

## THE TRANS-ATLANTIC JOURNEY OF *GUMBÉ*: WHERE AND WHY HAS IT SURVIVED?

by

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The word '*gumbé*' is extremely difficult to define. *Gumbé* can refer to a specific drum, dance, rhythm or social context. For the purposes of my research I define *gumbé* as both a drum and a genre of dance-music. Ultimately the drum and the genre are inherently linked: tracing the transatlantic journey of the *gumbé* drum illuminates varying conceptions of *gumbé* as a genre.

This ethnographic paper finds that *gumbé* survives where a Creole society, made from a specific trio of peoples, has emerged. The above conclusion is significant because it challenges overly simplistic models of change that are often applied to the development of popular music in Africa. Ultimately, the study of *gumbé* proves that creolization fostered the proliferation of a modern, non-traditional popular music long before the arrival of the foreign music industry in Africa.

The *gumbé* is a square frame drum that originated in the Maroon (runaway slave) communities of Jamaica during the eighteenth century. Since the escaped slaves were African, it is safe to assume that the *gumbé* was modelled on various pre-slavery African drums. In 1793 and 1795 the Jamaican Maroons staged two uprisings. These events instilled fear into the British administration, who were increasingly anxious of a Jamaican revolt that would mirror the successful Haitian slave rebellion of 1793. In 1795 the British authorities responded to the mounting tension and deported 550 of the rebellious Maroons from Jamaica to Nova Scotia. Four years later 400 of the same Jamaican Maroons were then 'returned' to Africa: they were taken to Freetown, Sierra Leone. Thus the *gumbé* drum completed a transatlantic loop, the first instance of a 'return trip to Africa'. The drum itself is made from animal skin stretched across a square frame. It is made in a range of sizes, from large bass drums which are sat upon when played to smaller hand-held versions.

The study of *gumbé* is an incredibly valuable one for six key reasons. Firstly an understanding of *gumbé*'s development can give an insight into the culture of freed and returned slaves to Africa, a much under-explored aspect of the slave trade. Secondly, it illuminates an alternative history of popular music in West Africa. Cuban music arrived in Africa in the 1930s and is often hailed as the proto-typical 'returned' Caribbean music. Prior to Cuban forms, Trinidadian calypso arrived on Ghanaian shores in 1873, transported by English-speaking West Indian troops stationed there by the British during the Anglo-Ashanti wars. Yet, stretching even further back, and as this article

details, it was in fact *gumbé* that first ‘returned’ to the continent in 1800. Thirdly, unlike Cuban music yet similar to the spread of Trinidadian calypso in Africa, *gumbé* spread throughout West and Central regions via real people not via recordings. The nature of *gumbé*’s diffusion demonstrates the existence of a modern and cosmopolitan music scene long before the first vinyl records were introduced by Western record labels. Fourthly, an understanding of *gumbé* is a way into evaluating emerging urban cultures and corresponding issues of identity in nineteenth century Africa. Fifthly, *gumbé* was the precursor to highlife, the first pan-African music, which subsequently had a major influence on the development of modern genres such as Congolese *rumba*, via English-speaking West African coastal workers employed in the Free Congo in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Lastly, the general trajectory of *gumbé* in Africa, from a derivative music to various indigenized styles, provides a template that aids the understanding of the development of many other popular styles of music in Africa. Swahili *taraab* and South African *marabi* are just two examples of other musical forms that follow this pattern.

The first half of this article is an ethnographic survey of *gumbé*. Sources available on the topic cut across old colonial borders between Francophone, Lusophone and Anglophone Africa, and are wildly disparate and unbalanced. There is no complete picture of *gumbé* and piecing it together is a challenge. As such, I have attempted to order a logical compilation of material related to *gumbé* and known to me at this time. My sources encompass a range of media from the oldest known written references to contemporary YouTube videos. Obviously this ethnography is by no means exhaustive or absolute and I have not been able to conduct fieldwork in either the Caribbean or Africa. Yet, it does accurately reflect the secondary information currently available on this topic and pulls it together for the first time. My methodology aims to explore *gumbé*’s intricate history by threading together library documents, online resources and audio recordings. This first half of this paper is admittedly not a holistic ethnography but rather an ethnographic survey.

