Marronnage and Arts

Marronnage and Arts:
Revolts in Bodies and Voices

Edited by

Stéphanie Melyon-Reinette

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS
PUBLISHING

Marronnage and Arts:
Revolts in Bodies and Voices,
Edited by Stéphanie Melyon-Reinette

This book first published 2012

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-4142-0, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-4142-9

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

List of Tables

FOREWORD

Originating from a conference organized for the Africaphonie Festival in Paris, on May 10, 2011, “Marronnage: Music, Dance and Politics” was intended to be a crossroad of visions, viewpoints and overlapping discourses. In fact, this crossroad was to be a junction between science and the senses, between objectivity and subjectivity, between reflection and emotion, an encounter which would join scholarly analyses and researches with artists’ testimonies.

Why choose to mix two spheres which seem to be antithetical antipodes? Why the combination of arts and sciences? The simplest response is as follows: most of the time, we would probably think that people interested in studying music and/or dance have the soul of an artist. It is, therefore, thoroughly interesting to meld the worlds of art and science which are seen as opposed and contradictory, because, in fact, they are not. They are complementary and together can provide perspectives and substance in analyzing a phenomenon. Because the objects of the conference were music and dance, we invited various kinds of artists and scholars: ethnomusicologists, musicologists, art-therapists, musicians, dancers and choreographers. We wanted to see ideas, theories and experiences confronted, and to have them complement one another. The belief in the richness of human experience led us to ask artists to offer testimonies of their own musical grounds and construction, of their musical inspirations and political motivations (if any). It is likely that some artists have produced musical and dance trends which were the result of the social and political circumstances from which they have emerged and developed. The artists are people who allow, through the reappropriation of their roots, or through the fusion of the remnant parts of their native and imposed cultures, the emergence of new traditions and new observances of their cults and rites.

The conference was therefore concerned with the cultures of postcolonial countries and societies, in a period from slavery to the contemporary era, in order to shed light on the various music and dance trends that have appeared. Thus, studying the notion and the expressions of revolt through these artistic trends, we decided to consider the idea of “marronnage” as intrinsically linked with slavery, abolition and the post-slavery period through three distinct axes (which are also interdependent):

Bodily marronnage (traditional music and dances, drumming and skin instruments). Slaves were oppressed and kept in bondage, their bodies used as instruments to increase the economic richness of their masters. They would therefore find relief and freedom in their late-night dances and circles.

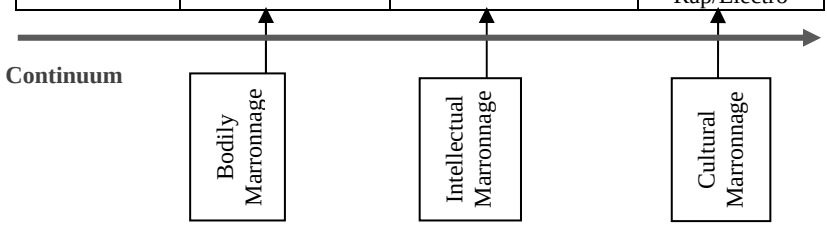
Cultural marronnage ("urban roots," music and dances of the twenty-first century): During decolonization, music and dance were also vectors of speeches of freedom, of revolt (during the civil-rights movement), and of the claiming of black identity.

Intellectual marronnage (contemporaneous music and dance of the twenty-first century): It is "intellectual" because many cultural movements in the 1990s, for example, were clearly thought out and philosophically built to counteract the effects of "assimilation" by permitting the emergence of counter-cultures (inheritances of the founding fathers of the black, Panafrican and Afrocentrist movements of the previous period considered).

Consequently, art expressions might be interwoven with our determinations, stances and involvements. The point of this book is to highlight the similarities and the differences which exist between all those trends which have developed in different postcolonial societies with a common starting point, slavery, and with the same colonizers: the French, Spanish and English. The enslaved men and women delivered on the coasts of the Caribbean islands came from various ethnic tribes, thus, their characteristics intermingled and evolved into distinguished cultural and traditional forms with common traits. In fact, this book's purpose is to reveal the codes and the meanings behind the dance and music whose images often are misunderstood, unknown, denied or disparaged, especially when it comes to traditional dances, too often misused or reduced to folklore when there is in fact a depth of meaning behind it. Modern and contemporary black music trends are too often criticized and denigrated because, most of the time, their origins are also ignored.

Here is the summary of the three axes defined before the conference:

Periods	**Slavery**	**1930–1960: Decolonization**	**1990–2000: Late-twentieth century**
Kinds of Music and dances	Traditional	Contemporeanous	"Urban-Roots"
	Rara	Jazz	Hip Hop Ka
	Gwo ka	Reggae	Trip Hop
	Maloya	Afrobeat	Soul Kréyòl
	Bèlè	Hip Hop	New trends Rap/Electro



This book will appeal to a large range of readers: scholars as much as music lovers, professional dancers, dance fans, cultural protagonists, and so on and so forth. Its vocation—as was the conference—is to make this knowledge available to anyone interested in black, postcolonial and politicized dance, music and cultures. In addition, the contributors vow a real passion to their subjects, as most of them are both scholars and artists. They conciliate the worlds of analysis and experience in both living and deciphering the cultural form. Do we need to be immersed in some cultural phenomenon in order to understand it better? Does neutrality count here? Can we rely on a scientific judgement when he or she is immersed in their subject? Isn't that participating observation?

