign?

These questions were debated at length. The UPLG stuck to its decision to participate in local elections if appropriate to their local strategies. Here again, we see how the UPLG's strategy was actually rooted in positions developed by previous nationalist organizations such as the AGEF, the GONG, and the CPNJG (*Comité Populaire Nationale de la Jeunesse Guadeloupéenne*). In one of its foundational texts in 1963, the GONG articulated a political strategy based on participation in local elections

¹¹⁹ Frédéric Bobin, "Les Indépendantistes d'Outre-Mer se muent en gestionnaires," *Le Monde*, 31 October 1994.

¹²⁰ "La Situation politique en Guadeloupe," *Les Temps Modernes*, 1961.

¹²¹ Césaire, interview with the author, 13 July 2009.

"C'est que quand tu organises quelque chose pour arriver à un front, une fois que tout est organisé, il faut quelque fois prendre des décisions. Et dans les années 80, il y avait des décisions qui étaient très difficiles à prendre. Et le mouvement s'est un petit peu effrité à ce moment là."

and a boycott of national polls. In 1968, following its eighth congress, the AGEF echoed this position, calling for abstention during all presidential and legislative elections but arguing that municipal and cantonal elections should be used to promote the revolutionary cause. It highlighted the importance of electing nationalist representatives to the Conseil Général (departmental congress) in order to promote a nationalist agenda and attack what the French colonial system from within. In 1983, the UPLG supported the candidacy of several pro-independence candidates in several municipal elections including Sainte Rose, Port Louis, Sainte Anne, and Le Moule. However, no candidates affiliated with the UPLG ran in the 1985 cantonal elections and, in 1986, the UPLG refused to participate in all elections, including the regional elections, a position that no doubt confused many of its supporters.¹²²

What was behind this apparent shift? “There was a big debate,” explained Thierry Césaire, “there were some disagreements.”¹²³ Théodore elaborated, using the example of Jean Barfleur. Barfleur had been active within the patriotic camp as co-creator of the CPNJG in 1964. In 1983, Barfleur successfully ran for mayor in Port Louis. For Théodore, Barfleur illustrates a basic split within the patriotic camp. While Théodore and others continued to see the struggle for independence as a global battle that included economic, political and cultural fronts, Barfleur represented another current that wished to focus on a purely political strategy.¹²⁴ The shifting political strategy of the UPLG may

¹²² *L’UPLG et les élections*, 19-52.

¹²³ Interview with the author, 13 July 2009.
“Ça a été un vaste débat. C’est une des divergences [au sein du camp patriotique].”

¹²⁴ Interview with the author, 3 August 2009.

reflect a desire to tailor its strategy to each individual poll, but it also betrays the internal tensions within the patriotic camp.

Dany Bebel-Gislert also believes that the patriotic camp's electoral strategies may have ultimately hurt its credibility. If agricultural workers had been quick to put their trust in the new unions following the creation of the UTA, they seemed reluctant to transfer that trust from the social to the political field. According to Bebel-Gislert, workers had put union leaders on a pedestal which their involvement in the murky world of politics threatened. In addition, her interviews with Guadeloupean workers suggest that these workers may have felt disconnected from politics overall or at least did not see the connection between the social movement in which they were involved and the political demands that accompanied that movement. Workers preferred to let nationalist leaders deal with political issues without getting involved themselves. Bebel-Gislert identifies a third reason why the union grassroots may have been reluctant to follow pro-independence activists' political strategies. She explains that, as corrupt as the political system may have been in Guadeloupe, many workers had developed strategies of opposition within this system. They knew how to manipulate the system to get whatever advantages were available to them. Some may have feared that, once they took control of city halls around the archipelago, nationalist politicians would prove less accommodating.¹²⁵

In addition to all these factors, it is possible that changes in the movement's leadership also contributed to widening the gap between political activists and the new

¹²⁵ Bebel-Gislert, *Le Déficit culturel guadeloupéen*, 175-181.

unions' grassroots. Bebel-Gislert sees a turning point in the second congress of the UGTG in 1978, when the organization adopted a new platform in which the fight for national liberation took precedence over class-based social activism. In its pursuit of independence, the patriotic camp's leadership was willing to ally itself with activists coming from the *petite bourgeoisie* against which many workers had been struggling. According to Bebel-Gislert, for some agricultural workers, "*sa pa désann*," they couldn't swallow it.¹²⁶

Thierry Césaire agrees that there was a definite *embourgeoisement* of the movement's leadership starting the late 1970s. He explained: "All of the old leaders, all the leaders of the AGEG often came from lower-class families. So their goal was to rise to white-collar positions, to become middle-class. And when you get there, you no longer live in the same manner."¹²⁷ The AGEG had sown the seeds of this problem by recruiting future white collar workers to become the next generation of social and political activists. However, Césaire points out that Guadeloupean society as a whole was becoming more middle-class due to rapid modernization and transformation of the economy. It appears that the patriotic camp was caught in a contradiction. Modernization and the collapse of the traditional agricultural economy and lifeways had fueled the emergence of nationalist sentiment. However, nationalist leaders were an integral part of this process of modernization as they found careers in the service industry as lawyers, teachers, and

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 176,179.

¹²⁷ Interview with the author, 13 July 2009

"Tous ces anciens cadres, tous ces cadres de l'AGEG souvent venaient de familles très modestes. Donc l'aboutissement, c'était de devenir un cadre dans la vie, c'était de devenir un bourgeois. Donc, arrivé à ce moment là, on vit plus de la même façon."

doctors and embraced a modernist-reformist cultural program.¹²⁸ These careers put them at odds with the agricultural workers whose livelihood and culture they had set out to defend.

If some militants within the patriotic camp sought to challenge Guadeloupe's status at the ballot box, others advocated for more direct and violent confrontation with the French state. The radical GLA (Groupement de Libération Armée), founded by Luc Reinette in 1979, spawned the MPGI and the ARC in the early 1980s. These organizations engaged in a series of terrorist attacks, with the ARC claiming responsibility for all attacks between 1983 and 1986.¹²⁹ Even though organizations with links to the PTG, such as the UPLG, never ruled out occasional recourse to violent actions against symbolic targets, they understood that such actions as the ARC's bombing of the French préfecture in Basse-Terre, which injured twenty-three people, would alienate most of the Guadeloupean population. In addition, PTG militants were aware of the danger of engaging in an armed conflict with the French state. As one of them commented off-record, they were trapped on a small island and no match for the French military. An all-out conflict with French forces would only bring suffering to the Guadeloupean population and result in the annihilation of the independence movement.

¹²⁸ Cotellon is a lawyer, Césaire is a university professor, Anduse is a medical doctor. In contrast, as of 2009, Théodore was the manager of an agricultural cooperative of pineapple growers.

¹²⁹ Eddy Nedeljkovic, "Les indépendantistes de Guadeloupe tentent d'enrayer le déclin de leur mouvement," *Le Monde*; Pascal Ceaux, "Les indépendantistes guadeloupéens relèvent la tête," *Le Monde*. Luc Reinette was arrested in 1985, escaped from the Basse-Terre jail, was captured again in St. Vincent in 1987, extradited to France where he spent two years in jail before benefiting from a presidential pardon in 1989. In a strange compromise between nationalist demands and middle-class aspirations, Reinette now works for the French government's subsidized housing agency (HLM).

By the mid-1980s, even as the independence movement seemed to be at its most active, it suffered from several internal divisions. The most significant opposed the armed-conflict strategy of the MPGI to the political strategy of the UPLG. Even within the UPLG, militants were divided as to the extent to which the organization should engage in the French political process. In addition, there was a growing social gap between the middle-class nationalist leadership and the proletariat that formed the backbone of nationalist unions. These elements, combined with Mitterrand's decentralization, dealt a serious blow to the Guadeloupean independence movement. According to journalist Eddy Nedeljkovic, by 1994, the UPLG's membership was down to about a tenth of its peak enrollment ten years earlier.¹³⁰

B. Lockel: A prophet without a church

Up until the general strike organized by the LKP (*Lyannaj Kont Pwofitsyon*), which paralyzed the island for forty four days in 2009, it seemed that decentralization had all but put an end to any serious demands for status change in Guadeloupe. Faced with Mitterrand's new policies, the *camp patriotique* stood divided and incapable to agree on an effective strategy. Although its political legacy seemed uncertain, its social legacy was firmly established thanks to the popularity of the new unions. Culturally, the movement had also successfully reframed the discourse about Guadeloupean identity. The Creole language and the gwoka, once denigrated, were now held as essential national attributes.

What of Gérard Lockel's legacy? The guitarist's modernist aesthetics failed to attract much popular success. In an effort to increase gwoka modènn's popular appeal, Alza Bordin encouraged Lockel to play music that would be more danceable, to no

¹³⁰ "Les indépendantistes de la Guadeloupe tentent d'enrayer le déclin de leur mouvement."

avail.¹³¹ Even guitarist Ruddy Selbonne, now a devoted gwoka modènn disciple, admits that he was taken aback when he first heard one of Lockel's recordings.¹³² In addition, Lockel proved too uncompromising to accept students or to work with many musicians. Flautist Christian Dahomay reported that when he approached Lockel, the guitarist sat him down and informed him that before they could talk about music, they would have to talk about politics. Dahomay—who in spite of being sympathetic to the independence cause refuses to put his music at the service of a single political party—immediately ended the conversation. For years, saxophonist Jean-Fred Castry was left to work out of Lockel's book without any direct guidance before the guitarist finally agreed to mentor him and eventually integrate him into his group.¹³³

Over time, Lockel found himself more and more isolated. For awhile, Lockel was able to live off of donations from various militants who attended Saturday night concerts at his house, which he had renamed the *Foyer de Résistance Culturelle* (Community Center for Cultural Resistance). The crowds gradually dwindled and the concerts became less frequent. They are now extremely rare. While the guitarist once performed every Saturday, now his only regular performance happens once a year when Baie Mahault, the city where he resides, holds its *fête municipale*. Many of the musicians who have performed with Lockel over the years have either left the group or passed away. His two sons, Jean-Marie on drums and Franck on piano, are the only keepers of the flame left. Their impact on Guadeloupean music is limited though because they only perform at

¹³¹ Bordin, interview with the author, 25 July 2009.

¹³² Interview with the author, 8 August 2008.

¹³³ Castry, interview with the author, 7 August 2008.

their father's request. When I attended Lockel's annual concert in 2008, only nine people were in attendance.

Yet Lockel's influence extended beyond his impact on the nationalist ideology of the AGEG and UPLG. Many militants, musicians and non-musicians alike, purchased his treatise. While most people found it rather impenetrable, others were inspired by its thoroughness and authority. Many musicians who had been playing other styles of music started practicing its exercises. The GKM stimulated the imagination of other musicians who soon came up with their own versions of instrumental gwoka. With the exception of the groups led by singer Guy Konket, whose trajectory seemed completely independent of Lockel's, most instrumental gwoka groups either defined their music in opposition to the guitarist's or endeavored to incorporate his ideas to various degrees. Among the latter, we should single out the work of flautist Olivier Vamur with the group Horizon, guitarist Christian Lavisio, and the group Eritaj (Legacy), created a few years ago to carry the gwoka modènn torch.

Conceived in reaction to the assimilationist ideology which had led to the 1946 law of departmentalization, the Guadeloupean separatist movement was steeped in nationalist ideology. This brand of Guadeloupean nationalism was a local manifestation of a modernist-socialist cosmopolitan formation, most specifically a Marxist-Maoist branch of this formation, which Guadeloupean students acquired through their contacts with African and Asian students in metropolitan France. Far from embracing hybridity, Guadeloupean separatist thinkers argued for the existence of an essentially stable

Guadeloupean nation. Indeed, they conceived their national identity as rooted in cultural practices of African origins and in opposition to French-colonialist culture.

Culturally, Guadeloupean separatists focused their efforts on promoting Creole and gwoka. In keeping with broader patterns of postcolonial nationalism, they adopted a modernist-reformist agenda which was manifested in music by the creation of gwoka modènn. The brainchild of guitarist Gérard Lockel, gwoka modènn is an uncompromising expression of a musical ideological process in which most aesthetic decisions are politically motivated.

Even if Guadeloupean independence remains an unfulfilled dream, Guadeloupean nationalism has had a profound cultural impact. Yet the cultural program of the *camp patriotique* was not adopted wholesale. In the following chapter, I will demonstrate how these ideas coalesced into a Guadeloupean habitus as musicians—inspired by Lockel’s work—debated, adapted, or adopted different parts of his proposal and put forward alternative interpretations of modernist-reformism.

Chapter 4

“Kyembé rèd!”: Gwoka and the Guadeloupean national imaginary

Gérard Lockel presents a bit of a paradox. At the same time that he was developing gwoka modènn, rehearsing and touring with his groups, and working with the *camp patriotique* to promote Guadeloupean independence, he was also jealously guarding his creation. He trained a select few musicians with whom to perform. He waited almost seven years to release his first album. His proclaimed dream of transforming his Foyer de Résistance Culturel into a Guadeloupean national conservatory never became reality, probably in part because of a lack of institutional support, but also because the guitarist himself proved a reluctant teacher. He wrote a treatise that many found too esoteric to be an effective learning tool. Olivier Vamur, now an accomplished *modènn* flautist, practiced exercises from Lockel’s book for years before a friend who played with Lockel finally let him know that he did so incorrectly. Commenting on his contacts with Lockel, Vamur declared: “No musical information filtered through. [...] That is to say, everything that Lockel did was like a secret.”¹

During the 1970s and early 1980s, when salsa and Haitian *konpa* dominated Antillean popular music taste, nationalist discourse influenced a generation of musicians to turn their attention to gwoka. Lockel’s refusal to share his vision left a void. Christian Dahomay explains: “The people needed stars, the people needed a beacon. And Lockel

¹ Interview with the author, 8 August 2009.

“Il n’y avait pas d’information musicale qui filtrait. [...] C’est à dire tout ce que faisait Lockel, c’était du secret, de l’ordre du secret, quoi.”

refused to play this role.”² Singer and songwriter Guy Konket became such a beacon. His song “Kyembé rèd” (Hold on) threatened to displace Lockel’s anthem “Lindépandans” as an anticolonialist battle cry at a time when a series of often violent strikes shook Guadeloupe. Gwoka groups, both traditional and instrumental, multiplied in Guadeloupe and in France. While a few of these groups had direct ties with the organizations within the *camp patriotique*, most did not. This situation invites an investigation of Guadeloupean nationalism from below, a counterbalance to the official discourse of the separatist leadership.

In a way, the work of Lockel, the AGEF, and the UPLG offered an exceptional example of musical nationalism as defined by Turino, a model in which the music exists in virtual symbiosis with a nationalist political project. However, Kelly M. Askew and Shannon Dudley each point out a significant problem with Turino’s definition of nationalism as a project of state-building, fundamentally different from national sentiment, or what Arjun Appadurai calls patriotism and what I refer to as national consciousness. Indeed, as Dudley points out, the separation between nation building and national consciousness is artificial, since the success of the former hinges on the existence of the latter. In addition, both Dudley and Askew warn that such an approach tends to privilege the agency of political leaders and ignore the contribution of the citizenry.³

² Interview with the author and Guy Konket, 4 August 2008.
“Pép-la bizwen dé vedét, pép-la bizwen dé repè. E Lockel réfizé de jwé ròl-lasa.”

³ Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 158-177; Askew, *Performing the Nation*, 9-13; Dudley, *Music Beyond the Bridge*, 264-267; Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music*, 13.

In response to top-down approaches to the study of nationalism, Askew proposes the following:

Rather than an abstract ideology produced by some to be consumed by others, nationalism ought to be conceptualized as a series of continually negotiated relationships between people who share occupancy in a defined geographic, political, or ideological space.⁴

In this, Askew echoes Verdery's conceptualization of nationalism as an ideological process.⁵ Such a focus, claims Askew, exposes the internal contestations and variants that, together with the official discourse, form the local manifestation of nationalism.

In this chapter, we turn our attention to the construction of the Guadeloupean "national imaginary," to borrow from Askew's terminology. In contrast to Anderson's "imagined community," which implied "a finality not reflected in real life," Askew defines the "national imaginary" as "the multiple and often contradictory layers and fragments of ideology that underlie continually shifting conceptions of any given nation."⁶ Starting in the 1970s, gwoka became an important site where conceptions of the Guadeloupean nation were not only debated but also performed. I argue that these debates increased gwoka's cultural capital and managed to transform the Guadeloupean habitus.

I start this exploration of the Guadeloupean nationalist ideological process in Grosse Montagne, in northern Basse-Terre. There, in 1975, a violent strike set agricultural and industrial workers against landowners, factory management, local political representatives of the French state, and the police. Not only did this strike

⁴ *Performing the Nation*, 12.

⁵ *National Ideology Under Communism*, 9.

⁶ *Performing the Nation*, 273.

encapsulate the social climate in Guadeloupe at the time, it also witnessed the emergence of Chérubin Céleste, a Catholic priest, as a charismatic voice for Guadeloupean independence. In 1984, Céleste went on to celebrate the funeral mass for Vélo, the legendary but destitute makè from Pointe-à-Pitre. Vélo's funeral highlighted the explosion of gwoka into the Guadeloupean national imaginary.

As gwoka affirmed itself into the Guadeloupean imaginary, gwoka groups multiplied in metropolitan France and on the archipelago, further reinforcing gwoka's cultural capital. These groups engaged in sometimes virulent and antagonistic debates as they interpreted—that is to say understood and explained verbally, but also performed musically—various visions of Guadeloupean nationalism. In performance and in pedagogy, musicians were faced with important questions. Should they focus their efforts on codifying traditional gwoka practices, preserving the music and dance from future corruption? Or should they celebrate the music's tradition of innovation, its capacity to absorb outside influences and generate new practices? Should they follow Lockel's model and develop musical systems that celebrate, even exacerbate, gwoka's local specificity? Or should gwoka partake in cosmopolitan musical formations?

I will explore these questions through the work of key performers and educators, focusing more closely on the career and influence of Guy Konkèt. If Lockel was a leading intellectual and ideologue in the Guadeloupean separatist movement, Konkèt became the movement's griot, capturing the mood and struggle of the island in his songs. Yet Konkèt's approach to music was very different from Lockel's. While Lockel insisted on a segregation of Guadeloupe's various musical traditions, Konkèt seemed to celebrate

what Marie-Céline Lafontaine called the “unity and diversity” of Guadeloupean musical practices, restoring gwoka within a creole continuum.⁷

I conclude this chapter in Paris in 1978, with the creation and short life of the group Tumblack under the patronage of fashion designer Paco Rabanne. The members of Tumblack found themselves in a difficult position as they tried to affirm their national identity, find popular and financial success, and negotiate Rabanne’s exoticist discourse.

I. Striking the drum amidst labor strikes: Guadeloupe in the 1970s and ’80s

A. Chérubin Céleste: Nationalism, Religion, and Modernist Reformism

The patriotic camp gained a powerful ally when Chérubin Céleste, a priest from northern Basse-Terre, rallied to the support of agricultural workers and independence politics. At a time when the Catholic Church in Guadeloupe seemed content with the political and social status quo, Father Céleste was greatly troubled by the French government’s response to the events of 1967.⁸ The labor movements of 1971 and 1975 further strengthened his desire to support striking workers and the nationalist unions that represented them. The events of 1975 were an especially strong catalyst. In February 1975, the UTA and UPG led a strike among sugar cane fieldworkers to ask for a 5% raise and the parity of the SMAG (*Salaire Minimum Agricole Garanti*/Guaranteed Minimum Agricultural Wage) and the SMIC (*Salaire Minimum Interprofessionnel de Croissance*/Minimum Inter-professional Growth Wage), essentially demanding equal minimum

⁷ Lafontaine, “Unité et diversité des musiques traditionnelles guadeloupéennes.”

⁸ Farrugia describes the conservative attitude of the Church in *Le fait national guadeloupéen*, 16.

wages for agricultural, industrial, and service workers.⁹ After several weeks of work disruptions, landowners and factory management, with the support of the *Préfet*, remained unwilling to meet the unions' demands. In March, the conflict escalated when the owner of the cane processing plant in Grosse Montagne decided to evict striking workers from his land.¹⁰

Father Céleste saw the defense of oppressed workers as part of his pastoral duties. Witnessing the situation in Grosse Montagne, the priest began a hunger strike to bring representatives of the government and private management back to the negotiating table (Figure 4.1). He took up temporary residence in Grosse-Montagne's chapel which then became a meeting point for members of the UTA, UPG, and UGTG along with members of nationalist Christian organizations such as the MRJC (*Mouvement Rural de Jeunesse Chrétienne*). Energized by Céleste's hunger strike, sugar cane workers around the island ceased work. Meanwhile, the local government-controlled media circulated fake reports of widespread violence in order to discredit the strikers. In an attempt to behead the movement, the *Préfet* ordered the CRS (*Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité*, France's antiriot police) to storm the chapel in Grosse Montagne and arrest Céleste. The priest barely managed to escape by hiding in an ambulance. Faced with growing popular anger, the *Préfet* quickly reversed his position and convened factory and land owners, union representatives, and government officials to a round table. Father Céleste ended his

⁹ Up to this point, the minimum wage was lower for agricultural workers than in other economic sectors.

¹⁰ Agricultural workers in this area were generally housed on the *habitation* (plantation) for which they worked.

“Chrétien, donc indépendantiste: Entretien avec Chérubin Céleste,” *Les Temps Modernes*, 1946-1960.



Figure 4.1: Father Céleste reflects on his hunger strike in the pages of the separatist newspaper *JaKaTa*, April 1980.

hunger strike and most of the unions' demands were met.¹¹

The standoff between the government and nationalist unions during the 1975 strike had led to the arrest and trial of the UTA general secretary, Nomertin Thernusien. The trial sent a shockwave through Guadeloupe as the defendant and all of his witnesses refused to address the court in French.¹² Nationalist militants had managed to force Creole into the French justice system. A few years earlier, around 1972, Father Céleste had achieved a similar coup when he began serving mass in Creole instead of French and introduced the gwoka into the Catholic service, a daring move given the music's association with sin and secularity as well as the Church's assimilationist stance. Again, the priest saw it as his pastoral duty to combat cultural alienation. He explained the benefits of using Creole in church:

It is easier to understand the text and it allows us to escape the religious mysticism associated with the use of French. Furthermore, by speaking our own language in church, we get reconciled with ourselves. It helps us assert our identity and be more comfortable with it, especially since we use Creole to discuss our relation to God and to each other. It seems to me that, for the poor people who attend our church, this is a special way for them to valorize their culture and to assert their identity after centuries of contempt caused by slavery and assimilation.¹³

For Father Céleste, the use of Creole and gwoka was but the first step in a broader theological reflection aimed at adapting Catholicism to Guadeloupean culture.

¹¹ "Chrétien, donc indépendantiste: Entretien avec Chérubin Céleste," *Les Temps Modernes*, 1946-1960; "Dossier No. 1: Les Grandes dates du mouvement syndical," *JaKaTa*, Mai 1980, 4.

¹² Bébel-Gislert, *Le déficit culturel*, 124-128.

¹³ *Les Temps Modernes*, 1954

"La compréhension du texte a été rendue plus facile et a permis de sortir de la mystification religieuse entretenue par le Français. Et puis, cette pratique de notre langue à l'Eglise nous réconcilie avec nous-même, nous aide à nous affirmer dans notre identité, d'autant plus que c'est à propos de notre relation avec Dieu et les autres que nous l'utilisons. Il me semble que, pour les pauvres qui fréquentent notre église, c'est un chemin privilégié pour les aider à se valoriser et à s'affirmer dans leur identité méprisée pendant des siècles d'esclavage et d'assimilation."

Interestingly, in a fairly conservative demonstration of his own allegiance, this effort did not involve an embrace of syncretic religious expressions, which Céleste described as “mysticism.” Rather, the priest hoped that, by presenting Catholic texts in Creole, his parishioners would better understand the Church’s dogma, leading them to more thoroughly embrace Catholic beliefs and practices, and turn their back on the *gadéd zafè*.¹⁴ Thus, Céleste’s embrace of gwoka and Creole was symptomatic of his own adherence to cosmopolitan modernist-reformist values.

B. “Vélo mò!” (Vélo is dead!): A Popular State Funeral?

The death of Marcel Lollia, a.k.a. Vélo, on 5 June 1984 put Father Céleste at the center of a popular demonstration in which music, religion and politics intertwined. Vélo had lived in Pointe-à-Pitre and gained some level of notoriety as the *makè* for Madame Adeline’s folkloric ballet in the 1960s. He also performed on the streets of Pointe-à-Pitre, especially on Saturday mornings, and appeared on most of the gwoka recordings produced by Marcel Mavounzy in the 1960s, most famously as the *makè* for legendary singers Chaben and Robert Loyson. All of this had given him a certain visibility. Yet for all of his talent, Vélo died destitute following a long struggle with alcoholism.

Vélo’s funeral itself became an act of resistance as three priests including Father Céleste defied the local clergy, took over the Saint Paul and Saint Pierre Basilica in Pointe-à-Pitre and celebrated a funeral mass in Creole accompanied by the sound of gwoka. Moreover, Vélo’s funeral, and the funeral wake that preceded it, played an important role in building a sense of national community. I see Vélo’s funeral as an unofficial, oppositional, state funeral of sorts in which the Guadeloupean nation rallied

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1955-1959.

against the French state. The role of state funerals as nationalist rituals has been well documented and analyzed.¹⁵ Yet funerals can also offer “a highly theatrical, symbolic model of political action especially well suited to circumventing political police and government censors,” as Tom Trice wrote about student protests in 1870s Saint Petersburg.¹⁶ For Vélo’s funeral, Guadeloupeans took to the streets and commandeered the cathedral, essentially co-opting the official pageantry of state funerals for the purpose of popular resistance. In addition, as discussed earlier, the participatory ethics of Guadeloupean funeral wakes—in which kinesic and musical participation in a communal performance serve to reinforce social bounds—contributed to turning Vélo’s passing into a watershed moment in the construction of Guadeloupean national consciousness.

Indeed, the *tanbouyé*’s death was a wake-up call to many Guadeloupeans who were still sitting on the edge of the nationalist cultural revival. Several thousand people marched through the streets of Pointe-à-Pitre and filled the Place de la Victoire to pay their last respect during an all-night funeral wake.¹⁷ Vélo, who had received very little public recognition during his lifetime, was suddenly heralded as a symbol of resistance as nationalist organizations used this opportunity to shed light on the social, political and cultural conditions that had led to the makè’s destitution and premature death. Colonialism and alienation, these organizations argued, had caused the Guadeloupean

¹⁵ See for example: Avner, “The Sacred Center of Power;” Fulcher, *The Composer as Intellectual*.

¹⁶ “Rites of Protest,” 52.

¹⁷ “Le gros ka perd son maitre,” *France-Antilles* (8 June 1984): 1, 2; Nagou, Gratian. “Vélo, un rassembleur d’hommes,” *France-Antilles* (15 June 1984): 6; “Vélo, son dernier spectacle,” *France-Antilles* (11 June 1984): 1, 3.

people to ignore its traditions and culture to the point that artists like Vélo were left to die on the street.¹⁸



Figure 4.2: Statue of Vélo “Ka King” in Pointe-à-Pitre

Vélo’s death and funeral marked a high point for cultural nationalism in Guadeloupe. These events, attended by a large portion of the population and relayed by the local media, did much to reinforce the role of gwoka and the Creole language in constructing a sense of Guadeloupean community. Many Guadeloupeans who had not paid much attention to the drummer when he was still performing embraced gwoka after Vélo’s death.¹⁹

Vélo is today considered a national hero and a statue of the percussionist, commissioned by the carnival group Akiyo, sits in the middle of the Rue Piétonne (Figure 4.2).

II. “Mizik a Konket cho”²⁰

The display of popular support for gwoka generated by Vélo’s funeral cannot be solely attributed to the patriotic camp’s official cultural campaign. Undoubtedly, groups like the AGEG, the UTA, and the UPLG did much to raise awareness about gwoka. Their success, however, would have been limited without the contributions of musicians who,

¹⁸ Mounien, interview with author, 15 July 2009.

¹⁹ Guilbault, *Zouk*, 34-35; Bébel-Gislert, *Défi culturel*, 128-132; Michel Halley, interview with the author, 11 August 2008; Alain Jean, interview with the author, 22 July 2009.

²⁰ Konket’s music is hot.

while sympathetic to the patriotic camp's social and political goals, refused to associate themselves directly with any one separatist organization.

Foremost among these musicians was singer and composer Guy Konket (Figure 4.3).²¹ Konket was born in Jabrun, in northern Basse-Terre, in the late 1940s. He grew up in a rural environment, surrounded by notable musicians. His mother, *Man* (Madam) Soso, worked on the nearby sugar cane plantation and was also a respected gwoka singer.²² For several years, Man Soso dated the percussionist Carnot, a legendary léwòz and quadrille musician. In an interview, Konket reminisced about hiding to listen to Carnot and the many musicians who would come visit his mother.²³ Carnot for his part remembered Konket's fascination with the drum.²⁴ At this time, probably in the late 1950s, gwoka and quadrille coexisted in most rural areas. In fact, Carnot remembers certain Saturday nights when people danced quadrille



Figure 4.3: Guy Konket at a léwòz in Guadeloupe, August 2008.

²¹ Although Konket now favors the Creole spelling of his name, primary sources from the 1960s, '70s, and '80s frequently use the spellings "Conquette" or "Conquête."

²² Mounien, interview with the author, 15 July 2009.

²³ Interview with the author, 4 and 5 August 2008.

²⁴ Carnot with Lafontaine, *Alors ma chère*, 57-58, 119.

inside Man Soso's *kaz a blan*²⁵ while others participated in a *léwòz* outside.²⁶ In addition to the quadrille and *léwòz* musicians, Konket also remembers that musicians from local dance bands occasionally visited his mother's house. This musical mix—a testimony to the vibrant musical life in mid-century Guadeloupe—had a profound influence on Konket and informed his later musical choices.

Konket was drafted for military service in 1967, the year of the deadly riots in Basse-Terre and Pointe-à-Pitre. Once released, he started recording for Henri Debs, the biggest record producer in the French Antilles, and Célini, another producer who also put out recordings by gwoka singers Chabin and Robert Loyson. Konket's recordings immediately stood out. For one thing, at a time when gwoka was still considered old-fashioned, here was a young gwoka singer addressing his own generation with texts that spoke of their experience. For example, the song "Baimbridge Chaud" captured the energy of the newly opened Baimbridge high school (and the affectation of some of the students who refused to hitchhike to school in anything other than Italian sports cars).²⁷

Konket's songs capture more than the preoccupations of a generation. They capture the mood of a difficult period in Guadeloupean history. The song "La Gwadeloup malad" is typical of Konket's politically engaged lyrics: "Wi mé frè, la Gwadeloup malad,

²⁵ The *kaz a blan* (literally, white people's house) was used to house agricultural workers on *habitations* (plantations) in northern Basse-Terre. The *kaz a blan* was designed to house several families. Its outer walls were built of concrete. The structure was divided into two rows of back-to-back individual rooms separated by wooden walls. Each room had a door that opened on a covered gallery. Common kitchens were found at each corner of the structure. The manager of the *habitation* assigned each family one or more rooms according to its needs. Families with more than one room could remove the wooden participations to create a bigger living space. Carnot, *Alors ma chère*, 12-13, 21-22.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 58, 120.

²⁷ *Nostalgie Caraïbes, Vélo & Guy Conquête*; Konket, interview with the author, 4 August 2008.

o! Nou pé trouvé rimèd pou nou sôvé péyi-la mé zanmi” (Yes my brothers, Guadeloupe is sick. We can find a remedy to cure our country my friends). The bulk of the lyrics offer an indictment of politicians who meet and make speeches but never propose concrete solutions to help the archipelago. This sort of social consciousness made sense in a musical tradition in which singers have often reflected the life of their community in their lyrics. However, “La Gwadeloup malad” differs from traditional gwoka lyrics in one important way. The older gwoka songs to which we have access, either through recordings or because they are still performed today, commented on the life of specific local communities. In contrast, “La Gwadeloup Malad” displays a national awareness. The lyrics mention politicians in Paris and Brussels (one of the seats of the European Economic Community), in opposition to which Guadeloupe is presented as a unified whole. This shift from a local to a national focus is symptomatic of the nationalist process described by Benedict Anderson. The recording functions here as an extension of “print-capitalism,” an essential condition to the creation of national consciousness according to Anderson.²⁸ Indeed, while older gwoka singers addressed a limited local audience during *léwòz* or *kout tanbou*, recordings made it possible for someone like Konké to distribute his music throughout Guadeloupe and even to reach Guadeloupean emigrants in France.²⁹

²⁸ *Imagined Communities*, 37-46.

²⁹ Konké was certainly not the only singer to use traditional gwoka as a way to bring attention to Guadeloupean social struggles. The other famous example would be the two versions of “Kann a la richés” recorded by Robert Loyson in 1972 (*Nostalgie Caraïbes: Robert Loyson*). These songs denounce the unfair use of a sliding scale to compensate cane growers according to the sugar content of their harvest. While Loyson composed the first version of the song of his own accord, Wozan Mounien informed me that the UTA encouraged the singer to write a second version with more pointed lyrics. Mounien, interview with the author, 15 July 2009.

In our conversations together, Konket seemed intent on downplaying his past social activism, preferring to keep the discussions focused on music, on his career, and on the future. According to the singer, his participation in the Guadeloupean social struggles was limited to occasionally playing for organizations like the AGEG, but he vehemently denied ever belonging to any separatist organizations. “I am not a politician,” he told me, “I am a musician above all.”³⁰ However, Wozan Mounien, the former general secretary of the UPLG, told me an anecdote that sheds a slightly different light on Konket’s involvement in Guadeloupean social conflicts:

It was the strike of 1971. Guy Konket was arrested and jailed on charges that he played gwoka on a picket line, that he excited striking workers, and enticed other workers to keep them from reporting to work. That was the motive. So, at that time, he was imprisoned in Basse-Terre and we put together a collective of lawyers, because [about twenty people had been arrested overall.] In addition, you had students striking in support of agricultural workers. So he went and sang in Baimbridge. For the youths, he had become a very popular singer. Because he was popular and because of his ties to the social movement, he was jailed. And that boosted his career further. In a way, he became the gwoka singer of the people.³¹

Konket’s early recordings did not, for the most part, challenge traditional gwoka practices. Yet in some instances, they proved quite innovative. On most recordings,

³⁰ Interview with the author, 4 August 2008.
“Je suis pas politicien moi. Je suis musicien avant tout.”

³¹ Mounien, interview with the author, 15 July 2009.
“C’est la grève de 1971: Guy Konket a été arrêté et emprisonné au motif qu’il jouait du gwoka sur un piquet de grève [qui] excitait les grévistes et attirait les non-grévistes pour les empêcher d’aller travailler. C’était ça le motif. Donc à ce moment là, il a été emprisonné à Basse-Terre et on a monté un collectif d’avocats parce qu’il y avait [une vingtaine de personnes arrêtés]. Il est resté environ deux semaines en prison. [En plus,] parce que les étudiants et les lycéens étaient en grève également pour soutenir la canne, il était allé chanter à Baimbridge. Pour la jeunesse, il était devenu un chanteur très populaire. Du fait qu’il était populaire et qu’il était lié à un mouvement sociale, il a donc été emprisonné. Et c’est de là que ça a boosté un peu sa carrière: il est devenu en quelque sorte le chanteur de gwoka populaire.”

Konket is accompanied by a conventional ensemble of boula, makè, and chacha.³² The songs are structured as a succession of calls and responses between himself and a chorus. On some occasions though, Konket alters the response during the course of a performance, thus creating different sections within a single song, a definite departure from standard gwoka practices. The clearest instance of this technique happens in “Lapli ka tombé” (It is raining).³³ The song starts with a long response: “Lapli-la tonbé, pa ni travay pou nou, la la, lapli-la tonbé” (It rained, there is no work for us, it rained). Halfway through the performance, and following a short break from Vélo, the répondè switch to a shorter response, “tandé” (listen), thus accelerating the pace of the exchange with the lead singer and increasing the overall intensity of the performance. Christian Dahomay points to this sort of practice to explain that the modernization of gwoka was not necessarily limited to the introduction of melodic instruments. “Guy was one of the first to arrange the chorus in gwoka,” stated Dahomay.

From then on, the singer-chorus system was destroyed. Not just anybody could sing the response with Guy, because there were arrangements. If you didn’t know them, you couldn’t sing. He was one of the first to do that. [...] The modern aspect isn’t necessarily limited to Lockel.³⁴

³² Konket regularly performed on stage in Guadeloupe in the 1970s. Unfortunately, the reviews published in *France-Antilles* never describe the ensemble that accompanied him. We are therefore left guessing if these were traditional groups with gwoka, répondè, and chacha, or if they also featured melodic instruments. *France-Antilles*’ headlines hint at traditional performances:

“Conquête ou la bonne tradition du ‘gros ca’,” 25 April 1970.

“Shelly+Conquête+Colting Un cocktail... explosif!,” 30 August 1971.

Silvert, Jean-Claude. “Un public survolté applaudi les ‘grands patrons’ du folklore,” 21-22 April 1972.

³³ *Nostalgie Caraïbes: Vélo & Guy Conquête*.

³⁴ Interview with the author and Guy Konket, 4 August 2008.

“Guy a été un des premiers à faire des arrangements de choeurs dans le gwoka. Le système de chanteur-répondeurs, c’était cassé. N’importe qui ne fait répondè avec Guy, parce qu’il y a des arrangements pour les choeurs. Si tu connais pas, tu peux pas répondre. Il a été l’un des premiers à faire ça. [...] Le côté moderne, c’est pas forcément Lockel.”

Like Lockel, Konket added Western melodic instruments to traditional gwoka ensembles as early as 1967 or '68 when he collaborated with biguine and quadrille musicians, most notably famed biguine saxophonist Emilien Antile.³⁵ For Konket, these collaborations were a natural extension of his childhood experience. Having grown up in an environment where gwoka, quadrille, and biguine coexisted, it seemed logical for the young singer to mix these influences.³⁶ In fact, during our conversations, Konket insisted that this choice was guided by artistic consideration, not political ideology, thus distancing himself from Lockel's self-conscious reformist efforts.

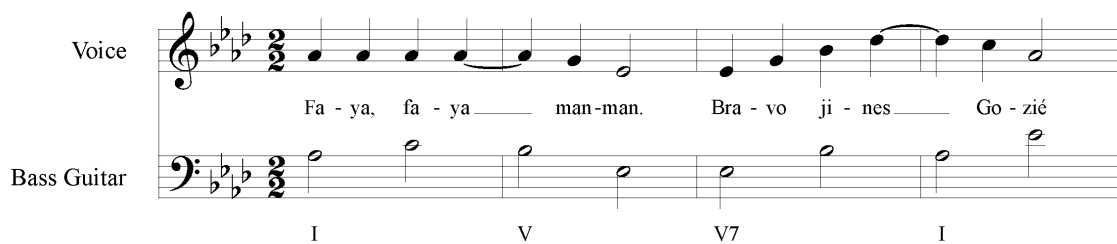


Figure 4.4: Response of "Faya faya," my transcription. Note the tonic-dominant-dominant-tonic harmonic progression outlined by the bass line and melody.

In contrast to Lockel's gwoka modènn, Konket's early music was resolutely tonal, as this brief excerpt from the melody and bass line of "Faya faya" demonstrates (Figure

³⁵ In several conversations, Christian Dahomay pointed out that Konket was not the first gwoka singer to do so. That honor, according to Dahomay, belongs to Dolor. Unfortunately, I have not been able to verify this information. Dolor did record "Ti fi-la ou té madam" with singer Anzala and Vélo as well as an unidentified saxophonist, probably Robert Mavounzy or Emilien Antile, but I do not have an exact recording date (*Tumbélé! Biguines and Afro-Latin sounds from the French Caribbean, 1963-1974*). Following Konket's recordings with biguine musicians, Robert Loyson recorded two tracks with biguine musicians, "Jen fouyé, Piè fouyé" and "Nou kalé a Kutumba," for Célini in 1972 (*Nostalgie Caraïbes: Robert Loyson*).

Konket's recordings with Antile include "Faya Faya," "Natali O," and "Si sé kon sa, pa ni rézon" on *Patrimwan, Vol. 1*. The songs "Ban klé a Titine" and "Firmin au tribunal" on *Nostalgie Caraïbes: Vélo & Guy Konket* find Konket accompanied by an unidentified group featuring alto sax, accordion, bass, maké, boula, bwa (clavé), and chacha. On "Jo mayé dé grenn dé-la" and "Loto wouj la" (*Patrimwan, Vol. 1*), Konket is accompanied by Serge Christophe and Jidor playing gwoka as well as an unidentified bass player.

³⁶ Konket, interview with the author and Christian Dahomay, 5 August 2008.

4.4).³⁷ In this extract, as in all of Konket's other songs featuring a bassist from this period, the bass clearly outlines tonic and dominant chords. Likewise, the sax solos of Emilien Antile never venture from a solidly tonal vocabulary.

Konket, his music, and his discourse invite us to consider the musico-ideological process in three ways. First, they highlight fundamentally different conceptions of the Guadeloupean musical field. While the AGEG and Lockel viewed quadrille, biguine, and gwoka as essentially separate musical traditions, Konket embraced all of them as part of a cohesive whole. Second, Konket's universalist musical concept was at odds with Lockel's call for a focus on national specificity. Finally, when musicians like Guy Konket opened gwoka up to external influences, they proclaimed that the future of the music would follow a path of innovations. However, these innovations had the potential to threaten gwoka's specificity and therefore encouraged efforts from conservative musicians to codify and preserve its practice.

III. Gwoka and the Creole Continuum

The AGEG's cultural report and Gérard Lockel's writings divided the Guadeloupean musical field into three distinctive forms, each with its own socio-political significance. In the separatist leadership's eyes, quadrille symbolized French imperialism and forced assimilation while gwoka was heralded as a music of resistance and the only truly Guadeloupean musical expression. Lockel and the AGEG also shunned biguine, although they did so for different reasons. The guitarist denounced it as a bastard music, clearly expressing his dislike for cultural hybridity. The AGEG, meanwhile, was more

³⁷ Guy Conquette Groupe, *Patrimwan*, Vol. 1.

nuanced, recognizing biguine as a national creation but deploring its frequent association with *doudouisme* and assimilationist politics.³⁸

Konket's music offered a dramatically different conception of the Guadeloupean musical field. As a child, he met musicians such as Carnot who played both gwoka during *léwòz* and *tanbou di bas* (a large frame drum) during *balakadri* (quadrille balls). He experienced the Guadeloupean musical field not as distinct forms but as connected genres and, as a musician, did not hesitate to mix these genres. I see Konket's musical concept as illustrative of Marie-Céline Lafontaine's challenge to the Guadeloupean nationalist orthodoxy.

A Guadeloupean ethnologist who, in the 1980s, worked for France's Centre National de Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), Lafontaine wrote several articles about rural Guadeloupean musical practices, most of them based on her fieldwork in the area near Jabrun.³⁹ Importantly for us as we consider the Guadeloupean nationalist ideological process, she was the first scholar to take issue with the leading nationalist cultural platform. She did so in two related articles published in 1983 and 1988.⁴⁰ I will focus here on the older of the two pieces since it was explicitly written as a response to the AGEG's report.

In "Le carnaval de l' 'autre,'" Lafontaine exposes and criticizes the ideological basis of the AGEG's—and, by extension, other leading nationalist organizations'—cultural stance. She attacks the AGEG's argument on two fronts: first from a theoretical

³⁸ See chapter 3.

³⁹ Lafontaine, "Musique et société aux Antilles;" Lafontaine, "Terminologie musicale en Guadeloupe."

⁴⁰ Lafontaine, "Le carnaval de l' 'autre,'" Lafontaine, "Unité et diversité des musiques traditionnelles guadeloupéennes."

and historical angle, then from an ethnographic perspective. The article is far from a total rebuke of the patriotic camp's political aspirations. Indeed, Lafontaine appears rather sympathetic to the separatist cause. Yet in 1983, she proposed an alternative model of Guadeloupean national culture at a moment when internal debates threatened to fragment the separatist movement in Guadeloupe.⁴¹

Lafontaine starts by offering a corrective to the Marxist theoretical basis of the AGEG's analysis. Like the AGEG, she recognizes the historical division between a dominant class made up of plantation owners and colonial officials of European origin and a dominated class of African descent. However, Lafontaine takes aim at the AGEG assertion that Guadeloupe's dominated culture represents the sole genuine expression of its national culture. Instead, the ethnologist argues that Guadeloupean national culture results from a consensus that emerged from the dialectic relationship between the dominant and dominated classes.⁴²

Examining the particular conditions ruling this dialectic in Caribbean societies, Lafontaine reaches two conclusions. First, based on the numerical superiority of slaves of African descent, she proposes that creolization in Guadeloupe consisted of the reinterpretation of European borrowings through African cultural schemas.⁴³ In "Musique et société aux Antilles," she recognizes the existence of a creole continuum along which cultural expressions could be organized from the most to the least African. However, she argues in "Le Carnaval de l' 'autre'" that any effort to privilege certain musical forms,

⁴¹ See chapter 3.

⁴² "Le carnaval de l' 'autre,'" 2131-2133.

⁴³ "Le carnaval de l' 'autre,'" 2136.

"les emprunts à la culture européenne seront réinterprétés en fonction des schèmes culturels africains."

such as gwoka, as more genuinely Guadeloupean because of their perceived rural or African origin is misplaced. Rather, she urges Guadeloupeans to embrace both sides of their cultural heritage, European and African. Failing to do so, presses Lafontaine, amounts to denying the Guadeloupean people's collective creative power in the face of oppression.⁴⁴

Finally, Lafontaine's analysis of early Caribbean colonial societies leads her to conclude, as I did in chapter 2, that slavery and colonization created a society in which Africanisms were systematically stigmatized and where social mobility depended on the adoption of European codes and practices. Lafontaine then challenges the common nationalist narrative which portrayed quadrille as the dance of assimilation, forced onto slaves by repressive plantation owners or willingly embraced by house slaves and freedmen eager to turn their back on their culture of origin. Lafontaine argues, to the contrary, that plantation owners only trained a few slaves to play European instruments. Furthermore, all slaves understood that they would benefit from acquiring proficiency with the dominant class's cultural and social codes.⁴⁵

The same historical analysis allows Lafontaine to challenge the AGEF's claim that colonial authorities prohibited the practice of African-derived dances. She suggests that legislation restricting slave gatherings and dances was never fully or successfully

⁴⁴ "Musique et société aux Antilles," 2 (Page given refers to online document.); "Le carnaval de l' 'autre,'" 2142.

Lafontaine's creole continuum is a more restricted version of Hannerz's continuum "in which the various contributing sources of the culture are differentially visible and active." Hannerz, "The World in Creolisation," 552.

⁴⁵ "Le carnaval de l' 'autre,'" 2143.

See chapter 2 and Cyrille, "Creole Quadrilles of Guadeloupe, Dominica, Martinique and St. Lucia" for a similar argument.

enforced and that slaves danced the calenda or the bamboula with the knowledge, if not the explicit consent, of their owners. Likewise, she contends that reports of slaves using drums to communicate and organize rebellion do not represent a historical reality but simply betray the fears of an outnumbered plantocracy.⁴⁶ It is therefore wrong, continues Lafontaine, to assign an intrinsic revolutionary function to certain musics, as the AGEG did with gwoka. Over the course of Guadeloupean history, both gwoka and biguine have been used at different times to serve different political ends, from progressive to conservative. Moreover, to subject music to ideological diktats, as the AGEG or Gérard Lockel proposed to do, can stymie aesthetic development and does not guarantee the popular support of the music thus created.⁴⁷

In addition to these theoretical and historical challenges to the main nationalist cultural discourse, Lafontaine uses her ethnographic data to argue for a unified Guadeloupean musical field that includes gwoka, biguine, and quadrille. She bases this inclusive approach on several observations. First, and perhaps most importantly, the rural population she studied embraced both the African-derived gwoka and the European-derived quadrille as nothing less than Guadeloupean. In addition, all three musical genres served the same social functions within this community. Finally, Lafontaine points to a number of musical similarities between the three genres of music, foremost among them a common basic duple meter known as the *boulawon*.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ “Le carnaval de l’ ‘autre,’” 2139-2142.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 2161-2169.

⁴⁸ According to Lafontaine, the *boulawon* is the basis of the tumblak and graj, and was adapted to serve as the basis for the Guadeloupean biguine.

Interestingly, within this unified musical field, Lafontaine distinguishes between the prevalence of European diatonic scales in quadrille and biguine and their relative rarity in gwoka and funeral wake singing, genres that, according to Lafontaine, privilege pentatonic scales. Lafontaine bases this assertion at least partially on the writings of Gérard Lockel, whom the ethnographer hesitates to challenge in the same way that she challenges other aspects of the nationalist cultural discourse. Accepting the widespread presence of pentatonic scales in gwoka and refusing to question outright the scientific legitimacy of Lockel's claims, Lafontaine nonetheless sounds a cautionary note, calling for further comparative studies of Caribbean music in order to establish, or deny, the existence of a musical scale specific to Guadeloupe, such as Lockel's gwoka scale. She also concludes, albeit in a footnote, that the rural population she studied did not hear musical scales as distinctive and defining characteristics of each musical genre. In other words, for the rural population around Baie-Mahault and Lamentin, a gwoka song using a diatonic tonal scale is still a gwoka song. This flies in the face of Lockel's assertions.

We see here that Lafontaine proposes an important alternative to the leading nationalist cultural discourse. For years her writings have been some of the only scholarly sources on Guadeloupean music. Yet beyond their role as secondary sources, her articles document her involvement in and contribution to the Guadeloupean nationalist ideological process. Lafontaine did not reject the idea of Guadeloupean specificity. However, where the AGEF had constructed a stable model of Guadeloupean nationality based on what it presented as unadulterated African retentions, Lafontaine argues for an inclusive approach in which creolization serves to celebrate Guadeloupean creativity in

the face of colonial oppression, reconciles European and African contributions to Guadeloupean culture, and allows for future cultural evolution, without denying the possibility of a specific national culture.

My own historical analysis, presented in chapter 2, confirms most of Lafontaine's arguments, although I do not agree with her interpretation of creolization, which I see as too restrictive. For Lafontaine, creolization was determined by the numerical superiority of African slaves and consisted in a reinterpretation of European culture according to African cultural schemas. This model falls prey to a simple dualism between European and African cultures and does not allow the culture of the dominated group to influence that of the dominating class. Compared to Lafontaine's ethnography, my own fieldwork reveals the impact of the nationalist program on the Guadeloupean cultural field. In the 1980s, Lafontaine described the *léwòz* as being threatened with extinction as the agricultural cycle that had sustained it was itself rapidly disappearing.⁴⁹ As I noted in chapters 1 and 3, the *léwòz* never vanished and indeed has experienced a successful revival.

Few gwoka recordings from the late 1960s to the early '80s capture Lafontaine's creole continuum as fully as the few sides on which biguine musicians have accompanied gwoka singers such as Chabin, Loyson, or Konket. By the time of Lafontaine's writing, gwoka was probably too closely associated with the nationalist hardline for many musicians to embrace her vision of the Guadeloupean musical field. However, I hear her ideas confirmed in the music of early zouk groups. Zouk was, at least originally, a

⁴⁹ "Musique et société aux Antilles."

popular manifestation of the same sort of cultural nationalism that encouraged the emergence of numerous instrumental gwoka groups in Guadeloupe and in metropolitan France, as Jocelyn Guilbault underlined in her seminal study of zouk.⁵⁰ If zouk emerged as a French Antillean response to the growing popularity of Haitian and Dominican groups and out of a desire to create a national popular music, it expressed an identity very different from that advocated by the AGEF. As Guilbault has demonstrated, zouk musicians celebrated their hybridity. They embraced their entire musical heritage: not only gwoka but also carnival music from both Martinique and Guadeloupe, quadrille, biguine, and a slew of foreign influences from Haitian *konpa* to North American soul. Take for example “Banzawa” recorded by Jacob Desvarieux in 1983.⁵¹ The track mixes a *cinquillo* (a rhythmic ostinato shared by many genres of Caribbean music) played on



Figure 4.5: *Cinquillo*.

tibwa and *chacha* (see Figure 4.5), a *menndé* rhythm played on

gwoka, plucked guitar ostinati reminiscent of both Haitian *konpa*

and Congolese guitar playing, and a synthesizer programmed to

sound like an accordion, an instrument typical of quadrille ensembles.⁵² As we will see in chapter 5, another generation of musicians has, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, found new ways to express this hybridity through gwoka-inspired music.

⁵⁰ *Zouk*, 31-37.

⁵¹ Desvarieux, *Banzawa*, Sonodisc (1983).

⁵² For more information on the *cinquillo*, see Manuel, *Creolizing the Contradance*, 20-22. For its use in biguine and zouk, see Guilbault, *Zouk*, 60, 132. About guitar playing in Haitian *konpa*, see Averill “Toujou sou konpa” in Guilbault, *Zouk*, 76.

IV. “La musique, c’est la musique?”: Specificity or Universality

At its very core, instrumental gwoka manifests two contradictory desires: the desire to express a locally specific identity and the desire to partake in cosmopolitan networks through the adoption of cosmopolitan practices. This tension is captured in the introduction to Eddy Pitard’s gwoka method. For Pitard, gwoka is “the language used to carry the thoughts, the behavior, the lifestyle, and the gesture of the black ethnicity in Guadeloupean society,” a definition centered on the narrow, ethnically specific definition of Guadeloupean identity frequently found in Guadeloupean nationalist rhetoric.⁵³ Later, in his discussion of gwoka modèn, Pitard writes: “The *modèn* [sic] aspect of gwoka leads us to enter into the universal language of the musician, the composer and the arranger.”⁵⁴

The tension between the specific and the universal is inherent to the nationalist process. Turino demonstrates that nation-states depend on cosmopolitan codes and models in order to participate in cosmopolitan networks and be recognized by other nation-states. Yet they must also protect their specificity lest they risk being absorbed by these cosmopolitan formations and “disappear as distinct, and thus operative, units on the international scene.”⁵⁵

⁵³ Pitard, *La Musique Gwoka*, 6.

“Le Gwoka est le langage qui véhicule la pensée, le comportement, la manière de vivre, l’expression et la gestuelle de l’ethnie noire dans la société guadeloupéenne.”

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 7

“L’aspect modèn du Gwoka nous emmène [sic] à entrer dans le langage universel du musicien, du compositeur et de l’arrangeur.”

⁵⁵ Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*, 15.

While Turino rightly points to the fundamental paradox of nationalism, his model reduces postcolonial nationalisms to joining one of three cosmopolitan formations—modernist-capitalist, modernist-socialist, or fundamentalist-Islamic—in order to gain international recognition.⁵⁶ Thus Turino's model, like Anderson's, is essentially modular, and to a large degree, determinist. However, as Chatterjee rightly underscores, the adoption of European-style nationalism in societies under European domination poses a series of questions regarding the complex relation of thought, culture, and power. Most importantly, anticolonial nationalists must decide whether nationalism and modernization—two ideas born out of the European Enlightenment—are culturally neutral, universal concepts that can easily be transposed from one socio-cultural context to another, or cultural-relative theories that need to be adapted to the particular sensibilities of non-European societies. In addition, within the context of an anticolonial struggle, the adoption of thoughts and models borrowed from the colonial power is in itself problematic and requires a number of strategic choices in order to claim some degree of intellectual independence. Chatterjee explains:

When the new framework of thought is directly associated with a relation of dominance in the cross-cultural context of power, what, in the new cultural context, are the specific changes which occur in the original categories and relations within the domain of thought? That is to say, if relations of dominance and subordination are perceived as existing between cultures, which is what happens under colonial rule, what are the specific ways in which frameworks of thought conceived in the context of the dominant culture are received and transformed in the subordinate culture?⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music*, 9-10.

⁵⁷ Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, 26-27.

In other words, nationalist militants engaged in an anticolonial struggle must decide what to borrow from the nationalist framework offered by the colonial power and what to retain and privilege as expression of their cultural specificity. In addition, they must adapt the dominant intellectual framework to make it acceptable to local sensibilities, or at least devise a discourse that can appropriately achieve the same effect. Finally, they must create a strategy to bring local cultural expressions in line with cosmopolitan expectations.

Wozan Mounien understood the problem as it related to creating a new musical style based on gwoka. Recognizing that the process involved the appropriation of “foreign” practices, he offered the following critique of Lockel:

However, the problem is [to decide] where to make a break and what to synthesize. It was this problematic that [Lockel] didn’t pose. Because of this, he has remained stuck on a very closed ideological position. However, cultural identity is always shared. There is no culture, even if it is original, that can exist without outside contributions, without outside influences. We are not, [with gwoka modènn], in a logic of cultural hybridity, we are in a logic of creation of a new culture based on our traditions, historical roots, anything you want. But at the same time, we are, somewhat, francophiles. We had, therefore, to find the juncture between the two [French and Guadeloupean cultures] to create something that was different. That may be what was missing from [Lockel’s] approach.⁵⁸

The tension between the specific and the universal—the local and the cosmopolitan, or the subordinate and the dominant—in the Guadeloupean nationalist process is not a mere theoretical wrangling. As Guadeloupean performers interpreted

⁵⁸ Mounien, interview with the author, 15 July 2009.

“Or le problème, c’est la rupture jusqu’à quel point et la synthèse à partir de quoi? C’est cette problématique là que lui il ne pose pas. Ce qui fait que lui, il est resté sur une ligne idéologique très fermée. Or l’identité culturelle est toujours quelque chose de partager. Il n’y a pas de culture qui soit, même si elle est originelle, elle ne peut pas exister sans apports extérieurs, sans influences extérieures. On n’est pas dans la logique du métissage culturelle, on est dans la logique de la création d’une culture nouvelle à partir de traditions, issue de notre ancrage historique, tout ce qu’on voudra. Mais en même temps, on est, quelque part, francophile. Donc il faut trouver le point de jonction entre les deux pour faire quelque chose qui soit différent. Et c’est ça qui peut être manqué chez lui.”

modernist reformism, this tension shaped many of their musical choices. It also informed various approaches to the inclusion of gwoka in music pedagogy.

A. Performing Ideologies

With music heard as an expression of national consciousness, musicians were aware of the ideological implications of their aesthetic choices. Tensions flew high amongst the various instrumental gwoka groups in Guadeloupe in the early 1980s. Olivier Vamur found a “cut-throat” atmosphere when he returned to the archipelago from Paris around 1980. “If you played with so and so, you couldn’t talk to so and so,” he explained.⁵⁹ The stakes were apparently high enough that some musicians reported receiving physical threats for playing the “wrong” kind of music with musicians whose patriotism seemed suspicious in the eyes of some.

The names musicians used to describe their output reflected this tension. A few groups embraced the label “gwoka modènn.” Of those, some actually tried to follow in Lockel’s footsteps. For example, Eritaj—one of the few groups in Guadeloupe today that continue to perform in the gwoka modènn vein—recorded their first album in 2007 and promoted it with the slogan: “l’album gwoka modèn [sic]” (the gwoka modèn album). Trumpeter Edouard Ignol, a.k.a. Kafé, also claimed the gwoka modènn mantle, although his music shared very few formal characteristics with Lockel’s, as I will demonstrate below. Other groups, trying to distance themselves from Lockel, adopted the label “gwoka évolutif” (progressive gwoka). Interestingly, the group Eritaj uses this label

⁵⁹ Vamur, interview with the author, 8 August 2009.

“Quand je suis arrivé, c’était amusant parce que c’était à couteau tiré entre les groupes. Si tu jouais avec untel, il ne fallait pas parlé avec untel.”

strategically when they want to emphasize that they have not formally studied with Lockel.

In this atmosphere, Konké offered a potent alternative to Lockel's music and ideology. When I asked for his opinion of Lockel's scale, Konké's answer highlighted his profoundly universalist conception of music:

[Lockel] said: "There is no *do*, there is no *ré*, [...]." There is none of that stuff with Lockel. But music is music. Whatever the scale. Whether it be the music of *guaguanco* in Cuba, in Africa, music is music. That's all. That's the phenomenon. That's what Lockel did not understand. Here, you play gwoka music. You go to Cuba, you play Cuban music. But everywhere, there is one music. It is music. But Lockel wanted to say: "No. Specifically, it is our music, with its own scale that is specific." But in gwoka, we sing with *ré*, we sing with *do*, with everything.⁶⁰

He added: "Gwoka is a mix. There are Cuban contributions, there are African contributions. [...] And that's the result."⁶¹ I prodded further and asked him what, in his eyes differentiated gwoka from other musics. His answer remained unwavering:

Lockel wanted to differentiate [gwoka] from other musics through his atonal-modal system. But this music belongs to everybody. There are contributions. There are no differences. If the African listens to it, he likes it. If the French listens to it, he likes it. Everyone likes it. That's it.⁶²

⁶⁰ Interview with the author and Christian Dahomay, 4 August 2008.

"Lockel, il a personnalisé. C'est sa musique et pas d'autre. Ça a dit, y a pas de *do*, y a pas de *ré*, y a pas de truc. Y a pas ça chez Lockel. Mais la musique, elle est la musique. Quelque soit la gamme. Que ce soit la musique au *guaguanco* à Cuba, en Afrique, la musique, elle est la musique. C'est tout. C'est ça le phénomène. C'est ça que Lockel n'a pas compris. Ici, tu joues de la musique gwoka. Tu vas à Cuba, tu joues de la musique cubaine. Mais ça existe partout qu'il y a une musique. C'est LA musique. Mais Lockel voulait dire non, au niveau spécificité, c'est notre musique à nous, qui a une gamme, bon, elle est spécifique. Mais dans le gwoka, on chante avec *ré*, on chante avec *do*, avec tout et tout."

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

"C'est un mélange. Y a des apports cubains, des apports africains. [...] Le résultat, c'est ça."

⁶² *Ibid.*

"Lockel voulait différencier avec d'autres musiques par le système atonal-modal. Mais cette musique est la musique de tout le monde. Y a des apports. Ça ne différencie pas. Si l'africain l'écoute, l'africain l'aime. Un français l'écoute, il aime. Tout le monde l'aime. C'est ça."

The distance between Lockel’s expression of Guadeloupean specificity and Konket’s embrace of musical universalism left a lot of room for musicians to find answers to Wozan Mounien’s question: in the quest for a new national music, what gets discarded and what gets synthesized? What scale is most appropriate? Should musicians rely on tonality? If so, should the music include chords? Should the chords be arpeggiated? If not, what voicings are appropriate?

Different groups came up with different solutions to these questions. I am only going to outline some of the most common. None of the many groups with which I am familiar adopted Lockel’s system indiscriminately. Some, like the group Horizon featuring Olivier Vamur and guitarist Christian Lavisio, occasionally play some of Lockel’s compositions and use rehearsal time to practice exercises from his treatise together.⁶³ However, their compositions—some of the most complex I have heard in



Figure 4.6: “Bòd lanmè,” beginning of main theme. Gwakasonné, *Temwen*. My transcription.

instrumental gwoka—mix a number of different scales including pentatonic, whole-tone, and chromatic. Many instrumental gwoka groups of the period relied extensively, but rarely exclusively, on pentatonic scales, as “Bod lanmé” by Robert Oumaou’s group Gwakasonné exemplifies (Figure 4.6). The song “Lien étewnél,” composed by

⁶³ Vamur, interview with the author, 8 August 2009.

I have spent an extensive amount of time rehearsing with this group and have witnessed this firsthand.

saxophonist Georges Troupé, uses three pentatonic scales: F major pentatonic for the introduction, the relative D minor pentatonic for the response, and a mode of A minor pentatonic, starting on D, for the call (Figure 4.7).



Figure 4.7: “Lien étewnél,” composed by Georges Troupé. Troupé, *La Méthode Verte*, édition 2000.

In order to skirt the issue of tonality, many instrumental gwoka groups have avoided any sort of explicit harmony. Melodies are frequently played in unison and octaves. This is the case for “Bòd lanmè” in which trumpet and saxophone play in unison, with the flute playing up an octave and the bass stating the melody two octaves below. Likewise, even when a group includes a piano or a guitar, it is rarely used to play chordal accompaniments. Christian Dahomay remembers that when he and his sister Marie-Line created the group Katouré in the late 1980s, they struggled with the best way to integrate a piano in their music. The pianist who joined the group had played popular music and had a strong affinity for triadic chord voicings. Dahomay preferred for the pianist to use quartal voicings that have weaker tonal implications or, better Yet avoid chords altogether and play melodic ostinati in the manner of Cuban pianists.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Interview with the author, 2 July 2008.

Like Christian Dahomay, many instrumental gwoka groups favor polyphonic and polyrhythmic textures. This is the case, for example, of Gwakassonné, Kimbol, and Horizon, as well as Guy Konket's work since the 1980s. This approach relies on layering various instrumental ostinati on top of one another. Often this is limited to a bass vamp layered between the polyrhythmic texture of the percussion and the main melodic line, whether it be sung or played on instruments (Figure 4.8). Guitar players, such as Gilbert Coco with Guy Konket's group or Christian Lavisio with Kafé and Horizon, also commonly rely on vamps. The origin of these vamps is hard to trace. They could reveal the influence of Haitian *konpa*, which was popular in Guadeloupe in the late 1970s and early '80s, or that of the Cuban son, a style with which many musicians were familiar. As noted earlier, they could also be traced to Congolese guitar playing, a style itself influenced by Cuban genres.⁶⁵ Regardless of its origin, the use of ostinati is particularly well-suited to modal music, that is to say music that does not rely on chord progressions but in which a tonic pitch can nonetheless be easily identified. In instrumental gwoka, vamps are usually found in modal compositions or in modal sections within a composition. They are especially common as an accompaniment behind instrumental solos. As such, I hear the use of ostinati as an interpretation of Lockel's edict that gwoka is an "atonal-modal" music. Beyond this harmonic interpretation, vamps can also serve to perform the *boula* on melodic instruments. For example in "Soufrière" on Robert Oumaou's latest recording, the bass notes in pianist Yvan Juraver's left hand mimic the accents of the *kaladja* rhythm on which the composition is based.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ For the influence of Cuban music on Congolese rumba, see Stewart, *Rumba on the River*.

⁶⁶ Oumaou, *Sang comment terre* (GES-002); Juraver, interview with the author, 22 July 2008.

Figure 4.8: “YouYou,” basic groove. Konket, *Guy Konket et le groupe ka*, Editions Bolibana (BIP-96). My transcription.

Not all instrumental gwoka groups abandoned tonality in favor of modality or atonality. Kafé, who led one of Guadeloupe’s most successful instrumental gwoka groups, relied on tonal chord progressions in most of his compositions. For example, his version of the traditional song “Bòdé Apiyé” clearly harmonizes the melody in D minor using tonic, sub-dominant, and dominant chords voiced in thirds on a keyboard.⁶⁷ As the next chapter will demonstrate, in recent years, many musicians have challenged Lockel’s “atonal-modal” theory and have comfortably mixed gwoka rhythms and tonal chord progressions.

The structure of instrumental gwoka compositions varies greatly from group to group. Some compositions, like those of Guy Konket, retain the traditional gwoka

⁶⁷ Kafé 3, *Gwo Kafé*, Disques Debs (CDD26-64-2). These are recent recordings. Kafé’s first album, featuring many musicians who would go on to form the group Horizon, was recorded for Henry Debs in 1983. Unfortunately, it has never been released on CD and I have not been able to listen to it.

structure of call and response to which they simply add an instrumental background.⁶⁸

The groups Horizon and Kafé often integrate this practice within more complex arrangements that also include introductions, instrumental interludes, rhythmic breaks, and sections of instrumental improvisation. In contrast, Gwakasonné often dispenses with call and response altogether, building its arrangements by stringing contrasting sections together: some vocal, some instrumental, some improvised, some precomposed.

Instrumentation also varies greatly. While most groups feature vocalists in at least some of their compositions, there are plenty of purely instrumental performances. Most groups include a bassist but others do not, such as the group Simen'kontra that performs traditional songs with instrumental solos. Some bassists perform rhythms that are closely related to the pattern of the boula, but most seem to favor more independent approaches that recall the bass playing on funk, reggae, merengue, or salsa recordings. Likewise, there is a contrast between groups that include a drum set and those that only use gwoka drums. Bandleader Kafé proposed a compromise of sorts by creating the *batrika* (ka set), a drum set in which each drum is shaped like a gwoka, complete with *zoban*. Among the groups that use a drum set, very few have adopted the set with two hi-hats and no bass drum proposed by Lockel. José Gustarimac, who plays with Horizon, uses a set with two hi-hats, but he kept the bass drum. The presence of gwoka drums seems to be the only constant, although I have often rehearsed with Horizon when no boula or makè was present.

⁶⁸ For example, see Konket, *Guy Konket et le groupe ka*, Editions Bolibana (BIP-96).

As this brief survey of instrumental gwoka practices since the 1970s makes clear, it is impossible to define the genre according to strict formal practices. All of these groups have only two things in common. First, when they feature a singer, the text is always sung in Creole. Second, all the groups based most of their compositions on the rhythmic patterns commonly found in traditional gwoka and trained listeners can easily identify these patterns. Beyond this, each group's musical choices reveal different interpretations of modernist reformism. Musicians have engaged with cosmopolitan musical practices in various ways as they decide what to preserve from their vernacular music and what to borrow from cosmopolitan genres such as Haitian *konpa*, Cuban *son*, North American jazz, funk, and disco, or Jamaican reggae. Thus, in Guadeloupe, the musical ideological process remains open-ended and unresolved. Many musicians and cultural activists have expressed a desire to standardize instrumental gwoka performance codes, a step that would allow for the unification of musical practices and thus cement instrumental gwoka as a stable nationalist music. However, as Christian Dahomay noted in an interview, tensions over the different systems are still high enough that a consensus remains elusive.⁶⁹

B. Gwoka and music pedagogy

The debates over instrumental gwoka's performance practices have a parallel in music pedagogy. When writing his method book, Lockel chose to distance gwoka from standard Western European musical practices in several ways: he introduced a new scale, but also new notational systems for both melodic instruments and for the drum. Even though he retained French *solfège* syllables, his system was, ideologically, intended as a

⁶⁹ Personal interview with the author, 26 December 2007.

total rupture, a modernist gesture. As Mounien pointed out, the goal was to create a new culture rather than to participate in a process of hybridization. Therefore, Lockel refused to acknowledge his debt to cosmopolitan musical genres, jazz foremost among them. While this approach reinforced gwoka modènn's specificity, it also made it more difficult for the new music to participate in cosmopolitan networks: without a shared musical vocabulary, musicians struggled to adopt (and adapt) Lockel's style.

Other musicians took a different approach. If gwoka could be modernized to be performed onstage with Western European instruments, why could it not be used to teach children how to read and write European music? Doing so required an ideological shift. Lockel perceived tonality and *sofège* as imperialist impositions and symbols of France's domination. Other music educators interpreted the nationalist project differently and sought, by a sleight of hand, to distance European notation from its association with colonialism. Music notation was not solely European, they argued, it was universal.

This was the position adopted by saxophonist Georges Troupé who created the *Atelier de musique Marcel Lollia dit Vélo* in Sainte Anne in 1986, with the goal of teaching children how to play gwoka through "the use of universal music reading and writing." As if to placate nationalist concerns, he added that this approach did not "exclude the study of music through its essence," an ambiguous phrase which can be interpreted two ways.⁷⁰ On one hand, it can indicate a commitment to teaching music orally, a common aspect of the transmission of vernacular traditions. On the other hand, I

⁷⁰ Troupé, "Une partie de la vie musicale de Georges Troupé," *La Méthode Verte*, édition 2000. "En 1986, j'ouvre l'atelier de musique Marcel Lollia dit Vélo de Valette à Sainte-Anne, dont le travail rythmique est basé sur l'utilisation de la lecture et de l'écriture musicale universelle, cette orientation n'excluant pas l'étude de la musique par son essence."

also interpret it as an effort to reconcile Troupé's universalist claim with his view of gwoka as essentially Guadeloupean.

Troupé notated drum “pitches” using a five-line staff with a treble clef. Troupé writes pitches produced on the *zoban* on the C space and assigns the G line to those, lower, produced near the center of the head.⁷¹ Black and white squares reinforced this notation above the staff: large black squares indicate downbeats, smaller black squares represent other low notes, and white squares stand for high notes. (Troupé does not differentiate between *médyòm* and *fonsyèw* (medium and low) pitches.) Troupé also relies on standard Western rhythmic notation. To this descriptive notation, Troupé adds a prescriptive element in the form of “Ds” (*droite*, right) and “Gs” (*gauche*, left) to indicate what hand should strike the drum (Figure 4.9).⁷²

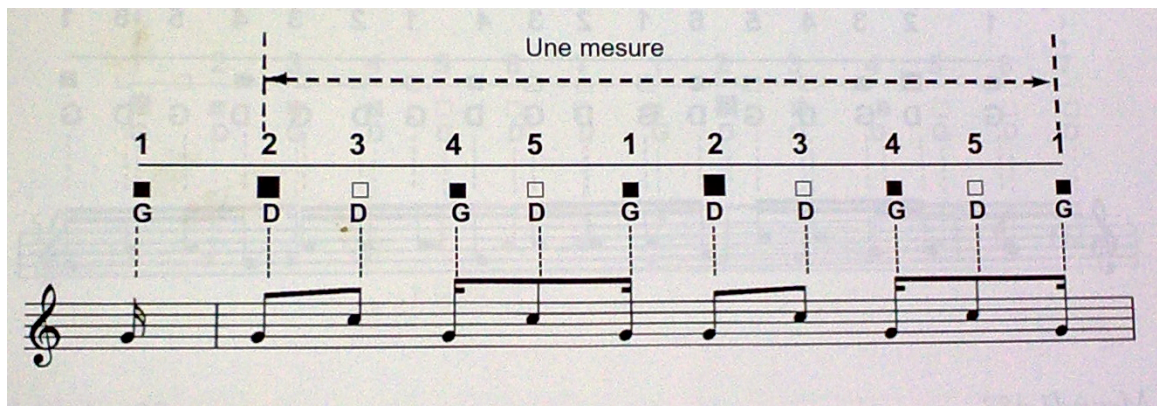


Figure 4.9: Notation for the graj rhythm. Troupé, *La méthode verte*, edition 2000, 13.

⁷¹ In the 2004 edition of his method, Troupé abandoned the treble clef but did not otherwise alter his system.

⁷² In this discussion, I apply the terms “descriptive” to notation that represents what the music sounds like and “prescriptive” to notation that tells musicians how to produce the required sounds. Thus, I consider Western notation to be largely descriptive: it represents a string of sounds whose notation is similar regardless of the instrument being performed. I see tablatures as prescriptive: they represent a string of movements and are instrument specific. I realize that my application of this terminology departs from Charles Seeger’s use of these terms but I understand them as an extension of Mantle Hood’s writing on this topic.

Seeger, “Prescriptive and Descriptive Music Writing;” Hood, *The Ethnomusicologist*, 91-102.

Other authors have tried to design different combinations of prescriptive and descriptive elements. Gustave Labeca uses a five-line staff and Western rhythmic notation, with “Ds” and “Gs” for fingerings, but without a treble clef.⁷³ Patrick Solvet uses a similar system but abandons any prescriptive elements, such as fingering indications. In our lessons, Christian Dahomay gave me worksheets that use a staff with three lines and two spaces to represent the three basic pitches of a gwoka drum but relied on Western rhythmic notation. Noteheads shaped like pie slices indicate which hand to



Figure 4.10: Christian Dahomay’s notation of the graj rhythm.

use to produce each pitch (Figure 4.10). Other than his reliance on Western rhythmic notation, Dahomay’s system is entirely prescriptive. Indeed, his *Metòd-Ka* uses a similar system but omits meter markings and boils all the rhythms down to a succession of quarter notes and quarter rests.⁷⁴ Assuming that the player will put the worksheet on the floor in front of him/her as (s)he practices, the spaces represent sections of the drumhead. Those at the bottom of the staff, closer to the musician, represent pitches produced on the *zoban* and those on the upper space, furthest from the musician, pitches produced near the center of the head. Thus the notation inverts what are conventionally thought of as “high” and “low” pitches.

⁷³ Labeca, *I ka i pa ka*.

⁷⁴ Dahomay, *Metòd-Ka*.

Very few gwoka method books deal with melodies. Those that do all use Western music notation.⁷⁵ Of the methods that I have surveyed, only one adopted Lockel's "atonal-modal" system. In fact, with the focus clearly on teaching how to play the drum rather than melodic instruments, most methods do not broach the topic of tonality. Eddy Pitard, offering a lone, non-committal voice, declares that gwoka modènn integrates European instruments with traditional gwoka and benefits from the addition of all forms of harmony—tonal, modal, and atonal.⁷⁶

Only saxophonist Jean-Fred Castry reprises Lockel's "atonal-modal" discourse. Castry is a former member of Lockel's GKM and the director of the CEFIRM, a music school which he created in 1989.⁷⁷ Since leaving Lockel's group, Castry has developed his own theory of gwoka modènn based on what he calls gwoka's "note reservoirs." This system, which he claims to be "atonal-modal," is based primarily on mathematical combination of fragments of whole-tone scales separated by half-steps. I must admit that the system is so complicated that I have been unable to understand it or to imagine its applicability to actual music making. Moreover, in the seven books he has written on this topic, Castry makes only a nominal effort to justify his theory based on recorded gwoka performances. When he does, as in the beginning of the first volume of the series, he limits his examples to very brief transcriptions without naming his sources, making it impossible to verify either the accuracy of the transcriptions or the validity of his

⁷⁵ See for example: Troupé, *Méthode verte*, edition 2000, 29; Labeca, *I ka i pa ka*, 185-194; Castry, *Gwoka: La méthode moderne*, Volume 2.

⁷⁶ *La musique gwoka*, 7.

⁷⁷ CEFIRM: Centre Eveil Formation Rencontre Information Musique.
<http://www.cefrim.fr> (Accessed 15 February 2011); Castry, interview with the author, 7 August 2008.

theory.⁷⁸ Regardless of the validity of his claims, Castry's reliance on Western music notation and mathematical formulas to present his theory (scale fragments are given abbreviated names like RSym2 and their combinations explained with additive formulas, e.g. GT+RS3) strongly reveal Castry's universalist aspirations.

In chapter 3, I explained how music notation can participate in an ideological process. The various approaches to music pedagogy taken by gwoka musicians in the past thirty years further illustrate this point. In order to appropriate music notation introduced by their colonial power, Guadeloupean educators have had to adopt an ideological discourse of universalism. They have also found various ways to adapt Western notation to their particular musical and ideological needs. Because consistent fingerings are an important aspect of playing *boula* in a gwoka ensemble, educators have tried to incorporate prescriptive elements within their notation. Two considerations drive most choices. Educators seek to develop a pedagogical method that will allow gwoka musicians to participate in cosmopolitan networks by learning the fundamentals of Western music notation, usually relying on universalist claims. However, they try to do so without denying gwoka's specificity, without challenging the basic assumption that gwoka is an essential expression of Guadeloupean nationality. Thus, taken together, these method books reveal the kind of ideological process, the kind of negotiation, that Chatterjee sees as emblematic of anticolonial nationalism.

⁷⁸ Castry, *Gwoka: La méthode moderne*, Volume 1-7. Transcriptions are found in Volume 1: *Les réservoirs de notes dans la grande musique ka*, 11-36.

V. Preservation or Innovation

A. The *bigidi* of teaching dance

The creation of gwoka schools throughout Guadeloupe has played an important role in promoting the music and elevating its cultural capital. Choreographer Jacqueline Cachemire-Thole and her husband, *tanbouyé* Yves Thole, opened the first private gwoka school, the Akadémiduka (Ka Academy), in Guadeloupe in 1986. Cachemire-Thole was born in 1941. As was the case for many cultural activists of her generation, her family discouraged her from attending gwoka performances. As a child, her experience of the music was limited to overhearing the group La Brisquante, the most famous Guadeloupean folkloric ballet, rehearsing above Madame Adeline's *café* on the Place de la Victoire in Pointe-à-Pitre.⁷⁹ In the early 1970s, Cachemire-Thole, then a physical education teacher, decided to integrate dance into her curriculum. She started out using French pop songs and film scores as the basis for her choreographies before turning her attention to gwoka. Like many people of her generation, she had to go through a period of investigation and learning with older stewards of the tradition. In 1972, she created her first ballet based on gwoka rhythms. She met Yves Thole in 1984. Thole and *tanbouyé* Bébé Rospart furthered Cachemire-Thole's immersion into the universe of traditional gwoka. The Akadémiduka reflects Cachemire-Thole's own trajectory: students are taught how to dance gwoka through the production of ballets inspired by traditional music and

⁷⁹ Throughout this section, the word "ballet" does not have any association with European dance techniques. In Guadeloupe, it refers specifically to the stage presentation of folkloric dances.

dance moves. Some of the Akadémiduka's early teachers, such as dancers Mario Coco and Raymonde Torin, have borrowed from this model to open their own schools.⁸⁰

Many gwoka schools have opened in Guadeloupe (and in metropolitan France) since the 1980s. When it comes to teaching gwoka dancing, educators face an inherent instability or conflict, a *bigidi*, to borrow choreographer Léna Blou's terminology. Should dance schools focus on preserving the tradition, setting its codes, and passing them to a younger generation? Or should the tradition serve as platform for innovation, open to new interpretation and new additions?