The second half of this article addresses my primary research question: why has *gumbé* survived in some locations and not in others? I propose that *gumbé* has survived to a deeper extent in locations where a truly Creole society, made from a specific trio of peoples, has emerged. Ultimately *gumbé* proper survives in locations where a Creole society has occurred via the explicit combination of European colonialists, displaced ex-slaves of diverse African descent (who had been enslaved in the Caribbean) and local inhabitants. Conversely where one particular ethnicity has taken dominance and so a truly Creole society has not formed, such as in Senegal (Wolof) and Mali (Mande), *gumbé* has largely, though not necessarily completely, disappeared. In other instances, such as in Ga communities in Ghana, *gome* (*gumbé*) has become wholly indigenized and is now seen as a tradition attached to a specific ethnicity and so divorced from its Creole past.

My thesis is dependent on the argument that *gumbé* itself is an intrinsically Creole form of music. It was born in a Creole context in the New World out of a clash of diverse African and European cultures. Significantly it is an inter-ethnic, non-religious

and recreational practice. Much like *gumbé* itself, the terms ‘Creole’ and ‘creolization’ are extremely difficult words to define. Put most simply, Creole culture is the result of “the blending of two or more older traditions on new soil” (Bilby 1985: 185). Yet debate surrounds the term; many academics argue that the concept of ‘Creole’ is specific to the unique history of the Caribbean and should not be applied to other locations (See: Palmié 2007 and Hall 2010). Ulf Hannerz has written the most convincing riposte to such criticisms and observes, “Creole cultures [is] turning into more of a generic term, of wider applicability” (1996: 66). Martinican scholar Eduoard Glissant argues that “the whole world is becoming an archipelago and becoming creolized” (Glissant 1990: 26). Paradoxically, and in a mirror image of *gumbé*, such debates reveal that the term ‘Creole’ has itself become ‘creolized’. Whilst the appropriate modern day use of the term ‘Creole’ remains a hotly debated topic, using the concept carefully allows a valuable insight into the nature of *gumbé*’s survival in the Caribbean and across West and Central Africa. Furthermore, due to the history of the slave trade and circuitous cultural relationship between the Caribbean and Africa, it is entirely appropriate to apply the concept of creolization to Africa. It is important to note that Creole is not a finite racial or ethnic signifier.

### **The *gumbé* in Jamaica**

The first known record of *gumbé* music comes from Jamaica where it evidently first emerged, and so it is important to begin a survey of the topic in this location. In 1774, the British colonial administrator and historian Edward Long described “the goombah” as a “hollow block of wood, covered with sheepskin and stripped of its hair” (Long 1774: 423). Long’s description is basic but accurate. The Jamaican *gumbé* is a square frame-drum with animal skin (usually goat) stretched across the frame. In Jamaica the drum is variously described as being played with the hands or sticks (See: Belisario 1837, Duran 2003, De Aranzadi 2011). Long’s “hollow block” clearly refers to such a square frame-drum, the construction of which required carpentry skills. Other African derived drums did not require such expertise and were made from hollowed out logs. These cylindrical models were banned by slave owners in the Caribbean, who thought they were heathen and dangerous, and because they were associated with war in Africa so could potentially be used to communicate information and galvanise slave rebellions.<sup>1</sup> The banning of traditional cylindrical drums no doubt contributed to the proliferation of *gumbé* drums in Jamaica.

Although Long’s 1774 account is the earliest written record, it is widely accepted that *gumbé* was thriving in Jamaican Maroon communities since the first slave imports to Jamaica in the sixteenth century. Harrev, who to date has written the most comprehensive report on the cross-cultural phenomenon of *gumbé*, suggests that in order to prove this claim, evidence of *gumbé* prior to 1795, the date of the deportation of

<sup>1</sup> Many Jamaican planters prohibited drums from as early as 1688 (Rath 2003: 79), and the 1717 Jamaican ‘Slave Act’ forbade ‘the gathering of slaves by the beating of drums and blowing of horns’ (Cited in: Epstein 1977: 59).

550 Jamaican Maroons to Nova Scotia, must be found (Harrev 2001: 16). Whilst Harrev is right to be so judicious in his treatment of sources, it is also important to consider issues of illiteracy and their isolated social positioning that would have prevented Maroons from recording their history themselves. All accounts of *gumbé* during the eighteenth century are made by outsiders to the relevant community; slavers, visitors, missionaries, journalists. Furthermore the very nature of the drum's role in Jamaica, as an expression of a culture other than that of their oppressors, meant that the practice of *gumbé* music would have largely been hidden from the view of such outsiders. Curtin estimates that 736,000 to 759,000 slaves were imported to Jamaica over the period 1665 to 1786 (Curtin 1969: 53). Considering the huge number of African slaves that were imported to Jamaica and the cloistered nature of Maroon communities, it is extremely likely that *gumbé* drumming was practiced on the island well before 1795.

In 1823 another visitor to the island described African-style dancing to the *gumbé* drum and denounced the “rude music” (In Abrahams and Szwed 1983: 301). Evidently the drum-dance was considered to be lewd and immoral by some. A sketch published in 1837 by Jewish Jamaican artist Isaac Mendes Belisario (Figure 1.) documents the *gumbé* drum being played at a Jamaican Junkanoo festival (Belisario: 1837).



Figure 1. Belisario: “Band of the Jaw-Bone, John-Canoe”, 1837.

The central figure in the painting is a man playing the square *gumbé* frame drum. Another early reference to *gumbé* in Jamaica is contributed by Moreton in 1790 who observes, “a herring-barrel, or tub with sheep-skins substituted for the heads, in imitation of a drum, called a gumbay” (Moreton 1790: 155). Similar to the ensemble

depicted in Belasario's sketch, the Jamaican *gumbé* was and continues to be commonly played with cylindrical drums such as the *grandy* or printing (Bilby 1992: 6). The term *gumbé* can refer to the genre of music played on these drums as whole. Moreton probably called the cylindrical drums he observed 'gumbay' due to their involvement in a *gumbé* ensemble. Such confusing referrals serve to blur the distinctions of *gumbé* tradition and allow various interpretations of its component parts to co-exist in different locations, a trait that has contributed much to its survival. Evidently *gumbé* is itself a Creole tradition.

The album, *Drums of Defiance: Maroon Music From the Earliest Free Black Communities of Jamaica* (Smithsonian Folkways: 1992) provides evidence of *gumbé*'s survival in Jamaica. Recorded over the period 1977 to 1991 by the anthropologist Kenneth Bilby, this collection of recordings includes several examples of the *gumbé* drum and genre in practice across four different Maroon communities; Charles Town, Moore Town, Scott's Hall and Accompong. Interestingly the *gumbé* in Charles Town has two legs whilst the Accompong version has four (Bilby 1992: 12). The variation of the *gumbé*'s construction across Maroon communities demonstrates further the adaptable and multifarious nature of the tradition.

That the *gumbé* drum remains a valid symbol of Maroon culture is evidenced by its inclusion in contemporary touristic and educational ventures. In a YouTube video of the 2007 annual celebrations in the Maroon community of Accompong, a *gumbé* drum is clearly visible at 00.31m/s. (*Accompong Annual Maroon Celebration*, available from [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1h-HLUff\\_c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1h-HLUff_c) accessed 18 July 2011). Another recent example includes a home-made YouTube video uploaded in 2009 which features two local musicians demonstrating the use of small hand-made *gumbé* drums that are for sale in the Maroon Town gift shop (*Drum Playing In Maroon Town Gift Shop*, available from [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RsX\\_4UQc8vE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RsX_4UQc8vE) accessed 20 July 2011). The Charles Town Maroon Drummers and Dancers are a cultural group who perform traditional music for educational and touristic purposes. They include a *gumbé* drum in their ensemble. In 2009 at the invitation of the Canadian Jamaican High Commission the group travelled to Nova Scotia to perform a series of concerts as part of the Emancipation and Independence Celebrations there (*Charles Town Maroon Drummers*, available from [http://www.maroonsjamaica.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=frontpage&Itemid=1](http://www.maroonsjamaica.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=frontpage&Itemid=1) accessed 115 July 2011). The inclusion of *gumbé* in this significant performance acknowledges its currency as a potent symbol of Maroon culture.

The *gumbé* tradition diffused throughout the Caribbean via inter-island migration and re-exportation whereby colonial administrators imported slaves to and from other Anglophone ruled locations. After the American Civil War (1861 – 1865) a large number of British loyalists and their slaves migrated to the Bahamas and the other West Indies, a pattern of migration that had already begun in the previous century and continued well into the eighteenth century. It is estimated that between 6,000 to 7,000 individuals migrated to the Bahamas from 1783 to 1790 (Siebert 1913: 22) and that some 5,700 of them were slaves and free blacks of West African origin (Craton 1993: 252).

### **The *goombay* in the Bahamas**

It is most likely that the *gumbé* drum was introduced to the Bahamas by slaves arriving from other Caribbean islands and America. Yet accounts of a square frame drum resembling the Jamaican *gumbé* drum are non-existent. Bahamian *goombay* drums are typically made from cylindrical wooden tubs or oil cans with a goat-skin stretched across the top (Kuss 2007: 368). It appears that the *gumbé* rhythm and genre survived but was transplanted on to existing or available cylindrical drums. It is unclear exactly why this transplant occurred. Collins proposes the most logical solution. He considers the same occurrence across West Africa in his 2001 paper “Pan African Goombay Drum-Dance Music”. He notes that the transposition of *gumbé* rhythm to local instruments during the 1930s can be viewed as a “modernisation (via *goombay*) of a pre-existing recreational music” (Collins 2001: 5). The transferral of *gumbé* rhythm to already existing and readily accessible drums in the Bahamas can be viewed as an example of this process.

*Goombay* drums have been found in the Bahamas since the eighteenth century and, as in Jamaica, are associated with the annual Junkanoo Festival (Kuss 2007: 368). The term *goombay* has also come to refer to a genre of calypso-style music associated with musicians such as Blind Blake and *The Percentie Brothers*. The album *Bahamas: Goombay 1951-1959* (Frémaux & Associés: 2011) is an excellent resource of *goombay* inflected music from the island nation. The track ‘*Goombay*’ by the popular musician George Symonette features the *goombay* drum with vocals, piano, guitar, drums, shaker and a five-stroke timeline played on claves. Recorded in 1954 the song bears the discernible influence of Jamaican *gumbé*, mento and even American jazz, which would have reached the Bahamas via accessible Floridian radio stations. Significantly, the Bahamian track ‘*Goombay*’ is very clearly an imitation of the song, “El Manicero”, which is famed as the first recording of Cuban music to be marketed in Africa in the early 1930s. The opening vocal calls of ‘*Goombay*’ emulate directly the same musical gesture heard at the start of “El Manicero”. “El Manicero” was hugely popular across West Africa, and Cuban styles went on to wield a deep and longlasting influence over popular music in the region, particularly in the independence era, as heard in the work of bands such as *Orchestra Baobab*. Like *goombay*, the Afro-Caribbean roots of Cuban music represented a modern and urban sensibility that was other to that of colonialism, and could be embraced by the emerging Creole classes. The musical integration of “El Manicero” with *gumbé* rhythm and drums on the track, ‘*Goombay*’, implies a similar kind of ‘signifying’ across both genres that have made them powerful modernizers in African music.

Jamaica and the Bahamas have retained the most recognisable and strong *gumbé* traditions in the Caribbean. The purpose of this project largely concerns the nature of *gumbé*’s survival along its transatlantic trajectory. As such I have not explored other instances of *gumbé* in the Caribbean in depth here.

### **The diffusion of *gumbé* across Africa**

*Gumbé* was first 'returned' to Africa via Freetown, Sierra Leone. From there *gumbé* spread to at least fourteen other West and Central African countries; Senegal, Guinea Bissau, The Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Angola, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. *Gumbé* was initially transmitted by migrants who travelled from Sierra Leone across West and Central Africa to work in developing industrial and urban centres. Other migrant workers from the hinterland then took up *gumbé* themselves and continued to spread it further afield. *Gumbé* was popular with such groups because it eschewed specific ethnic associations, was a recreational pursuit and was secular. *Gumbé's* flexible nature suited emerging Creole societies where many different cultures, religions and ethnicities mixed together anew.

### **The *gumbé* in Sierra Leone**

The *gumbé* drum in Sierra Leone is consistently described as a square frame drum, either of the large bass variety which the player sits upon or as a smaller hand-drum version (See: Cohen 1981; Horton 1979; Van Oven 1982 and Harrev 1998).

Freetown was founded in 1787 by the Sierra Leone Company and was a philanthropic and business venture that grew out of the abolitionist movement. The settlement was created to receive Africans or individuals with African heritage who were 'returning' to the continent from the New World. Freetown quickly became a melting pot of ethnicities and nationalities. A study of *gumbé* in Sierra Leone is particularly portentous as it allows the researcher an insight into issues of identity in newly formed urban centres in eighteenth century Africa. By continuing and renewing *gumbé* practice to reflect their trans-Atlantic experiences, ex-slaves and an emergent Creole class reformed their identity as one connected to both the colonialism of the New World and to the cultural customs of Africa.

By 1800 Freetown had become home to at least 2,000 immigrants. The first 400 people arrived in 1787 and were recruited in London. The group was predominately made up of London's 'Black Poor', residents of eighteenth century London who were of African or Asian heritage (Harrev 1988: 1). The second wave of immigrants, a group that consisted of approximately 1,000 African-Americans from Nova Scotia, arrived in 1792. These émigrés had been awarded their liberty in return for fighting for the British in the American War of Independence (1775-1783). Eight years later in 1800, approximately 400 of the 550 Jamaican Maroons who had also been sent to Nova Scotia arrived in Freetown (Rodriguez 2007: 518).

In addition to these three key waves of immigration Freetown was host to a number of other immigrants; British naval and army workers, liberated slaves, sea traders and 'Kru boys' all flowed in and out of the city. As a result of such sustained diversity some Afro-European inter-marriage occurred and inter-racial clans such as the Sherbro-Tuckers and Sherbro-Rogerses emerged (Ogot 1992: 397).

The offspring of Freetown's diverse late eighteenth and early nineteenth century

community became known as Creoles, or Krio. Today, Krio culture is very much alive and is dominant in Freetown and within larger Sierra Leonean society. Evidently the population of Freetown was inherently diverse from the outset and Creole by nature. Freetown was one of the first urban cities in Africa and *gumbé* was harnessed as an apt expression of the new and complex identity issues that arose out of the cosmopolitan circumstance. The case of *gumbé* in Sierra Leone provides a template by which we can better understand processes of urbanisation across nineteenth century Africa. Out of the diverse cosmopolitan settings arise fresh cultural practices that express a new urban identity.

In his 1868 publication, *History of Sierra Leone* Sibthorpe describes instances of *gumbé* taking place in the 1820s as one of the ‘amusements’ of the Maroon community and of liberated slaves of central African descent (Sibthorpe (1868) 1970: 28). That Sibthorpe describes *gumbé* being played by both Maroons and slaves of varying African origin hints at the early nature of *gumbé*’s rapid and wide diffusion across different ethnic groups in Freetown society. Another written reference to *gumbé* in Sierra Leone was published in 1858 in a weekly Christian newspaper, *The African and Sierra Leone Weekly Advertiser*. The editor warns his readership against “Gumbay dancing in all its forms” and advises “the wiser and better portion of the people to avoid it” (In Harrev 2001: 2). The newspaper’s description of *gumbé* “in all its forms”, reveals the occurrence of variation within the tradition itself. These two sources suggest that *gumbé* was commonly used for general leisure and entertainment purposes during the nineteenth and early twentieth century in Sierra Leone.

In contrast, a collection of written sources dating from the twentieth century up to the present day detail the specific use of *gumbé* in Krio wedding celebrations. Kreutzinger recounts the playing of *gumbé* music at a pre-wedding party that occurred during the period 1900 to 1920 (Kreutzinger 1968: 39). Fifty years later in 1978, Ware also observed a number of *gumbé* groups performing at weddings (Ware 1978: 304). In 1981 Cohen described *gumbé* music at two krio weddings (Cohen 1981: 182), and in 2010 De Aranzadi observed how the drum ‘is still used in Freetown to enter into a trance and predict the future in events such as baptisms and weddings’ (De Aranzadi 2010: 23). Lastly Harrev informs us that *gumbé* has become ‘the preferred entertainment at Krio weddings and other festive occasions’ (Harrev 2001: 4). This reporting of *gumbé*’s performance contexts informs us of *gumbé*’s increasingly important role as a symbol of Krio culture in Sierra Leone. As *gumbé* became absorbed into the developing Krio culture it became a valid and popular expression of a new inter-ethnic identity and took an increasingly pronounced role in significant celebrations and cultural events, such as weddings. It follows then, that a Krio identity became progressively more established and was increasingly embraced during the twentieth century. Today, Krio is considered a culture in its own right and is celebrated accordingly. In Sierra Leone a truly Creole society has been achieved via the convergence of three key peoples: European colonialists, displaced ex-slaves of diverse African descent (who had been enslaved in the Caribbean) and local inhabitants. Furthermore, currently Creole (Krio)



is accepted as a valid modern identity and lived experience; it is no coincidence then, that *gumbé* has survived in Sierra Leone.

Furthermore, *gumbé* was a key influence upon three modern styles of popular music from Sierra Leone; *maringa*, *asiko* and *milo-jazz*. The renowned *maringa* musician Ebenezer Calendar (1912 – 1985) actually began his career in an ensemble that included a *gumbé* drum (Collins 1985: 41). During the 1950s Calendar released almost 300 *maringa* songs which bore the influence of *gumbé* (Collins 2001: 1). His song ‘Lumley’ features a binary *gumbé*-derived rhythm, a lilting calypso guitar part and call and response vocals (African Elegant, Original Music: 1992). Significantly, in the last line of each verse Calendar sings, ‘Freetown is my colony’. As the Freetown-born son of a Jamaican father and a Sierra Leonean mother, Calendar was a product of Creole society and produced complex *gumbé* inflected music that appropriately reflected this heritage.

A contemporary example of *gumbé*'s influence can be heard in the music of the popular band, Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars. The track “*Oruweibe/Bobo*” from their album *Rise & Shine* (2010) features the *gumbé* drum and call and response vocals. It is sung partly in Krio and partly in the language of the Oje secret society. Their song “*Kele Mani*” from their album *Living Like A Refugee* (2006) also features the *gumbé* rhythm, as does the song “*Soda Soap*” from the same album. In interview with Banning Eyre (available from <http://www.afropop.org/multi/interview/ID/105/Reuben+Koroma+Refugee+Alls+Stars-2006>, accessed 18 August 2011), band leader Reuben Koroma expresses the deep influence *gumbé* has had upon their music:

In fact, most of our music, this African music, is *gumbé*. 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 *gumbé*.

As Koroma's comment reveals, *gumbé* has survived in Sierra Leone as both a standalone tradition and as a manifest influence in modern popular music. *Gumbé*'s survival in Sierra Leonean society is linked to its standing as a powerful signifier of a shared Creole identity.

### **The *gumbé* in Guinea Bissau**

In Guinea Bissau, the *gumbé* is a binary dance rhythm played on the *tina* water drum. The drum is played with closed fists, and is made from a halved calabash floating in a tub of water (Duran 2003, *Manecas Costa and the Gumbé Rhythm*, available from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p005xjz9> accessed 16 July 2011). Evidently Guinea Bissauan *gumbé* has survived apart from the original drum. There has been no academic exploration into why this has occurred or indeed into Guinea Bissauan music in general. On first evaluation this process appears to echo the same occurrence in the Bahamas. There, transposition of the *gumbé* rhythm to alternative drums is best explained as the modernisation of a pre-existent local music via *gumbé* (Collins 2001: 5). But considering the West African origin of *gumbé* and its transatlantic journey, the Guinea

Bissauan process is more accurately described as taking the *gumbé* back to its roots. In this case, the *gumbé* is both a symbol of Creole culture and is broadly associated with indigenous tradition.

*Gumbé* has had a deep influence on Guinea Bissauan culture, and is widely recognised as the country's trademark sound. In 2003, Lucy Duran travelled to Guinea Bissau and recorded two hour long radio programmes that spotlight *gumbé's* pervasive presence in the country (Duran 2003). *Gumbé* has been prevalent in popular music since the 1970s when bands such as Cobiana Djazz and Super Mama Djombo began to mix electric guitars with *gumbé* and other folk traditions.

Manecas Costa is a contemporary musician from Guinea Bissau whose music is rooted in *gumbé* tradition. His album *Paraiso de Gumbé* (2003) features the *gumbé* rhythm mixed together with other traditional styles including the *broška* style of the Balanta ethnicity (Duran 2003a: 5). His multifaceted music is demonstrative of *gumbé's* inherent flexibility.

The Creole language, Crioulou is the lingua franca of Guinea Bissau and the language in which *gumbé* is sung. Crioulou was also a language of resistance, a dialect that was pivotal in establishing a Creole culture that stood in opposition to the colonial regime, despite also being influenced by it. This position mirrors that of Guinea Bissauan *gumbé* itself: a tradition which stands in opposition to, yet is related to, the history of European colonialism. The majority of Guinea Bissauans practice indigenous animist beliefs which involve paying tribute to spirits of the forest (Duran 2003: 2). The prevalence of Creole culture and of animism is central to understanding why *gumbé* is so deep-rooted in Guinea Bissauan culture. Firstly *gumbé* is inter-ethnic and so can represent a Creole identity. Secondly, *gumbé* is non-religious and so can be practiced alongside animist beliefs easily. *Gumbé* continues to be the country's trademark sound and it is no coincidence that the term is now employed as a generic term for popular music. Today Guinea Bissauan musicians such as the London based band, Tony Dudu and *Gumbé Jazz*, comfortably fuse *gumbé* drum rhythms with an array of influences. The Creole nature of the tradition has ensured its survival in Guinea Bissau, a country anchored by the acceptance of its Creole history.

### **The *cumbé* and *kunki* in Equatorial Guinea**

Equatorial Guinea is comprised of two parts; a continental region and an insular region containing the islands of Annobón and Bioko (formerly Fernando Pó). Evidence of *gumbé's* history and survival in the insular region is detailed by the Spanish scholar Isabela De Aranzadi (2010). With the exception of De Aranzadi's recent work, literary and musical sources concerning the history of *gumbé* in this location are scant to non-existent. *Gumbé* drums in Annobon are known as *cumbé*. The corresponding drum on the island of Bioko is referred to as *kunki*. The *cumbé* and *kunki* are both square frame drums that are played with the hands and with the feet (De Aranzadi 2010: 25, 30).

De Aranzadi reasons that *gumbé* was most likely transplanted to Equatorial Guinea via ex-slaves who came to the island to work after being repatriated at Freetown, Sierra

Leone (De Aranzadi 2010: 24). Migration between West and Central African countries was certainly common-place during the nineteenth century and many tradesmen would have flowed in and out of Equatorial Guinea bringing *gumbé* with them. Despite the fact that Fernando Pó was under Spanish rule, a British anti-slavery squadron was based in the capital city Malabo (formerly Clarence City) from 1827 to 1872. During these forty-five years the British administration brought large numbers of Sierra Leoneans to live on the island (Collins 2001: 3). Furthermore Malabo was built in 1827 using wood brought in from Freetown (De Aranzadi 2010: 40). Since the construction of the square-framed *gumbé* drum requires specific carpentry skills that cylindrical log drums do not, the influx of carpenters to Equatorial Guinea in the early nineteenth century most likely corresponds with the introduction of the *gumbé* drum to the region. *Gumbé* diffused to and proliferated in Equatorial Guinea due to the emergence of an urban centre. Considering the nature of *gumbé*'s spread in terms of urbanisation allows us to consider corresponding issues of identity in nineteenth century Africa.

I could find no written, audio or video evidence of contemporary *cumbé* or *kunki* in Equatorial Guinea, although this is probably largely due to the lack of information available on the country in general. De Aranzadi's 2010 study suggests the music is still practiced. Furthermore the emergence of a Creole language, Annobonese, evidences the formation of a truly Creole society in Equatorial Guinea. Bearing this and the sociological history of the country in mind, it is most likely *gumbé* has survived there. It is widely believed that *cumbé* from Equatorial Guinea was taken to Latin America by Spanish colonizers and so, is closely related to *cumbia* (See: Campbell 1995; Roberts 1998; De Aranzadi 2010).

### **The *gome* in Ghana**

In Ghana, the square frame drum is called the *gome*, a word derived from the term *gumbé*. The drum is played with the hands and feet and is accompanied by a bell pattern. During the 1920s to 1950s *gome* had a deep influence on many neo-traditional Ghanaian styles including *simpa*, *gahu* and *konkoma*. Furthermore in the 1950s many early highlife bands featured *gome* drums (Collins 2001: 3). