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LA MÚSICA ENTRE ÁFRICA Y AMÉRICA

A MÚSICA ENTRE ÁFRICA E AMÉRICA
MUSIC BETWEEN AFRICA AND THE AMERICAS

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THE TRANSATLANTIC "RETURN" OF AFRO-AMERICAN MUSICS TO AFRICA

A CASE STUDY

Almost precisely at midnight, on the First of October in the year 1800, several hundred black people completed a long and grueling transatlantic voyage. According to oral traditions that have survived to the present, the ordeal of capture, incarceration on European ships, and forced removal from their country of origin had taken place not, as one might expect, on the shores of Africa (Bilby 2005: 378-410). In fact, Africa was where the long journey *ended* – not, as one might expect, where it had begun. The original point of departure (and country of origin) had actually been the Caribbean island of Jamaica, on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

The captives on this "reverse" transatlantic voyage were Jamaican Maroons – descendants of enslaved Africans who had escaped from plantations and fought their enslavers to a standstill, forcing the British government in 1739 to sign a treaty recognizing their freedom and their right to a semi-autonomous territory of their own in the interior of the colony. Nearly six decades after this, a newly-arrived colonial governor, Lord Balcarres, had provoked these Maroons into a second war. Unable to defeat them through force of arms, the corrupt governor had resorted to trickery and had used false promises and duplicitous diplomacy to entrap them and deport them en masse from the island. [1] In 1796 they had been

An earlier version of this chapter appeared as "Africa's Creole Drum: The Gumbe as Vector and Signifier of Trans-African Creolization," in *Creolization as Cultural Creativity*, edited by Robert Baron and Ana C. Cara (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011, pp. 137-177). The author gratefully acknowledges the University Press of Mississippi for permission to reproduce the better part of that chapter here.

1 For detailed accounts of the Second Maroon War and the treachery of the British governor that led to the deportation of an entire community of Maroons from Jamaica in 1796, told primarily from a Maroon perspective, see Bilby (1984; 2005: 378-382).

sent against their wishes to Nova Scotia in Canada. After four trying years in this harsh climate, they finally arrived in the fledgling colony of Sierra Leone on the coast of West Africa.

The story of these Jamaican Maroons who ended up in Sierra Leone points to an important but often neglected dimension of the African diasporic experience that has begun to receive increasing attention in recent years: the "return" of Africans and their descendants from the Americas to their continent of origin. [2] The Maroons who were exiled from Jamaica at the end of the 18th century were among the earliest of these "returnees" – and certainly among the first to make this "reverse" voyage in large numbers, as a group. Nearly six hundred strong, they were able to bring much of the robust Afro-creole culture their ancestors had forged in Jamaica across the ocean with them. Among the things they carried with them was the knowledge of a distinctive type of musical instrument – an unusual square frame drum with four legs, known as *gumbe*.

This study follows the transatlantic trajectory of this Caribbean drum, examining a number of questions raised by its transplantation from American to African soil. Even more remarkable than the journey of the gumbe drum from Jamaica to Africa is the fact that, once there, this Afro-Caribbean instrument became the basis for a series of important new musical and social developments. After becoming firmly established in Freetown, Sierra Leone during the first half of the 19th century, the gumbe drum diffused across much of West and Central Africa, and certain

2 As Michael Gomez (2006: 11) points out, "Africa itself would be profoundly impacted by these returnees [from the Americas], especially in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria, so that while an understanding of the Americas is unattainable without an appreciation of the African background, Africa itself cannot be understood without recourse not only to the transatlantic slave trade, but also to the consequences of the reversal of that trade, consequences that continue to reverberate." Recent studies focusing on particular manifestations of this diasporic "return" include Blyden (2000) and Campbell (2006). The implications of such "return" migration for anthropological theory, and the need to conceive of it as part of a larger Afro-Atlantic "dialogue" rather than a one-way reverse movement, are discussed notably in the work of J. Lorand Matory (2005; 2006). Scholarship on musical "return" or "feedback" from the Americas to Africa includes many works by John Collins, and a recent study by Richard Shain (2002), showing how Cuban popular music has spurred many new creative developments in Senegal during the 20th century.

musical and social practices, characteristics, and tendencies appear to have spread along with it. [3]

3 I am not the first to propose that the gumbe drum originally came to Africa along with the Jamaican Maroons who arrived in Sierra Leone in 1800. That distinction goes to Maud Cuney-Hare; so far as I know, she was the first to suggest this derivation in print, in an article in which she states, "the *Gumbia* is the name of the drum of the Maroons of Sierra Leone – it is also known in Jamaica" (Cuney-Hare 1918: 50). She reiterated this idea of a Jamaican Maroon origin particularly clearly in a list of African instruments she published in 1936, in which she again mentions a drum called "gumbia." She defines this as "the drum of the Maroons of Sierra Leone," adding that "it is also known in Jamaica from which Maroons were taken to Nova Scotia and thence to Sierra Leone" (Cuney-Hare 1936: 393). My own "discovery" of this path of transmission dates back to 1977, when, immediately after spending a summer in Sierra Leone (where I recorded a group of Krio gumbe musicians in Freetown), I headed to Jamaica to begin ethnographic fieldwork with Jamaican Maroons. Shortly after arriving in Jamaica for this fieldwork, I encountered the Maroon gumbe drum of Accompong (which I had earlier read about in writings by Katherine Dunham [1946] and others). Not long after this – with help from John Rudel, a drummer then studying for a degree at Wesleyan, and Joe Galeota, another drummer who had previously studied in Ghana, where he had built a Ga-style *gome* drum of his own – I began to gather additional information on the gumbe drum, with a view to establishing the details of its passage from Jamaica to Africa. Around 1979 I gave a number of classes at Wesleyan University in which I sketched out and discussed this story of likely "transatlantic return." In fact, as I later discovered, I was but one among a number of researchers – including Judith Bettelheim, John Collins, Barbara Hampton, and Flemming Harrev – who had independently begun to investigate this question around the same time, and had come to more or less the same conclusions. Since learning of their shared interests in the late 1980s and early 90s, I have exchanged considerable information about variants of the gumbe drum with each of these scholars. John Collins and Flemming Harrev, in particular, deserve to be singled out for special mention. Collins has carried out the most extensive research on new genres of African popular music to date, including certain gumbe – based styles, and has been untiring in his attempts to increase public awareness of the story of the gumbe's "return" from the Caribbean to Africa (see Lusk 1999); his contribution, which also includes a good deal of scholarship on other examples of "musical feedback" from the Americas to Africa, has been tremendous (see Collins 1985a; 1985b; 1987; 1989; 1994: 311-331; 2004; 2007). Harrev has undertaken the most extensive survey so far of the gumbe in Africa, unearthing many sources that have helped create a clearer picture of the instrument's spread (and its role in the emergence of new forms of popular music) across much of the continent. With considerable justification, Harrev has argued that the story of the gumbe requires us to push the history of urban popular music in Africa much farther back in time than is usually done – all the way back, in fact, to the beginning of the 19th century. His three important papers on the topic, unfortunately, remain unpublished (see Harrev 1997, 1998, 2001). I would like to thank all of the above-named colleagues for their help and their generosity in sharing information. I am grateful as well to the late Jean Rouch, Ian Hancock, Richard Graham, Robert Nicholls, John Chernoff, Ivor Miller, and Isabela de Aranzadi for providing helpful materials and exchanging ideas with me about the origins of the gumbe.

The questions raised by this complex story of transoceanic and transcontinental musical and cultural transmission have as much to do with change, adaptation, and shifts in identity as with cultural continuities and shared values and aesthetics. How did the gumbe lose its specific ethnic association with its original Jamaican Maroon "owners" in Sierra Leone? How did it come to be attached to other groups and identities? What are some of the factors that help to explain its spread not only from Maroons to other populations in Sierra Leone, but subsequently, over a period of more than a century, to a wide range of peoples in several different parts of the African continent? Why would this particular drum and the kinds of music played on it, and dances danced to it, be so appealing to people from widely varying cultural backgrounds dispersed across such a vast geographic area? And why would this particular drum be more likely than any other to be seized upon and used for the kinds of performance events in Africa associated with rapid cultural change? In short, why did the gumbe become "Africa's creole drum"? [4]

As this epithet suggests, the gumbe presents us with unique opportunities for the study and analysis of creolization, both as a fluid social process occurring over time and a cultural phenomenon that, in order to be meaningful, always entails some degree of continuity with multiple pasts. After following the trail of the gumbe over more than a century and a half, stopping along the way to consider a few specific ethnographic sites, I will return to these broader themes, concluding with a discussion of some of the theoretical insights to be gained from this particular example of ongoing musical creolization.

4 In choosing this evocative phrase, I intentionally pay homage to the book *Creole Drum* (Voorhoeve and Lichtveld 1975), a path-breaking study of literature and verbal arts in Sranan Tongo, the creole lingua franca of Suriname. Much can be gleaned from that book about processes of creolization – linguistic, musical, and cultural more broadly – but the book's connection with some of the points I intend to make here is perhaps best illustrated by the authors' description of "creole drum" (*krioro dron* in Sranan Tongo) as the part in a particular Afro-Surinamese dance and music cycle "in which everyone [without distinction] gets the opportunity to venture his [or her] criticism in songs of his [or her] own making" (19). Of course, the title I have chosen is also appropriate in the more obvious sense that the emergent African ethnic group in Freetown, Sierra Leone that originally adopted the gumbe drum as its own eventually became known (and still is today) – for reasons very germane to this study – as *Creoles* (spelled *Krio* in more recent times). Finally, the title also suggests the drum's ongoing association with "creolization" processes as it became detached from this specific Sierra Leonean Creole ethnic group and spread across West and Central Africa.

A Caribbean drum lands on African shores

How far back in time can we trace the gumbe, and what grounds do we have for styling it a "creole" drum? So far as I have been able to determine, the earliest written references to a square or rectangular frame drum bearing this name come from Jamaica, and they go back no further than the late 18th century. [5] Variants of this instrument continue to occur in later historical writings on the Anglophone Caribbean. During the early 19th century, the gumbe was associated with a variety of social contexts on Jamaican slave plantations. By the middle of the century, the instrument begins to crop up in descriptions from other parts of the Caribbean and North America as well. A handful of scholars noted the continuing existence of the gumbe in rural parts of Jamaica during the 20th century. By that time, it had come to be identified specifically with the Maroon community of Accompong, in the western part of the island; but its existence was also reported in conjunction with a particular variant of the masked dance known as "John Canoe" (also known as Jonkonnu, or Jankunu) that was practiced in non – Maroon areas (Beckwith 1929; Roberts 1924). [6]

5 The first clear reference to a square or rectangular gumbe drum appears to be in Long (1774: 425), where it is reported in conjunction with "John Canoe" (Jankunu) festivities in Jamaica. Square frame drums do occasionally appear in historical accounts from other parts of the Caribbean, as well as 19th-century North Carolina in conjunction with the "John Kuner" festival (where the name "gumba box" is noted). (The oldest report of a square frame drum that I know of from a Caribbean location other than Jamaica comes [indirectly, via the Virgin Islands] from Antigua, and was published in 1777, although the name of the drum is not mentioned; in this account of a slave funeral, it is stated that "the drums consisted of small square boxes over which skins had been stretched" [Oldendorp 1987 [1777]: 264]. My thanks to Robert Nicholls for this reference.) For several other 18th – and 19th-century accounts of drums called gumbe (spelled a number of ways) in Jamaica and other parts of the Caribbean, see Abrahams and Szwed (1983). In any case, judging from the number and frequency of reports from Jamaica, and the continuing existence of the instrument there in several different areas even today (see Bilby 1997; 2007), Jamaica appears to be the particular Caribbean location in which a square frame drum known as gumbe first emerged and had the most significant impact and the widest local distribution. Richard Graham (personal communication, March 1997), who has carried out extensive organological research on a number of Caribbean instruments, suggests that the gumbe might have developed as an Afro-creole innovation (whether in Jamaica or another Caribbean location) by slaves or free blacks skilled in carpentry, perhaps using old chairs or tables as frames or as partial models for frames. (The presence of functionless "legs" on the Jamaican gumbe, as well as the Sierra Leone gumbe and some of those in other parts of Africa derived from it, lends support to this idea.)

6 Variants of the square or rectangular frame drum known as gumbe continue to be found in Jamaica today not only in Accompong, but in the Windward Maroon communities of Charles Town and Scot's Hall on the other side of the island, as well as in a number of non-Maroon communities; in the latter, it is still associated with Jankunu masquerading and dancing, as well as spirit possession and healing (see Bilby 1992, 1999, 2007). Its occurrence in these widely separated present-day contexts suggests that this drum had a broad distribution in Jamaica during the slavery period, and that it might actually have developed over time into a kind of pan-African-Jamaican (Afro-creole) drum used by slaves (as well as Maroons), regardless of ethnic background, across the island.

Not surprisingly, when confronted with this unusual drum, scholars generally assumed an African origin. And when they turned to the African continent for confirmation, they indeed found square or rectangular frame drums there with cognate names that could reasonably be thought of as precursors. [7] But the evidence now available suggests that these African gumbe drums are actually derived from the *Caribbean* gumbe rather than the other way around. [8] It is not possible in the amount of space available here to examine in any detail the growing body of evidence pointing in this direction, but the line of reasoning that leads to this conclusion will emerge in the course of the discussion that follows. Lending additional strength to this conclusion is the fact that neither I nor others have been able to locate any mentions of an instrument fitting this description, whether called by this or another name, from anywhere on the African continent before 1800. Indeed, I know of no unambiguous descriptions of such an instrument in Africa even during the 19th century (although there are good reasons to believe

7 Lacking the evidence regarding migration from Jamaica to Sierra Leone that I provide in the present study, both André Schaeffner and Jean Rouch concluded that the gumbe drum originated in Africa, though neither was able to specify exactly where. Schaeffner (1964: 231) guessed that "its existence in Africa is ancient or relatively ancient" (my translation) – based on the fact that there were reports of its use among Africans in the Americas going back to the 18th century, and also because drums of this exact design were not documented anywhere in the world except in Africa and parts of the Americas with African populations. Rouch, in contrast, believed that the gumbe was "no doubt of Mandingo origin" (Rouch and Fulchignoni 2003: 167); but he never presented any evidence to support this assertion. (He may have been relying on Ortiz [1952: 417], who speculated, on the basis of scant evidence, that the Jamaican gumbe might have been "of Mandinga origin.")

8 The thesis of a Jamaican Maroon origin for the African gumbe, first developed by Bettelheim, Collins, Hampton, Harrev, and myself (though earlier suggested by Cuney-Hare), has yet to gain wide acceptance, though it has been acknowledged in a handful of scholarly publications. For instance, John Storm Roberts (1998: 259), citing myself and John Collins, states that "there is evidence the *goombay* or *gumbe* drum – a distinctive Jamaican neo-African instrument – had been brought to the West African coast by the 1820s." He also writes that the gumbe was "developed in Jamaica on African principles and re-exported to Africa in the early nineteenth century" (35). Impey (1998: 419), citing John Collins (1989), states that "the first popular music of West Africa is believed to have developed in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Its style became known as *gome* or *gombay*, and it is believed to have derived from the *gumbay*, a frame drum brought to Freetown by freed Jamaican slaves in the early 1900s [*sic*]." Likewise, Horton (1999: 230), clearly relying on the work of Collins, writes that "the name *gumbe* must have been brought from Jamaica to Sierra Leone by various groups who returned to Africa around the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries… [including] a number of Maroons from Jamaica [who] arrived in 1800." Also apparently on the basis of Collins's work, Salm and Falola (2002: 173) state of the closely-related Ghanaian *gome* drum that "it is believed that it was brought from Jamaica via Fernando Po."

that the occasional references to a musical genre called "goombay" in the 19th-century literature on Sierra Leone are tied to this specific drum, as we shall see). By the mid-twentieth century, in contrast, mentions of square or rectangular frame drums known as gumbe, or sometimes by other names, were common in Africa. Remarkably, these descriptions come from several widely separated parts of the continent – a matter to which we shall return shortly.

Let me sketch out a plausible scenario that will help to illustrate how this likely occurred. We have no direct evidence that the Maroons who left Jamaica in May 1796 brought any drums on the ship with them, nor that they used drums during their four-year stay in Nova Scotia. Not suprisingly, the sparse written documentation that has so far been brought to light reveals very little about the Maroons' expressive culture, which was viewed by the colonial officials entrusted with their care as a hindrance to their "civilization." But historian Allistair Hinds (2001: 213) points out that in Nova Scotia "the Maroons were settled in a manner which made it easy for them to retain the sociopolitical structures and attitudes which they brought with them from Jamaica. As the Report of the Maroon Committee put it, they were kept together in 'a body forming a distinct colony, and preserving all the habits and prejudices of Maroons [in Jamaica]'."

In 1798, some two years into their stay in Canada, the Maroons, disillusioned with the harsh climate, bound themselves to a collective oath intended to ensure their removal to another country. According to Benjamin Gray, the clergyman who had been assigned to them, the oath-taking was "attended with a dreadful religious ceremony" (215). [9] Gray also reported that "Christianity failed to make an impact because even though they attended church 'a great many of the Maroons were so far unacquainted with our own language, as not to comprehend fully what was addressed to them from the pulpit'" (218). To make matters worse, "the Maroons objected to Gray's involvement in their marriage and burial cerermonies," and as a result, according to the missionary, their interments were generally "the occasion of festive excess" (ibid).

As "Governor Wentworth [of Nova Scotia] attempted to cleanse the Jamaicans of their 'dirty' habits" (Picart 1996: 175), the Maroons apparently

9 For a detailed discussion of African-derived oath-taking practices, both historical and contemporary, among Maroons in both Jamaica and the Guianas, see Bilby (1997).

stayed true to their oath, practicing the culture they had brought with them while biding their time and continuing to agitate for relocation to a country with a more suitable climate. During this period, according to one source,

> The Trelawny's [i.e. Maroons'] burials were never performed by a chaplain of the established church. While they lived on Preston estate [near Halifax], they continued to conduct their burials in the Coromantee rituals. The deceased was simply taken to a place of rest where he/she would then be buried under a heap of stones. Various articles that were deemed necessary to help the individual on the voyage to the other world were buried as well. The usual articles included such things as a bottle of rum, a pipe and tobacco, and two days' food rations. Singing, which perplexed some Nova Scotians, was part of the service. Since singing at funerals was not unusual in Nova Scotia, it might have been ancient African burial songs the Maroons were chanting during their funerals, which would explain why Nova Scotians found them perplexing. One member of the House of Assembly was bewildered after learning that the singing he heard was actually accompanying a Maroon burial. (Picart 1996: 1975).

Clearly, throughout their exile in Nova Scotia, the Maroons had maintained a high degree of social solidarity and cultural integrity, and there can be no doubt that their traditional religion, from which their music and dance were inseparable, had played a large part in this. The attempts of the local authorities to convert and acculturate them had been, in Hinds's words, "a dismal failure" (Hinds 2001: 218). Indeed, it was partly because of this failure that the idea of permanent settlement in Nova Scotia was abandoned by the authorities, and a decision was finally made, less than four years after their arrival, to send them to the new colony of Sierra Leone on the West African coast. [10]

Once again, the written documentation is silent on whether there were any drums on board the ship that carried the Maroons to Sierra Leone, or whether they engaged in any performances of music or dance while en route to Africa. But given what we know of their time in Nova Scotia, it is safe to assume that a substantial portion of their religious (and thus musical) culture crossed the ocean along with them. This is suggested, for instance, by a report made almost two

10 For further information on the stay of the Jamaican Maroons in Nova Scotia, see Winks (1971: 78-95), Campbell (1990), Lockett (1999), and Hinds (2001).

years after their arrival in Sierra Leone, which stated that they still "believed in Acompang, whom they called the God of Heaven" (Archibald 1889-91: 153). [11]

In fact, we have very good evidence to support the idea that the Maroons brought their traditional ceremonial music and dance with them to Sierra Leone. For George Ross, the British employee of the Sierra Leone Company who accompanied the Maroons on their voyage from Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone, kept a journal recording certain parts of this journey, as well as a number of events that occurred during the first few months after their arrival in Sierra Leone. In his entry for October 23, 1800, roughly three weeks after he and the Maroons had disembarked in Africa, Ross attended a Maroon funeral in the vicinity of Freetown, at which one of the Maroons "chant[ed] over the corpse before burial." Ross goes on to comment on "some of the Maroon songs sung this evening." He also mentions that the night before, the Maroons' elderly leader, Montague James, had sung "a koromantyn song with great earnestness," and that this had "electrified all the Maroons who heard it" (Campbell 1993: 28). In a couple of other journal entries written over the following days, Ross makes a few ambiguous references to drums and drumming among the Maroons (though he does not offer any actual descriptions of drums, and never mentions the word *gumbe*).