I focus here on dance pedagogy but musicians face the same questions, as I will briefly discuss below. Drum makers are also confronted by the same dilemma. Some, like Claudius Barbin, use contemporary techniques to build instruments that adhere to conceived notions of the traditional gwoka. Others, like Félix Flauzin, engage in constant experiments to modernize the instrument itself, playing with various body shapes, adapting the tension system of Cuban *tumbadoras*, or adopting synthetic drum heads.⁸¹

Gwoka dance schools fall in one of three categories along a traditionalist-modernist continuum. Those that follow the ballet-based model set by Cachemire-Thole at the Akadémiduka sit near the center of this continuum. This is the case of Kamodjaka under the leadership of Raymonde Torin and Mario Coco's Sakitaw. These schools combine traditional moves into group choreographies that are designed primarily to be performed on stage. In these choreographies, the ring of traditional gwoka is rarely

⁸⁰ Canneval and Martial, *Almanaka 2007*; *Almanaka 2009*.

⁸¹ I describe the traditional construction of the gwoka in chapter 1. Flauzin, interview with the author, 21 December 2007.

present and improvisation plays only a minor role, if at all. Thus the ballets adapt the léwòz's participatory aesthetics to a presentational framework, replicating the process of modernist reformism described in chapter 3.

Choreographer Léna Blou (she frequently spells her name LénaBlou) has pushed this logic further. She discovered gwoka as a student of Cachemire-Thole's and went on to study dance technique and theory formally at the Sorbonne in Paris and in a number of workshops with French, Caribbean, and American dancers. Upon returning to Guadeloupe, Blou set out to combine her knowledge of modern and jazz dance with her childhood interest in gwoka. In the 1990s, she developed a modern dance technique based on traditional gwoka gestures which she called *techni'ka*. She has presented her work in numerous choreographies with her own company, Compagnie Trilogie, and in a book published in 2006. The book makes it clear that Blou's work results from an identity quest, her desire to reconcile her Guadeloupean heritage with her dedication to modern dance.⁸² Since 1990, she has also been teaching *techni'ka* in her own dance studio in Pointe-à-Pitre.⁸³

Léna Blou's *techni'ka* offers an extreme example of modernist reformism. Unlike Cachemire-Thole, Torin, and Coco, Blou fully embraces the codes of contemporary dance and choreography with the avowed goal of inserting gwoka dancing into cosmopolitan networks. In a short documentary on *techni'ka*, she explains: "I was convinced [...] that this dance was going to influence dance aesthetics throughout the world." She added: "Try to imagine: when you attend whatever school in the world, there

⁸² Blou, *Techni'ka*, 11-17.

⁸³ For most biographical information, see: <http://www.lenablou.fr> (Accessed 15 February 2011).

is Graham, there is *techni'ka*, there is jazz, there is classical. Try to imagine that.”⁸⁴ To some extent, Blou has succeeded. She was invited to present one of her choreographies with the prestigious Rudra Béjart Ballet in Switzerland in 2003.

At the other end of the traditionalist-modernist continuum lie a number of schools whose goals center on preserving the gwoka tradition. These schools, such as Bébé Rospart’s Sòlbòkò or Jacky Jalème’s Kabwa, adopt a neo-traditionalist philosophy, insisting on their students’ adherence to strictly defined rules. These rules are presented as inherited from *les anciens* (the elders), the tradition holders who played, sang and danced in *léwòz* in northern Basse-Terre. At least in the case of Jacky Jalème, nationalist ideology influenced this attitude: Jalème was a member of the nationalist youth group *Bijengwa* in the 1980s.⁸⁵ These schools focus on preparing *tanbouyé* and dancers for the *léwòz*. At the end of the school year, Rospart does not present a show like many of the ballet schools do. Instead, he organizes a *léwòz* in which his students rub elbows with most of the best performers of traditional gwoka.

Even this neo-traditionalist approach is not immune to reformism. These musicians do not advocate for a return to the apprenticeship of the days of yore. They embrace the idea of formal education. They insist on developing performance codes with the double goals of further unifying gwoka practices around the island and further legitimizing gwoka as a bounded musical genre defined by specific formal practices.

⁸⁴ Rugard, *Techni'ka*.

“J’étais convaincue [...] que cette danse-là allait influencer l’esthétique de la danse dans le monde.”
“Essayes d’imaginer. Quand tu vas dans n’importe quelle école dans le monde, tu as Graham, tu as *techni'ka*, tu as jazz, tu as classique. Essayes d’imaginer ça.”

⁸⁵ Jalème, interview with the author, 24 June 2009.

Bijengwa: Bik Jeness Gwadeloup (Camp for Guadeloupean Youth), an organization with strong ties to the UPLG.

Jalème has even sought and obtained a certification as a traditional dance and music instructor from the French government, a clear nod to cosmopolitan aspirations.

Yet reflecting some of the arguments described earlier between instrumental gwoka groups, many in the neo-traditionalist camp regard modernist efforts with suspicion. Jalème summarized this attitude when he told me: “That people want to play ‘progressive’ is their right but they should at least know what it is they’re trying to develop.”⁸⁶ Jalème went on to point out that many of the musicians and dancers, like Léna Blou, who participate in the modernist reformist project in Guadeloupe, are rarely seen attending swaré léwòz, a fact that seriously handicaps their legitimacy in his eyes. In another telling example of the neo-traditionalist/modernist divide, I approached Rospart during his léwòz in 2009 to introduce myself. As soon as I revealed that I was working on a dissertation on gwoka modènn, he walked away.

The same tensions also affect gwoka musicians, whether they play in instrumental groups or stick to the traditional all-drum line-up. I attended a concert by percussionist Klod Kiavué at the music club LaKasa near Baie-Mahault in July 2008. Kiavué’s set was part of a daylong encounter between Cuban bata and Guadeloupean gwoka musicians. That evening, Kiavué performed with a conventional gwoka ensemble of three drums. Kiavué himself played drum and sang lead. Another person sang the response and played chacha. What was remarkable about Kiavué’s performance was that all three drummers, both boula and makè, took turns improvising. When Kiavué finished his performance, the MC asked him about this new concept. Kiavué replied: “This is not another form of

⁸⁶ Jalème, interview with the author, 24 June 2009.

“Que les gens [aient] envi de faire de l’évolutif, ils ont le droit, mais il faut quand même savoir ce qu’on fait évoluer.”

gwoka.” He added: “I keep the same tradition as the elders. I describe what I see.” In other words, for Kiavué, innovation has always been part of the gwoka tradition.

Kiavué was not the first musician to reform gwoka drumming conventions.

Around 1972 or 1973, a group of five musicians who had apprenticed with Guy Konket decided to put together a new type of gwoka ensemble. The group Takouta was born.

Michel Halley, one of the group’s members, explains:

It was the beginning of the nationalist movement. [...] It was Africa. It was the era of African identity, the quest for the African heritage in Guadeloupe. That’s what we were seeking. We weren’t yet at a stage when people were proud to be Guadeloupean, not like today. [...] The elders, like Lockel and the others, they were in another dynamic. They were more politicized, [involved in communism]. But us, the youth, we were more into [Bob] Marley, Africa, a kind of initiatory or spiritual return, the contact with the spirits. [Takouta] was about playing the spirit of the African ancestors on drums, like Africans.”⁸⁷

Halley expanded further on the idea that Takouta was trying to reclaim what he perceived to be gwoka’s lost, or at least diminished, African essence by increasing the intensity and polyrhythmic complexity of the music. In Takouta, the three drums were assigned separate roles: bass, “rhythm,” and soloist. The bass and rhythm drums each played a different ostinato, choosing from two or three different figures. Meanwhile, the soloist combined phrases chosen from a dozen possible rhythms.⁸⁸ This approach crystallized in

⁸⁷ Halley, interview with the author, 16 July 2009.

“C’était le début des mouvements nationalistes. [...] C’était l’Afrique. C’était le temps de l’identité africaine, la recherche de la part africaine dans la Guadeloupe, on cherchait ça. On n’était pas encore au stade du guadeloupéen fier de l’être comme actuellement, hein? On était dans une phase un peu, heu, au niveau de la jeunesse, hein, il faut bien dire les choses quand même. Les plus grands, genre Lockel et tout ça, ils étaient dans une autre dynamique. Ils étaient un petit peu plus politisés que nous parce qu’ils sortaient de... Y avait beaucoup de communisme à l’époque, le communisme contre le capitalisme, c’étaient des grands courants de pensée, on va dire ça comme ça. Et nous, on se retrouvait en tant que jeunes, c’était surtout Marley, l’Afrique, l’espèce de retour initiatique ou spirituel, le contact avec les esprits. Ce sont des esprits ancestraux de l’Afrique joués au tambour comme les Africains.”

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

See also http://www.lameca.org/dossiers/gwoka/musique/rythmes/rythm_takouta.html (accessed February 16, 2011) for recorded example of the takouta rhythm.

a particular rhythmic combination that gwoka musicians now refer to as “takouta” or “takout.”

Takouta disbanded around 1976 or 1977 but it has been fairly influential. The group made the news, partially because of their innovative music and partially because of its members’ peculiar behavior.⁸⁹ The men performed mainly on the streets of Pointe-à-Pitre, dressed in khaki pants and bare-chested, their heads crowned with a *salako*, the East Asian-derived hat of fishermen from Les Saintes. In addition, the group went around accompanied by a goat that they had adopted while on a retreat on the island of La Désirade. Their demeanor was a far cry from the cosmopolitan aspirations of the nationalist leadership.⁹⁰ In fact, Takouta’s innovations were conceived not in progressive terms but rather as a quest to recapture a premodern past, an idealized, Africanized form of gwoka untouched by creolization.

With Takouta, we see that, as early as the mid-1970s, the leading separatist organizations had lost control of the discourse about musical nationalism. From this point on, musicians along with music and dance educators interpreted modernist reformism in various ways, deciding how best to engage with exogenous musical practices to express their national consciousness in music. They faced contradictory challenges. They needed to engage with cosmopolitan practices without losing their local specificity or, alternatively, to embrace a universalist discourse to express their cultural difference. Moreover, the nationalist leadership had justified their modernization effort by portraying

⁸⁹ Guilbault, *Zouk*, 34.

⁹⁰ Halley, interview with the author, 11 August 2008; Halley, interview with the author, 16 July 2009; Caprice, interview with the author, 21 July 2009.

gwoka as a music threatened with extinction under the assault of French cultural imperialism. Not surprisingly, while some musicians jumped on the reformist bandwagon, others responded with efforts to fix and preserve the tradition. Taken together, the examples discussed earlier illustrate how messy, inconclusive, and ambivalent the nationalist process has been in Guadeloupe.

VI. Gwoka in Paris: Dressed for Success

A. BUMIDOM and the Parisian Scene

Thus far I have focused my attention almost exclusively on gwoka musicians in Guadeloupe. However, a lively gwoka scene also developed in Paris as a result of several factors. First, the efforts of the AGEF led the most politically active Guadeloupean students in France to embrace gwoka, either in its traditional or modern forms. Second, the period 1963-1982 was marked by the massive migration of thousands of Antillean workers to the metropole, a migration sanctioned by the state and organized by the BUMIDOM. The impact of BUMIDOM can hardly be overstated. For over ten years, it sponsored the emigration of five thousand Antillean workers a year, half of them from Guadeloupe, the other half from Martinique. Many more people migrated to France of their own accord. By 1982, nearly 200,000 Antilleans were living in France, 44 percent of whom came through BUMIDOM.⁹¹ Nearly 70 percent of these migrants settled in or near Paris.⁹² BUMIDOM promised to facilitate the integration of the newly arrived migrants through training programs and internships in the service industry or low-level public services (post office, police, etc.). However, only about 12 percent of Antillean migrants

⁹¹ Anselin, "West Indians in France," 112-115.

⁹² Beriss, *Black Skins, French Voices*, 64.

benefitted from these programs. Whether they did or not, most workers were limited to low-paying jobs and, following the 1970s economic crisis, many of them faced unemployment.⁹³

Many musicians followed the migratory flow to the French capital, either as students or as job seekers. Guy Konket was among them. The singer went looking for work in Paris in 1973. He could not have picked a better time. The AGEF in Paris had been promoting gwoka amongst Guadeloupean students for the past two years. In his presentation during the 2008 Gwoka festival in Sainte Anne, Julien Mériion explained that many of the Guadeloupean students knew very little about gwoka when they arrived in Paris in the early 1970s. Through its political and cultural actions, the AGEF not only encouraged some students to learn to play the drum but it also created an audience for the music. It should be noted that this audience was not limited to Guadeloupean students but also involved students from Martinique and French Guiana.⁹⁴

As musicologist Françoise Uri pointed out during the 2008 Gwoka festival, Konket's arrival was a turning point. Not only did he bring a deep knowledge of the gwoka tradition to the French capital, he also found new ways of presenting his music with instrumental accompaniment. Indeed, Konket's music changed significantly in the 1970s. By the time he recorded the album "Guy Konket et le groupe ka" during a live Parisian performance in 1981, Konket's music had shed the biguine influence found on his Guadeloupean recordings and replaced it with the modal, vamp-based approach

⁹³ Anselin, "West Indians in France," 112-115.,

⁹⁴ "Kozé bokantaj: Gwoka an déwò (Paris): Quelle histoire? Yè, jodijou" (Discussion: Gwoka in Paris: What history? Yesterday, today), Festival Gwo Ka, Sainte Anne, 13 July 2008. Besides Mériion, other participants included Marcel Magnat, Daniel Losio, Jacky Aglas, Françoise Uri, Jacky Serin, and Eric Bordelais.

described earlier.⁹⁵ In addition, Uri explained, Konké was the first gwoka musician to arrive in the French capital with the express desire to live off his music. Through numerous performances for the many Antillean associations in the French capital or his large-scale concerts in venues such as the prestigious Salle Wagram, Konké was undeniably a significant influence on the development of gwoka in Paris.⁹⁶

Not only did the AGEF encourage the formation of several gwoka groups in metropolitan France, it also influenced the kind of gwoka these artists would play. Singer Erick Cosaque, who migrated to France in the mid-seventies to work as a postal employee but ended up leading several gwoka bands, told me: “The AGEF and UTEG (Union des Travailleurs issus de l’Emigration Guadeloupéenne, the metropolitan branch of the UGTG) made me realize that I couldn’t sing about just anything.”⁹⁷ Like many gwoka singers of his generation, Cosaque had an affinity for frivolous, if not risqué, songs. Upon his contact with nationalist activists, he decided to focus his lyrics on social issues, as his recordings with the group X7 Nouvelle Dimension illustrate. For example, the song “Man Gwo Wójé” (Mrs Big Roger) tells the story of a woman who comes home from work to find her daughter sick and who then goes looking for a remedy.⁹⁸ When Cosaque alters the refrain from “pitit an mwen malad mé zanmi” (my daughter is sick my friends) to “la Gwadeloup malad mé zanmi” (Guadeloupe is sick my friends), he reveals the song to be a thinly veiled allegory about his native island.

⁹⁵ Konké, *Guy Konké et le groupe ka*, Editions Bolibana (BIP-96).

⁹⁶ “Kozé bokantaj: Gwoka an déwò (Paris): Quelle histoire? Yè, jodijou,” Konké, interview with the author, 4 August 2008.

⁹⁷ Cosaque, interview with the author, 4 August 2009.
“L’AGEF et l’UTEG m’ont fait prendre conscience de ne pas chanter n’importe quoi.”

⁹⁸ Cosaque, *Musique Voix Percussions*.

Gwoka musicians in Paris used their music not only to raise awareness about Guadeloupe's socio-economic ills but also to address the experience of Guadeloupeans in the metropole. For example, Cosaque's best known songs "A kòz don biyé san fwan" (Because of a hundred-franc bill) is a strong denunciation of BUMIDOM's pernicious effects. The song tells the story of Antillean migrants lured to France by BUMIDOM's promises of paid internships but who, once the internship is over, find themselves without work. Cosaque's lyrics draw implicit parallels between men who invite destitute Guadeloupean youths to party in nightclubs only to turn them to prostitution, and the French government that tricked them to come to France in the first place. The song is intended as a warning to young Guadeloupeans not to throw away their youth for a hundred-franc bill. "A kòz don biyé san fwan," sings the chorus, "manké bél jiness an mwenn, ay, ay, ay" (For a hundred-franc bill, I lost my youth, ay, ay, ay).

It is interesting to note that Cosaque used his Parisian recordings to explicitly address an audience in Guadeloupe, a fact that highlights the synergy between the Caribbean island and its diaspora in France. Musicians and their recordings traveled back and forth across the Atlantic. A full understanding of the development of instrumental gwoka would require a greater investigation of musical innovations in the metropole than I have offered here. Moreover, we must note that it is in Paris, not in Guadeloupe, that gwoka was given a real opportunity to participate in cosmopolitan networks. In our conversations, both Konké and Cosaque informed me that gwoka musicians in the French capital attracted a wide audience: students and workers from Guadeloupe, Martinique, and French Guiana; francophone African migrants; and, of course, French

Parisians. As we will see below, cosmopolitanism came at a high price for some Guadeloupean musicians.

B. Tumblack and Paco Rabanne

Around 1976, a group of Guadeloupean musicians that included percussionists Marcel Magnat and Daniel Losio started performing regularly at a the *Feijoada*, a Martinican-run restaurant near the Hôtel de Ville in Paris. Both Magnat and Losio had been in the French capital for a few years. Both had contacts with the AGEF and other nationalist organizations. In our conversations, both expressed sympathies for the nationalist cause but explained that they never formally joined any militant group. The two men performed traditional gwoka with a group of friends at the *Feijoada* to entertain its customers. The restaurant attracted what the French refer to as the *Tout-Paris*, a crowd composed of famous musicians, actors, designers, and other personalities.

Among the *Feijoada*'s patrons, the group attracted the attention of fashion designer Paco Rabanne. It is not clear whether the designer was then in the midst of or at the beginning of what he described as a love affair with the French Antilles.⁹⁹ Regardless, Rabanne invited the group to perform for his upcoming fashion show, an Antillean-inspired collection. He also hired Losio, who had a gift for metal and wood working, to design some jewelry for the collection. Most importantly, he offered to negotiate a recording deal on behalf of the group with Barclay, then one of France's biggest recording companies.

The partnership with Rabanne was a boon for the Guadeloupean musicians who called their group Tumblack. They recorded an LP with Barclay (*Tumblack*, 1978),

⁹⁹ Pecqueriaux, "Paco Rabanne à la mode de chez nous," 9.

played for several of Rabanne's shows, and performed in some of Paris's most fashionable nightclubs. They even opened for Bob Marley's Parisian concerts in June 1978. With Tumblack, and under the aegis of Rabanne, gwoka entered fully into cosmopolitan networks.

It is important to insist that both Losio and Magnat remember the group with fondness and are proud to call Rabanne their friend. They describe their relationship with the designer as a fruitful partnership with a generous and respectful patron. They both assured me that neither Rabanne, Eddy Barclay, nor Yves Hayat—who produced the LP and wrote the arrangements for its two hit singles, “Caraiba” and “Chunga Funk”—intruded on the group's artistic direction. Thirty years later, their glee is still apparent as they recall playing at the Pavillon de Paris in front of ten thousand people or getting to meet the Rolling Stones.¹⁰⁰

At the time, performance opportunities were very limited for gwoka musicians. In Guadeloupe, Robert Oumaou remembers that Gwakassonné mainly performed at friends' houses with a few occasional concerts at the Centre des Arts, Pointe-à-Pitre's largest concert hall, once it opened in 1978.¹⁰¹ In the 1970s and '80s, there were hardly any small venues (music clubs or restaurants) featuring live gwoka in Guadeloupe. The situation was only slightly better in Paris. Guy Konket's concert at the Salle Wagram in the mid-seventies—a venue that can accommodate around a thousand people—was exceptional. Erick Cosaque remembers performing regularly in restaurants and cabarets

¹⁰⁰ Losio, interview with the author, 15 July 2010; Magnat, interview with the author, 6 July 2010.

¹⁰¹ Oumaou, interview with the author, 30 June 2010.

like the *Canne à Sucre* or for various Antillean associations. Opportunities to perform in bigger venues were scarce.¹⁰²

Gwoka groups, in the 1970s like today, record frequently but generally do so at their own expense. This also means that, for the most part, they do not have access to a distributor. Most groups sell their albums directly to audience members at live events or by putting them on consignment in local stores. This situation makes groups with recording contracts stand out. In Guadeloupe, Henri Debs, the island's biggest record producer, recorded very little gwoka in the 1970s and '80s, the two biggest exceptions being Konket in the '70s and Kafé in the early '80s. Under these circumstances, it is easy to understand the thrill experienced by young musicians who were given an entry into the global music market.

In spite of the musicians' positive recollections, Tumblack raises some important questions. From a practical standpoint, Paco Rabanne all but took ownership of the group. He controlled the rights to their compositions and managed their bookings. Perhaps not surprisingly given his profession, he even provided them with their stage costumes, which brings us to the second issue: the presentation of the group.

Rabanne may have been inspired by the French Antilles but he saw them through a problematic primitivist gaze. In an interview published in *Hi-Fi Magazine* around 1978, he explained that he preferred Guadeloupean over Martinican music because the former had remained closer to Africa while contacts with whites resulted in a Martinican music that was too modern for his taste. In contrast, he declared: "Guadeloupean music is the

¹⁰² Cosaque, interview with the author, 4 August 2009.

primitive music of the rain forest in all of its power and wild beauty.”¹⁰³ To capture this essence, the designer insisted that the studio be decorated with tropical plants while the group recorded its album. The same sort of primitivist approach is on display on Tumbblack’s album cover (Figure 4.11).¹⁰⁴ Indeed the cover plays on familiar representations of black physicality and sexuality: the couple’s clothing is designed to expose more than it covers, the woman’s open legs express her availability, the faces are tensed in an orgasmic grin as bolts of light and a powerful wave shoot from the gwoka.



Figure 4.11: Tumbblack, album cover. Artwork by Helene Majera (1978).

Musically, the LP is divided with the first side offering four compositions by the Guadeloupean members of the group. Three of the four numbers are instrumental and, save occasional sound effects, feature only percussion instruments. The song “Jubilé,” in contrast, spotlights the voice of Marcel Magnat accompanied by a very slow single drum pulse. The titles of three of the four songs—“Invocation,” “Jubilé,” “Vaudou”—evoke an imagined Caribbean mysticism. The second side opens with a toumblak mixed with boulagyèl vocables. Three minutes into the songs, most of the polyrhythmic layers fade

¹⁰³ Thanks to Daniel Losio for showing me this article. Unfortunately, Losio had torn the pages out of the magazine and I have not been able to locate the original, hence the skeletal reference below: Interview with Paco Rabanne, *Hi-Fi Magazine*, ca. 1978, 181-182
 “La musique guadeloupéenne, c’est la musique primitive de la forêt vierge dans toute sa puissance et sa beauté sauvage.”

¹⁰⁴ Tumbblack, *Tumbblack*, Barclay (91.024).

out, only to be replaced by an insistent bass drum beat. Gwoka gives way to disco.

Indeed, the next two songs on the album, “Caraïba” and “Chunga Funk,” were composed by Yves Hayat, a veteran of the French disco scene. On these songs, Tumblack is augmented by the rhythm and horns sections of the disco group the Droids, whom Eddy Barclay hired especially for this session. The mix of disco grooves, toumblak rhythm, occasional boulagyèl, funk bass lines, and tight horn arrangements that Hayat conjured up makes for effective dance music. However, the gwoka elements, while still audible in the mix, are not the music’s defining characteristic. Thus “Caraiba” and “Chunga Funk” remind us of the difficulty of maintaining a balance between cosmopolitanism and local specificity. In these songs, as in some of the jazz examples discussed in chapter 5, the cosmopolitan elements overcome expressions of local specificity.

Tumblack was the product of a complex musical and ideological process that unfolded over a ten year period. Musically, Tumblack participated in the same process of modernist reformism initiated by Lockel in 1969: a desire to bring global recognition to local traditional music through the adoption of cosmopolitan practices. Ideologically, Tumblack is more problematic. Even if group members embraced Guadeloupean nationalist ideas, this perspective disappeared as Rabanne took control of the group and, more importantly, the group’s image. The designer and his musical experiment soon attracted the ire of the nationalist press. In 1979, Rabanne took his fashion show to Guadeloupe and Martinique. Ahead of the event, an ad in *France-Antilles* read: “Paco Rabanne leads the way to help Guadeloupean culture... What about you?” (Figure

**Paco Rabanne
prend l'initiative d'aider
la culture
en Guadeloupe...**



...et vous?

Le Mardi 5 Juin à 20 heures,
Première Mondiale du

Show

de Paco Rabanne et ses mannequins
au cours duquel vous sera présentée
sa Collection d'Eté Haute Couture.
Participent à cette soirée,

Jobby Valente
et ses chansons

juin 1979

Paco Rabanne

Alors, le 5 Juin.....Venez nombreux !



paco rabanne
PARIS



Centre des Arts et de la Culture
Pointe-à-Pitre

Figure 4.12: An advertisement for Rabanne's upcoming fashion show in *France-Antilles*, June 1979.

4.12).¹⁰⁵ An anonymous author who identified himself as “an aware Guadeloupean artist” (could it be Lockel?) compared Rabanne’s involvement with Guadeloupean culture—music in particular—to slavery and scathingly denounced the designer’s racism.¹⁰⁶ The article was accompanied by artwork depicting a bull fighter (Paco Rabanne was born in Spain) ready to stab a gwoka player and dancer (Figure 4.13).



Figure 4.13: Paco Rabanne as torero stabs Guadeloupean slaves. *JaKaTa*, June-July-August 1979.

Since the 1970s, Guadeloupean artists have struggled to interpret the nationalist push for modernist-reformism in music performance as well as music and dance pedagogy. While the group Tumblack actually managed to bring international attention to

¹⁰⁵ *France-Antilles*, 1 June 1979.

¹⁰⁶ *JaKaTa*, June-July-August 1979, 11.

gwoka, they did so under conditions that, far from advancing the Guadeloupean nationalist cause, were reminiscent of the worst *doudouiste* imagery. In the 1980s, Guadeloupean and Martinican musicians created *zouk*, a popular music rooted in Antillean musical traditions and sung in Creole that also satisfied cosmopolitan standards of production. While the gwoka was originally an integral part of the *zouk* sound, the Guadeloupean drums were quickly replaced by more modern-sounding drum machines.¹⁰⁷ In the following chapter, I will turn my attention to a second wave of musicians who, since the late 1990s, have found new ways to introduce gwoka into cosmopolitan networks.

¹⁰⁷ See Guilbault, *Zouk*.

Chapter 5

“Révolution? Non, non, non, non”: Gwoka and *créolisation* in the new millennium

Introduction

Nationalist activism peaked in the French Antilles in the 1980s. On the political front, the various separatist groups, caught between two contradictory strategies, found themselves unable to articulate a common program towards independence. Some militants argued for a revolution at the ballot box: pro-independence candidates in local elections could bring about statutory change for the French Antilles from within the French political system. Others favored an armed revolution: a bombing campaign would force France to listen to the demands of the DOM. As explained in chapter 3, both paths had the potential to undermine grass-roots support for the patriotic camp. Meanwhile, Mitterrand's *politique des régions* increased the autonomy of France's overseas departments and addressed many of the nationalist cultural demands, further undermining the separatist enterprise.

In the domain of music, Gérard Lockel's *gwoka modènn* never garnered a significant popular following. However, it did inspire an explosion of groups that sought, in various ways, to mix the rhythms of traditional gwoka with cosmopolitan musical aesthetics. None of these groups made much of an impact on the music market, either

Core sections of this chapter are taken from Camal, “Creolizing Jazz, Jazzing the *Tout-monde*: Jazz, Gwoka, and the Poetics of Relation,” to be published in *Francophone Postcolonial Studies*.

locally or internationally. However, this new nationalist consciousness played a significant part in the emergence of *zouk*, a popular music genre based on gwoka and other traditional Antillean rhythms. By fully embracing cosmopolitan recording standards, *zouk* was able to conquer music markets not only in the francophone Caribbean, but also in Europe, South America, and Africa.¹

Finally, in the 1980s, the French Antilles saw the emergence of new identity concepts born in reaction against the Stalinist nationalism of the previous decade. Whereas the AGEG had emphasized a stable Guadeloupean national identity, several intellectuals—most of them Martinican—embraced creolization as a defining characteristic of their identity. New theories of hybridity emerged: Edouard Glissant’s concepts of *antillanité*, *créolisation*,² and *Tout-monde* inspired and in turn responded to the concept of *créolité* that Jean Bernabé, Raphaël Confiant, and Patrick Chamoiseau spearheaded.

Even as the gwoka drum and the *menndé* rhythm receded in *zouk*’s increasingly electronic mix, the idea of mixing gwoka and Western instruments survived to influence a new generation of musicians, the sons and daughters of the nationalist activists introduced in the previous chapters. These musicians, born in the 1970s, grew up hearing *Radyo Tanbou*, which broadcasted Lockel’s hymn on a daily basis.³ But the deregulation of the FM radio which made *Radyo Tanbou* possible also brought new local subsidiaries

¹ Guilbault, *Zouk*.

² Throughout this chapter, I use the French spelling “*créolisation*” to refer specifically to Glissant’s theory. The English “creolization” refers more broadly to the various linguistic and anthropological theories of hybridization in the Caribbean and elsewhere.

³ Fred Deshayes, interview with the author, 12 August 2008.

of metropolitan radio stations, such as NRJ, that broadcasted the latest zouk hits alongside those of Michael Jackson. All of these elements—FM radio, zouk, and new identity concepts—led this new generation to think of themselves differently than their parents and to ask new questions. They absorbed the nationalist discourse of the previous generation but, I argue, developed a post-nationalist stance. Singer-songwriter Fred Deshayes summed up the new problematic in a 2006 interview for the French daily *Le Monde*:

How do we, Guadeloupeans, live in this vast ensemble that is the French nation? We are legally French but we have a feeling of belonging to something different. This has nothing to do with political belief, it is simply a different way of being. I do not feel “black” either, it doesn’t mean anything! My community is composed of East Indians, whites, blacks: they’re all Guadeloupeans. I feel closer to *blan péyi* (Guadeloupean-born white persons) or to Guadeloupean Indians than to African Americans. Teenagers’ imagination isn’t turned towards Europe. They sing Jamaican dancehall in both Creole and English... My grandmother was light-skinned and didn’t really like black people. All of this is part of our reality. Questions remain. We have a customizable identity. A Guadeloupean person is pro-European when it benefits him, that is to say when France makes decisions that bother him; pro-French when Europe is embarrassing; and profoundly Guadeloupean when he meets a *metro* (person born in France) who bothers him. We do all this quasi-instinctively.⁴

In this chapter, I will explore how a new generation of Guadeloupean musicians has used gwoka to express this multi-faceted and performative identity. More than any generation before them, these musicians and their music bring together the concepts of

⁴ Labesse, “Fred Deshayes : la Guadeloupe est ‘responsable de son naufrage’.” “Comment nous, Guadeloupéens, faisons-nous pour vivre dans ce vaste ensemble que nous appelons ‘nation française?’ Nous sommes français légalement, mais nous avons un sentiment d’appartenance différent. Cela n’a rien à voir avec une détermination politique, c’est juste une manière d’être qui n’est pas la même. Je ne me sens pas black non plus (ça ne veut rien dire !). Ma communauté est faite d’Indiens, de Blancs, de Noirs, ce sont des Guadeloupéens. Je me sens plus proche d’un Blanc péyi ou d’un Indien guadeloupéen que d’un Noir américain. Dans la jeunesse, la recherche de l’ailleurs ne se situe pas en Europe. Les jeunes font du dancehall jamaïcain, où ils s’expriment en créole et en anglais... Ma grand-mère était claire de peau et n’aimait pas trop les Noirs. C’est tout cela notre réalité à nous. Des questions à régler. Nous avons une identité à la carte. Un Guadeloupéen est pro-européen quand ça l’arrange, c’est-à-dire lorsque la France prend des décisions qui le dérangent, pro-français quand l’Europe l’embarrasse et foncièrement guadeloupéen quand il croise un ‘métro’ qui l’embête. Cela se fait quasi instinctivement.”

creolization and nationalism. Although many Guadeloupean musicians feel ambivalent about *créolisation* and *créolité*, I argue that these theories and the new gwoka-based musics express similar ideologies and aesthetics. As musicians find new ways to combine gwoka with both intra- and extra-Caribbean musics, they also force us to question the applicability of *créolisation* and *créolité* to non-Caribbean settings. Can these theories, born out of a specific social and political context in the French Antilles, be transposed to explain global processes of hybridization? A close look at collaborations between gwoka and jazz musicians offers some answers to this question. Moreover, the encounter of jazz and gwoka allows us to fully grasp the tension between nationalism, creolization, and diasporic intimacy. Before plunging into these theoretical currents, and in order to understand how this new generation of musicians both benefited and broke from the nationalist ideology, we need to consider how they encountered and absorbed it.

VII. Nationalism, *Créolisation* and *Créolité*: A Guadeloupean Perspective

A. Growing up in a new cultural landscape

Earlier, I exposed the strategies used by the Guadeloupean patriotic camp to stimulate national consciousness through the promotion of select cultural expressions, namely the Creole language and gwoka. In chapter 3, I approached the transformation of the Guadeloupean habitus from the perspective of those activists who put specific programs in place to bring about this transformation. In chapter 4, I demonstrated how musicians interpreted the new national creed, contributed to the diffusion of its main ideas even as they sometimes questioned its orthodoxy, and helped to increase gwoka's

social capital. I would now like to turn our attention to the effects of the nationalist cultural program on the generation of musicians born in the late 1960s and '70s. I will focus here on two singer-songwriters: Dominik Coco (born in 1966) and Fred Deshayes (born in 1973).

Coco was born in Sainte Anne, in a family with loose communist leanings but no strong separatist sympathies. His family was typical of many families at the time: his parents spoke Creole to each other but the children were instructed to address their elders only in French. Gwoka was, at best, tolerated. Coco was a teenager in the 1980s, when cultural nationalism was at its peak in Guadeloupe, a fact that had a profound influence on him. Although the singer remembers hearing reggae, salsa and early hip hop artists like Afrika Bambaataa, the music that dominated his youth was gwoka. He explains:

[Gwoka] was pushed to the forefront, you know? It was after the 1960s and '70s when the nationalist movement had pushed gwoka to the forefront. Therefore, for me, when I was a teenager, gwoka, Guadeloupean identity, Creole were all very much present. And kids my age, I was around eighteen at the time, we played gwoka, right? We had our neighborhood gwoka group. That's it.⁵

Gwoka exposed Coco to nationalist ideology. "Gwoka raised your awareness," commented the singer.⁶ It inspired him to question and investigate Guadeloupean history and the influence of African culture. Coco also had a cousin who belonged to the local branch of BiJenGwa, the nationalist youth organization. The two talked a lot, furthering

⁵ Quote and biographical information:

Dominik Coco, interview with the author, 21 July 2010.

"Il était très mis en avant, hein? C'était après les années 60-70 où le mouvement nationaliste avait mis en avant le gwoka, hein? Donc, moi, quand je suis adolescent, le gwoka, l'identité guadeloupéenne, le créole est très présent. Et les jeunes en fait, puisqu'à ce moment-là j'ai dix-huit ans, bon, et bien on fait du gwoka, hein? On avait notre groupe de gwoka dans le quartier. Voilà."

⁶ *Ibid.*

"Le gwoka t'installait dans une espèce de prise de conscience."

Coco's immersion in nationalist ideology. Although Coco did not join the patriotic camp, his teenage encounters with gwoka and nationalist thinking encouraged his desire to promote Guadeloupean culture.

Fred Deshayes encountered nationalist ideology closer to home than Coco. His father belonged to the GONG and had strong nationalist convictions. In one of our many conversations together, the singer joked: "When I was young, I told my father: 'It's kind of good that in Guadeloupe we have bridges and stuff like that...' He told me: 'Yes, the French build bridges so that they can better transport the troops of repression.'"⁷

However strong his nationalist beliefs, Deshayes's father did not share the AGEF's views on music. In contrast to the nationalist hardline, Deshayes's father argued that biguine was the true popular music of Guadeloupe and had a better chance than gwoka of garnering widespread support. In the Deshayes household, the gwoka broadcasted on *Radyo Tanbou* mixed with biguine and Trinidadian calypso, which Deshayes *père et fils* particularly enjoyed. In addition, Fred Deshayes also grew up hearing the biggest names in 1980s R&B: Lionel Richie, Michael Jackson, and songwriter Rod Temperton whose songs particularly impressed Deshayes.⁸ All of these elements have combined to influence Deshayes's musical aesthetics.

In our interviews, Deshayes also highlighted the importance of the annual gwoka festival in raising the music's visibility. Indeed, over its twenty plus years of existence, the gwoka festival has arguably grown to become the most important institution for the

⁷ Fred Deshayes, interview with the author, 12 August 2008.

"Quand j'étais tout jeune, j'ai dit à papa: 'C'est bien quand même en Guadeloupe, y a des ponts et tout ça.' Il dit: 'Oui, les français font des ponts pour acheminer les forces de la répression.'"

⁸ Temperton is a British songwriter and a frequent collaborator of Quincy Jones's. He composed many of the hits on Jackson's *Thriller* album.

promotion of gwoka—both traditional and modern—in Guadeloupe. As with many things related to gwoka in Guadeloupe, it would be a mistake to view the festival strictly as a cultural event. Indeed, the gwoka festival, organized every July in Sainte Anne, participates in the modernist-reformist ideological process that has defined Guadeloupean nationalism since the 1970s.

The festival grew out of Félix Cotellon's effort during the late 1970s to promote cultural activities in conjunction with a youth soccer tournament organized by the *Comité d'Actions Sportives et Culturelles* (CASC) held on the beach in Sainte Anne during summer break. Cotellon is from Sainte Anne and the son of a local communist leader. He studied law in Bordeaux where he joined the AGEF. He briefly served as president of the AGEF, in 1973 and '74. Upon his return to Guadeloupe, he continued his militant activities within the UPLG, where he presided over the organization's cultural committee. Cotellon's organizing efforts faced a lot of resistance at first. Sainte Anne was a communist holdout and tensions ran high between the communist old guard, closely linked to the Soviet Union, and the new nationalist Maoist organizations. Around 1979-80, Cotellon managed to program some cultural activities alongside the summer sporting event.⁹

In 1988, as the CASC celebrated its tenth birthday, Cotellon organized a concert of instrumental gwoka on the beach in Sainte Anne. The CASC continued organizing gwoka concerts for several years. In 1991, the concerts became the "Festival de Gwo Ka Moderne." In 1993, the festival changed its name to "Festival Gwo Ka" and adopted its

⁹ All information about the history of the festival was provided by Félix Cotellon during an interview with the author, 29 July 2008.

current format presenting a blend of traditional and modern music along with debates around a selected theme. Past themes have included discussions of cultural exchanges between Guadeloupe and France, Africa, India and other Caribbean islands. In parallel with the festival, the center for popular and traditional music and dance of Guadeloupe, *Rèpriz*—over which Cotellon has presided since its creation in 2005—organizes a biennial conference on Caribbean music. All festival-related events are free and open to the public.

The festival lasts for about a week in July. In a blatant act of political opposition, the final concert is scheduled on the evening of July 14 so as to disrupt Bastille Day celebrations in Sainte Anne. Even though the festival is held within walking distance of the only resort in Guadeloupe, it caters mainly to locals: all the announcements are made in Creole and the program is also printed in Creole. No efforts are made to promote the festival abroad, including in metropolitan France, and neither the CASC nor the festival maintain an online presence.¹⁰ As a result, a crowd of several hundred people consisting mainly of Guadeloupean adults, sometimes accompanied by their children, descends nightly on the *Plage Galbas* near the fishermen's harbor in Sainte Anne. While few teenagers actually enter the festival ground, large groups gather within earshot, around the *bokit* vendors¹¹ who line the boulevard around the entrance to the beach.

As noted above, the festival's program blends traditional and modern gwoka with occasional concerts by quadrille ensembles, carnival groups, and foreign musicians, especially when appropriate to the festival's theme. For many musicians in Guadeloupe,

¹⁰ Rèpriz launched its own website in May 2010.

¹¹ The *bokit* is a local specialty: a fry-bread sandwich filled with either chicken, ground beef, or dry cod.

the festival offers their only performance opportunity. Thus, the gwoka festival serves three important functions. Its debates encourage public reflection on cultural issues. It helps maintain gwoka's creative vitality by providing a venue for new music and it ensures a fairly large audience for groups who would otherwise labor in obscurity.

Through the gwoka festival, radio programs, and youth organizations, Guadeloupean nationalists managed to transform the island's cultural landscape and inspire a new generation of musicians, such as Fred Deshayes and Dominik Coco. However, as we will see below, these musicians were as influenced by the international popular music that surrounded them as they were by nationalist rhetoric. This allowed them to develop a post-nationalist stance, one that weaves national consciousness within a fabric of transnational relations with the Caribbean, France, the United States, and Africa.

B. Theorizing hybridity in the French Caribbean

In the following pages, I will draw parallels between the music of Soft—Fred Deshayes's group—and Dominik Coco and the theories of *créolisation* and *créolité*. The move is problematic. In "Créolité and the Process of Creolization," Stuart Hall warns of the dangers of extending *créolisation* and *créolité* beyond the French Antilles. His survey of recent anglophone Caribbean literature leads him to argue that these concepts seem salient to our understanding of postcolonial societies in Jamaica, Saint Lucia, and Trinidad. However, he questions whether *créolisation* and *créolité* could be applied to the study of "wider processes of globalization."¹²

¹² Hall, "Créolité and the Process of Creolization," 27.

I think that Hall's warning should be heeded, even within the French Caribbean. A thorough exposition of the complexities of *créolisation* and *créolité* would exceed the scope of this dissertation. Rather, I think it more important to focus on those aspects that are the most relevant to a study of Guadeloupean post-nationalism. My goal here is to show that *créolisation* and *créolité* can be applied to the study of some Guadeloupean music but not all. Moreover, regardless of their academic attractiveness, my ethnographic work has revealed that Guadeloupean musicians often regard these theories with a certain amount of skepticism, if not outright rejection. This contradiction between the theoretical and the ethnographic cannot be ignored and needs to be explained.

Philosopher, ethnologist, and writer Edouart Glissant has developed and presented his ideas through a variety of media: essays, poems, plays, and novels, even occasionally combining genres within the same volume. These ideas are difficult to summarize because they have evolved over time. Together they form an ensemble that Glissant calls the "poetics of Relation."

As we explore the poetic of Relation and consider its implications for postcolonial theory, we need to keep two things in mind. First, Glissant's writing is rooted in the socio-political context of postwar Martinique. It responds to three ideological, aesthetic and political poles: assimilation/departmentalization, *négritude*, and nationalism. That Glissant's writing participates in Martinique's political process is evidenced by the opening pages of his seminal *Discours antillais* (originally published in 1981) in which the author stakes out his own position within the overall pro-independence Antillean landscape. He offers *antillanité* (Antillean-ness) as a new identity paradigm that not only

tempers nationalism, but also opposes all universalist claims, be they “the humanist universality of French values” or “the scientific universality of revolutionary values.”¹³ Thus, Glissant takes aim both at France’s colonial heritage and at the kind of socialist nationalism espoused by groups like the AGEG or the OJAM (Organisation de la Jeunesse Anticolonialiste de la Martinique).

In addition, we need to be aware that Glissant’s political engagement was not limited to theorizing Antillean identity. It was also, at various points in his life, very practical. Indeed, in 1959, Glissant was one of the founders of the radical anticolonialist *Front Antillo-Guyanais* (FAG, also known as FAGA: Front Antillo-Guyanais pour l’Autonomie),¹⁴ which was an important inspiration for the politicization of the AGEG. As a result of his involvement in the FAG, Glissant was forbidden from leaving metropolitan France for a four-year period from 1961 to 1965. Once back in Martinique, Glissant created the Institut Martiniquais d’Étude (IME, Institute for Martinican Studies) and the journal *Acoma*, the print outlet of the IME. Although Glissant was not involved with any particular political party at the time, his work within the IME marked his continued involvement with separatist ideology and his final break with Aimé Césaire “whose Parti Progressiste Martiniquais dominated local politics.”¹⁵

It is also important to note that Glissant did not conceive of his poetics of Relation as a theory but rather as a “vision.” As Mary Gallagher explains, *antillanité* refers to a reality that will remain virtual. J. Michael Dash concurs. “*Antillanité*,” he writes, “is

¹³ *Discours antillais*, 295, 426. Translations by the author.

¹⁴ Dash, *Edouard Glissant*, 13.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

ultimately [...] a dream but a fragile one.”¹⁶ The poetics of Relation is both militant and utopian. It is best understood as participating in an ideological process, an ongoing debate about Antillean identity shaped by the French overseas departments’ peculiar political status, an important point to keep in mind as we consider its transposability.

The poetics of Relation aims to answer a crucial question with global implications: “How can we affirm the self without rejecting the other and how can we become open to the other without losing the self?”¹⁷ In order to answer this question, Glissant relies on several key concepts: *trace*, *métissage*, *opacité*, *créolisation*, and *Tout-monde*. The *trace* puts people in relation with one another. It is both memory and path. The French word *trace*, like its English homonym, refers to a remnant, an impression, or a memory. However, in the particular geographic context of Martinique and Guadeloupe, the *trace* also refers to a path.¹⁸ Glissant seems fond of this ambiguity.¹⁹ Only by considering both meanings can we understand the role of the *trace* in putting people and cultures in relation with one another. The *trace* not only looks back, it also leads forward. Glissant offers the ‘*pensée de la trace*’ as a force capable of opposing the “*pensée de système*” (systematic thoughts) or “*systèmes de pensée*” (thought systems) that have characterized Western colonialism.²⁰

¹⁶ Gallagher, “The Créolité Movement,” 225; Dash, *Edouard Glissant*, 149.

¹⁷ Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, 23.
“Comment être soi sans se fermer à l’autre, et comment s’ouvrir à l’autre sans se perdre soi-même?”

¹⁸ Although mainly obsolete, this meaning also occurs in English, especially in the United States, e.g. the Natchez Trace.
“trace, n.1”. *OED Online*. November 2010. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.libproxy.wustl.edu/view/Entry/204174?rskey=fcERvH&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed February 26, 2011).

¹⁹ See for example: Glissant, *Le discours antillais*, 276-278; Glissant, *Traité du Tout-monde*, 18-19.

²⁰ Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, 17; Glissant, *Traité du Tout-monde*, 18.

Métissage and *créolisation* are closely linked in Glissant's system. While there is no single English translation for *métissage*, Glissant used the term "cross-breeding" in an address at the University of Oklahoma.²¹ In other situations, "cross-fertilization" seems equally appropriate.²² In 1990, Glissant defined creolization as unlimited *métissage*.²³ However, Glissant later drew a distinction between *métissage* and *créolisation*. In *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, the philosopher explained that the results of *métissage* can be predicted whereas *créolisation* introduces unpredictability in processes of synthesis.²⁴ Glissant further stipulates that in order to be truly successful, *créolisation* must combine cultural elements "of equivalent value" (*équivalents en valeur*), although he does not explain what this entails. In situations when creolization took place between elements of disparate value, it only took effect in a hybrid and unjust mode ("mode bâtard" and "mode injuste"). In the Western Hemisphere, where creolization is intrinsically linked with slavery and inequality (see chapter 2), Glissant proposes that artistic movements such as *négritude* or the Harlem Renaissance have provided the necessary correction to put African and European culture on a more equal footing.²⁵

Successful *créolisation* puts people and cultures in Relation, a phenomenon that Glissant observes throughout the world. French sociologist Denis-Constant Martin concludes that Glissant's poetics of Relation offers a system that addresses "both the elusive globality of a chaotic world and the 'opacity' (that is to say the irreducible

²¹ Glissant, "Beyond Babel," 561.

²² See for example Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, 19.

²³ *Poétique de la relation*, 46.

²⁴ Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, 19.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

specificity) of the place one is from.”²⁶ “Opacity” denotes for Glissant the limits placed on people’s capacity to apprehend Others’ difference as well as Others’ limits on losing their difference through acculturation.²⁷ Through Relation, the world becomes the “*Tout-monde*” which can be translated as both “Whole-World” and “Everyone,” depending on whether one chooses to focus on the French or Creole meaning.²⁸ Glissant envisions the *Tout-monde* as both “multiple and one,” a space where specificity and universality are reconciled.

Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant developed *créolité* as a response to Glissant’s *antillanité*. Arguing that *antillanité* failed to generate its own aesthetic, the manifesto *Éloge de la créolité* (1989) calls for a new creole literature that is rooted in orality, embraces its diglossia, is focused on the Antillean experience and history, and rejects any sort of universality.²⁹ Rather than offer a detailed analysis of the manifesto, I would like to focus on key differences between *créolité* and Glissant’s *créolisation*.

Both *antillanité* and *créolité* were conceived as responses to Césaire’s *négritude*. Glissant and the creolists celebrate *négritude* as a necessary step to counterbalance French culture’s stronghold on Antillean imagination, but all authors also agree that *négritude* failed to create an autonomous Antillean consciousness. Indeed, *négritude*

²⁶ Martin, “Can Jazz Be Rid of the Racial Imagination,” 109.

²⁷ Britton, *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory*, 18-19.

²⁸ In Creole, “*tout moun*” means “everybody.”

²⁹ *Éloge de la créolité*, 33-51.

merely replaced one outside reference (France) with another (Africa).³⁰ However, Mary Gallagher explains that Glissant and the creolists responded to Césaire in different ways:

Both movements distance themselves from *négritude* by insisting on the particular rather than the general: but whereas *antillanité* stresses immediate geographical relationality, the proponents of *créolité* focus more on culture. It is in great part through its defense and occasional illustration of Creole and of creolised French that the literature of the *créolité* opposes the Caribbean legacy of alienation. Whereas Glissant's vision is held to counter the generality of *négritude*'s reference by anchoring his thinking in the geocultural specifics of the Caribbean, *créolité* is claimed to have a deeper, more tangible or approachable cultural reach by virtue of its emphasis on language rather than space.³¹

Perhaps more indebted to nationalist thinking than Glissant, the authors of *Éloge de la créolité* explicitly seek to establish an authentic creole literature, to reclaim an aesthetic derived from self-examination and acceptance of its own creoleness, free from what W.E.B. Du Bois has called double-consciousness.³² Indeed, echoing Du Bois, the creolists write:

We are fundamentally stricken with exteriority. This from a long time ago to the present day. We have seen the world through the filter of western values, and our foundation was 'exoticized' by the French vision we had to adopt. It is a terrible condition to perceive one's interior architecture, one's world, the instants of one's days, one's own values, with the eyes of the other.³³

While Glissant certainly does not deny this double-consciousness, he does not propose to break it by seeking a more authentic mode of self-expression. Rather, his analysis of

³⁰ *Éloge de la créolité*, 18-21; Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, 17-18.

³¹ Gallagher, "The *Créolité* Movement," 224.

³² *Éloge de la créolité*, 22-23; Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 5.

³³ *Éloge de la créolité*, 76. Translated by M.B. Taleb-Khyar.

Martinican society leads him to reject any notion of authenticity, to which he prefers ambiguity.³⁴

Perhaps the biggest difference between *créolité* and *créolisation* is the most obvious. *Créolité* refers to an identity, and therefore has an element of finality to it. On the other hand, *créolisation* is an open-ended process and denies the existence of pure or authentic cultures. This may explain why, during my interviews with Guadeloupean musicians and activists, the terms “creole” and “créolité” came up more frequently than “creolization.” In an environment marked by nationalism and a quest to express a specific Guadeloupean identity, my interlocutors were perhaps more comfortable reflecting on what it means to be creole, while the process of creolization may have seemed overly abstract.

C. Soft and the “new” cultural politics of difference

Perhaps no musical group embodies the complex Guadeloupean perspective on *créolité* and *créolisation* better than Soft (Figure 5.1). Created in 2002, Soft has taken the Guadeloupean music scene by surprise. Twenty years after the advent of zouk and at a time when Guadeloupean music was increasingly dominated by the electronic sounds of *konpa* and dancehall, here was a group that played only acoustic instruments, centered their rhythm section around the gwoka, and sang politically and socially conscious Creole lyrics. However, what truly separates Soft from the many instrumental gwoka groups who came before them was the group’s unexpected popular success: three months after the release of their first album in 2006, the group had already sold over 10,000 copies in

³⁴ *Le discours antillais*, 284-293.

Guadeloupe alone, rivaling some of zouk's biggest hits.³⁵ Since then, Soft has released two equally successful recordings and has consistently filled concert venues in Guadeloupe, Martinique, and France.



Figure 5.1: Soft performing at the Gwoka Festival in Sainte Anne: Fred Deshayes (guitar), Joël Larochelle (bass), Philippe Sadikalay (saxophone), Julie Aristide (violin), unknown percussionist.

Singer-songwriter Fred Deshayes, saxophonist Philippe Sadikalay, and bassist Joël Larochelle form the core of the group. In addition, Soft's recordings and concerts generally feature the violin of Julie Aristide, the voice of Maxence Deshayes (Fred's brother) and the work of a number of percussionists. At various times, the group has performed with gwoka player Didier Juste, drummer Sonny Troupé (Georges Troupé's son), and percussionist Charlie Chomereau-Lamotte.

Although Soft is a collaborative enterprise, Fred Deshayes contributes the majority of the group's repertoire and sets the tone of its overall philosophy. A law

³⁵ Daoudi, "Soft, plus dur qu'il n'y paraît."

professor at the Université Antilles-Guyane, Deshayes has a sharp understanding of Guadeloupe's political and social situation, as well as the ways in which politics have shaped Guadeloupean music. Deshayes's ideology and musical aesthetics are a product of the cultural and political activism of his parents' generation, yet they are far from a mere extension of the nationalist discourse of the 1970s. In fact, although Deshayes does not claim any particular debt to either Glissant or the creolists—he can even be rather dismissive of the former—his complex views about Guadeloupean identity and his approach to music echo the writings of these Martinican intellectuals.

I argue that Fred Deshayes moves the Guadeloupean ideological process past nationalism. Deshayes and his music are indeed post-nationalist. Like the nationalist orthodoxy of the 1970s, however, Deshayes puts gwoka at the center of his expression of Guadeloupean-ness and of his musical creative process. In 2009, he told me that, with his music, he was seeking “what we [Guadeloupeans] can give the world, what is essentially Guadeloupean, what can't be found anywhere else, the phrasing that can only be found here. That's what I'm looking for.”³⁶ When working on a new composition, Deshayes generally starts by working out riffs and melodies that would fit a particular gwoka rhythm. When I asked him to define gwoka, his answer painted gwoka as the musical expression of the opacity of Guadeloupean identity. “I don't know [what it is]. I've never asked myself that question. I've never needed to ask that question. I've wondered that about zouk, about biguine, but not about gwoka.” He explained that he's sought definitions of zouk and biguine to separate them from other musical genres, *konpa* in

³⁶ Interview with the author, 20 July 2009.

“En cherchant ce que nous on peut donner au monde. Ce qui est essentiellement guadeloupéen, ce qu'on ne pourrait pas jouer ailleurs, le phrasé qu'on peut avoir que chez nous. C'est ça que je cherche.”

particular, but he concluded: “For gwoka, I’ve never really needed a definition. It’s like I’ve always known what it was.”³⁷

For Deshayes, gwoka is a musical expression of Guadeloupean-ness and both are fundamentally creole. He explained to me once that the “universe of the gwoka” expressed Guadeloupean difference but did so on a foundation that was *métissée* (hybrid), with contributions from both Africa and France, a position that would irk many Guadeloupean nationalists. Likewise, when I asked him to define what it meant to be Guadeloupean, his answer moved past an effort to define the Guadeloupean nation to settle on an expression of Guadeloupean creoleness:

What’s a Guadeloupean? What I can tell you, is that being Guadeloupean is, on principle, at least in my mind, without distinction of race, class, or origin. You can be Guadeloupean and white or Guadeloupean and Indian. It has nothing to do with that. The difficulty in defining the word Guadeloupean is the problem with the word nation more broadly. There are two conceptions: either you define the nation as a willingness to live together or you define it with objective criteria. [...] What makes us Guadeloupean? I don’t know. The fact that we say we are, that’s evident. And the fact, I don’t know, that we share creole references. Because Creole is not only a language: I do not *speak* Creole, I *am* creole. That is to say that I speak Creole and French. I am creole in my way of living, in my tastes.³⁸

Like Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant, Deshayes embraces his diglossia and his creoleness.

³⁷ Interview with the author, 20 July 2009.

“Je ne sais pas parce que je ne me suis jamais posé la question. Je n’ai pas eu besoin de me poser la question. Je me suis posé la question pour le zouk, pour la biguine mais pas pour le gwoka. [...] Le gwoka, j’en ai jamais vraiment eu besoin, comme si j’avais toujours su ce que c’était.”

³⁸ Interview with the author, 12 August 2008.

“C’est quoi un Guadeloupéen? Ce que je peux te dire, c’est le fait d’être guadeloupéen est en principe, enfin dans mon esprit, sans distinction de race ou de classe, or d’origine. Tu peux être guadeloupéen blanc, guadeloupéen indien, ça n’a rien à voir. La difficulté qu’on a à définir le mot guadeloupéen, c’est le problème qu’on a avec le mot nation en général. Il y deux grandes conceptions. Soit on définit la nation comme la volonté de vivre ensemble ou on la définit par des critères objectifs. [...] Qu’est-ce qui fait qu’on est guadeloupéen, je ne sais pas. Déjà le fait qu’on le dise, ça c’est évident. Et le fait, qu’on, je sais pas, est-ce-que c’est le fait qu’on partage, on partage, euh, les références créoles. Puisque créole, c’est pas seulement une langue: je ne parle pas créole, je suis un créole. C’est à dire que je parle créole et français. Je suis un créole dans la manière de faire, dans les goûts que j’ai.”

In 1994, Jocelyne Guilbault argued that zouk offered a musical performance of *créolité*, which she saw as an expression of a “new cultural politics of difference.” Guilbault borrowed the phrase from Cornel West and interpreted it as “the strategic moves that people use to play up (or play down) certain aspects of their culture, their personal experience, or their beliefs in different interactive situations with different people who, in turn have different interests.” Both West and Guilbault point out that this strategy is especially salient for those whose voices have been traditionally silenced.³⁹

The quote from Deshayes’s interview in *Le Monde* presented earlier in this chapter perfectly illustrates this sort of strategic performance of identity. The parallel between zouk and Deshayes’s music is perhaps not surprising. Deshayes explained to me that, although he is composing music nearly thirty years after the creation of zouk, he did not try to pick up where zouk musicians left off. Rather, he sought to regenerate his music by going back to the same point of departure—the traditional rhythms of gwoka and carnival—that zouk musicians explored in the early 1980s. Perhaps this “new cultural politics of difference” is no longer really “new,” yet I would argue that Deshayes presents a level of musical and intellectual engagement with the “politics of difference” that goes beyond anything zouk ever tried to achieve. The music itself is a performance of this contrast. Zouk is fundamentally dance music. Its lyrics may touch on social and political issues but it does so without ever losing track of the carnival ethos. In contrast, Soft’s music is meant to be listened to. Deshayes insists that the lyrics are a key aspect of his compositions.⁴⁰ A few people dance to Soft when the band performs in Guadeloupe, but

³⁹ “Créolité and the New Cultural Politics of Difference,” 162.

⁴⁰ Interview with the author, 20 July 2009.

the majority of the audience—mainly people in their thirties and older—stands or sits, listens, and occasionally sings along.

The recognition of gwoka's, and Guadeloupean-ness's, opacity allows Deshayes to put his music in relation with other genres, without fear of losing its Guadeloupean specificity and without desire to privilege any one cultural heritage. "I am Guadeloupean," affirms Deshayes, "and I express myself through an art form that is inferior to no other." As if responding to Glissant's belief that creolization requires elements of equal value, Deshayes adds: "Since we are of equal dignity [with other musical genres], our exchanges are easier and better accepted."⁴¹ Indeed, the group freely mixes genres. Their repertoire features songs based on gwoka rhythms along with biguines, zouk, *konpa*, calypso, soca, and R&B.

Deshayes's approach to guitar playing is equally open-minded. While the singer tends to downplay his guitar skills, he explained to me that his playing is greatly influenced by Western African music, especially *kora* playing and the guitar stylings of musicians like Salif Keita and Richard Bona. He also pointed out that he plays on nylon strings, a choice influenced by the sound of Brazilian and Haitian guitarists. Finally, Deshayes admitted to practicing classical guitar exercises, but never for very long: he joked that, being a composer at heart, he lacks the patience to focus on specific exercises and ends up trying to develop them into new compositions.⁴²

⁴¹ Interview with the author, 12 August 2008.

"Je suis un guadeloupéen et je m'exprime à travers d'un art qui n'est pas inférieur à aucun autre. [...] Comme nous sommes de dignité égale, nos échanges sont plus faciles et plus acceptés."

⁴² Interview with the author, 20 July 2009.



Figure 5.2: Soft, “Krim kont la Gwadeloup.” *Kadans a péyi-la*, Aztec (CM3282). My transcription.

The song “Krim kont la Gwadeloup” illustrates Deshayes’s compositional approach and his guitar playing style.⁴³ The song is based on the *menndé* rhythm and the guitar plays an E minor vamp that matches the rhythm of the boula (Figure 5.2). The minimal harmonic movement in this example reflects Deshayes’s desire to preserve what he sees as the simplicity of popular and traditional music. The melody of the song is a recitation around the pitch B with each phrase ending with a descent down to the tonic E, through a minor pentatonic scale. This melodic construction was inspired by Robert Loyson’s frequent use of a similar device, as we saw in chapter 1.⁴⁴

The song’s lyrics are typical of Deshayes’s socially conscious writing. In his compositions, Deshayes continues the modernist-reformist effort to elevate the value of popular music. He explains: “I try to give our music works that have a certain dignity.”

⁴³ Soft, *Kadans a peyi-la*. Aztec Musique CM3282.

⁴⁴ Fred Deshayes, interview with the author, 20 July 2009.

He seeks to “nurture a heritage” by writing “popular” music that has “a certain value.”⁴⁵ However, Deshayes’s lyrics depart from the nationalist rhetoric of the 1970s. Konkèt sang that Guadeloupe was sick and put the blame on the inaction of French and European politicians. Cosaque exposed the abusive nature of French migration policies. In contrast, in “Krim kont la Gwadeloup,” Deshayes turns the accusatory gaze inward, on Guadeloupeans themselves. The song is an indictment of corrupt Guadeloupean politicians, but also of the selfishness of those who refuse to share their wealth to help others, of the Guadeloupean youths who complain that they have no future but do not try to better themselves, and of the idealism of Guadeloupean intellectuals. Deshayes concludes: “Mwen menm pa méyè ki on dot/Si zot vlé, zot pé gadé avi an zot/Pas lè an vwé ka’y ka pasé/Sé nou menm fò nou pousuiv pou krim kont la Gwadeloup” (I am no better than anyone else/If you want you can keep your own advice/Because when I see what’s going on/It is ourselves that we have to sue for crimes against Guadeloupe).

In a follow-up on their album *Konfyans* (Trust), which came out after the general strike that paralyzed the island for forty-four days in January and February 2009, Deshayes offered equally sharp criticism for his fellow-citizens. In “Révolution,” he asks: “Es w pé konprann on pèp gwadeloupeyen ka palé ka di bétiz ka rété la ka soufè?” (Can you understand a Guadeloupean people who speak nonsense and who stay where they suffer?).⁴⁶ Echoing a discourse that has become so frequent around Guadeloupe that it borders on the clichéd, the song goes on: “Nou di mésyé kolonyalis/nou di mésyé

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

“Je cherche à donner à notre musique des oeuvres qui ont une certaine dignité.”

⁴⁶ Soft, *Konfyans*, Aztec Musique (CM2259).

esklavajis/nou di fwansé sé linjistis” (We say these people are colonialists/we say these people are slave-traders/we say that the French are unjust). However, when the singer asks: “Revolution?,” the rest of the group responds, in French rather than Creole: “Non, non, non, non.” Live performances highlight the satirical nature of the song. When performing at the 2010 Gwoka Festival, Deshayes asked each member of the group, in turn, if they would be available to start the revolution the following week. Julie Aristide answered that she could not do the revolution on Monday because of her yoga class, Joël Larochelle was not available on Tuesday because he had a *konpa* rehearsal, Philippe Sadikalay’s karaoke outing conflicted on Wednesday, and Maxence Deshayes had signed up for swimming lessons at the pool on Thursdays. The lead singer brought the point home: “Tout moun vlé chanjé la sosyété/Oui mais pas trop vite/Oui mais pas tout de suite” (Everybody wants to change society/Yes, but not too quickly/Yes but not right away). The singer asks the question in Creole and answers in French, underscoring that, below all the separatist discourse and regardless of how much they complain, many Guadeloupeans remain attached to some aspects of life under French rule.

The song certainly should not be heard as a call to arms in the same way that Lockel’s anthem, “Lindépandans,” was. In fact, Deshayes is very critical of Lockel’s music and ideology. During our conversations, he denounced repeatedly what he saw as Lockel’s normative, “soviet”—meaning dictatorial—approach.⁴⁷ For him, gwoka modènn lacks feeling. “Those who speak about atonal music,” he explained to me, “are trying to

⁴⁷ Interview with the author, 12 August 2008.

prescribe something. That's why I call [gwoka modènn] a learned music."⁴⁸ For

Deshayes, gwoka modènn failed to capture the musical qualities that most

Guadeloupeans enjoy and replaced them with an intellectual, politically-driven concept.

Deshayes also points to a paradox in Lockel's music:

[Gwoka modènn] seeks to express difference. However, one doesn't need that if one is different. The person who seeks difference is, in fact, engaged in a process that reveals that he feels similar. It is when you feel similar [to other people] that you seek to be different. The person who is different does not need to talk about his difference since he is different. [...] Difference is like existence. It cannot be demonstrated, it has to be experienced. [...] And art is this way. It expresses difference without needing to be complicated.⁴⁹

This is not to say either that Deshayes completely disavows the ideas and goals of the nationalist movement. His pride in his native island is evident to anyone who has a conversation with him or listens to one of his compositions. He also embraces and celebrates the heritage of his parents' generation's struggle. In the song "Gouté Gwadeloup" (Taste Guadeloupe), he sings: "An ka gouté tè a Gwadeloup pou i pé rakonté/Avan mwen té di dé jenn té ka filé on lidé/Avan mwen sé nonm doubout/Jenn a GONG ké mèt anwout/Po yo té vanté konsyans konsi konsyans pé pran difé" (I taste the Guadeloupean soil so that it tells me/Before me there were youths who worked out an idea/Before me there were men standing up/The youths from the GONG who blew on our

⁴⁸ Interview with the author, 20 July 2009.

"Ceux qui parlent de musique atonale, ils nous prescrivent quelque chose. C'est pour ça que j'appelle ça savant."

⁴⁹ Interview with the author, 12 August 2008.

"Ça, c'est une recherche de différence. Alors que, on n'en a pas besoin si on est différent. Celui qui cherche la différence, en réalité, est dans une démarche où il avoue qu'il se sent le même. C'est parce qu'on se sent le même qu'on cherche à être différent. Celui qui est différent n'a pas besoin de parler de sa différence puisqu'il a une différence. [...] La différence, c'est comme l'existence, elle ne se prouve pas, elle s'éprouve. [...] Et l'art, c'est comme ça. Il s'exprime, et la différence s'exprime, sans qu'on ait besoin de partir dans de la complexité."

consciences as if to set them ablaze).⁵⁰ But his is a different kind of nationalist consciousness. He professes his Guadeloupean identity but does so while remaining open to outside influences. He told me: “I want to explore my deepest roots, but I want to do so in 2008. When I was 12 or 15, I listened to Lionel Richie. I can’t erase that from my life.” He concludes: “One cannot ignore outside influences. You wouldn’t be the same [without them]. One cannot be in a constant state of virginity. In music, virginity doesn’t exist. There is only the authenticity of feeling.”⁵¹

D. Dominik Coco and *mizik kako*

Like Fred Deshayes, Dominik Coco grew up absorbing the musical maelstrom of 1980s Guadeloupe. Gwoka, zouk, hip-hop, reggae: each claimed part of his attention. Although he played gwoka with his friends, Coco actually started his musical career when he joined the band Volt Face, led by zouk legend Georges Décimus in the early 1990s. Coco left the band around 1995 to pursue a solo career. His first single, a duet recorded in 1998 with MC Kinky entitled “Natirèl Poézi” (Natural Poetry), was a product of his childhood: a mix of zouk, hip-hop, and gwoka.⁵² Since then, his music has continued to weave together Caribbean genres.

Gwoka is not always present in Coco’s music but its influence is unmistakable.

The title song from his 2003 album, *Lakou zaboka*, explicitly celebrates the gwoka

⁵⁰ Soft, *Partout étranger* Aztec Musique (CM2197).

⁵¹ Interview with the author, 12 August 2008.

“Je veux aller au plus profond de mes racines, mais je veux y aller en 2008. Et quand j’avais 12 ans, 15 ans, j’écoutais Lionel Richie. Je peux pas effacer ça de ma vie. C’est pas possible.”

“On ne peut pas ignorer les influences de l’extérieur. On n’est pas le même. On ne peut pas être en virginité continue. En musique, la virginité n’existe pas. Il existe l’authenticité du sentiment.”

⁵² The combination of the zouk beat and rap in Creole sounds remarkably like a French West Indian version of reggaeton, although reggaeton’s Spanish lyrics have kept this genre from attracting much attention in the French Antilles.

heritage, thus participating in the process of inscribing gwoka at the heart of Guadeloupean music.⁵³ This agenda is evident from the first line of the song: “Tanbou épi palé kréyol, dé potomitan ka kyembé nou, fo rekonèt” (The drum and Creole, the two central pillars that support us, we have to recognize that). Musically, the song blends gwoka elements into a complex structure. “Lakou zaboka” is based on a *léwòz* pattern played on boula, mixed with a clavé pattern played on a hi-hat. The form of the song is quite complicated, alternating between verses sung by Coco, various instrumental interludes, a piano solo, and a recurring refrain. Only the refrain borrows from the typical call and response structure of traditional gwoka: Coco sings and is answered by a chorus singing “Yonn dé” (one two), a quotation from a Guy Konket song of the same title.

“An rivé,” from Coco’s 2008 album *Lèspwi kaskòd*, offers a similar mix of references to traditional gwoka and contemporary sounds.⁵⁴ The song was co-composed with Martinican guitarist and DJ Jeff Baillard. The refrain of the song is borrowed from the traditional gwoka song “Nou rivé an léwòz a yo la.” However, in Coco and Baillard’s version, the original *léwòz* rhythm has been replaced by a rhythmic track that is remarkable because it does not reference any of the typical rhythms of Caribbean popular music. A maké, however, is heard as a solo instrument within the mix. The song also mixes Coco’s singing with the Creole rap of Fuckly. Amid this heterogenous mix, the subject matter and the many specific references to Guadeloupe and gwoka (Coco names dancers Lena Blou and Mario Coco in his lyrics) anchor the song within a Guadeloupean soundscape.

⁵³ Dominik Coco, *Lakou zaboka*, Koumbeat Prod. (Kako 001).

⁵⁴ Dominik Coco, *Lèspwi kaskòd*. Golèt Musik DHP 034-2.

Two songs on *Léspwi Kaskòd* illustrate Coco's debt to the Guadeloupean nationalist movement particularly clearly. The first, entitled "Mai 67," is built around samples taken from interviews with militants who participated in the events that shook Guadeloupe that year. The song serves to re-inscribe these momentous events in the memory of a generation who, like Coco, is too young to have a first-hand recollection of their import. The repetition of testimonies describing how cold-blooded French police opened fire on Guadeloupean protesters make this perhaps the most militant—certainly the most poignant—song on the album and a strong example of musical nationalism.

A poem by separatist poet Sonny Rupaïre (1940-1991), "Mwen sé gwadoupéyen" (I am Guadeloupean), serves as the basis for another song. Rupaïre was extremely influential within the AGEG, who published a collection of his poems in 1971 (Figure 5.3). However, Coco alters the end of the poem in a significant way. Rupaïre ends with the line "Mwen sé gwadloupéyen" to which Coco adds: "Mwen sé mâtiniké, mwen sé guyané, mwen sé karybéen. Tout pèp karayb" (I am Martinican, I am Guyanais, I am Caribbean. All Caribbean people). He then concludes the song with a straight-forward D major arpeggio. It is almost certain that Coco's tonal musical setting of the poem would displease the most



Figure 5.3: Collection of poems by Sonny Rupaïre published by the AGEG in 1971.

dedicated nationalist militants, as the anecdote described in the introduction makes clear. If his selection of a poem by Rupaire reveals his attachment to some of the ideas of the Guadeloupean nationalist movement, his last line opens up his identity onto the Caribbean, a move that illustrates Coco's post-nationalist conception of his identity.

Coco's music, like Soft's, is difficult to classify. Gwoka is only one of many influences, and neither musician claims the *gwoka modènn* or *gwoka évolutif* label. Coco's music is also much different from Soft's. While Soft is an all-acoustic group, Coco embraces electronic music. His particular blend of Caribbean and North American genres led two Guadeloupean DJs, Exxos and Star J, to call his music "kako mizik" (brown music), a label that Coco has since embraced. For Coco, "kako" is a Guadeloupean expression of creoleness, a new blend of tradition and modernity. He explained: "For me what I'm doing is Guadeloupean, even though it is influenced by things I've liked at different points in my life." When I pressed him about what it meant to be Guadeloupean, or to brand his music as Guadeloupean, his reply was similar to some of the ideas expressed by Deshayes:

[Guadeloupe] is my soil, the place where I was born. It's that simple. I've never stopped to think about it. [...] My roots are deeply Guadeloupean. So, there is a whole heritage that comes with that: a rhythm, a way of speaking, of moving. And I am myself. That's important. That's why I absorb the influence of other musics but I insist on keeping my identity, because this is who I am. I don't want to be American. I don't want to be Jamaican. Because, if I go to Jamaica, I want them

to see me as Guadeloupean. So they have to feel my past, my swing in a way. Even if their music has a little influence on mine.⁵⁵

Dominik Coco, Fred Deshayes, and the members of Soft are examples of a generation of musicians who, having grown up with the nationalist activism of the 1970s and 1980s, feel secure in their Guadeloupean-ness and are embracing outside musics to enrich their own experience without fear of losing their national identity. I found echoes of their ideas in my conversations with Sonny Troupé—who currently plays all kinds of musics from gwoka to zouk to jazz and who is interested in blending gwoka and metal—and with saxophonist Jacques Schwarz-Bart. Together these eclectic encounters suggest that there is something at work resembling *créolisation* in the experience of a generation of Guadeloupean musicians. Is this sufficient to assume that *créolisation* and *créolité* have the same significance in Guadeloupe, and around the world, as they do in Martinique? In other words, can these concepts be abstracted from their place of origin? Are they applicable to other social and political contexts? An examination of recent collaborations between jazz and gwoka musicians offers some answers.

⁵⁵ Interview with the author, 21 July 2010.

“Pour moi, ce que je fais est guadeloupéen même s’il y a des influences de mon époque ou de mes époques de vie dedans.”

“C’est ma terre, c’est mon lieu de naissance. Voilà, tout simplement. Je me suis même jamais posé cette question. [...] Mes racines sont profondément guadeloupéennes. Donc avec ça, il a tout un patrimoine qui l’accompagne en fait. Donc un rythme, une façon de parler, de bouger. Et je suis moi. Et c’est important. C’est pour ça que je prend l’influence des autres musiques mais je tiens à garder une identité parce que je suis ça. J’ai pas envie d’être américain. J’ai pas envie d’être jamaïcain. Parce que si je vais en Jamaïque, je veux qu’ils me ressentent en tant que guadeloupéen. Donc il faut qu’ils ressentent mon vécu, mon swing, en fait. Même s’il y a une petite influence de leur musique.”

VIII. Jazz and Gwoka: When Nationalism, Diasporic Intimacy and Créolisation Collide

From Ulf Hannerz professing a world in creolization to James Clifford declaring that “we are all Caribbeans now in our urban archipelagos,” creolization theories have gained widespread appeal.⁵⁶ Before these anthropologists, Glissant had, since the publication of *Le discours antillais* in 1981, proposed the poetics of Relation as a global phenomenon. In *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, sounding much like Hannerz, he wrote: “The thesis that I will defend in front of you is that the world is creolizing.”⁵⁷ Like Glissant, postcolonial studies scholars have embraced creolization’s potential to celebrate the creative ingenuity of “subaltern and deterritorialized peoples” and its power to subvert “older notions of cultural dissolution and disorganization.”⁵⁸ In these instances, creolization comes to function very similarly to Homi Bhabha’s concept of hybridity.⁵⁹ In a interview with Jonathan Rutherford, Bhabha explained:

But for me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the “third space” which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom.⁶⁰

Meanwhile, a number of anthropologists have expressed reservations about this trend. Drawing attention to the importance of indigenization in the process of creolization, Mintz was among the first to argue that creolization in the Caribbean has

⁵⁶ Hannerz, “The World in Creolisation;” Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 173.

⁵⁷ Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, 15.

⁵⁸ Khan, “Creolization Moments,” 237-238.

⁵⁹ Stewart, “Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory,” 19.

⁶⁰ Bhabha, “The Third Space,” 211.

been historically fundamentally different from contemporary processes of globalization. Therefore, advocates Mintz, creolization should not be divorced from its original historical and geographic context.⁶¹ More recently Stephane Palmié has echoed Mintz's position, bringing our attention to the many perils involved in transposing creolization from a linguistic to an anthropological concept. This shift, Palmié argues, resulted in creolization becoming an overburdened and overdetermined set of theories. For Palmié, the (I hesitate to call it recent) trend to apply creolization theory to globalization studies amounts to little more than an anthropological relexification, with creolization displacing, with little apparent benefit, other terms such as hybridization or syncretization. This trend comes at a price for students of the Caribbean: "To my idea," writes Palmié, "Caribbeanists stand much to lose from such disciplinary relexification—and not only in analytical acumen but in political terms as well." He argues that, as creolization becomes a universal theory, the Caribbean will lose its specificity and thus virtually disappear. For Palmié, this has serious ethical consequences. He concludes:

As a Caribbeanist, I cannot help but ask: if the whole world is in creolization these days, how are we to talk about people whose local worlds are the products of centuries of struggle against those violent and dehumanizing processes out of which the global (post)modernity we currently inhabit ultimately emerged? Historically, the unstable and fluid Caribbean hybridities and syntheses were achieved at a grueling price. And to dawdle with these well-documented facts is to indulge in an intellectually vapid and politically irresponsible solipsism.⁶²

Aisha Khan brings up another problematic aspect of creolization. In "Creolization Moments," she warns that creolization, in the Caribbean and outside of it, serves "as both a model that *describes* historical processes of cultural change and contact and a model

⁶¹ Mintz, "Enduring Substances, Trying Theories."

⁶² Palmié, "Is There a Model in the Muddle?," 193. See also Palmié, "Creolization and its Discontent."

that *interprets* them.” According to Khan, academic studies too often conflate these two aspects. Writes Khan:

What is at stake, in other words, in the recent (re)appearance of interest in creolization is the distinction between creolization as process (empirical, historical, cultural, transformative) and creolization as concept (the theoretical models developed to account for and understand those processes)—and the consequences of conflating process and concept.⁶³

I would add that considering creolization as a discursive strategy within a broader ideological process further complicates this matter.

A. David Murray and the Gwoka Masters: The Limits of *Créolisation*

An examination of American saxophonist David Murray’s collaboration with Guadeloupean musicians affords us an opportunity to test the global applicability of creolization theory. Indeed, French sociologist Denis-Constant Martin proposed in a recent article in *Black Music Research Journal* that Glissant’s concept of *créolisation* could help reconcile jazz’s historical roots as an African American music with its recent universalization.⁶⁴ Comparing the meaning of *créolisation* within Glissant’s theory with its interpretation by the musicians involved in what has become known as David Murray’s Creole Project, I demonstrate, in contrast to Martin, that “creolization,” “creole,” and “creoleness” continue to hold specific and disputed meanings in Guadeloupean society, thus problematizing their wider application as concepts capable of describing global processes of cultural exchange or identity formations.

David Murray, a longtime Paris resident, met Guadeloupean percussionist Klod Kiavué at the Banlieues Bleues festival in 1995. Within two years, the two men had

⁶³ “Creolization Moments,” 238.

⁶⁴ “Can Jazz Be Rid of the Racial Imagination?”

organized a collaborative project which initially linked US jazz musicians with musicians from Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Cape Verde. This collaboration resulted in a first album simply entitled *Creole*. Ultimately, this broad exploration of creole music proved unwieldy, forcing Murray and Kiavué to limit the scope of their project. Kiavué proposed that they record an album focused on compositions by Guadeloupean gwoka singer Guy Konket. This launched the group David Murray and the Gwo-Ka Masters. Konket only spent two years touring with the group, but Murray and Kiavué have since continued to look for ways to blend North American jazz with Guadeloupean gwoka.

The liner notes to David Murray's Creole Project CDs reveal that issues of ethnic, racial, and cultural identities loom large over this collaboration. References to *créolisation*, *créolité*, and Afrocentrism abound. For example, the liner notes to the album *Creole* include a short endorsement by Gérard Lockel, who appeared on two tracks. In his text for *Creole* and in contradiction to his unremitting nationalist convictions, the guitarist defines himself as an "Afro-American musician" born in a colony, a condition he equates with *créolité*, in defiance of generally accepted definitions that are not racially exclusive. Echoing Glissant, he states that Caribbean musics are self-sufficient and therefore hold international appeal. But he also insists that Afro-American musicians distinguish themselves because their "authentic" musics are free from the bounds of tonality that characterize "occidental" music.⁶⁵ In contrast, journalist Jacques Denis wrote in his liner notes for the album *Gwotet*:

Neither white nor black, the international Creole movement is extending its reach across the world today, like a soundtrack accompanying what Glissant has called

⁶⁵ Murray, *Creole*, Justin Time Records (JUST 115-2).

“Créolisation.” This historical process is giving form to a new and necessarily complex identity, one impervious to the categories and structures of traditional historiography. This identity is in permanent flux, a flux that Brazilian Tom Zé has summed up well in his neologism unimultiplicity.⁶⁶

Lockel’s unorthodox definition of *créolité* and his rejection of hybridization with occidental music directly contradict Denis’s embrace of creolization and “unimultiplicity.” It is therefore important to unravel how the musicians involved in the Creole Project understand words such as “Creole,” “creolization,” and “*créolité*.” I want to make clear at this point that the musicians I interviewed often conflated all three terms to an extent that would likely disturb Edouard Glissant and the authors of the seminal *Éloge de la créolité*. Having addressed the theoretical distinctions of these terms earlier in this chapter, I would now like to expose their meaning and relevance to a specific group of musicians.

I first contacted David Murray in December 2006. During the course of the interview, Murray expressed interest in *créolité* but rejected the possibility that anything like it could have emerged in the United States. The saxophonist argued that slavery in the United States had resulted in a more profound type of cultural erasure than in the Francophone Caribbean. Under these conditions, Murray concluded, it has been impossible for creole languages to develop and therefore a concept like *créolité* did not really apply to North America.⁶⁷ In Guadeloupe, Klod Kiavué confirmed Murray’s

⁶⁶ Murray, *Gwotet*, Justin Time Records (JUST 200-2).

“Ni noir, ni blanc, cette internationale créole est à l’œuvre aujourd’hui de par le monde, bande-son bien réelle de ce que Edouard Glissant nomme si justement la créolisation, processus historique qui fait surgir d’une partie de l’Atlantique Noir défini par Paul Gilroy une nouvelle identité rhizomatique, par nature complexe et par essence irréductible aux schémas de l’historiographie classique. Un autre homme, le Brésilien Tom Zé, a trouvé un bon mot en forme de néologisme pour traduire cette transformation continue: unimultiplicité.” English translation by Anna-Louise Milne.

⁶⁷ Murray, interview with the author, 13 December 2006.

conclusions: “American musicians are not concerned with it. They want to defend something closer to Césaire than Chamoiseau. [...] That’s certain, closer to Fanon, Césaire than Chamoiseau. As American musicians, they fail to see anything of interest in this story of *créolité*.”⁶⁸

Kiavué also expressed personal reservations about *créolité*. Speaking of his work with Murray, he stated: “This thing of *créolité*, it has always been a problem for this music. Because not everybody embraces the concept. [...] I don’t embrace it.” He added:

Someone like Lockel would tell you: “If you are the world, you are nothing at all.” You see, the idea is a little bit like saying that we are the world. If you are the world, you are nothing at all because, up until now, in Guadeloupe, the black ethnicity has created *gwoka*. They developed it but they were never given the right to speak out. Up until now, in the history of Guadeloupe, the black ethnicity never really had the right to speak out, you see, except through music.⁶⁹

Here, Kiavué looks with some suspicion at what the authors of *Éloge de la créolité* have referred to as their “open-specificity” (*spécificité ouverte*).⁷⁰ Far from welcoming *créolité* as a potential resolution of the tension between the universal and the specific, Kiavué rejects this unstable and inclusive identity in favor of a more specific identity based on race and nationality, an attitude that reflects the influence of the Guadeloupean nationalist movement of the 1970s. As Richard Burton has explained, Antillean intellectuals from

⁶⁸ Kiavué, interview with the author, 24 December 2007.

“Les musiciens américains, ça ne les concerne pas. Eux, ils veulent défendre un truc, ils sont plus proches de Césaire que de Chamoiseau. [...] Ça c’est clair, de Fanon, Césaire que de Chamoiseau. Parce qu’ils voient pas l’intérêt, pour eux en tant que Noirs américains, [de] cette histoire de *créolité*.”

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

“Le truc de la *créolité*, ça a toujours été un problème pour cette musique là. Parce que tout le monde n’adhère pas [...] Moi j’adhère pas... Le mélange, un gars comme Lockel, il te dit aussi: ‘Si tu es tout le monde, tu n’es rien du tout.’ Tu vois un peu, l’idée c’est un peu ça, dire que, bon, nous, on est le monde. Si tu es le monde, t’es rien du tout parce que, jusqu’à maintenant, en Guadeloupe, l’ethnie noire a créé le *gwoka*, l’a développé et n’a jamais eu droit à la parole. Jusqu’à maintenant, dans l’histoire de la Guadeloupe, l’ethnie noire n’a jamais eu réellement droit à la parole, tu vois, à part de par la musique.”

⁷⁰ Bernabé et al., *Éloge de la créolité*, 28.

Césaire to Chamoiseau have struggled to “affirm their difference in the face of [...] the reductive universalism of the whole Jacobin-Republican tradition in France.”⁷¹ For this reason, Guadeloupean nationalist thinkers remain suspicious of any universalist claim—including those of Antillean writers such as Glissant—to which they oppose a discourse promoting the specificity of each island’s culture.

Not only do many Guadeloupean *gwoka* musicians reject *créolité*, they also regard the term “creole” with suspicion. Radio host Alain Jean explained to me that he refuses to use the term “creole” to define a person, preferring to limit the use of the noun to refer to the language. People, he argued, should be referred to as Guadeloupean, Martinican, or Caribbean, but not creole or Antillean.⁷² Thus Jean expressed his preference for terms that conceptualize the Caribbean as a group of separate nations, each with its own specific culture. The term “Caribbean” is preferred over “Antillean” whose use remains strongly tainted by French colonialism.⁷³ Likewise, Jean expressed his distrust for the word “creolization” which he perceived as often emphasizing the primacy of European over African culture. During the course of my research in Guadeloupe, many musicians echoed this attitude, including Kiavué who once told me, dictionary in hand, that he could not consider himself creole since the *Petit Robert* still defined “creole” as “a person of white race born in the tropical colonies, especially in the Antilles.”⁷⁴

⁷¹ Burton “The idea of difference in contemporary French West Indian thought,” 141.

⁷² Interview with the author, 22 July 2009.

⁷³ Several musicians I spoke with remarked that one becomes Antillean in France. In the Antilles, people are either Guadeloupean, Martinican, or *Guyanais*.

⁷⁴ 2006 edition.

“Personne de race blanche, née dans les colonies intertropicales, notamment les Antilles.”

More than creolization, it is the legacy of the Middle Passage and slavery that generates what Paul Gilroy calls “diasporic intimacy” between the members of the Creole Project.⁷⁵ Kiavué stressed the common ground he and Murray found between their respective musical traditions: “As we were talking, we realized that *gwoka* and jazz had the same foundation. They are both music, we all know the story, they are music that descends from slaves. The only difference, as we like to say, is that one sings the blues of cotton and we have the blues of the sugar cane. So they are two different branches.”⁷⁶

Later, he elaborated on this idea:

We agreed on two things: that they are rebellious musics, two musics created to fight slavery, to fight the whites and that they are improvised musics. So those are the two fundamental characteristics where these musics meet: two protest musics and two improvised musics. This provided the entire basis for our discussions.⁷⁷

Even if Murray and Kiavué question terms such as “creole” or “creoleness,” it is conceivable that, beyond their own awareness, something like *créolisation* is at work in their musical collaboration. On the surface, this seems entirely possible. Murray professes a vision for a new music that goes beyond a superficial juxtaposition of jazz and *gwoka*. He explained: “I’m trying to mix jazz with *gwoka* music, Creole lyrics but at the source of it, the bottom of it, so that it grows out together.”⁷⁸ For Kiavué, the band is trying to

⁷⁵ Gilroy “Cultural Studies and Ethnic Absolutism,” 193.
I will return to the concept of “diasporic intimacy” later.

⁷⁶ “En discutant, on se rend compte que le *gwoka* et le jazz ont les mêmes fondations. Ce sont des musiques, on connaît l’histoire, des musiques de descendants d’esclaves. La seule différence, c’est comme on aime dire, une ça a fait le blues du coton, nous on a le blues de la canne. Donc, c’est deux branches différentes.”

⁷⁷ Interview with the author, 24 December 2007.
“On s’est mis d’accord sur deux choses: c’est que c’est deux musiques rebelles, c’est deux musiques qui ont été créées pour combattre l’esclavage, pour combattre les blancs et c’est des musiques d’improvisation. Donc ça, c’est les deux caractères fondamentaux pour nous où ces musiques-là se rejoignent: deux musiques de revendication et deux musiques d’improvisation. C’est ça qui a été le socle des discussions.”

⁷⁸ Interview with the author, 5 June 2008.

develop a new idiom that is neither jazz nor *gwoka* and which he sees captured in the neologism “gwotet” which Murray coined to designate his new musical group, but which also means “big head” in Creole, as Kiavu  humorously pointed out in a conversation.

The conditions seem poised for what Glissant has imagined as a meeting of cultures of equivalent value. However, in his study of the “world music” phenomenon, musicologist Timothy Taylor explains that collaborations between Western and non-Western musicians often replicate subordinating structures inherited from colonialism. While Taylor warns us that these hegemonic practices inform even the output of musicians who try to work around them, he leaves some room for more egalitarian collaborations.⁷⁹ It is easy to imagine that the work of Murray and the Gwo-Ka Masters falls into this latter category. David Murray is a versatile musician who has successfully promoted himself in a great variety of musical contexts. While this collaboration adds to his reputation for eclecticism, it offers little, in terms of market visibility or financial reward, that he could not achieve with his other projects. On the other hand, percussionists Klod Kiavu  and Fran ois Ladrezeau claim to have benefitted from the collaboration. Through their tours with the Gwo-Ka Masters, they have been able to meet festival organizers, promoters, and journalists around the world, and thus bring more attention to their own music. However, these connections have yet to bear concrete professional rewards and neither Kiavu  nor Ladrezeau have gained access to the international touring circuit outside of Murray’s outfit.

⁷⁹ Taylor, *Global Pop*, 39-68, 173-96.

Murray himself seems to have noble goals for this music. In 2008, the saxophonist explained to me that his goal was to bring greater recognition to *gwoka*. He stated: “I told Klod that I’m trying to give *gwoka* wider recognition so that we can get *gwoka* to the Grammys. [...] I got a Grammy here for some work I did with McCoy Tyner but *gwoka* needs its own Grammy.”⁸⁰ In a 2005 interview with Guadeloupean jazz critic Luc Michaux Vignes, Kiavué explained the value of working with a musician who is invested in developing a financially successful project. For Murray as for Kiavué, the Creole Project’s success should translate into sales of concert tickets and albums. And because the band does sell, the Creole Project has managed to raise awareness about Guadeloupean music in Europe and, to a lesser degree, in the United States.⁸¹ But at what price?

Arguing for an analytical model based on communication rather than semiotics, ethnomusicologist Steven Feld asserts that musical sound structures “exist through social construction, and they mean through social interpretation.” In other words, music is polysemic and its meaning depends on the socio-historical context in which it is both produced and received.⁸² For Guadeloupean musicians, as for a large portion of the Guadeloupean population, *gwoka* remains a national and nationalist symbol. While Murray respects the *gwoka* tradition, he is not limited by this particular historical

⁸⁰ Interview with the author, 5 June 2008.

Murray won the Grammy for best jazz instrumental performance in 1988 for his participation to McCoy Tyner, *Blues for Coltrane* (Impulse).

⁸¹ Saxophonist Jacques Schwarz-Bart’s recordings (2006, 2008) blending jazz and *gwoka* have done much to bring attention to Guadeloupean music in recent years as well. However, in spite of the fact that Schwarz-Bart was born in Guadeloupe in a well-known literary family, his albums have also garnered negative reactions from many *gwoka* musicians.

⁸² Feld, “Communication, Music, and Speech about Music,” 7.

heritage. He, for example, can ignore the debates which have surrounded Lockel's concept of *gwoka modènn*. This frees him to transform the music as he sees fit in order to increase its market appeal. For many *gwoka* musicians in Guadeloupe, this leads to a "bastardized" form of music, and the musicians who collaborate with Murray are sometimes accused of "prostituting" the music. Both Kiavué and Ladrezeau have acknowledged this difficult situation during interviews and private conversations.

Finally, it seems that no matter how much Murray and the Gwo-Ka Masters would like this to be a collaboration of equals, it simply cannot be. Citing Feld, Taylor warns that "no matter how collaborative and syncretic a musical style sounds, we should always remember the musicians' relationship to the means of production."⁸³ In this case, Murray controls every aspect of the recording process, and more importantly, makes all the decisions during mixing and editing. This gives the saxophonist complete control over the band's recorded output.⁸⁴

Over time, the aesthetic of the Creole Project has evolved in revealing ways. The album with Guy Konket was sung entirely in Creole.⁸⁵ An educated listener could fairly easily identify the basic *gwoka* rhythmic patterns in the mix. In addition, Murray based many of his arrangements on previous Konket recordings. For example, his arrangement of "YouYou" has the bassist playing the same ostinato used on Konket's live recording.⁸⁶ The group's latest album offers a revealing contrast. The musicians recorded in

⁸³ Taylor, *Global Pop*, 173.

⁸⁴ Murray, interview with the author, 5 June 2008.

⁸⁵ Murray, *Yonn-dé*, Justin Time Records (JUST 140-2).

⁸⁶ See Figure 4.7.
Konket, *Guy Konket et le groupe ka*, Editions Bolibana (BIP-96).

Guadeloupe in 2008 and invited local quadrille accordionist Négoce to join them. Mixing took close to two years. During this time, Murray decided to eliminate the tracks laid down by Négoce. Instead, he solicited blues singer Taj Mahal and US singer Sista Kee (a.k.a. Kito Gamble) to overdub English lyrics based on poems by Ishmael Reed on half the tracks. The result is an album sung almost entirely in English and in which a heavy funk influence masks most of the distinctive Guadeloupean elements. If this collaboration initially augured some of the unpredictable creative results promised by Glissant, it has since come dangerously close to illustrating globalization's homogenizing effects. In his liner notes for the album, journalist Jacques Denis wrote that the album offered "impressions of America in the tropics."⁸⁷ However, the album could as easily be interpreted to represent impressions of American imperialism in the tropics. In fact, Guadeloupean trumpeter Franck Nicolas, during a phone conversation in December 2008, commented that he perceived Murray's work as a "colonization of the ka."

From these observations it seems that even if some Guadeloupean artists participate in a process that has much in common with Glissant's *créolisation*, the poetics of Relation holds little value in describing the collaboration of musicians who, at least on the surface, claim a creole connection. Because Glissant developed the poetics of Relation within the particular political context of Martinique, the concept does not necessarily map well onto the Guadeloupean experience. Here I partially concur with Burton who believes this difference results from two factors: the strength of Guadeloupean nationalist ideology and the comparatively weak influence of Aimé

⁸⁷ Murray, *The Devil Tried to Kill Me*, Justin Time Records (JUST 224-2).

Césaire on that island's cultural and political history.⁸⁸ While it is true that Césaire's personality does not loom over Guadeloupean politics as it does in Martinique, it is a mistake to ignore the influence of *négritude* on Guadeloupean nationalist thinking. In fact, the AGEF developed its political and cultural stance in response to Césaire and departmentalization. Its 1970 cultural report acknowledges the importance of *négritude* as cultural resistance but criticizes Césaire and Leopold Senghor for conceiving anti-colonialism as a racial rather than a class struggle. Furthermore, the report denounced *négritude* for privileging racial solidarity within the African diaspora and for failing to recognize the existence of essentially different national cultures in the Caribbean.⁸⁹ Glissant in turn responded both to departmentalization and to the sort of nationalism espoused by pro-independence parties in Guadeloupe and Martinique by emphasizing the fluidity of culture and undermining pretenses of racial or national essentialism. Yet since the 1970s, the impact of nationalist ideology in Guadeloupe has been strong enough to limit the penetration of Glissant's ideas among Guadeloupean intellectuals.

Nevertheless, if I may borrow from Geertz, I do believe that even if the *Tout-monde* does not necessarily offer a model of global cultural exchanges, it does provide an attractive model for what these exchanges should be.⁹⁰ Saying this acknowledges the utopian quality of some of Glissant's writings without denying his contribution to postcolonial theory. It is undeniable that Glissant brings a new perspective to the study of cultural interactions and power relations within the Caribbean and elsewhere, as Celia

⁸⁸ Burton, "The idea of difference in contemporary French West Indian thought," 149-150.

⁸⁹ AGEF, *Rapport culturel*, 33.

⁹⁰ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 123.

Britton demonstrates.⁹¹ Yet the militancy of his recent publications, such *Quand les murs tombent* (coauthored with Patrick Chamoiseau), reveals that the *Tout-monde* remains an unachieved dream, to paraphrase J. Michael Dash.⁹² Glissant's oeuvre is best understood as participating in an ideological process, an ongoing debate about Antillean identity shaped by the French overseas departments' peculiar political status. Abstracting Glissant's poetics of Relation from its particular geopolitical context in order to extend it to disciplines beyond the field of postcolonial studies, as Martin does in his study of jazz, is problematic. As the study of David Murray's Creole project reveals, creolization is not only unsuited to explain transnational collaborations, but there is also a risk that it masks some of the inequalities that underlie them.

B. Jazz Ka and Diasporic Intimacy

The meeting of jazz and gwoka reveals an inherent tension between nationalism and creolization. Creolization, it appears, functions best as a model to interpret post-nationalist musical creations in Guadeloupe rather than as a global theory. The meeting of jazz and gwoka also brings to the fore the tension between national and diasporic consciousness. In chapter 3, I explored the role of diasporic cosmopolitanism for Guadeloupean nationalist thinkers. What remains of this concept forty years later? Comparing the significance of jazz for Lockel, for Klod Kiavué and François Ladrezeau, and for a younger generation of Guadeloupean jazzmen sheds light on these musicians' perception of their own positions within the African diaspora.

⁹¹ *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory*.

⁹² Dash, *Edouard Glissant*, 149.

In the introduction to his seminal book on the black Atlantic, Paul Gilroy proposes that Teddy Riley's dub-mix of Soul II Soul's "Keep On Moving" "encapsulates the playful diasporic intimacy that has been a marked feature of transnational black Atlantic creativity."⁹³ Regrettably, Gilroy does not expand on the idea of diasporic intimacy, nor does he clearly define it. Looking at encounters between jazz and gwoka reveals possible interpretations of diasporic intimacy. In doing so, we glimpse the significance and limits of diasporic consciousness for Guadeloupean musicians.

Gilroy's "diasporic intimacy" evokes anthropologist Michael Herzfeld's theory of "cultural intimacy," which I discussed in chapter 3.⁹⁴ For Herzfeld, cultural intimacy plays a central role in defining positions of insiders and outsiders in relation to a particular social formation. It is an especially powerful tool for the study of nationalism *qua* national consciousness, but it can easily be applied to transnational social formations, including diasporic consciousness.

Based on Herzfeld's definition of "cultural intimacy," I understand "diasporic intimacy" as binding people together within the "black Atlantic," Gilroy's model for mapping cultural exchanges between Africa and members of its diaspora in Europe and the Americas. In other words, diasporic intimacy is essential in creating diasporic consciousness. The legacy of slavery and colonialism is central to Gilroy's argument about modernity and double-consciousness as well as to his construction of the black Atlantic. Likewise, my interviews with Murray and Kiavué illustrate that the legacy of slavery is fundamental in creating diasporic intimacy among Afro-Guadeloupean and

⁹³ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 16.

⁹⁴ *Cultural Intimacy*.

African-American musicians. However, the memory of slavery can be invoked by different people at different times to elicit different types of solidarity. Indeed, as a constructed identity unit, diasporic consciousness combines and competes with other units such as class, gender, sexuality, or nationality. The encounter of Guadeloupean gwoka with American jazz offers a fertile terrain on which to explore the tensions between race and class-based intimacy as well as between diasporic and national consciousness.

I have explained earlier that jazz offered Guadeloupean nationalists a example of diasporic cosmopolitanism in the late 1960s. This remains true today. Franck Nicolas, a Guadeloupean trumpeter who has developed a music that he calls “jazz ka,” explains: “I think that jazz is a great way to make this music [gwoka] international, like Latin jazz.”⁹⁵ While Lockel tried to distance his music from jazz, Nicolas and saxophonist Jacques Schwarz-Bart—who has developed his own version of jazz ka—are explicitly trying to combine jazz and gwoka. Indeed, Nicolas describes jazz ka as having a gwoka foundation but being “pure jazz.”⁹⁶

Like Murray and Kiavué, Nicolas justifies his involvement in jazz by evoking racial solidarity and diasporic consciousness: “I feel black, a product of slavery. Americans are like us, they have the same roots. This is how I perceive my [music].”⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Interview with the author, 8 July 2010.

“Je pense que le jazz c’est un super moyen de pouvoir faire en sorte que la musique soit internationale, comme le Latin Jazz.”

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

“Je me sens black issu de l’esclavage. Comme les américains qui sont comme nous, qui ont les mêmes racines. Moi je voyais mon truc la-dedans.”

Thus slavery is the linchpin of diasporic intimacy for Murray, Kiavué, and Nicolas. This was not true of the people who wrote the AGEG's report. Indeed the socialist revolution envisioned by the AGEG was predicated on class rather than racial solidarity and the AGEG evoked the memory of the plantation to create this class solidarity, drawing parallels between the exploitation of slaves and that of contemporary agricultural and industrial workers.

The contrasting meanings of slavery for two generations of Guadeloupean musicians highlight an important shift. For the nationalist militants of the 1970s, slavery and gwoka—the music most closely associated with slave opposition to the plantation system—served to generate class solidarity and national consciousness. Thirty to forty years later, as the socialist discourse of the previous generation recedes, we find musicians using slavery to claim racial solidarity and intimacy with other members of the African diaspora and to justify their reliance on jazz to inscribe gwoka within cosmopolitan networks.

While I want to underscore the tension between class and race solidarity as well as between national and diasporic consciousness, I do not mean to suggest some sort of abrupt and total generational schism. In fact, by the 1980s many writers such as Joslen Gabali used gwoka to formulate an unambiguous vision of Guadeloupean ethnic nationalism that privileged African-derived culture. Furthermore, even today, many people in Guadeloupe continue to listen to gwoka—and gwoka hybrids—with nationalist ears.

A closer look at jazz ka and its reception will illustrate this point. Franck Nicolas (Figure 5.4) was born in Guadeloupe to a Guadeloupean father and a French mother. As a budding trumpeter, Nicolas was fascinated by jazz, Miles Davis especially. He moved to France to pursue his musical training in both classical music and jazz. In 1998, Nicolas returned to Guadeloupe and started performing with Kafé. This apprenticeship inspired him to search for a new fusion of jazz and gwoka. The resulting concept, “jazz ka,” blends the harmonic language of jazz with the rhythmic patterns of gwoka. For example, the song “Soley Gwadeloup” borrows the chord changes from John Coltrane’s “Moment’s Notice” which are played over a fast toumblak rhythm.⁹⁸ Like Lockel,



Figure 5.4: Franck Nicolas performing with Jazz Ka Philosophy at the Festival GwoKa in Sainte Anne, July 2010.

Nicolas bases his compositions on the seven rhythms commonly played in traditional gwoka, often doing so in a self-conscious way, as on *Jazz Ka Philosophy* where each song is named for a particular rhythm and a historical figure: “Woulé Delgrés” and “Léwòz Ignace” are but two examples.⁹⁹ Unlike Lockel, Nicolas does not feature a drum set in his group but he does rely on tonal and modal harmonies derived from contemporary jazz. Thus gwoka modènn and jazz ka both mix cosmopolitan and vernacular elements, albeit in different combinations.

⁹⁸ Nicolas, *Manioc Poésie*, Kyph Distribution (077 KA).

⁹⁹ Delgrés and Ignace were two Afro-Creole officers who led the resistance against the restoration of slavery in 1802.

The nationalist discourse of the 1970s, under Lockel's influence, has had a profound effect on what is now perceived as a musical marker of Guadeloupean-ness and what is not. The rhythmic patterns of the gwoka, the *boulagyel*, and atonality are heard as Guadeloupean but harmony is still suspicious. This was made clear to me in the summer of 2010 when I attended a series of concerts by Franck Nicolas and his group. Following the band's appearance at the Gwoka Festival in Sainte Anne, a friend of mine commented that, as a gwoka aficionado, he did not like the music but the jazz fan in him liked it very much. For my friend, the jazz elements in Nicolas's work obscured the musical markers of Guadeloupean specificity. Instead of celebrating jazz ka as an expression of diasporic consciousness, my friend, who has a history of involvement in nationalist politics, criticized the music for failing to express Guadeloupean nationality according to his own set of signifiers.

If something akin to *créolisation* is at work in the music of such Guadeloupean artists as Soft and Dominik Coco, an exploration of the encounter between jazz and gwoka, be it in the collaboration of North-American and Guadeloupean musicians or in the work of Guadeloupean jazz musicians, suggests a tension between creolization, diasporic consciousness, and nationalism. As I hope the preceding paragraphs make clear, these concepts are not mutually exclusive. My friend's reaction following Nicolas's concert makes it clear that they can even coexist within a single person. Thus Nicolas can name all the compositions on one of his albums after the seven gwoka rhythms and Afro-Caribbean historical figures, a move that plays on nationalist symbols, while embracing diasporic cosmopolitanism, and even celebrating his own hybridity. Indeed, in addition to

his work with Jazz Ka Philosophy, the trumpeter also leads a group that performs only French popular songs. “I also claim that heritage,” explained Nicolas. “France is half of me, it is my mother.”¹⁰⁰

Throughout this chapter, and indeed much of this dissertation, I have been dealing with musicians who have participated in Guadeloupean ideological processes not only through their music but also through their own discourse about their music. However, there are musicians who refuse to engage in debates about identity or the nation. What are we, as researchers, to do when faced with this challenge? Can music participate in ideological processes even if musicians claim purely artistic motivations? Returning here to the distinction, raised by Khan, between creolization as a model that describes processes of hybridization and creolization as a model that interprets them, I would like to suggest that music does not have to be attached to an explicit political discourse to be interpreted as such.

The work of saxophonist Jacques Schwarz-Bart offers a good example. Schwarz-Bart is the son of two prominent authors and an embodiment of cultural hybridity. His father André Schwarz-Bart was Jewish and born in Switzerland. His mother, Simone Schwarz-Bart, is Guadeloupean. Jacques was raised in Guadeloupe and Switzerland but, like many of his fellow-citizens, he studied in France. At age twenty four, Schwarz-Bart, who was at the beginning of a promising career as a high-level civil servant, decided to dedicate his life to music instead. He picked up a saxophone and, within three years, was proficient enough to get a scholarship to study at the Berklee College of Music in Boston.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with the author, 8 July 2010.

“Je revendique aussi ce côté-là. La France, c’est ma moitié, c’est ma mère.”

Schwarz-Bart left France, and quickly managed to make a name for himself in Boston and New York, the city he now calls home.¹⁰¹ Schwarz-Bart's nickname, "Brother Jacques," illustrates his hybrid, fluid, and liminal position, signifying on the French nursery rhyme "Frère Jacques" and the African American epithet "Brother."

Schwarz-Bart's musical career also reflects this hybridity. The saxophonist has performed with conguero Giovanni Hidalgo, jazz trumpeter Roy Hargrove, and soul sensations Erykah Badu and Me'shell N'degeocello. In the Caribbean, Schwarz-Bart has played alongside Martinican biguine pianist Mario Canonge and steel pan virtuoso Andy Narrell, among others.¹⁰² In 2002, he participated in Franck Nicolas's musical manifesto *Jazz Ka Philosophy*. In 2006, Schwarz-Bart proposed his own version of jazz ka with the album *Soné ka la*, followed two years later by *Abyss*. Unlike most Guadeloupean musicians, Schwarz-Bart's position on the international music scene is established enough that he was able to record both albums under contract with Universal Music, an affiliation that has given him much greater exposure in the international music press.¹⁰³

When I interviewed Schwarz-Bart in 2007, while he admitted wanting to bring more attention to gwoka, he adamantly drew a strict separation between music and ideology. "Music and ideology do not mix well," he told me. When I approached the topic of *créolité* later in our conversation, he insisted: "I don't bother with any concept

¹⁰¹ Schwarz-Bart, interview with the author, 26 December 2007; Le Bananier Bleur, "Jacques Schwarz-Bart - Saxophone;" Contat, "L'Affaire est dans le sax;" Koda, "Musique: Le voyage abyssal de Jacques Schwarz-Bart;" Murph, "Players: Jacques Schwarz-Bart - Gwoka Bridge."

¹⁰² Le Bananier Bleur, "Jacques Schwarz-Bart - Saxophone."

¹⁰³ Schwarz-Bart, *Soné ka-la*, Universal Music France (B0009204-02); Schwarz-Bart, *Abyss*, Universal Music France (5308078). See note 101 for a list of articles about Schwarz-Bart in the French and American press.

that is not directly musical.”¹⁰⁴ Taking Schwarz-Bart at his word would mean ignoring the complex hybrid nature of his music: his two “jazz ka” albums actually present a mix of gwoka, jazz, dancehall (“Pé la,” featuring Admiral T), zouk (“Déshabillé,” featuring Jacob Desvarieux), electronica (“Drum & Bass”), along with the more subtle influence of Jewish kaddish (“André,” written after his father’s death) and Moroccan Gnawa music. Is this music not the product of creolization simply because its composer says so?

I believe that Jocelyne Guilbault’s concept of “audible entanglements” is helpful in this situation. Guilbault examines audible entanglements “to illuminate and amplify the production of nation and diaspora” in Trinidadian calypso competitions. “Far from being ‘merely’ musical,” writes Guilbault, “audible entanglements [...] also assemble social relations, cultural expressions, and political formations.”¹⁰⁵ Through its audible entanglements, Schwarz-Bart’s music is a performance of creolization. Whether the saxophonist wishes it or not, his music participates in Guadeloupean ideological processes. For some, he may represent the pinnacle of modernist-reformism: a music based on gwoka, created by a Guadeloupean musician that has fully integrated cosmopolitan networks. Yet others may question Schwarz-Bart’s legitimacy and bemoan the fact that gwoka’s most visible representative on the global stage has thoroughly hybridized the music (and resides in New York City).

In the new millennium, gwoka is finally starting to emerge on the global music scene, thanks in part to Guadeloupean musicians who are creating new gwoka-based

¹⁰⁴ Interview with the author, 26 December 2007.

“Art et idéologie ne font pas bon ménage.”

“Je ne m'embarrasse d'aucun concept qui ne soit pas directement musical.”

¹⁰⁵ Guilbault, “Audible Entanglements,” 40-41.

hybrids and in part to the interest of African American musicians who are discovering, embracing, and diffusing the music.¹⁰⁶ Analyzing these encounters, and the new creations that result from them, reveals ways in which Guadeloupean musicians have moved beyond the nationalist discourse of the 1970s and '80s. Theorizing these encounters is a challenging but rich exercise. The tensions between nationalism, diasporic intimacy, and creolization highlight the fact that the meaning of the latter is contingent on a specific geographic, social, and political context. In this chapter, I hope to have demonstrated that creolization in the French Antilles participates in a specific ideological process and that it is most efficient as a model explaining cultural creations that are also part of similar ideological processes. I argue that transposing creolization theories to explain processes of hybridization, syncretization, or globalization beyond the Caribbean is highly problematic. I agree with Stéphane Palmié that stripping creolization of the social tensions and suffering that have defined it in plantation colonies not only weakens its analytical potential, it also amounts to downplaying or masking altogether the great inequalities that have fueled, and continue to stimulate, the emergence of new cultural expressions in colonial and postcolonial societies.

¹⁰⁶ In addition to Murray, this list includes saxophonist Kenny Garrett who has worked with Guadeloupean guitarist Christian Lavisio and recorded a track entitled “Gwoka” on his own *Beyond the Wall*, Nonesuch Records (B000GNOSBS).

Conclusion

Guadeloupean music between nationalism and creolization

Gwoka between folklorization and commodification

In the forty years since the creation of gwoka modènn, Guadeloupe's vernacular drum music has grown from stigmatization to global celebration. Along the way, it has mixed with other musical genres in a process that some celebrate as creolization and others denounce as bastardization. The debates surrounding the music's significance and signification for the people of Guadeloupe, for the Guadeloupean diaspora, and for non-Guadeloupean audiences are far from settled. As we have seen, these debates highlight the role of nationalism and creolization in shaping the sound of Guadeloupean music. They also reveal the ways in which Guadeloupean music has been deployed to create a sense of national unity, to express national consciousness, or to celebrate Guadeloupean creoleness.

Edouard Glissant and Richard Burton have both lamented the folklorization of French Antillean culture.¹ To the extent that gwoka is now completely divorced from the social conditions that saw its emergence, an argument might be made that traditional music in Guadeloupe is sustained only for consumption by an educated middle-class that has never experienced the harsh reality of plantation life. I partially agree with Burton who argues that creole culture has become exotic, even in the eyes of many French Antilleans. I have been surprised to find echoes of *doudouisme* in the *ballets* that Mario

¹ Burton, "The French West Indies *à l'heure de l'Europe*," 12-13; Glissant, *Discours antillais*, 292-293.

Coco and his students present at the Gwoka festival. Madras dresses, straw hats, bare chests and clean khaki pants: Coco's shows are filled with a nostalgia for Guadeloupe *antan lontan* (in the past), for a pre-modern lifestyle that is all the more appealing in that it is totally foreign to the children performing it and to their parents. Undeniably these shows celebrate Guadeloupe's rural heritage, but couldn't the same thing be said of the folkloric *ballets* that La Brisquante performed for tourists in the 1950s and '60s?

Yet I wonder if Burton would still lament the exocitization and commodification of creole culture if he were writing today. In the time that I have spent in Guadeloupe, I have been surprised by the visible success of nationalist cultural efforts. Creole is spoken everywhere: on the street, on the radio, on TV, even in schools. Nationalist success in elevating gwoka's cultural capital is also undeniable even if it is more modest. Although Lockel's gwoka modènn never became the dominant form of popular music that it aimed to be, his initial foray into diasporic cosmopolitanism has inspired musicians to continue to mix gwoka with countless musical genres. Gwoka continues its relationship with jazz in the work of guitarist Christian Lavisio with US saxophonist Kenny Garrett.² The group Urban Ka blends the gwoka of François Ladrezeau, the world beat guitar of Charlie Chovino, and the electronic sounds of DJ After (Figure 6.1). In 2009, Michel Halley organized a large-scale concert of gwoka and dancehall at the Centre des Arts in Pointe-à-Pitre. Billed as "Dub'n'ka," the project promised the meeting of "our traditional musical

² Lavisio, *Ti moun a lafrik* (LAV 2-2008).

heritage” with the street: “tradition and modernity in symbiosis.”³ The concert, later issued on CD and DVD, paired traditional gwoka singers and *tanbouyé* with the rising stars of Guadeloupean pop music and dancehall. Over the last forty years, modernist reform has transformed gwoka from a shameful reminder of slavery to an expression of national consciousness and put the music in relation with cosmopolitan genres.



Figure 6.1: Flyer advertising the concert of Urban Ka at the Artchipel concert hall in Basse-Terre, 30 May 2009.

It is impossible to know what impact these new hybrid styles will have. When I attended the Urban Ka concert at the Artchipel, the crowd was only nominally younger than the audience at the gwoka festival. The reality is that gwoka and gwoka-based musics—such as that of Soft and Dominik Coco—seem to attract mainly a middle-aged and middle-class audience. The sounds of dancehall and konpa dominate the Guadeloupean soundscape as they blast from car radios, cellphones, bars, and shops around the island and captivate the attention of teenagers. In this context, will Halley’s Dub’n’Ka inspire a new generation of musicians or will it be remembered as a gimmick that successfully filled the Centre des Arts? If Guadeloupean musicians continue to blend their traditional music with sounds taken from around the world, what influence will nationalist ideology have on their aesthetic decisions? Will creolization adequately describe their creative process?

³ *Dub ‘n’ Ka de Michel Halley*, WIC Production, 2009; 150 min. DVD.

Sounds and issues for future research

Much work remains to be done about gwoka's current position in Guadeloupean culture. In particular, we need to elucidate the role of women in the history of the music in order to better understand the contemporary gendering of performance roles in gwoka. We also need to take this investigation to France to consider the significance of gwoka for Guadeloupeans living in the metropole. This transatlantic perspective would undoubtedly shed new light on issues of nationalism, creolization, and diasporic intimacy.

This dissertation does not include any discussion of the contribution of carnival groups, the *gwoup a pò*, such as Akiyo or Vokoum, an absence that future research should correct. These groups' emergence in the late 1970s and '80s was a direct consequence of the nationalist activism of the period and they too played an important part in the Guadeloupean ideological process. Moreover, a study of the *gwoup a pò* would contribute to the growing body of scholarship on carnival and politics in the Caribbean.⁴

The general strike led by the Lyannaj Kont Pwofitasyon (Alliance against profiteering) that shook Guadeloupe for forty-four days in January and February 2009 highlighted the power of *mizik a mas* (literally "mask music," carnival music) during social protests. It also revealed the tension between gwoka and carnival music. Although I was not in Guadeloupe during the LKP, several friends reported that during rallies and demonstrations, older protesters started singing Lockel's anthem "Lindépendans," only to be drowned out by the song that became the rallying cry of the movement, "La Gwadeloup sé tan nou" (Guadeloupe is ours; composed by Jacky Richard). "La Gwadeloup sé tan

⁴ See for example: Dudley, *Music from beyond the Bridge*; Guilbault, *Governing Sounds*.

nou” is based on the *senjan* rhythm typical of carnival music in Guadeloupe. It is obviously tonal and easy to sing. Its lyrics have an unmistakable nationalist flair: “La Gwadeloup sé tannou/La Gwadeloup sé pa ta yo/Yo péké fé sa yo vé/Sa yo vé an péyi annou” (Guadeloupe is ours, Guadeloupe is not theirs/They can’t do whatever they want in our country). In the months following the strike, the song provoked many debates as to who were the “nou” (us) and “yo” (them) mentioned in the lyrics. In short, once more, music was at the center of debates about Guadeloupean identity.⁵

Music between “nou” and “yo”

The distinction between “us” and “them” is central to the study of both nationalism and creolization in Guadeloupe. I have demonstrated that both processes have shaped music making on this French Caribbean island. Nationalism and creolization have also influenced what Guadeloupeans hear as their music, what they perceive as foreign, and how they value each. In this regard, a comparison of the evolving Guadeloupean attitudes towards konpa and zouk, and the interaction between the two genres, is enlightening. Zouk was developed as a nationalist response against the popularity of “foreign” konpa in the 1970s. Yet zouk borrowed many stylistic elements from konpa.⁶ Recently, the popularity of zouk having somewhat faded, konpa has reaffirmed itself as a leading popular genre on the island, even as the presence of Haitian migrants continues to generate xenophobic responses from too many Guadeloupeans, a situation that Soft pointedly captures in their song “Wouvé la pòt” (Open the door).

⁵ For example, the Gwoka festival organized a debate titled “La Gwadeloup ant nou é yo (Guadeloupe between us and them): Problématiques et enjeux de la question identitaire” on 11 July 2009.

⁶ Guilbault, *Zouk*.

If politics and ideology have shaped Guadeloupean music, music has also provided an important site where Guadeloupeans can express and debate their national identity. Through the strategic use of musical markers, Guadeloupean musicians can either express their cultural specificity or open their identity to the rest of the world. When they participate in a *swaré léwòz* or sing along to Coco's "Mwen sé Gwadeloupéyen," Guadeloupean audiences literally perform their community into existence. By patronizing some musical genres more than others, zouk rather than gwoka modènn for example, Guadeloupeans consciously or unconsciously express who they are as a community. In a territory with readily available and identifiable separatist music, can the success of so many vapid "zouk love" hits be seen as anything other than an expression of tacit comfort with the political status quo, or at least an indication of political apathy? Answering this question may be pushing the sociological analysis too far. After all, even the most fervent nationalist militants may like to party and there is nothing to prevent someone from dancing to zouk love on saturday night and listening to Lockel's recordings on Sunday. Regardless, the point remains. In Guadeloupe, music, ideology, and identity are tightly interwoven.

Lockel's gwoka modènn offers an exceptionally strong example of musical nationalism, that is to say a music created first and foremost to serve a nationalist political movement. Guadeloupean nationalism is peculiar in several ways. It started sometime in the early twentieth century, when black union and political leaders began using Creole to rally the support of the black peasantry. It later found an expression in *négritude*, an artistic movement that mixed ethnic nationalism and primitivism. This

ethnic nationalism culminated, at first, in an unusual but successful push for decolonization through assimilation. It then reinvented itself, invigorated by Marxism and Maoism. This second nationalist wave achieved a great deal in the field of culture but has not (yet) managed to secure Guadeloupe's independence.

The musical expressions of Guadeloupean nationalism result from a dialogical process involving musicians and ideologues. Lockel's gwoka modènn experiment underscores the failure of the separatist leadership to impose their particular vision onto the Guadeloupean people. Yet they succeeded in awakening consciousness. Few musicians may have adopted Lockel's music wholesale, but it inspired many of them to develop their own interpretation of modernist reform. The back and forth between musicians and audiences secured gwoka's place in the Guadeloupean national imaginary.

Thus Guadeloupean nationalism is undoubtedly indebted to European nationalism but it is not a mere copy of it. Although Guadeloupean separatist organizations originally adopted Stalin's understanding of the nation and advocated for a socialist revolution, their nationalist platform was quickly appropriated and reinterpreted. The initial class loyalties mixed with ethnic nationalism. Ethnic nationalism confronted France's own Jacobinical heritage. Musicians decided that they could mix national consciousness and tonality. Guadeloupean nationalism results from the emergence of political institutions specific to the French Antilles. It mixes elements of Marxism, Maoism, Jacobinism, and black nationalism. In brief, in Guadeloupe, nationalism itself was creolized.

Studying Guadeloupean music has provided me with an opportunity to explore the connection and tension between nationalism and creolization. This, in turn, has helped

me defined two contrasting models of creolization. The first is a theoretical model in which creolization explains the emergence of syncretic cultures under the specific historical and social conditions of colonialism and slavery. The second is a political strategy and opens a counter-hegemonic creative space. This model of creolization emerged in reaction to both (neo)-colonial domination and the nationalist modernist reformist project. It is at the heart of Glissant's *Tout-monde* and I see it at work in Soft's and Coco's music.

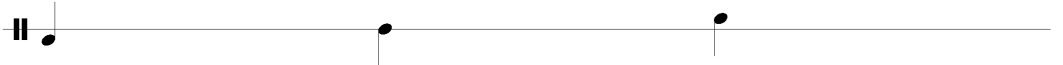
As we saw in chapter 2, Guadeloupean gwoka is undeniably the result of a historical process of creolization. However, gwoka's role in recent Guadeloupean ideological debates offers a particularly strong case for understanding creolization as a political strategy. As such, creolization has allowed Guadeloupean musicians in the past ten to fifteen years to move beyond nationalism and affirm their identity while remaining open to outside influences. This form of creolization collapses the barriers between "nou" (us) and "yo" (them) without threatening to overshadow local specificity. To paraphrase Aisha Khan, when applying creolization theories to postcolonial, globalization, or music studies, we need to distinguish between these two models of creolization. I would argue that the first, theoretical, model is most relevant to the study of cultural syncretization in colonial societies, in the Americas and elsewhere. While I do not think that the second, political, model can be applied uncritically to study musical hybridity, I am convinced that it has much to contribute to our understanding of the relationship between hybridity, identity formation, subalternity, and resistance.

Appendix 1

Common gwoka rhythms

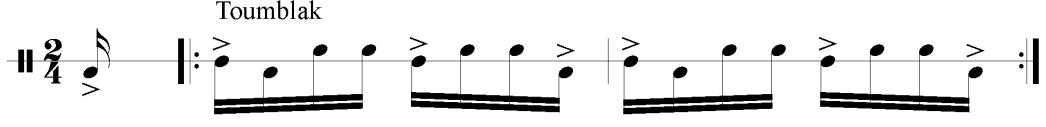
I compiled the following list of common gwoka rhythms and their variations based on my lessons with Christian Dahomay, Jacky Jalème, and François Ladrezeau as well as my field observations, available printed sources, and the analysis of a variety of commercial recordings.

Key

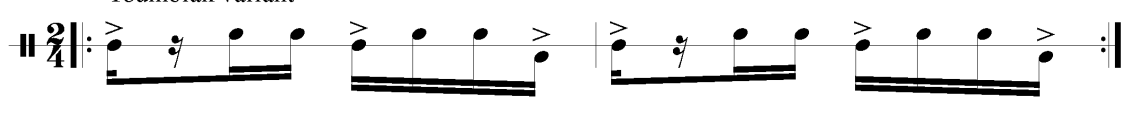


Fonsyè: bass Médyom: medium Zoban: high

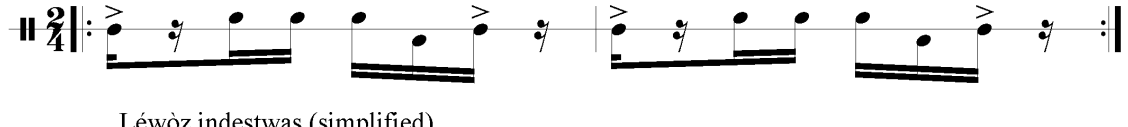
Toumblak




Toumblak variant



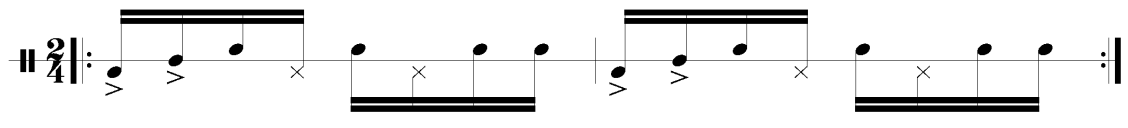
Kaladja



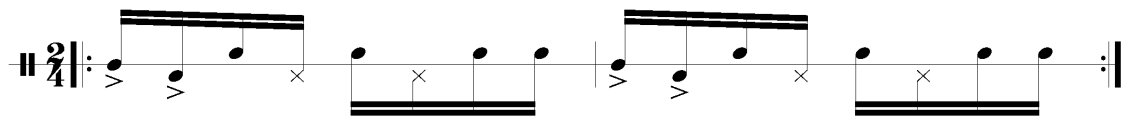
Léwòz indestwas (simplified)



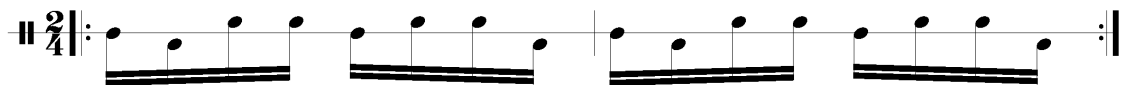
Léwòz jabrun



Léwòz jabrun (variant)



Graj



Menndé (Lockel, Traité de gro ka modên)



Menndé (variant)



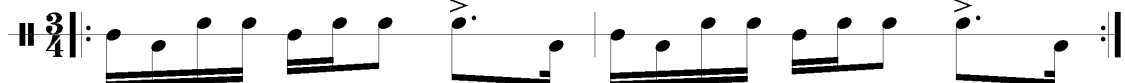
Menndé (Christian Dahomay)



Menndé (Gustave Labeca, I ka i pa ka)



Padjanbèl or Pajanbèl



Granjanbèl



Woulé



Woulé (variant)



Appendix 2

List of interviews

Anduse, Roland (separatist activist, member of the AGEg): 4 August 2009.

Aristide, Julie (violinist, member of the group Soft): 11 July 2008

Bernos, Marc (guitarist): 8 August 2008.

Bon, Philippe (cultural activist, conseiller spectacle vivant for the Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles, Guadeloupe): 28 July 2010.

Bordin, Alza (trombonist, played with Gérard Lockel): 25 July 2009.

Caprice, Alain (photographer, visual artist): 21 July 2009.

Castray, Jean-Fred (saxophonist, director of the CEFrIM music school, author of a method of gwoka modènn): 7 August 2007.

Césaire, Thierry (separatist activist, member of the AGEg): 23 July 2009.

Chomereau-Lamotte, Charlie (percussionist with Gérard Lockel and Soft): 9 July 2009.

Coco, Dominik (singer, song writer): 21 July 2010.

Cosaque, Erick (singer; song writer): 4 June 2009; 11 June 2009.

Cotellon, Félix (President of the AGEg, 1973-74; President of the Comité d'Actions Sportives et Culturelles, 1978-2010; President of Rèpriz, the Centre régional des musiques et danses traditionnelles et populaires de Guadeloupe): 29 July 2008.

Dahomay, Christian (percussionist, multi-instrumentalist, composer, instructor): 26 December 2007; 2 July 2008; 7 July 2008; 12 July 2009.

Dahomay, Marie Line (singer; in charge of the oral history project at LAMECA): 26 December 2007; 24 July 2008; 16 July 2009.

Diakok, Max (dancer): 28 July 2008.

Deshayes, Fred (song writer, lead singer of the group Soft): 12 August 2008; 20 July 2009.

Flauzin, Félix (percussionist, drum manufacturer): 20 and 21 December 2007.

Geoffroy, René (singer, percussionist, member of the group Kan'nida): 25 June 2009.

Guembé, Jean-Denis (percussionist with the group Horizon): 23 July 2009.

Halley, Michel (percussionist; cultural activist): 26 December 2007; 11 August 2008; 16 July 2009.

Honoré, Yves (bassist, music producer): 16 July 2010.

Jalème, Jacky (dancer, percussionist, instructor): 19 december 2007; 25 July 2008; 24 June 2009.

Jalet, Marc (jazz bassist): 24 December 2007.

Jean, Alain (radio host, music collector, cultural activist): 22 July 2009.

Juraver, Yvan (pianist): 22 July 2008.

Kiavué, Klod (percussionist, singer, composer): 24 December 2007; 27 June 2008; 6 August 2008; 6 August 2009; 9 July 2010.

Konket, Guy (singer, composer): 4 and 5 August 2008.

Ladrezeau, François (singer, percussionist, composer, bandleader, member of Akiyo): 11 August 2008.

Losio, Daniel (percussionist, drum manufacturer, member of the group Tumblack): 15 July 2010.

Magnat, Marcel (percussionist with the group Tumblack): 6 July 2010.

Mathieu, Patrick (director SACEM Guadeloupe): 8 July 2010.

Mounien, Wozan (separatist activist, union leader, former president of the UGTG): 15 July 2009.

Murray, David (jazz saxophonist, composer): 13 December 2006; 5 June 2008.

Nicolas, Franck (trumpeter, creator of jazz ka): 8 July 2010.

Oumaou, Robert (percussionist, composer): 1 August 2008; 30 June 2010.

Phipps, Jean-Pierre (percussionist): 23 July 2009.

Poumaroux, Gérard (bassist, director of the Centre culturel Sonis): 18 July 2010.

Samba, Pierre (manager of the group Soft): 17 July 2009.

Schwarz-Bart, Jacques (saxophonist, composer): 26 December 2007.

Selbonne, Ruddy (guitarist with the group Éritaj): 8 August 2008.

Succab, Frantz (separatist activist, editor of JaKaTa, author): 22 July 2010.

Sylvestre, Michel (trombonist with the group Horizon): 14 August 2008.

Théodore, Louis (separatist leader, member of the AGEG, the GONG): 3 August 2009.

Troupé, Sonny (percussionist): 13 August 2008.

Vamur, Olivier (flautist, member of the group Horizon): 8 August 2009.

Selected discography

Many gwoka recordings are self produced and distributed. I have included the name of the record company when it is available, followed by the catalog number, and the date of copyright.

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Coco, Dominik. *Lakou Zaboka*. Koumbeat Prod. Kako 001, 2003.

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