Marronnage will be addressed with questions like: How has this music and these dances of revolt appeared? Can music or dance really be seen as a lever of revolt? What is the musical or instrumental discourse (e.g. ethnomusicology, musicology, musicians, dancers, dance anthropology etc.)? What is a Maroon? What did it mean half and a century ago, in the late twentieth century, and what does it mean today? Is the body of the "Maroon" a discursive process in opposition with the established order, or a body in opposition? Is "Marooning" becoming a "nigger," claiming one's blackness? What are the great periods of identity, racial and cultural

acknowledgement and recognition? Do the musicians of those periods consider themselves as Maroons, as rebels, as revolutionary thinkers? Are music and dance outlets for social discrepancies and historical frustrations and/or tools of struggle? What is the link between dance and music in Maroon art expression? To which extent do artists take part into the political process, and is there any such involvement from the artistic field? Are there artists involved in the democratic, political and community processes? Are there forethinkers, pioneers, political leaders among them?

Consequently, the call for papers was the starting point of this project. The scholars and artists who submitted proposals—which were accepted and presented in May 2011 in Paris—appear in this collection. Though a few gave up the project, I solicited others to submit proposals after the conference. Thus, this is a rich cultural piece of which I am really proud to share with readers, researchers and art lovers. It gathers professionals, scholars and artists, depicting and analyzing cultural and artistic forms inherited from the slavery era such as traditional practices in the French West Indies (*Gwo ka* in Guadeloupe, *Bèlè* in Martinique, *Maloya* in Réunion, etc.), and modern music trends like Reggae, Dancehall, Hip Hop and Rap, born from the 1960s and developing up to the present, through the concept of marronnage (whose meaning differs from one place to another). The chapters will enable readers to experience a trip through the Caribbean islands as well as the Indian Ocean (because we often forget that slavery also existed elsewhere in the world, and not only in the Caribbean), and the countries of South America such as Brazil. They will discover the great diversity of the black cultures and of the Black diaspora, meant here in Paul Gilroy's sense, the Afro-descendants.

In the first part entitled "Traditional Drums and Original Marronnage," various approaches are delivered through the artists' lenses, experiences, histories and analyses. They look at traditions as fundamentals of resistance both of themselves and of their native people. Because the drum was an instrument and an arm in liberation during slavery, it is today a symbol of resistance, of inheritance—from the Maroons, the niggers or the *kaf*, or any other group defined in accordance with its African origins—and of communication with the metaphysical and societal spirits.

The second part, "Allegorical Marronnage," reveals how the concept of marronnage, this process of freeing oneself by fleeing from bondage and the dehumanizing treatments the slaves suffered in those islands and countries, is played out socially via customs and traditional practices. Thus, carnival is a projection of marronnage through the reincarnation of historical, legendary and political figures into the artists' and carnival followers' bodies. The body turns into a sociopolitical flag, transfiguring

anticolonial standpoints. Elsewhere, the allegory is expressed through the reappropriation or the reusing of public spaces, clearly and primarily seen as oppressive and thoroughly involved in the assimilating project of the societies they live in. Therefore, they reuse these public spaces, turning them into arenas or safe milieus for the positive processes they are involved in. Furthermore, it can be read in a third manner; that music becomes in certain cases a metaphor for marronnage.

The third and last part, "Symbolic Marronnage," exemplifies the fact that marronnage, seen as an inheritance from the past, is a prism of rebellion and anticonformism that artists draw from in order to shape their own forms of expression, their own speech, and direct their political claims through.

Consequently, marronnage is a stance, an attitude, a mentality. This book provides a wide span of shapes, ideologies or demonstrations of marronnage and shows how the quest of freedom expressed during slavery has infiltrated the social relationships and the arts to develop approaches and expressions of identity specific to postcolonial societies, conditioned by the interracial and phenotypico-social interactions, the aftermath of slavery, and undoubtedly the social-economic structures which rank the black communities at the lowest levels. Those music and dances have been, and remain, new cosmogonies with particular codes, new spheres where black slaves, freed men and their descendants could and still can express, scream, cry or enjoy their freedom. All the contributors here shed new light on those phenomena and unveil the preconceived stereotypical, folkloric, sensualized and heavy ideological blanket that conceals the Caribbean, African and Indian Oceanic cultures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, my acknowledgements will be addressed to all the contributors who willingly participated in this project and provided both their investigations and their passion: scholars Nathalie Montlouis, Dr. Steve Gadet, Marie Cousin, Klara Boyer-Rossol, Dr. William "Lez" Henry, Dr. Michelle Bermiss-Smith and artists Edmond Mondésir, Florence Latappy, Ashaman Jahlawa, Asaliah Gad, Tiwony and Nèg Lyrical. Interestingly, those who participated in the project are, in the most part, both scholars and artists, and consequently they have presented the side of their coin they preferred to be recognized by. Thank you for the richness of your contributions, and for a better knowledge and understanding of those music trends rooted in revolt and rebellion.

The conference which took place in Paris in May 2011 aimed at celebrating the abolition of slavery by broaching a topic which is more and more important in the Caribbean and which encompasses its whole meaning in metropolitan France and in the African diaspora. Consequently, I am really honoured to be able to have this conference published thanks to Cambridge Scholars Publishing, and I am adamant in thanking France as well, since it is a constant struggle to have those subjects broached in that country, even though they must be seen, accepted and inherently incorporated into *l'Histoire de France*.