The Maroon community of Accompong, which still exists in the hills of western Jamaica, can help us to interpret this fragmentary information. The Accompong Maroons were originally part of the same larger group of Maroons to which those who were deported to Sierra Leone – the Trelawny Town Maroons – had belonged. (The people of Accompong Town and those of Trelawny Town in fact constituted a single Maroon ethnic group and polity, known to the British as the Leeward Maroons). When war broke out in 1795, the Maroons of Accompong had refused to join their sister Leeward community of Trelawny Town in the rebellion (Bilby 2005: 379). Because of

11 "Acompang" in this passage is probably a distortion of a West African Akan word for the Supreme Being, such as Asante-Twi "Onyankopong" (in the Kromanti ritual language of the Windward Maroons of Jamaica, a cognate term, "Yankipong," still carries this sense [Bilby 2005: 483]). Much confusion has been caused by the similarity of "Accompong" (the name of the surviving Leeward Maroon community in western Jamaica) and "Onyankopong," and the assertion that the former is derived from the latter is repeated and uncritically accepted in a wide variety of sources. It is more likely, however, that "Accompong" (since the town was named after a prominent Maroon under-officer said to have been the brother of Cudjoe, the 18th-century leader of the Leeward Maroons) is derived from "Akyeampong," a personal name common among speakers of a number of Akan languages.

this, the Accompong Maroons were allowed to remain on the island, while their brothers and sisters from Trelawny Town were deported to Nova Scotia and then Sierra Leone. Today, in the Jamaican community of Accompong, Kromanti ["koromantyn," in Ross's 1800 rendering] songs are still sung at Maroon funerals and certain other kinds of ceremonies; and these songs, along with various others, are sometimes backed with the Maroon drum called *gumbe* – the same square frame drum with which we are concerned here. [12] There can be little doubt that the Maroon Kromanti musical tradition briefly glimpsed by Ross in Sierra Leone in 1800 and the Maroon Kromanti musical tradition still practiced by Accompong Maroons in Jamaica today are cognate. Given the central role of the gumbe drum in the Accompong tradition, it seems virtually certain – especially when all the other evidence is considered – that the very closely-related Trelawny Maroons who were deported to Sierra Leone brought the gumbe drum, or the knowledge of how to make it, with them.

Indeed, the Accompong Maroon gumbe drum I photographed in Jamaica in 1978 and the West African Krio (Creole) gumbe drum I photographed in Freetown, Sierra Leone a few months earlier, in 1977, are so similar, and share such a distinctive design, that it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the latter is derived from the former. Both are square frame drums that resemble a stool, with four legs, and they feature the same unusual tuning mechanism, consisting of an inner frame driven by wedges against a skin stretched over an outer frame [13] [see Figures 5-8].

12 For discussions of Accompong Maroon musical traditions, see Roberts (1926), Dunham (1946), Bilby (1981, 1992) and DjeDje (1998). All four authors provide background on the important role played by the gumbe drum in Maroon ceremonial contexts. DjeDje (1981: 115) provides a transcription of one Accompong Kromanti song. Bilby (1992) includes an audio example of a version of the same song (performed a cappella).

13 The famous musicologist and organologist André Schaeffner was particularly intrigued by the gumbe, partly because of its unusual, highly distinctive design, and partly because it was found so widely in Africa (sometimes appearing under other names). This led him to undertake the first comparative study of square frame drums. Pointing out that no instrument of this type was attested anywhere in Brazil or Europe, and that drums with a square shape were rare outside of Africa, he went on to assert that "the tuning system is absolutely unusual and derived from no other." (Ortiz [1952: 415-419] encountered a drum of more or less the same design in Santiago de Cuba, but concluded that it was derived from the Jamaican gumbe drum; in all likelihood, this drum reached eastern Cuba via the migration of Jamaican laborers there during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.) Because of its rareness, Schaeffner concludes that this peculiar instrument is in all likelihood "an African invention" (Schaeffner 1964: 239-240; my translation) (see note 7). Apparently, he was unaware of the mass migration of Jamaican Maroons to Sierra Leone in 1800, or of the important role played by a square frame drum called gumbe (incorporating the exact same rare tuning mechanism) among contemporary Jamaican Maroons.

From Maroon drum to Krio (Creole) drum

What changes did the Jamaican Maroon gumbe undergo in Sierra Leone as the 19th century unfolded? In short, it became the basis of a new popular dance music identified with the mixed Afro-American and African population that came to be known as Creoles; this new genre eventually took the name of the drum itself, becoming known as *gumbe*.

Creole society in Sierra Leone emerged from an amazingly complex coming together of diverse peoples. The cultural process involved was strangely reminiscent of what had already transpired a thousand times over on the other side of the ocean, beginning some three centuries earlier, when African people of multiple origins were thrown together on the slave plantations and in the towns of the Caribbean. In the earliest years of the Sierra Leone experiment, the key players among the subalterns newly introduced into the colony were the Jamaican Maroons, together with the so-called "Settler" population that had preceded them, composed of a few thousand black Nova Scotians with origins in Virginia and South Carolina. But in the following decades, the situation changed drastically as the capital of Freetown became one of the main destinations for thousands of "Recaptives" or Liberated Africans – people who had been captured and enslaved along the coast of West Africa, only to be intercepted by British patrols before the ships in which they had been imprisoned could reach the Americas. These individuals, who came from a great many different regions and were culturally extremely heterogeneous, constituted the bulk of the population that was rapidly to evolve into a new people known as Creoles.

In the early years, each of these distinct groups – the "Settlers" (African-Americans who had come via Nova Scotia), the Maroons from Jamaica, and the Liberated Africans – was internally differentiated. According to Claude George (1904: 198), "the Settlers [i.e. Nova Scotians] belong to a variety of African tribes whom the accident of slavery had brought together, but had by no means lost their original languages, which were not as various as those of the Liberated Africans." To judge by present-day oral evidence (Bilby 2005: 79-87), the Maroons too – though they had already evolved a distinctive Afro-creole society and culture of their own by this time – probably still displayed internal cultural differences

that reflected their diverse African ethnic origins. But the group that was by far the most heterogeneous (as well as the largest) was the Liberated Africans.[14] Indeed, this group may well have represented the most diverse population on the entire continent of Africa at that time. According to George (1904: 198), "the term *Liberated Africans* [in Sierra Leone] comprises by far the most varied and multifarious elements found to exist on the West Coast of Africa, from the Gold Coast down to Nigritia, viz. the Cromanties, the Popos, the Yorubas, including Egbas, Ijebus, Kankajas, Gbomnas, the inhabitants of the Niger territories, Congo, Fernandopo, Cameroons, etc." Gary Stewart and John Amman provide us with a particularly effective indication of the sheer diversity of the emerging Creole society of Sierra Leone. "By the early 1850s," they state, "a German missionary named Sigismund Koelle had documented 160 languages and 40 dialects among Freetown citizens who had come to the colony from up and down the West African coast and as far east as Malawi and Mozambique. Names of areas within the colony like Congo Town and Kroo Town reflected this astonishing diversity. The mix of people produced Freetown's Creole community – now called Krio – whose European-influenced culture and language – also called Krio – came to dominate the region" (Stewart and Amman 2007: 20).[15] According to Akintola Wyse (and a number of earlier authors he cites), "this motley collection of Africans 'represented about as heterogeneous an assemblage, in language, custom and belief as can be imagined'" (Wyse 1989: 2).

Although the absorption of the Maroons into the larger population occurred gradually, the first stages of this process had already been set in motion within a few years of their arrival in Sierra Leone. Blyden (2000: 31) argues that "though the [M]aroons initially kept their separate community and retained their identity, eventually they began to interact more with other settler groups. By the time the Crown took over the colony in 1808, some semblance of unity existed between the different groups of settlers in Freetown." According to a number of historians, the Maroons played a

14 Wyse (1989: 2) puts the number of Liberated Africans brought to Sierra Leone between 1808 and 1864 at 84,000.

15 The work to which Stewart and Amman are referring was published in a book called *Polyglotta Africana* (Koelle 1854). Using present-day linguistic classifications, the number of languages documented by Koelle would actually be about 120.

particularly prominent role in gradually bringing about this "semblance of unity," making fundamental contributions to the emerging Creole culture as the new society evolved over time. "By mid-nineteenth century," says Mavis Campbell (1992: 101), "the Maroons and the settlers were to grow together through marriage, business and religious affiliations and to become the cornerstone of the Creole society of Sierra Leone."

We have little information on exactly how and when the gumbe lost its specific association with Maroons and became identified with the broader Creole population. Describing the situation in 1834, a British observer asserted that "the nationality of the Maroons in Sierra Leone is distinctly maintained" (Rankin 1836: 116). The same writer mentions a dance known by the Maroons as "Tallala," which he characterizes as "the all-ravishing dance of the Freetown maidens" (Rankin 1836: 283).[16] This wording would seem to suggest that although this dance was understood to have Maroon origins, it was now danced by "Freetown maidens" from various groups, not just Maroons. Some three decades later, in 1868, another British writer, relying partly on Rankin's previous account, gives the name of this dance as "Talla" – adding, very importantly, that this dance was "the mother of Goombay" (Sibthorpe 1868: 28). One might infer from this statement that by this time music and dance styles once associated exclusively or primarily with Maroons had produced new "offspring" that were still identified with the gumbe drum (having taken on its name), though no longer necessarily specifically with Maroons.[17]

One thing we do know is that in the crucible of creolizing culture that was Freetown during the first half of the 19th century, music and dance performances were privileged sites for the negotiation of interethnic sociality, cultural difference, and identity. According to one observer writing in the 1830s, "there are numerous… dances amongst the mixed

16 Less than ten years later, another writer mentions a type of music (and presumably dance) of the Maroons in Sierra Leone known as "Fullulah" (Clarke 1843: 57-58). Although I have carried out extensive ethnomusicological and ethnographic research among Jamaican Maroons (see Bilby 1981, 1992, 2005), I know of no music or dance terms used in any of the present-day Maroon communities that bear a resemblance to either "Tallala," "Talla," or "Fullulah."

17 Apparently relying on the same 1868 source, Wyse (1989: 1) writes of "the *talla* dance of the Maroons – which became the *goombay* of their Krio descendants."

population of Freetown and the neighbouring villages. Nothing is easier than to make one; nothing more is required than to give a man money to strike a tomtom, and numbers of either sex will rapidly collect together, without further invitation, and set themselves in motion" (Rankin 1836: 307). It is safe to assume that the drum ("tomtom") of choice on such occasions was often the gumbe. A few years later, in a passage in which the "Creoles," the "Settlers," and the "liberated Africans" are all mentioned in the same breath, Clarke (1843: 57-58) points out that "all classes of the Africans are very fond of dancing." His description of these dances that draw Africans of all sorts is worth quoting at length:

> A circle is generally formed, from which two of the group of opposite sexes step out, waving the arms, clapping the hands and singing, whilst they move towards each other, the man bending the body in no very decent way as he approaches his partner, who jerks the hip from side to side. One by one, others join the dancers, till the excitement becomes general, whilst the drums are fast and furiously beaten, and continual accessions pour in on all sides, wherever the music is heard, in order to participate in the joyous festivity. The young Creole girls attend the dance with the hair generally neatly plaited, whilst staid matrons stand looking on, with their piccaninnies, either in their hands or swathed to their backs, their head-dress being the general one, consisting of a kerchief gracefully arranged. (57)

"The song and dance," observes Clarke, "are often kept up with the utmost vivacity till dawn, and for several successive nights, the excitement being sustained, and fanned into an almost maddening intensity by deep potations" (58). As the 19th century moved on, these danced interethnic encounters must have been one of the main theaters in which ethnic identities were performed and renegotiated, and there can be little doubt that gumbe drummers continued to be enlisted for many such gatherings. In any case, by the last few decades of the century, the gumbe had become the drum of the Freetown masses, identified with the lower-class Creole population in general.

It is easy to imagine why this drum and some of the elements of style associated with it might be selected more readily than others in such polyethnic contexts. In a sense, the gumbe had arrived in Africa ready-

made for the bridging of inter-African cultural difference. Its design and the Afro-creole music originally associated with it had evolved in a distant Caribbean land, and represented a new synthesis that had no association with a specific indigenous African ethnic identity or language. It was not seen as belonging to people from Yoruba, Asante, Mandinka, Kongo, or any of the dozens of other provincial ethnic categories (or sub-categories) that had been thrown into the mix in Freetown; it excluded no one. It did not carry the divisive potential of the music and dance genres closely identified with these specific ethnolinguistic groups, which could easily be used to maintain ethnic boundaries by highlighting linguistic and musical differences. Yet, at the same time, the gumbe and its rhythms remained identifiably and palpably "African" in a broad aesthetic sense. People from all the African ethnic groups named above would have heard and felt things in this Afro-creole music that were more familiar to them at first – and more similar to their own musical practices – than the sounds encountered, for instance, in Christian churches or other European-dominated contexts. This no doubt contributed to its wide (and almost immediate) appeal in a social setting defined by the presence of an uprooted, displaced African population, bewildering ethnic and linguistic diversity, and an imposed European colonial culture that was both alien and alienating.

The Sierra Leonean diaspora: the spread of Africa's Creole drum

The emerging Creole population of Freetown soon became one of the most mobile in Africa. As the historian A.P. Kup notes, "Freetown Creoles were [from the 1830s on] likely to be drawn along the coast. Many young men got clerkships and by [the middle of the 19th century] Creoles were to be found from the Gambia to Fernando Po" (Kup 1975: 157). Soon after this, the advent of the steamship led to rapid expansion of the "Krio Diaspora" all along the West African coast, opening the way for a whole new outpouring of "country traders" – small-scale hawkers for whom long-distance maritime travel had previously been unaffordable. As a result, by the 1860s, substantial communities of Freetown Creoles – made up of both wealthier merchants and more humble traders – could be found in Fernando Po, Liberia, Gambia, Bonny, Calabar, the Cameroons, and beyond. Indeed, it has been estimated that around this time fully twenty per cent of the population of Lagos consisted of Sierra Leoneans (Lynn 1992).

Simultaneous with the development of this traveling culture was the emergence in Freetown of a new generation with a strong sense of local Creole identity. Leo Spitzer tells us that "by the 1870s the lines separating the Nova Scotians, Maroons, and Recaptives had virtually disappeared. The last of the original settlers from the United States and the West Indies were dying out. The importation of new Liberated Africans ceased completely during the 1840s and the Creoles – the children of the settlers and recaptives who had been born in Sierra Leone – began to outnumber their parents and grandparents" (Spitzer 1974: 12). These travelers belonging to a new generation (and others belonging to subsequent ones) no doubt brought the gumbe drum and its rhythms with them as they fanned out along the coast of West Africa. [18]

And from here the story becomes too vast and complicated to relate in any but the most cursory way in the amount of space available here. By the first few decades of the twentieth century, the gumbe drum and its varied offspring had spread out across an enormous swath of coastal West Africa, and had moved inland as well, having been adopted, refashioned, and in some cases, "reindigenized," in numerous local contexts. By mid-century, cognate traditions using the same or similar drums, sometimes known as gumbe, sometimes by other names, had been documented in – among other West African locations – Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Guinea Bissau, Ivory

18 The island of Fernando Po (now known as Bioko), located in the Gulf of Guinea off the coast of Cameroon and Old Calabar, seems to have played a particularly important role in the spread of the gumbe, partly because of its close connections with Sierra Leone. As Lynn (1984: 258) states, "Fernando Po 'Creole' society was very similar to that of Sierra Leone – it had a similar history and was in some ways an outgrowth of Sierra Leone." Although in the early years "Sierra Leonians formed the core of the town [of Clarence, the main British settlement] and gave it its early Creole character," it soon became a "true melting-pot." According to Lynn, "a missionary survey of the 873 inhabitants of Clarence in 1841 noted thirty-six different ethnic groups in the town, with a spread across Africa from Senegal to the Congo" (Lynn 1984: 260-262). When introduced (or re-introduced) to this environment by Freetown Creoles at various points, the gumbe must have once again found fertile ground. As we will see below, we know of at least a few documented cases of the diffusion of the gumbe drum directly from Fenando Po to mainland Africa, including to both the Gold Coast (Ghana) and the Belgian Congo. A version of the gumbe drum (the same design, with four legs), known as *cumbe*, is still played in the present-day Republic of Equatorial Guinea (Aranzadi 2009: 131-146, 175, 202-203; 2010). (Bioko [Fernando Po] now forms part of Equatorial Guinea; the nation's capital , Malabo, is actually located on Bioko.)

Coast, Gold Coast, Dahomey, Nigeria, as well as in several parts of Central Africa. [19] In virtually all these cases, these cognate traditions were associated

19 Most of these cognate traditions appear to belong to one or another of three somewhat distinct musical streams, known (sometimes interchangeably) as gumbe, assiko, and maringa (Harrev 2001). Over time instrument designs have undergone certain changes, as have the names applied to them. One of the most common transformations is the loss of the four "legs" or "feet" characteristic of Jamaican and Sierra Leonean gumbe drums (though these are still found, for instance, in Ghanaian *gome*, as well as the *cumbe* tradition of Equatorial Guinea [Aranzadi 2009: 134-135, 202-203]). Other than the disappearance of these more or less functionless appendages, and considerable variation in size, the design of the drums in question remains more or less constant (all are square or rectangular frame drums with the same unusual tuning mechanism). All of the West African drums that have retained the four legs appear to have kept the name *gumbe* (or names that are very close cognates) as well. Many of those that no longer have legs are now known by different names, such as *tamelan* (from English *tambourine*) in Ghana, *tambalí* in Equatorial Guinea (also from *tambourine*) (Aranzadi 2009: 204-205), and *samba* in Nigeria. (Others, however, are still known as *gumbe*; see Schaeffner [1964: 240-241] for several drawings of one such legless gumbe drum from Benin [then known as Dahomey]; interestingly, some of Schaeffner's informants in northern Dahomey told him the name of this drum, *gumbe*, was of Fon origin [242].) These changes in both the design and the names used for these drums render the historical connections between these related instruments less apparent, and for this reason most scholars have remained unaware of these connections. But in many cases, the connections remain traceable. Take, for instance, the legless rectangular frame drum known in Lagos and other parts of Nigeria as *samba*. Drums of this kind and the styles associated with them played an important role in the development of *asiko* music, as well as juju music and other popular Nigerian genres (Alaja- Browne 1989: 233; Waterman 1990: 39-40, 46, 49). (For a detailed drawing of a Yoruba samba drum clearly showing that the tuning mechanism of this legless, square frame drum is – or originally was – exactly the same as that of the Jamaican gumbe, see Thieme [1969: 274]; for a photo of an Edo (Bini) samba drum from Nigeria with the same features, see (Dagan 1993: 116); see also Schaeffner [1964: 242] on the presence of square frame drums of the exact same design in Lagos.) Several sources suggest that Nigerian asiko music and the samba drums on which it was played were originally associated with "Saro" people (a Nigerian name for people of Sierra Leonean origin residing in Nigeria) (Waterman 1990: 39-40). Thomas (1992: 73), for instance, writes of asiko (played on rectangular samba drums) that "this music was common with the Christians and the Saros." Another source suggests strongly that drums of this kind (or earlier versions of them) were once known as *gumbe* in Yoruba-speaking parts of Nigeria, and that these were recognized as being of Sierra Leonean origin: discussing Yorubas who converted to Christianity and became preachers in the early 20th century, Toyin Falola mentions that "a powerful sermon was written [in the Yoruba language] in 1909 by A.W. Howells to criticize the *goombay* dancing style, alleged to have been imported from Sierra Leone" (Falola 1999: 18; see also Howells 1909). For additional photographs, drawings, and discussions of gumbe drums (or related frame drums) from various parts of Africa, including Sierra Leone, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Benin, Gabon, and Congo, see Dagan (1993:96, 116, 127) and Meyer (1997:224-231).

with migration stories; in many cases, they were tied to polyethnic, often urban, social contexts. As André Schaeffner (1964: 248) noted in the early 1960s, "the term *gumbe* is applied today to musical performances in urban environments, not so different from those provided by our [Parisian] cellar clubs, music parties, or cabarets" (my translation). Even where variants of gumbe-based music had been thoroughly indigenized, now forming part of ethnically-specific repertories and used to back songs in local languages, they were still recognized as something relatively new, something that had been introduced from elsewhere relatively recently. [20]

One of the first to recognize and suggest some of the broader implications of what I am pointing out here – certainly one of the first to put this recognition in writing – is the art historian Judith Bettelheim. In her 1979 dissertation on the Jonkonnu festival of Jamaica, she included an appendix on the gumbe (or gumbay) drum, in which – after a brief survey showing its wide distribution in both the Caribbean and Africa – she anticipated the thrust of the argument I am making here, in the following passage:

> It seems reasonable to assume, from all the above data, that the frame drum of West Africa, sometimes called gumbay, might owe its origin to a Caribbean source. The use of the word gumbay in the above West African examples is usually associated with non-traditional musical groups. These groups demonstrate either multi-ethnic composition or include influences from non-indigenous sources. Is it not possible that Caribbean Blacks introduced both the frame drum and the word gumbay to West Africa? Beginning with the Maroon immigrants of 1800, and then taking into account other returning Blacks, there certainly has been ample communication between West Africa and the Caribbean. (Bettelheim 1979: 318) [21]

20 An interesting description of one such heavily indigenized urban gumbe tradition is provided by Bohumil Holas (1953). The particular gumbe (goumbé) group studied by Holas in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, founded in 1936, was by the 1950s ethnically homogeneous, made up entirely of young Dyula (Dioula) people, all of whom were Muslims. (Its music and dance, however, continued to be based on an ensemble of gumbe drums – square frame drums of non-Dyula origin – sometimes supplemented with an imported "jazz" drum kit [129].) Even in this ethnically homogeneous case, Holas stresses "the theoretical absence of ethno-religious criteria" of membership, the weakening of traditional gender divisions, and the overall "theoretically open character" of this particular gumbe group (120-122).

21 In a later article, in which she updates her work on the gumbe drum and adds a number of new references, Bettelheim maintains her position on the Caribbean origins of the drum, pointing out once again its association in many parts of Africa with polyethnic contexts and "non-indigenous" forms of music (Bettelheim 1999: 10).

As Bettelheim recognized, there would seem to be some connection between the probable Caribbean origins of the gumbe and its association in several parts of Africa with groups that "demonstrate either multi-ethnic composition or include influences from non-indigenous sources." Indeed, one might conjecture that as the gumbe left Sierra Leone and traveled from one point to another, social, economic, and cultural factors similar to those that had operated in Freetown in the first decades of the 19th century combined in comparable ways to produce similar outcomes elsewhere on the continent. If this Afro-creole drum had proven to be particularly well-suited to the bridging of ethnic and cultural differences and the fashioning of new identities in the polyethnic cauldron of Freetown shortly after 1800, why could the same not have held true of later versions of this drum as they were introduced into new polyethnic environments in other parts of Africa during the later 19th and 20th centuries?

The rapid expansion of world capitalism during the 20th century helped to produce an explosion of such new environments. During this period, much of Africa was radically reshaped by massive labor migration and rapid urbanization. Like Freetown in its early years, the new cities that sprang up across the continent were characterized by tremendous ethnic heterogeneity. Urban peripheries in particular were typically made up of displaced people who came from disparate cultural zones and spoke several different languages. These new town dwellers, living side by side on the margins, were faced with the necessity of adapting to difficult and shifting economic circumstances. Just as importantly, they found themselves in nascent and somewhat chaotic social environments lacking the kinship-based structures and relative cultural stability of the rural communities from which they or their parents had migrated. Like the gumbe drum rhythms first brought to Freetown by the Jamaican Maroons in 1800, the music and dance styles associated with later generations of this Afro-creole instrument no doubt retained recognizable features of a generalized "African" musical aesthetic; at the same time these gumbe-based expressions would have remained largely free of musical and linguistic features perceived as narrowly ethnic or "tribal." For this reason, the gumbe drum had a special appeal and could easily be adapted to the needs of these emergent polyethnic communities. As a part of this process of adaptation, the gumbe also became an emblem of "modernity" – an expression of the new condition in which these polyethnic migrants, many of them young, found themselves – and in keeping with these symbolic associations, came to act as a kind of magnet and container for "non-indigenous" musical influences,

whether European, Afro-American, or other. The gumbe was now on the way to becoming not just Sierra Leone's, but Africa's, creole drum.

African Gumbe variations

Let us briefly examine three well-documented and particularly revealing examples of the gumbe drum in West Africa. The Ga people of coastal Ghana have an important musical genre known as *Gome* (sometimes pronounced "Gombe," or "Gumbe"). Using a modified version of the same four-legged rectangular frame drum brought to Sierra Leone by Jamaican Maroons, it is a vital and still-growing tradition encompassing several subgenres. Today, Gome is closely associated with Ga ethnic identity, and Gome songs are typically sung in the Ga language, or in a mixture of Ga and English.[22] As late as the 1960s, however, many of these songs were sung in West African Pidgin English.[23] The ethnomusicologist who has worked most extensively with this Ga tradition, Barbara Hampton, tells us how this came to be. "Gome," she points out, "is a musical system that was introduced into Kpehe [a heterogeneous neighborhood in northwest Accra whose residents come from the Ga, Akan, Ewe, Dagomba, and other ethnic groups from northern Ghana and Togo] by Ga labor migrants when they returned from Fernando Po, an island of Equatorial Guinea, where they say that they learned it from Sierra Leonean artisans after 1947."[24] She goes on

22 Rentink (2004: 35) writes of Gome that "nowadays it finds it place in the traditional music of the Ga and is usually danced by elder people or by cultural groups." An interesting example of how Gome had already been indigenized and given new local meanings by the 1970s is provided by Barbara Hampton, whose Ga teachers were able to offer an inventive folk etymology, telling her that "*Gome* is derived from the Ga word for 'caterpillar'," and that "the musical system is so-called because the associated dance movements, in the perception of the musicians and patrons, depict those of the caterpillar" (Hampton 1983: 227n12).

23 For an example of a Ga Gome song ("Mr. Jacobson") in Pidgin English, recorded in the early 1960s, see Annan (1964). Working in the 1970s, Hampton (1983: 222) found that "Gome texts are bilingual, using both pidgin English and Ga."

24 See also Hampton (1977). Based on interviews with elderly Ga musicians, the ethnomusicologist John Collins believes that at least some variants of Gome were introduced by Ga carpenters and blacksmiths returning from the Cameroon and Belgian Congo area much earlier than this, around 1900 (Collins 1985: 103; 2004: 9; Rentink 2004: 34). These Ga laborers, Collins notes, had been "working alongside Sierra Leone artisans, as these two groups of skilled West African workers were employed between 1885 to 1908 in building the docks and infrastructure of the then Congo Free State" (Collins 2004: 9). Adding another piece to the puzzle, Coplan (1978: 102) notes that "carpenters from the Gold Coast returned from the Cameroons with a type of syncretic singing in pidgin English called *gombe*."

to state that "Gome is an urban musical ensemble because it is supported by a polyethnic, socioeconomically diverse patron group; is distinctly of the city; serves the musical needs of city dwellers; and is, itself, linked to the urban-industrial complex through direct interactions with it" (Hampton 1979-80: 5).

A closer look reveals that one of the most distinctive things about Gome is the open attitude of those who practice it. Hampton (1983: 222) makes the important point that the very way that the tradition evolved in Ghana (and perhaps even before that, in Fernando Po) suggests "a perception of Gome as a potentially appropriate music for the needs of a diverse population." Ethnic heterogeneity was a fundamental "social fact" from the very beginning. In Fernando Po during the late 1940s, where Ga migrants originally learned the rudiments of gumbe drumming while playing alongside fellow laborers from Sierra Leone, the new music "served as a bridge across ethnic boundaries among colonial subjects for the limited objective of recreation" (226). Although the version that was introduced to Ghana by returning migrants in the early 1950s was played at first by groups made up exclusively of Ga individuals, Gome was soon adapted to changing political and economic conditions in Accra (and in the new nation of which it was a part) that created a rapid "influx of people into the community from all regions of Ghana" (218). As Hampton observes, "this situation contributed to the acceptance of friendship [rather than kinship or ethnicity] as an alternative associative relationship by Gome musicians and ultimately the use of friendship as a basis for recruitment." Because of this, "in 1957, the Gome ensemble, just as Kpehe and Accra were, became polyethnic in composition" (ibid).

Hampton sees the historical circumstances that had led to the birth of this still-young tradition as having continuing significance in the present, arguing that "the precedent for this shift from an emphasis on kinship to friendship in recruitment as well as from monethnicity to polyethnicity in the composition of the musical ensemble was established in Fernando Po" (ibid). This would suggest that the process of musical and cultural "recreolization" of this relocated and incipiently indigenized offshoot of the gumbe tradition, which had been set in motion by the sudden appearance in the mid-1950s of tremendous ethnic heterogeneity (accompanied by social fragmentation) in this neighborhood of Accra,

was supported by cultural values that had become intertwined with earlier versions of the tradition in Fernando Po. What we see in this particular case of transplanted gumbe, then, are signs of a developing "tradition" of adaptive openness supported by an ethic of inclusiveness. This is reflected, for example, in "the lack of boundaries between positions within the age cycle, as reflected in the dance arena" (223). (In keeping with this, "members of Kpehe society say that young people and children are attracted to Gome because it allows them unrestricted participation" [ibid]). It is also reflected in the "relaxation of sexual boundaries [that] was extended to the Gome dance arena, resulting in male and female duet or couple dancing and in the portrayal of romantic love in mimetic dance variations" (219). The boundaries bridged through this extension of gumbe music and dance, therefore, had to do not only with ethnicity, but also with age and gender. [25]

A rather similar socio-musical configuration, also going by the name gumbe (or "Goumbé"), was encountered repeatedly by the renowned filmmaker and anthropologist Jean Rouch while he was undertaking his pioneering study of West African labor migration during the 1950s. Rouch described *Goumbé* to one interviewer as both "the name of a drum," and a "dance of displaced people" (Rouch and Fulchignoni 2003: 167). The innovative *ethno-cinéaste* featured the gumbe associations he was in the process of studying in some of his best known films, including *Moi, un Noir* (1958), *La pyramide humaine* (1959), and *La Goumbé des jeunes noceurs* (1965). (Center stage was given to one group in particular, based in Treichville on the urban periphery of Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire [Ivory Coast].)

The particular footage Rouch selects to represent these music and dance associations says much about their significance for practitioners. The *Goumbé* scene in *Moi, un Noir*, for instance, features "a young novice

25 Given this boundary-bridging aspect of *gome*, it is not surprising that this instrument (and certain musical characteristics associated with it) became an important component of one of the most popular Ghanaian bands of the mid-1970s, Wulomei, whose music, though played by musicians who were mostly Ga, represented a self-conscious blend of elements from diverse Ghanaian ethnic genres – a "multi-ethnic symbolic complex" intended to appeal to young people from Ga, Akan, Ewe, and other ethnic backgrounds while at the same time remaining "indigenous" in a more general way (Coplan 1978: 111-112). According to Collins (1985: 47), the music of Wulomei "crossed all boundaries in Ghana."

champion, dressed cowboy style," and "bicycle dances (rodeo)," followed by a dance contest in which the winners are proclaimed "King and Queen of the Royal Goumbé" (Rouch 2003: 355) – moments signifying a self-conscious (and at times ironic) engagement with "modernity." In *La pyramide humaine*, the *goumbé* footage is carefully selected to make a statement about the openness and inclusiveness of such dance events, and to point to the potential for boundary-crossing and negotiation of new identities with which these urban performing groups are typically associated. The film follows a group of young students, African and European, living in Abidjan, who are groping for ways to develop friendships across the racial line dividing them. In one critical scene, after some of the problems of racism with which they must contend have been exposed, "the Africans take the Europeans to a Goumbé (club for young Abidjan dancers), and for the first time, boys and girls, Africans and Europeans, dance in the streets, led by the 'Goumbé Queen,' Nathalie" (356).

Of the three films mentioned above, the one that is most revealing – and is also one of the best documents we have of West African gumbe performance during the middle years of the 20th century – is *La Goumbé des jeunes noceurs (*The *Goumbé* of the Young Revelers). It is in fact a filmic ethnography of a particular voluntary association started by young laborers who had recently migrated several hundred miles from Upper Volta to Abidjan.[26] As Rouch (2003: 360) explains, "the young people who come to work in Abidjan often form spontaneous associations for mutual help and entertainment, which are called 'Goumbés' in Ivory Coast, after the name of a square drum that serves as the rhythmic base to their dance." The members of the association are ethnically and occupationally diverse. What links them together as a single community in this semi-urban agglomeration of displaced people thrown together by chance, according to the filmmaker, is music and dance – "the tambourine player is a tailor, the singer-composer is a button sewer in a clothing-manufacturing business, and the leading lady, Nathalie, is a mother and homemaker" (ibid). Like the sense of community it helps to generate, this music and dance is actively conceived by its performers as something "new" and "modern" – something that can serve as a suitable expressive medium for a new, still

26 *La Goumbé des jeunes noceurs* has pertinently been described as a "film about a goumbé society formed by migrants in Treichville as a focus for social activity amongst people living away from their homes and the traditional kinship structure" (Eaton 1979: 19).

evolving, identity. "Every week the dancers practice to invent new dance steps," Rouch tells us. "Once a month, the musicians must compose new songs for the Goumbé." Following this, "every month, a parade of the Goumbé takes place in the streets of Treichville" (ibid). To address these needs – and to foster other kinds of mutual aid as well – the musicians and dancers have created a formal social structure, replete with "officers" bearing titles such as president, vice president, high commissioner, and secretary, along with a set of "statutes" that are read at regular meetings.

Among Rouch's writings, one finds a beautiful and rather specific description of the actual social circumstances and processes that led to the growth of this and other such gumbe associations on the urban periphery of Abidjan. As we have seen, Rouch was able to observe these processes directly, and even film them, as they unfolded on the ground in the 1950s and 60s. "Most frequently," reports Rouch,

> the children who are torn between their parents [because of migration and interethnic marriage] settle on the coast, casually brought up by the mother and educated by the father at minimum expense. They are called *dankasa* meaning 'born in foreign lands.' In both Ghana and the Ivory Coast they form a distinct mixed group held apart by both the indigenous coastal people and the migrants. Belonging to neither the maternal nor the paternal group they have no tradition and attempt to create customs of their own [...]. Rejected by all, they have formed themselves into separate groups, finding compensation in creating voluntary societies where loneliness, despair, and dreams are shared. This has led to the creation of *goumbe* societies in the Ivory Coast. Initially similar to the many mutual societies found on the coast, the *goumbes* rapidly become young people's dance societies [...]. This suggests the development of a new type of community, a community of the rejected, but of people who have withstood contempt and are creating a new way of life. (Rouch 1961: 303-304)

Another major extension of gumbe music and dance – one that has been better documented than most – arose in Mali. One of the earliest accounts from this part of Africa – if not the first – comes from Michel Leiris, who was told of a tradition called "goumbé" when traveling in the

vicinity of Bamako during the famous 1931-33 Dakar-Djibouti Mission organized by the Musée de l'Homme. Leiris describes this variant of gumbe as "a new children's organization," a "gallant association of boys and girls not yet, or only recently, circumcised." Not only is this clearly a youth-oriented phenomenon – almost all the members are of school age, he notes – but it is also clear that the performers have a predilection for things perceived as modern and European. During large gatherings, he tells us, "the *goumbé* drums of the society are decorated with French flags, and the distinctive sign of the president [of the gumbe association] is a complete European khaki suit" (Leiris 1934: 68; my translations).

Some three decades later, Claude Meillassoux (1968: 116-130) undertook an investigation of three different gumbe groups as part of a larger ethnographic study of voluntary associations in the city of Bamako. Meillassoux's well-grounded discussion is full of details that are of particular interest to us here. Like Leiris, Meillassoux notes that this is an activity associated with youth; many of the members, both male and female, are in their teens. People generally agree that the tradition "probably came from Senegal," but "no one knows exactly when" (117).[27] The name *gumbe* itself (referring to the square frame drum at the center of music and dance events) is "foreign to any of the languages spoken in Bamako" – in fact, "no one knows where it came from or what it means" (ibid). Even more interesting is the fact that, according to Meillassoux, the ethnic background of participants is "irrelevant" (120). Members include Fulani, Mandinka, Bamana, Soninke, and people from various other ethnic groups who have joined together to create new music and dance styles – and to cooperate in other ways as well – in this polyethnic urban context (ibid). (Songs "are inspired by modern music, and phrases of charleston, rumba, samba, mambo, conga, and cha-cha can be detected"; and dance steps "are even more directly inspired by

27 Interestingly enough, in Senegal, the local gumbe tradition (as well as the related style known as *assiko* or *ashiko*, "played on a wooden square instrument covered with goat skin") is said by some to have originated on Gorée Island (Benga 2002: 78n2). Since this island is known above all else for the important role it played in the French slave trade, the idea that the gumbe drum and its rhythms originated there suggests that it is seen as non-indigenous, and perhaps as something tied to the European slave trade and the circulation of creolized forms of culture with which that trade was closely associated. In another article, Thioub and Benga (1999: 216, 221) suggest that the Senegalese gumbe is sometimes seen as "Afro-Brazilian," and note that its ostensible origins on Gorée Island are "difficult to date."

Western dances than is the music," with rock-and-roll and the twist being among the most recent influences [126].)

The main qualification for joining one of these gumbe groups is what Meillassoux describes as "a minimum urban standing" (121). That is, participation is usually limited to town dwellers whose social ties are based primarily on locality and friendship (in short, voluntary association) rather than kinship or ethnic identification. The gumbe groups studied by Meillassoux, thus, use the principle of inclusiveness – together with the unifying potential of African-style music and dance – to create solidarity and a sense of community in a fluid and highly heterogeneous social environment that came into existence only recently as a result of large-scale migration. In sociological terms, these music and dance associations, as Meillassoux succinctly puts it, "were created by groups of friends who wanted to structure their relationships" (119). In creating social structures where none had existed before (in this new, polyethnic urban context), they were forging new forms of culture through what might be seen as a textbook example of creolization.

We know that gumbe groups similar to these were active for many decades not just in Mali, but over a wide expanse of Mande country. Referencing urban life in the 1950s in places such as Dakar (Senegal), Abidjan (Ivory Coast), Conakry (Guinea), and Bamako (Mali), Manthia Diawara (1998: 114) writes of "a style of street party called Goumbé or Bals Poussières, which became extremely popular among the boys and girls of Mande West Africa. The parties brought together in the streets young people who considered themselves urbanized and 'civilized,' but who were not rich enough to afford the cover charge at nightclubs. The Goumbé had the reputation of bringing together elegant young men, or *zazaou*, and beautiful young ladies who were sophisticated enough to dance arm-in-arm with their men." Diawara adds to this a critical observation – one that clearly ties these groups, as a social phenomenon, to the gumbe associations encountered by Meillassoux in Bamako in the 1960s (and, indeed, to similar groups described in several other parts of Africa): "The young people who organized Goumbé in the cities were usually migrant workers from villages and neighboring countries. The Goumbé brought them together regardless of clan and traditional gender divisions" (ibid).

Some final thoughts on Africa's Creole drum: homecoming and creolization

Certainly, this story of transatlantic "return," neatly encapsulated in the gumbe drum, is significant symbolically, evoking powerful tropes of cultural continuity and reconnection across centuries of exile and separation. One reason the transatlantic voyage of the gumbe makes such an effective symbol of diasporic reconnection is that it is one of the earliest known examples of cultural "diaspora in reverse." As a musical symbol, it can be made to stand for many later examples of transatlantic musical transmission in this "reverse" direction, including the "return" to Africa, during the 20th century, of popular Afro-American (including Caribbean and Latin American) musical genres such as jazz, rumba, calypso, salsa, reggae, and hip-hop/rap (which, in turn, themselves often influenced new developments in gumbe music and dance in various parts of the continent). Such cases of diasporic musical "feedback" may be imagined as a kind of "coming home." Paraphrasing this larger story of musical reunion in a way that suggests its truly epic proportions, John Collins argues for the special significance, both symbolic and substantive, of the gumbe as the very first in a long line of "returnees":

> The earliest "homecoming" is a Jamaican frame-drum dance music known as Goombay… introduced by freed Maroon slaves [sic] to Freetown, Sierra Leone, on October 1, 1800, where it is still played and laid the basis of that country's first popular music (c. 1900), known as Asiko (Ashiko)… Goombay and Ashiko subsequently spread from Sierra Leone to many West and Central African countries (Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Gabon, Congo, Camerouns, and Fernando Po), creating an important musical building block for various 20th century African popular and neo – traditional music styles: such [as] Maringa, Milo Jazz, Highlife, Juju music, Gube, Gome, Le Goumbe, Simpa, and Gahu. (Collins 1998, cited in Horton 1999: 231) [28]

28 This passage is part of a personal communication from John Collins to Jacqueline DjeDje of December 28, 1998, reproduced by Horton in his article. A similar representation of the "Pan African Goombay drum-dance" as the embodiment of a process of "homecoming" can be found in Collins (2007: 179-182).

As appropriate as this figurative notion of "musical repatriation" may be in this context, I would argue that the gumbe serves just as effectively as an emblem of what has aptly been called "the miracle of creolization" (Trouillot 1998; Price 2001; 2006). As a Caribbeanist, I am in sympathy with those of my colleagues who have expressed reservations about the increasingly broad and uncritical use of a term whose somewhat murky origins and complex (and often contradictory) prior meanings are bound up with historical circumstances specific to this particular part of the world. Not surprisingly, as the term is applied with increasing alacrity across disciplines to a range of vastly differing contexts and phenomena, criticisms of creolization as a theoretical construct have begun to multiply (Mintz 1996; 1998; Khan 2001; 2007; Palmie 2006; 2007a; 2007b; Stewart 2007).

Among the risks brought by this proliferation of unanchored "creolization discourse" are loss of theoretical coherence, and trivialization (through facile contemporary "multiculturalist" analogies) of social and cultural processes that have often involved tremendous human costs – particularly in the paradigmatic Caribbean setting, where such processes cannot be viewed apart from histories of decimation, colonial domination, forced migration and repopulation, slavery, and ongoing economic exploitation and marginalization, as well as the continuous struggles waged against all of these (Trouillot 1998). To give too little weight to these specific histories in attempting to imagine (and in doing so, theorize) the "miracle of creolization" that issued from these histories is to lose sight of what arguably makes "creole" cultural formations distinctive to begin with – that is, the social conditions that favor (if not force) the relatively rapid combination (and recombination) of cultural forms that once seemed disparate, and their creative use in reconstituting a shattered sense of "community" or "society." In the Caribbean (and clearly, in some other parts of the world), these formative social conditions, past and present, are most often reflexes of large-scale political and economic forces. If static, autonomous, or overly-mechanical models of culture fail to do justice to the contingent complexities of social reality in general, they are particularly unhelpful in this context. The uncritical use of linguistic models (themselves currently under attack) in theorizing cultural creolization has also come under fire, partly because creole linguistics has of necessity relied as much on speculation about unknown (and perhaps

unknowable) historical sociolinguistic factors as on the collection of empirical data (Palmie 2006; 2007b).

Such criticisms notwithstanding, the case at hand almost unavoidably invites analysis in "creolist" terms. How else might one make sociological sense of the growing mass of empirical data that confronts the persistent researcher of the gumbe drum? An instrument that appears to have been born in the Caribbean as an Afro-creole invention, once transplanted to Africa, becomes the initial basis for an astonishing array of new forms of music and dance across much of the continent, all of them (at least at first) self-consciously "non-indigenous." Although the driving economic motor in the African contexts where the gumbe took root is not slavery, these varied African environments nonetheless display certain unmistakable similarities with many Caribbean (and other American) slave plantations – most notably, culturally and linguistically heterogeneous groups of Africans thrown together in new, economically precarious settings devoid of a preexisting sense of "community," and lacking overarching older social institutions and relatively coherent "traditional" cultures into which these displaced individuals might readily be integrated. And although the conditions facing these uprooted and displaced migrants in Africa may not have been as harsh or traumatic as those under which enslaved Africans lived and labored in the Americas, they involved severities and challenges of their own. (One is reminded here of Rouch's portrayal of the marginalized gumbe adherents on whom he focused as "a community of the rejected," a joining together of "people who have withstood contempt" even while "creating a new way of life" [Rouch 1961: 304].)

The case of the transatlantic, pan-African gumbe suggests that cultural creolization, for all its problematic aspects (especially when divorced from "the historical conditions of cultural production" [Trouillot 1998: 8]), remains an avenue of inquiry into social and cultural change well worth exploring further.[29] Whether or not we wish to apply the label "creole" to the various manifestations of the far-

29 Among the more sustained and serious attempts to grapple with cultural creolization (in the broadest sense) to date – though from rather different perspectives – are Chaudenson and Mufwene (2001) (which is of particular interest in connection with the present study, since it includes an entire chapter specifically on musical creolization [198-224]), and Haring (2004). See also Baron and Cara (2011).

flung gumbe drum and the genres of music and dance associated with it, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that there is something about this "gumbe complex" – something distinctly "cultural" – that has led to its repeated selection for similar social and aesthetic purposes over such a long period of time and across such a broad expanse of space. (Of course, gumbe is but one of many different Western-influenced music and dance traditions that have spread over large portions of Africa, some of which have been used in similar ways; but, aside from being one of the most widespread, it stands out as the one with the longest history.[30]) One thing this particular example of cultural creolization seems to demonstrate (and, for some of us, to reconfirm) is that, for all their newness, creolized forms of culture – in this case music and dance – can contain substantial amounts of "history"; that is, they can easily retain enough from a cultural past (or pasts) to make them readily (and appealingly) recognizable to persons raised in cognate cultural traditions associated, in contrast, with more narrowly-defined ethnic identities. Such creolized forms can "speak" to a broad range of people who can sense a kind of "kinship" (even if a somewhat distant one) with their own specific cultural traditions.

Because of this – and this is part of their "creoleness" – such creolized traditions, as long as they retain enough of this "history" and at the same time do not become too thoroughly indigenized and narrowly identified with a specific ethnic group, can continue to be used to bridge ethnic differences, and can serve as an effective basis for the creation and expression of new social formations and identities in situations of rapid change, upheaval, and accelerated intercultural contact. In this particular case, as we attempt to account for the repeated selection of the gumbe in African polyethnic contexts over time, we find ourselves falling back on the theoretical notion of a shared, generalized West African cultural substratum that goes back to Melville Herskovits, and was further developed by Mintz and Price (1992 [1976]) – an idea that has at times been criticized as too vague, or too difficult to pin down empirically (Palmié 2007b: 182-187), but which remains powerfully persuasive when applied to cases such as the present one.

30 See, for instance, Schmidt (1998) on the spread of "palm wine" guitar styles from Freetown to Fernando Po and beyond as part of the "Kru diaspora" along the West African coast.

The spread of the gumbe in Africa clearly has to do with the continuing operation of underlying cultural principles and predispositions – shared values, aesthetics, and the like. Indeed, arguments for the existence of a shared African cultural substratum may perhaps be made more clearly and persuasively with regard to music and dance than any other cultural sphere. It is no doubt partly for this reason that musicians and dancers have played such a prominent role in the on-the-ground negotiation of new forms of belonging and identity (as well as the mass-mediated versions of such negotiations) throughout sub-Saharan Africa. The ethnomusicologist David Coplan, who has looked closely at such processes not just in South Africa, but in Ghana (Coplan 1978) and other parts of the continent, makes a strong case for the privileged position of urban musicians as cultural brokers who are able to help dislocated people recreate order in rapidly-shifting, anomic social environments throughout Africa:

> Urban performers have been centrally involved in the processes of cultural communication and collective reinterpretation, transforming expressive materials to reflect social forms and objectify new meanings. Musicians function as cultural brokers partly because they are able to provide social commentary in musical terms as well as in verbal expression associated with performance. In urban South Africa, musicians and musical occasions have been important in re-establishing bases of social communication and order in situations of extreme disorganization, segregation, oppression and change. (Coplan 1982: 120)

If the specific reference to South Africa were removed, this passage might just as well serve as a description of the creative, community-building activities of gumbe musicians and dancers from one emergent polyethnic zone to the next, beginning shortly after this Afro-creole Caribbean instrument first found its way to African shores at the beginning of the 19th century.

When Jean Rouch was undertaking his seminal study of labor migration in West Africa in the 1950s, the vogue for what has come to be known as "creolization" was still many years off. But, as I earlier suggested, many of the concomitants of the creolization concept are already there in the description of his that I quoted above: the uprooting and

sudden throwing together of people with diverse cultural pasts; and their need, under these unusually fluid and challenging circumstances, to – in Rouch's words – "create customs of their own" and bring into being "a new type of community," by "creating a new way of life" (Rouch 1961: 303-304). Despite the current popularity of critiques dwelling on the essentializing sins of the past, and the constant (and necessary) reminders that representations of "traditional" societies and cultures as static and clearly-bounded were never anything more than Western anthropological fictions, it would be pointless to argue that the rapidly-forming, unusually heterogeneous social environments observed by Rouch did not contrast in very significant ways with the more homogeneous and culturally stable (though not "static") communities from which the individuals who made up these settlements on the urban periphery (or their parents) had recently migrated. And this is partly what made them such hotbeds of cultural (and especially musical) creolization.

This particular story is far from over. For echoes of "Africa's creole drum," the gumbe, are still quite audible in some of the continent's most vibrant contemporary musical expressions.[31] These range from Ghanaian highlife, which is traceable in part to gumbe and ashiko music (Collins 1989) and was later influenced by (and itself influenced) a neo-traditional gumbe-related genre known as kpanlogo (Salm and Falola 2002: 178-179; Rentink 2004: 34-37), to the currently reigning

31 Gumbe music has continuously exerted a powerful influence on the popular music of Sierra Leone, ranging from the early efforts of Ebenezer Calender in the 1950s (Bender 1989: 45, 52-54, 64; 1991: 112) to the mailo (or milo) jazz style (based partly on gumbe rhythms) that took over as one of the most popular musics of Freetown in the 1980s (Nunley 1987: 160-173; Ashcroft and Trillo 1999: 634-635). This is hardly surprising, given that neo-traditional groups and popular electric bands would often share the same performing spaces. According to Naomi Ware, "rhythm bands" known ("after the principal drum") as "goombay" or "gombay" were very much a part of this equation in Freetown during the 1960s. As she was able to observe in 1968-70, "goombay groups and a similar type of rhythm music called 'milo jazz' frequently appear as alternate entertainment with popular bands at outdoor dances only" (Ware 1978: 304). Reuben Koroma, leader of the internationally-known, reggae-oriented Sierra Leonian band the Refugee All Stars, told interviewer Banning Eyre in 2006, "Gumbe comes from the Kriol people, the returned slaves…. In fact, most of our music, this African music, is *gumbe*. We just transfer it onto the Western instrumentations. What we used to play on the drums, we just transfer it to the bass and the guitars. But it is purely *gumbe*" (Afropop Worldwide web site, http://www.afropop.org/multi/interview/ID/105/Reuben+Koroma-Refugee+Alls+Stars-2006; accessed July 10, 2007). See also Cummings (2006: 39).

electric pop style of Guinea-Bissau – known, not coincidentally, as *gumbe* (sometimes spelled *goumbe*) – which has recently been making incursions in world music markets (Duran 1992).[32] According to Manthia Diawara (1998: 115), "the current wave of Mande jazz and blues performances by such artists as Oumou Sangaré, Morfinla Kante, Zani Diabaté, Ali Farka Touré, and Toumani Diabaté is indebted to the Goumbé songs."[33] Other African bands that have recently become popular among world music consumers in the West, such as Orchestra Baobab of Senegal, cite gumbe drumming and dance as among their formative influences. Almost predictably, one of the latest confections to arise and have some international impact is known (and marketed)

32 Among the better known Guinea-Bissau gumbe/goumbe performers who have released recordings are Cobiana Djazz, Gumbezarte, Ramiro Naka (and his band, N'kassa Cobra), Tabanka Djaz, Justino Delgado, Eneida Marta, and Manecas Costa. In this setting, too, gumbe music, despite varying degrees of indigenization, appears to have retained many of its general "creole" characteristics. According to Guus de Klein (1999: 499), *gumbe* in Guinea-Bissau "combines a contemporary sound with the ten or more musical traditions that survive in the area… The lyrics of gumbe are in Kriolu, a creole synthesis of African languages and the colonial Portuguese… [and] Kriolu is an integral part of gumbe music."

33 In addition to urban popular music, gumbe has also influenced the growth of other "neo-traditional" musics in various parts of Africa that fulfill similar functions. One example is Ghanaian kpanlogo (Rentink 2004), mentioned above. Another is *simpa*, played in the polyethnic (though primarily Dagomba) town of Tamale in northern Ghana. Much like gumbe associations of the 1950s, *simpa* groups, according to Chernoff (1979: 129), "are like clubs for the young people of various neighborhoods," and "practice for their competitions, singing songs with flute or harmonica and drum accompaniment to Highlife, Rumba, Cha-cha, Kalakala, Meringue, Soul, and Agbadza rhythms," backed by a variety of "different instruments, from dondons to sets of square-frame drums to sets of conga and jazz drums." Elsewhere, Chernoff notes that "a style of music and dancing called Gumbe" once existed in northern Ghana, but that "Gumbe has evolved into the Simpa music of today." He adds that "Gumbe groups originally used square-frame drums with bells, rattles and occasionally a squeeze drum" (Chernoff 1985a: 163). An audio example from northern Ghana of gumbe-style drumming played by Dagbamba drummers can be found on Chernoff (1985b). Some gumbe-related neo-traditional styles have even made their way to cities in the U.S., such as New York, where a *gome* drummer, Kimati Dinizulu, and his group, the Kotoko Society, regularly performed a rather "creole"-sounding mix of West African genres during the 1980s. Using the *gome*, "a square drum laid on its side," Dinizulu and his group would launch into "a variety of different traditional rhythms including Kpanlogo and Asafa from Ghana and Temine from Sierra Leone." According to two observers, "the admixture of these elements becomes an Esperanto for all who are conversant in the language of the drum" (Strmel and Wachtel 1988: 25).

as *reggae goumbé*.[34] In this new urban sound from Côte d'Ivoire, which combines the rhythms of the West African gumbe drum with the reggae "beat" – born in the 1960s on the other side of the ocean in the gumbe's original "homeland" of Jamaica – the remarkable trajectory of this Afro-creole drum has symbolically come full circle.

Among other things, these still-resounding echoes of transatlantic movements that can be traced back more than two centuries ought to remind us that Africa, like the Caribbean cradle of creolization to which it made vast contributions, has long been a privileged site for the interlinked kinds of cultural confrontation, radical recombination, and identity creation that garner so much attention in the academy these days. In this sense, at least, it has long been – like several other supposedly far-removed "outposts" in the Atlantic world of which it has long been a part – in the vanguard, rather than the wake, of what we know today as "modernity."[35]

34 Although the best-known exponents of reggae goumbé, Les Frères de la Rue, are now based in Paris, they hail from Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, and their style, which represents a new fusion of Jamaican reggae with local Ivorian "traditional" genres, is inspired partly by the rhythms of the same square frame drum documented by Rouch in Abidjan (and elsewhere in West Africa) in the 1950s. In any case, Les Frères de la Rue are not the first reggae artists from Côte d'Ivoire to have been influenced by gumbe. International Ivorian reggae star Alpha Blondy had a gumbe singer in his family while growing up in Abidjan (Konaté 1987: 107, 126n4). In one interview, when asked about his earliest memory of music, Blondy mentioned "gumbe, which is a kind of popular dance… a very popular African folklore kind of style." And he added – perhaps the most interesting observation in this interview, from the perspective of the present study – "and strange, I found gumbe in Jamaica!" (Davis 1988: 34).

35 In invoking "modernity" in this context and in this way, I clearly owe a debt to Sidney Mintz's writings (e.g., Mintz 1966) that point to the Caribbean as the site of one of the earliest – if not the first – manifestations of certain key social and economic features generally associated today with the onset of modernity.

Figure 1. "Band of the Jaw-Bone, or John-Canoe," 1837, by Isaac Mendes Belisario. Illustration showing a non-Maroon version of the Jamaican *gumbe* drum witnessed by the artist in Kingston, Jamaica during the mid-19th century. Lithograph with watercolor. From I.M. Belisario, *Sketches of Character, An Illustration of the Habits, Occupation, and Costume of the Negro Population, in the Island of Jamaica* (Kingston: J.R. De Cordova, 1837).

Figure 3. Close-up of non-Maroon Jamaican *gumbe* drum, showing tuning mechanism consisting of wedges that produce tension by driving an inner frame against the skin attached to the outer frame. Lacovia, St. Elizabeth, Jamaica. 1991. Photo: Kenneth Bilby.

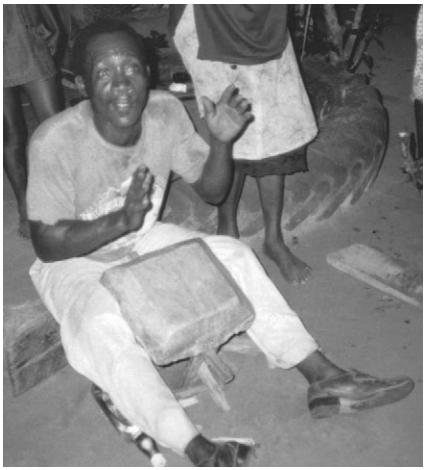

Figure 2. Non-Maroon Jamaican *gumbe* drummer. Lacovia, St. Elizabeth, Jamaica. 1991. Photo: Kenneth Bilby.

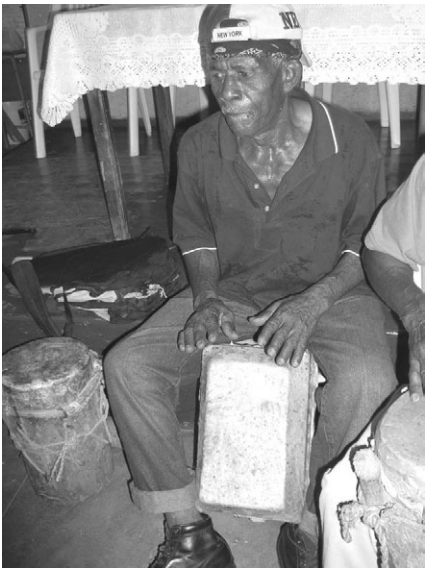

Figure 4. Maroon from the Windward (eastern Maroon) community of Scot's Hall playing the *gumbe* drum used in the traditional ceremonial music of that community. Moore Town, Portland, Jamaica. 2008. Photo: Kenneth Bilby.

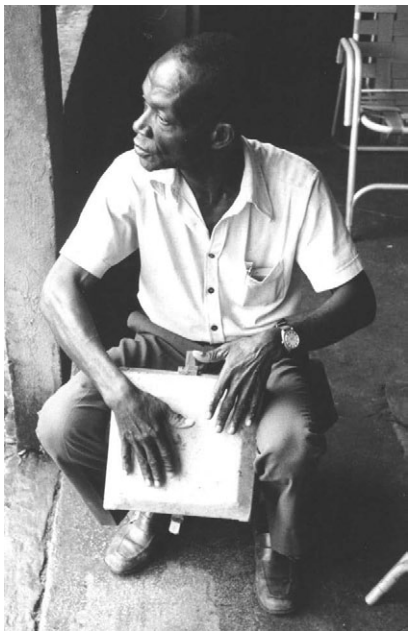

Figure 5. Martin-Luther Wright, Colonel (leader) of the Jamaican Maroon community of Accompong (whose close relatives from Trelawny Town were shipped en masse to Nova Scotia in 1796 and to Sierra Leone in 1800), demonstrating playing of the *gumbe* drum used in the traditional ceremonial music of that community. Accompong, St. Elizabeth. 1978. Photo: Kenneth Bilby.

Figure 6. Colonel Martin-Luther Wright displaying side-view of the Maroon *gumbe* drum. Accompong, St. Elizabeth. 1978. Photo: Kenneth Bilby.

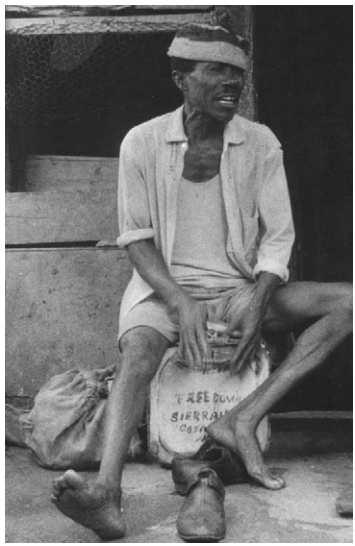

Figure 7. Arthur Pinkney (of the Krio *gumbe* band, Freetown Goombay No. 1) playing the Sierra Leonean *gumbe* drum. Freetown, Sierra Leone. 1977. Photo: Kenneth Bilby.

Figure 8. Morlai Kamara (of the Krio *gumbe* band, Freetown Goombay No. 1) displaying side-view of the Sierra Leonean *gumbe* drum. Freetown, Sierra Leone. 1977. Photo: Kenneth Bilby.

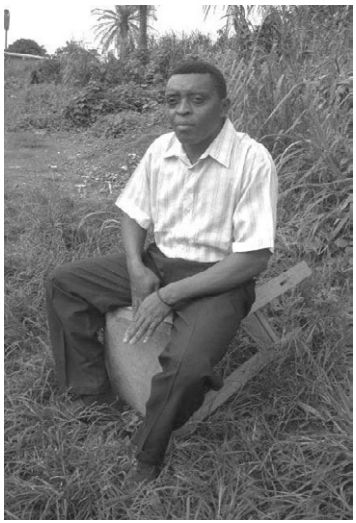

Figure 9. West African *cumbé* player. Equatorial Guinea. 2007. Photo: Isabela de Aranzadi.

Figure 10. Photo of West African *cumbé* drum, showing modified (lengthened) version of original Caribbean tuning mechanism consisting of wedges that produce tension by driving an inner frame against the skin attached to the outer frame. Equatorial Guinea. 2007. Photo: Isabela de Aranzadi.

Figure 11. Ghanaian "guitar band" Bokoor in Ofankor, Ghana, c. 1980. At the far right (with the player seated upon it) is the Ga *gome* drum, derived from the Sierra Leonean and Jamaican Maroon *gumbe*. On the left, a musician plays the handheld tamalen, a related frame drum that uses a variant of the same distinctive turning mechanism. Photo: John Collins/BAPMAF Archives, Accra.

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