Two women must also be thanked: Nathalie Montlouis, who is now one of my dearest friends and an accomplice in conferences, and who contributed in the translations and reading of certain articles; and Dr. Michelle Bermiss Smith, who helped in reading those pages as well.

Finally, I address my acknowledgements to history and all the men and women who have built ours. To the freedom fighters and those human beings who struggled, died and survived to make the music that is still vivid and bright today, for us to pass over to new generations and other peoples and cultures.

Dr. Stéphanie Melyon-Reinette

PART I

TRADITIONAL DRUMS AND ORIGINAL MARRONNAGE

THE EVOLUTION OF *GWO KA* FROM THE TWENTIETH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT DAY

MARIE-LINE DAHOMAY

Nowadays, many details and specificities of the genesis of *Gwo ka* still remain unknown. This work is an attempt to summarise the main phases of the evolution of *Gwo ka* in Guadeloupe[1] throughout the twentieth century, the period wherein the sources are the most numerous. Nevertheless, it is important to insist that the analysis of the complex journey of *Gwo ka* music would require more than a short article.

Born from the encounter between contrasting musical, social and ritual practices from the enslaved African-Diasporic populations, *Gwo ka* music comes from a Caribbean island called Guadeloupe. Guadeloupe is a French overseas department, a true melting pot where Amerindian, African, European and Indian cultural influences have interacted for centuries.

The few historical sources available designate the music of the enslaved under various terms such as *Calenda* (Labat 1704), or *Bamboula* (Merovil 1918) after the emancipation. Nevertheless, the descriptions they give, especially that of the *Bamboula*, present common characteristics with *Gwo ka*, corroborating the theory of its common roots with the music of the enslaved.

Oral tradition bounds *Gwo ka* with a survival instinct, the spirit of resistance, marronnage, the cry for freedom, the distress of exile and the drive for transcendence and creation. *Gwo ka* music is itself a creation of transcendence (Uri 1991, 39), most likely elaborated through various processes of appropriation, imitation and borrowing of cultural features which are almost unidentifiable today, as they have influenced this music for centuries. However, if the ritual function no longer exists, *Gwo ka* remains greatly influenced by African features (La fontaine 1983). A new instrument of percussion emerged from this musical practice: the *Tanbou-Ka.* However, the first photographic evidence of the existence of such an instrument, dating back to the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries,[2] identified it by the name of *tam-tam.* In the 1950s and 1960s the popular word *gwotanbou* (“big drum”) was used interchangeably

for the drum and its music.[3] Napoleon Magloire, a prominent *Gwo ka* singer from Mare-Gaillard in Gosier,[4] along with other traditional musicians from the Ste Rose village, testify to having always heard the appellation *ka* from their boyhood. Therefore, the question is: when did the Guadeloupean population used the word *Gwo ka* to designate this music? Could it be a recent circumstance?

This issue is less controversial in the traditional milieu than the significance and the origin of the word *Gwo ka*, for which three theories were coined:

- A mystical approach: the word *ka* allegedly has the same significance as the symbol *ka* in Egyptian mythology.
- An Afro-centric approach: *Gwo ka* could be a corrupted form of the word *N'goka* which designates a drum in North Dahomay and Angola.
- A Linguistic approach: *Gwo ka* could be the translation in Creole (*Kréyol*) for the French expression *gros quart de baril*—"big quarter of a barrel" (barrels used to transport and store salted meat were then used as the body and resonance chamber of the instrument).

Although anchored in the suburbs of larger cities, at least since the end of the nineteenth century, *Gwo ka* comes from the world of the plantation, from the Guadeloupean rural context. This musical genre associates dances, song repertoires and percussion according to the following pattern:

- The audience assembled in a circle (called *la ronde*)
- Two drums are used for the *boula* rhythms
- A solo drum called *make* is used
- A singer and a chorus perform the call and response songs
- Smaller percussions such as *cha cha* are used
- Only one person dances at a time in the midst of *la ronde*.

In the Caribbean, there are music, dances and even drums similar to *Gwo ka*. One can recognize words such as *ka, boula,* and "big drum."[5] However, *Gwo ka* music has specific characteristics and codes exclusive to its Guadeloupean base which are:

- Seven fundamental rhythms, each with specific repertoires of songs and dance steps.
- A *santimanka*,[6] a particular musical colour inherent to this music.

- The *lokans*, the stamp of a good singer, comprises improvisation skills, variations and modulation of the voice, the ability to narrate and eloquence. It also includes the resonance and the sonority of the voice.
- *La rèpriz*, a medium used by the singer, the dancer and the drummer (the *tambouyé*), to position themselves on the rhythm and the measure. *La rèpriz* resets the dynamic of the musical ensemble. It is also a beat used by the dancer and the *makè*[7] to transition the dance steps.
- Codes, precise phrases of percussion allowing, for instance, the transition from one rhythm to another, or to move to the coda.
- Particular foot work for the dance; the heel and the mid-foot are used as contact points to reach the *bigidi*,[8] which is the state where the dancer is no longer stable on the ground and is on the verge of falling.
- The creation of a special context or space beneficial to its diffusion, such as *la swaré léwòz*[9] and the *kout'tanbou. Swaré léwòz* is the name given to the open air parties organized near the factories or the plantations on the workers' pay day or every fortnight (also called *kenzen*). The *kout' tanbou*[10] exists outside of the Léwòz context. The former can be improvised or organized with events such as *la bamboula anba mawché*[11] during local fairs.
- *Gwo ka* is simultaneously regarded as a catharsis and entertainment medium, and even a means of earning a living.
- The lyrics of the songs, often anecdotal, usually narrate the everyday lives of the common people.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, *Gwo ka* was considered to be a music genre practiced by *vyé-nèg*. The songs, dance and percussion distinctiveness were transmitted orally and informally, either by imitation or osmosis. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s numerous folk ballets[12] were performed on local, Caribbean and even international scenes. Although they vectored a *doudouistic*[13] and folk image of the tradition, these groups played a great part in the preservation of *Gwo ka* and in the alteration of mentalities (Leauva 2008).

As early as 1946, the year of the *Départementalisation*,[14] Guadeloupe had become the scene of a major social crisis in which most factories had to shut down causing the rural population to flock to the city. It was a time during which the Bumidom[15] scheme created massive migration to France. A branch of *Gwo ka* would therefore migrate to other lands,[16] where the French dominant culture would reinforce the disgust of the Guadeloupeans

and their ancestral traditions.

In 1963, the Guadeloupean Marcel Mavounzy made the first audio recording[17] of *Gwo ka*. Other producers such as Henry Debs and Raymond Célini would follow. Traditional *Gwo ka* from the countryside would henceforth become accessible to all Guadeloupeans. The diffusion of the song repertoire, the rhythms, the *boulagèl*[18] and the *makè* percussion phrases were promoted by this new audio support, making it easy for people to learn. Key *Gwo ka* figures such as the illustrious drummers Vélo, Brabant, Loyson, Chaben, Sergius Geoffroy, Anzala, Dolor and Guy Conquette[19] were brought into the limelight. The latter would conquer the youth of the 1970s with his innovative and modern approach to *Gwo ka*, characterised by his singing and improvised style. He was the forerunner of *Gwo ka* teaching, and the very first *Gwo ka* classes were held in his house at Jabrun in Baie Mahault.

The 1970s and 1980s witnessed a radical time in *Gwo ka* history. Due to the growing nationalistic and cultural awareness fuelling various identity struggles, *Gwo ka* was defined as the only "authentic" music of the Guadeloupean people (AGEG 1977; Lockel 1978). This social movement was encouraged by political parties, trade unions and students alike. In the midst of this Guadeloupean identity quest, *Gwo ka* was to play a major role, which was probably amplified by the aforementioned propaganda throughout the entire island (Cyrille 174). The Radio Station "Radio Tanbou" broadcasted *Gwo ka* music on a permanent basis and the "*Gwo ka* Festival" was created during the same period. This new cultural conscience generated deep changes in the *Gwo ka* world, which was to face increasing influence from modernity and globalisation.

Gwo ka influence exceeded its traditional domain. From then on, it was concerned with socio-political problems, the economy, spirituality, education, the diffusion of information, the creation of slogans or the transmission of messages. Since most of the factories had shut down, the occasions and context for the *kout' tanbou* and *Swaré Léwòz* took over the streets, the churches, the strikes, the political meetings, cultural gatherings, family events, the schools, local fairs and diverse commemorations. The basic configuration was modified, showing an increasing number of *boula*, *makè* and *chacha.* From this period, traditional groups were commissioned to coordinate the *Swaré léwòz.* Proper sound systems were used to optimise the musical experience. The *Léwòz* became increasingly popular as *grands léwòz* could attract around a thousand visitors. All modern means of communication from banners, the internet, flyers, TV advertisements and the media in general became commonly used. The production of recorded music increased, from vinyl to compact discs and

sometimes complemented by music videos, and many documentaries have already been produced on the topic.

The transmission of *Gwo ka* was gradually formalised through the proliferation of workshops, classes or music and dance methods. In each district, schools[20] were opened, securing the preparation of the younger generation and producing numerous talented artists of whom many were invited to perform on international scenes.[21] Genuine pillars of this cultural movement,[22] these schools were able to convey to their students legitimate cultural values in addition to the music and dance legacy.

Drum making became a recognized line of work. Each artisan enhanced their research around the sounds, the norms, the method of stretching goat skin[23] and the use of new materials. Consequently, the modern *tanbouka*—of differing craftsmanship with regard to its size and shape—has a higher pitch compared to the originals. The *djembéka* became prominent in the twentieth century and came in the form of a *djembe*,[24] with the same skin tension as the *tanbouka*. The occupation of drum maker was officially recognised in 2011 by the French Ministry of Culture, which presented Yves Tholes with the title *Maître d'Art*.[25]

The notion of folk groups, popular in the 1960s, gave way to choreographic groups[26] and dance companies in the late the twentieth century. These groups allied tradition and modernity in their performances. The choreographer Léna Blou, initiated to *Gwo ka* by Jacqueline Cachemire,[27] founded in 2010 a training centre called *Techni'ka*[28] for professional dancers.

This evolution in *Gwo ka* added meaning to the artistic creation. Every year, the compositions of both the elders and the younger generation[29] have enhanced its repertoire. Polyrythmic[30] innovations resulted from new conceptions of the rhythmic approach, and a new rhythm, the *takout* from the group *takouta*, was created. New talented groups, drummers, dancers and singers have come forward, each one presenting their personal or singular styles and even techniques typical to specific Guadeloupean localities. Nowadays, there are professional traditional artists registered at the SACEM.[31] If the singers are traditionally male, the past twenty years have witnessed an increasing number of female[32] singers, especially in performances or in Women's *Léwòz* (*Léwòz a Fanm*). These women bring to *Gwo ka* a more harmonious *santimanka*. The *Les femmes chantent les classiques du Ka*[33] event allows female singers from all musical backgrounds to experience the particular *Gwo ka* style of singing. *Gwo ka* has also infiltrated carnival through the repertoires of *group a po*[34] such as Akiyo, Voukoum, Mas Ka Klè (Laumuno, 2011), which often have their own *Gwo ka* factions and organise *Swaré léwòz*. During the carnival

procession, the *Gwo ka* songs are complemented by an adapted or *senjan*[35] rhythm played on carnival drums.

A modern form of *Gwo ka* emerged from these years of *Gwo ka* "emancipation." Supported by the musician Gerard Lockel since the 1970s, this new liberated approach of *Gwo ka* proclaimed its legitimacy as a true musical genre deserving to be written and played on musical instruments. Nationalist and activist, Gerard Lockel released the first work of his musical group in a box set of three vinyl discs in 1977, then published his *Gwo ka* method titled: *Gwo Ka Modèn*. During the same period, other musicians attempted to associate other musical instruments to *Gwo ka*, such as Patrick Jean Marie and his group Atika, Guy Conquette, Gilbert Coco, Christian Dahomay, Georges Troupe, and Kafé among many others. However, the expression and concept *Gwo Ka Modèn*, which is protected terminology developed by Gerard Lockel, has nowadays entered informal language as the expression *Gwo ka moderne* (modern *Gwo ka*).

Many other groups[36] would later join this quest for a modern expression of *Gwo ka*, from the most "purist" to the most "diluted" forms open to various musical genres. New percussive instruments emerged from these endeavours: the *gwadlouka*, *the yakalok*, *la batterie Gwo ka* and the *batrika*.

The *Gwo ka moderne* concept erases the basic *Gwo ka* configuration described above. The call and response form is no longer systematic. The triad singer/dancer/*makè* is no longer at the core of the performance. The stage has become the privileged space of *Gwo ka* expression. The music is supported by the performance, its structure, and harmonisation. Some creations have the ambition to remain authentic in the traditional repertoire. Others, essentially inspired by the *santimanka* and the rhythms, have elaborated a particular sense of harmony. This can be seen in the work of Christian Laviso, who created the *guitareka* concept, a genuine mutation of the *makè* and the *Gwo ka* expression on a guitar, and today he is recognized as a highly talented French guitarist (Laviso 2008), Laviso has embraced jazz influences while remaining anchored to his *Gwo ka* heritage.

Throughout its evolution, *Gwo ka moderne* contributed to the reconciliation of traditional musicians with the Jazz world and vice versa. This concord came after many "hostile" years when *Gwo ka* was not considered a true musical genre. At the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, numerous Jazz and *Gwo ka* fusions were made possible through the collaboration of artists such as the American saxophonist David Murray, Gerard Lockel and the *Gwo ka* Masters,[37] or the alliance of the group Akiyo Ka and a Breton group called Carre Manchot.[38] Along

with these initiatives and musical innovations, the general interest shown by international musicians[39] greatly helped to effect a change of mentalities as far as *Gwo ka* legitimacy was concerned. The Jazz/*Gwo ka* marriage was consummated through the young generation of Guadeloupean jazzmen, which has borne new concepts and spaces of expression to the international scene through such artists as Franck Nicolas, Jacques Schwarz-Barth,[40] and the Castry brothers. Other musicians would come back to the country, bringing with them their musical experience and incorporating it in the *Gwo ka moderne* concept.[41]

The musical path opened by *Gwo ka moderne* presented a contemporaneous instrumental expression of the traditional frame, which has increasingly inspired other non-traditional musical ensembles.[42] These ensembles are known for using the *Gwo ka* repertoire on other rhythmic forms such as Zouk, Funk and Combo Jazz. There again, the traditional structure is altered, with the pieces performed often aimed at favouring partner dancing. In nightclubs and balls, the *lokans* and the drums are adapted to the rhythm played. There are many interpretations of these traditional songs, performed by zouk[43] singers,[44] however, this phenomenon creates confusion as the younger generation regard them as being the original pieces. Some of these groups complement the *santimanka* with an additional Caribbean touch, as perfected by the group Soft,[45] whose success has spread from Guadeloupe to Caribbean and European shores, while the group Kriyolio experiments with the *santimanka* through the *guadajazz* combination.

Urban music, Hip Hop, Dancehall, Ragga, and Slam[46] have also came into the heritage of the *Gwo ka* rhythms, dance steps and *tanbouka*. The encounter of these different musical genres occurred during two performances: Dub N'Ka in 2003 and Urban'ka in 2007 in which the masters of *Gwo ka* shared their musical experience with urban music celebrities.

Finally, at present two ideologically and musically opposed spheres are attempting to interact: *Gwo ka* and opera. Indeed, some lyrical singers have tried their voices within the classical *Gwo ka* repertoire and vice versa.[47] In 2006, Akiyoka experimented with Mozart during the *Journées Internationales de la Harpe* (International Days of the Harp). Christian Dahomay,[48] composer, author and researcher in *Gwo ka*, is currently writing musical pieces for large ensembles. Two of his *Pieces pour Gwo ka et Cordes* (Music for *Gwo ka* and strings), performed by the Chevalier St Georges' orchestra, were played in various classical concerts in Guadeloupe and in France.

Is There a Rupture Between Tradition and Contemporaneous Creation?

While originally confined to villages or the countryside in general, *Gwo ka* nowadays occupies the entire Guadeloupean territory. It is present in all the strata of the Guadeloupean population. In its traditional form, it could preserve most of its fundamental codes and its primary configuration despite some apparent mutations. Becoming more accessible through a more modern and open form, *Gwo ka* has exploded into a multitude of new styles available to a wider audience. As such, it has a universal propensity as Klod Kiavué, the *tanbou makè* of David Murray's[49] group, explained: "I think that my own compositions are not *Gwo ka* and that those of Murray are likewise open. I would define it as *Mizik a Nèg*,[50] yes; this is how we like to call it, a universal music of the black people." Jacques Schwarz-Bart also sensed the universal propensity of *Gwo ka*:

> I find that there is something bubbling in *Gwo ka* music that favours improvisation. It is a path open to many people. And many will explore it. Similarly to Dizzy, who brought the Latin Jazz form to the Unites States. When he first started, people thought that he had lost his mind. Fifteen years later, Latin Jazz had entered the universal language. In a few years, it will be normal to invite *Gwo ka* jazz ensembles in Jazz festivals. Well, at the moment, the purists do not understand what I do. Sometimes, I use some effects on my sax, and this offends them. If we are able to offend the purists, we must be on the right path (laughs). Because nothing is pure. There is no such thing as pure music. Music equates to movement, so let's make it move.[51]

Nevertheless, modernity needs the experience of these "purists" as they cultivate the *santimanka.* The latter is indeed the foundation and the characteristic feature of *Gwo ka*, sustaining the roots of ancestral inspiration. As long as this *santimanka* reamins identifiable at different levels through both modern and traditional pieces, *Gwo ka* will resist the phenomenon of globalisation. In fact, even when borrowing various characteristics from the culture of the "other," globalisation never ceases to standardize other styles and genres.

At this stage of evolution, one can wonder if the appellation "traditional" is still suited to *Gwo ka*, as oral transmission, typical to traditional music form, tends to disappear in favour of formalised teachings and as its artistic creation, incontestably modern, opens it to the world: "It is better to identify *Gwo ka* as a contemporaneous music, meaning that it is a music that is not fixed in its original period but a music that lives throughout time that it is played and danced while accepting the

constraints imposed by modern world" (Laumuno 2011).

In the twenty-first century, *Gwo ka* has become an ethos, a way of life. It epitomises the spiritual strength which helped the people throughout the long nights of negotiation during the LKP[52] movement in 2009. *Gwo ka* is also present in some Guadeloupean churches, whether they be Catholic or Pentecostal, and some use it for therapeutic purposes. The omnipresent symbol of the Guadeloupean identity, the *tanbouka*, is an inspiration for clothes, jewels, craft making, tattoos, architecture, furniture, and brands. The various utilisations of this symbol express the Guadeloupeans' need to introduce themselves as heirs of an original culture and their eagerness to define their territory.

Nowadays, the challenge for *Gwo ka* is to enter the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity for the year 2012. As such, it would therefore be regarded as intangible cultural heritage among other endangered cultural specificities. "Saving" it would mean to ensure "the sustainability, the identification, the documentation, research, the protection, the promotion, the enhancement, the transmission essentially through formal and informal means, as well as the revitalisation of its various aspects."[53] As demonstrated in this chapter, *Gwo ka* continues to develop, multiplying its styles and its spaces. Therefore, it manages its own "sustainability," even its "substance," through formal education in numerous schools and the publication of methods, music scores, the production of CDs and movies as well as the manufacturing of its instruments. Academically speaking, there are numerous researchers and students of various origins who come to Guadeloupe each year to study and write articles on the manifold aspects of *Gwo ka*.

To what extent will such recognition affect Guadeloupean *Gwo ka*? How will France, supposedly concerned with the protection of this heritage among others things, "strive"[54] to enforce the various measures and policies of which the inventory is the only mandatory aspect according to the convention's wording? What will be both the triggering factors of this endeavour and its manifestation in the cultural life? These are current issues still to be discussed in the *Gwo ka* world.

BÈLÈ IN MARTINIQUE: THE FOUNDATION OF RESISTANCE AND EXISTENCE

EDMOND MONDÉSIR*

(*) Translated from French by Nathalie Montlouis

In my childhood, I was never directly involved in *Bèlè*. This disconnection was due to the fact that, at that time, I lived in a village where *Bèlè* was not actually practiced. People who practiced *Bèlè* (the *Bèlè* people) did it very naturally within their homes and families of their neighbourhood. They never travelled to do performances. However, I had heard about one of my grandfathers who was a *Bèlè* drummer from various stories. I had gathered that he was so passionate about drumming that he experienced many problems in his personal life—his wife actually left him because of drumming. It is from there that, in an obscure corner of my conscience, I was persuaded that I was from a lineage of *Bèlè* people. Nevertheless, at that time, I had never directly interacted with *Bèlè*.

However, I used to hum various songs; actually, they were fragments, partial reproductions of various songs that came to me God only knows how. These were tunes that could be heard anywhere, as though floating in the atmosphere. These were a type of song that could have been derived either from *bèlè*, *beguines*, Christmas carols or from the singing part of the tales that were told in wakes.

It was the era of oral transmission. We have to realise that there was no radio and, of course, no television. I have had the opportunity to hear people "make music" in the neighbourhood, especially at one of my uncles or at some of our neighbours or family friends' house. There used to be balls with one or two musical instruments and people would beat on anything at hand—chairs or tables, in a similar fashion to the Christmas Carol or *Chanté Nwel* musical tradition.

I remember that there was a courtyard where we rolled dice in trays placed on trestles. Inside the house, others sang and danced while many ate and drank. The day after, one could find incrusted on the ground the

tops of the lemonade bottles drank during the party.

Therefore, we did have a cultural practice linked to singing with some form of drumming that was not *bèlè*, as we were not from a *bèlè* neighbourhood. Yet, the youth of the time was in the habit of beating on anything that could produce a characteristic sound or an interesting rhythm, such as saucepans, pales or boxes. This musical practice was the reproduction of tunes and sounds that we heard among us and it is this atmosphere that influenced me in my childhood. As I was growing up, this musical tradition would gradually create in me a fundamental interest in drumming practices.

Edmond Mondésir and his drum.

This love for the drum, this real passion shared by many Martiniquan youths, celebrated by some artists in various compositions, was actually paradoxical. It happened during a time when these musical practices were scorned by mainstream society as they were regarded as "nigger"[55] practices.

This is perhaps the reason why an effective transmission of *bèlè* practices was so difficult; one must know that even in the *bèlè* milieu, one had to face up to prejudice.

This is how things were, and this was my practice. When I go through my memories, I believe that it is probably later, as a sixth form college student in 1963, that I first heard about Ti Emile and *bèlè*. Back then, I did not really pay much attention to it. Paradoxically, it was in France, when I started tertiary education in 1965, that I really got acquainted with the *bèlè* drum sonorities, and encounter was very emotional for me.

Indeed, sometime earlier, several *bèlè* recordings had been released. There was the AGEM record (General Association of Martiniquan Students), made possible thanks to the recordings of Frank Hubert and his determination and intrepidity, as well as one covering Anca Bertrand and Leon Sainte-Rose's *bèlè* approach.

As a student, I was encouraged to deepen my interest and love for

percussion, which was being refined and more focused on *bèlè*. In this multicultural environment provided by the university, I was able to realise the importance of one's musical heritage. Moreover, I had access to multicultural musical productions, allowing me to develop my musical inclinations. Indeed, I had numerous Guadeloupean friends who had a more thorough knowledge of their percussive heritage, *Gwo ka*. I had access to their music and I was struck by two records of the legendary Velo, a mythic character of Guadeloupean *Gwo ka*. My next door neighbour was a French Guyanese who urged me to discover various recordings that valorized the particular Guyanese rhythms. There were also the African students who translated their culture through songs and rhythms very naturally. In addition to all of these influences, I was particularly impressed by the musical productions from Haiti. Before I left Martinique, I had the opportunity to listen to the ensembles of Nemours Jean-Baptiste and Wéber Sicot.

It is during this period that I truly became mesmerised by all these musical styles, and I was always listening to music on record players at the time. I remember that I purchased one and I sang these songs and listened to this rainbow of drum-based music all day long. As a matter of fact, I created a rather strange musical instrument from a tambourine and two metal cooking pots tied together, allowing me to produce percussive music in my student room. I remember that I had truly exalted moments beating my instrument and improvising songs with bits of texts and a lot of onomatopoeic speech.

Around the same time I also encountered Cuban music, with its characteristic and fantastic dimension of percussion. They were complex forms, generally orchestrated, which I discovered thanks to the impressive and ever growing record collection of one of my Guadeloupean friends who was a Jazz aficionado. Listening to music was almost a religious ritual for him and I believe that he was the one who encouraged my taste in listening to music. I began to buy records, clearly not as much as he did, but enough to listen to systematically once back in my student room. When I look back, I realise that listening to music had become an essential part of both our lives.

We could be studying alone or visiting other students in their rooms, but listening to music was a constant. "The main auditorium" was the name for the room of this particular friend, who often invited us to listen to his new musical acquisitions.

I remember that he did not like to listen to a particular song. He believed that the only valid attitude was to listen to the entire album. One had to go from side A to side B. If pressed for time, one could listen to just

one side, but it was imperative to listen until the end.

All of these people and musical encounters shaped my approach to music. As my ideas were maturing, it occurred to me that once back at home, I would have to work hard to find another dimension to our percussive practice in Martinique. In fact, during my regular holidays in Martinique, I systematically sought to establish a contact with what I considered to be our "own cultural expression" as far as the dances and songs related to *bèlè* drumming were concerned. I used to reflect on the fact that the Guadeloupeans and Africans had their own cultural expression that they valorized, and I was determined to do whatever was necessary to valorize our own. I was driven by this reflection and it became a need for me to elaborate on. In fact, as I listened to other modes of expression, I came to realise that, as a Martiniquan, I had my own and I could not wait to discover it in all its dimensions, developing and expanding it to present it as it really was to others.

I remember that I was totally fascinated by African music, modern or traditional, as long as they were based on percussion or played by instruments such as the *balafon* or *kora*. Nevertheless, this did not create a need to go back to Africa, but encouraged me to work harder towards the elaboration and development of our own Martiniquan musical expression. From the start, my approach was to elaborate a dimension that would be specific to Martinique. This dimension was to take into account our historical background as the expression of our creational process.

When I settled back in Martinique, I decided to systematically go wherever there was drumming. Strangely enough, drumming was to be found in the folk groups of the time. In spite of the fact that, at that time, the programme of the folk ballets was essentially constituted of traditional dances such as *biguine*s, waltzes and *Mazurkas*, there was always a section dedicated to *bèlè* where drumming and dancing were clearly suitable for this expression.

In the same period, I started to investigate the state of the *bèlè* tradition in Martinique. Indeed, I had the opportunity to join various groups in order to take an active part in the aforementioned *bèlè* sections, and I took the opportunity to conduct several interviews. My investigations also led me to the Martiniquan countryside to visit several elders and spend time with them. These people had been influential figures in the *bèlè* world. My aim was to learn as accurately as possible what was done in the past through unobtrusive questions. Indeed, I had discovered that there was a gap between my theoretical questions and the practical preoccupations of my interlocutors. Moreover, it was evident that there was information or events that they were not willing to talk about for personal reasons, and

that I was therefore unable to tackle.

There was an undeniable atmosphere of distrust amongst those who knew the authentic *bèlè*. These people had had conflicting experiences at the time of the development of folk groups after the popularisation of the work of Anca Bertrand. There had been great endeavours to adapt authentic *bèlè* practices for an international audience. Many folk groups had been created with this perspective in mind, causing some friction due to the incomprehension between the folk performers and the true *bèlè* practitioners.

This schism created disaffection and distrust, and I believe that at some points several elders were persuaded that the era had gone. They were persuaded that, similar to the way that cars had supplanted mules and horses as common means of transportation, one had to accept that the original *bèlè* traditions were to give way to modern practices and disappear honourably, as even then very few people were still interested.

This was the period of the rural exodus. Many, who belonged to the *bèlè* world from the districts of Ste Marie, relocated to Fort de France, France or wherever employment and the prospect of a better life seemed possible.

This was the general mentality of the time. Undoubtedly, without a revival of the *bèlè* practices, this state of mind would have led to the collapse or the disappearance of these practices. I was motivated by all these factors. I was determined to create a new practice in this milieu, and this is exactly what I have endeavoured to do.

Indeed, we encouraged the creation of an association called ALCPJ[56] (Another Path for the Youth). One of the main interests of this association, which united many young people, was to practice our traditional and fundamental music together. We were involved in an endeavour to rediscover our Martiniquan values and we translated them through the cultural elements that constitute *bèlè* (*tibwa,* drums, songs, dances). We also decided to relaunch cultural elements such as *koudmen*. A *koudmen* is a form of work in self-help groups that many farmers utilised to accomplish various tiring and time consuming tasks. The person who needed a job completed usually provided food and drinks for the many workers who would finish in very little time what could have taken days of labour for a single person. This practice, which consisted in meeting the other workers at an appointed time and place (usually a Saturday) to help someone in farming tasks or something similar, would sustain an effective interest for the rural world in many young people. Through this interest an attraction could be developed, reinforcing the relation between the youth and the *bèlè* elders. The eagerness of the youth brings the vitality

necessary to the elders and is essential to the continuation of the *bèlè* tradition.

From this point on, this revival movement relaunched an interest in the *sware bèlè* (*bèlè* evening), which soon became quite a craze. This was the creation of another *bèlè* world. On one hand, the youth saw in it a source of knowledge even though some elders were reluctant to share it. Nevertheless, after some time, it had become evident to these elders that this new movement was an opportunity for them to be recognised as respectable *bèlè* practitioners, admired culture bearers needed and respected by the younger generation. As this movement grew wider, it began to be more important for Martiniquan society.

To get to know or understand the *bèlè* history, it is necessary to establish parallels between our history and that of the other islands surrounding us, in the various countries which also experienced cohabitation with African slaves and the colonizers. To put it simply, one can say that *bèlè* is from Africa. *Bèlè* is the continuation of the African musical practices as far as the rhythm is concerned (due to their main instrument, the drum). However, it is also regarded as African from the perspective of the feel and melodies (even though on this point, one has to take into consideration the European influences) and the dances. *Bèlè* is not a mere reproduction. Indeed, the conditions specific to the various geographical areas where the Africans were sourced were the true origins of these particular processes.

In the Martiniquan case, it is difficult to establish with accuracy the exact origins of the *bèlè* due to the absence of direct knowledge. Indeed, the transmission process is generally directed by ritual practices connected to religious traditions, or the social stability of a given community. Alas, in Martinique this has not been the case for the Africans who composed, throughout our history, the larger ethnic group of the island.

It is singular that one can talk with enough accuracy about the Caribs' or the Kalinagos' ritual practices, music and dances. The same can be said about the cultural practices of the Tamils or about the ritual characteristic of the celebration of the New Year in Chinese families and even the cultural behaviours specific to the community generally known as Syro-Libanese, while the practices specific to Africans are uncommonly "obscure." These are the reasons why there are no certitudes about African heritage. Our knowledge of our African past is mostly based on educated conjectures and theories.

The difficulty in identifying clear African cultural practices is also connected to the fact that the Africans that were taken from their countries during the slave trade era were definitively severed from their homeland. Their social relationships, religious practices and cultures were destroyed.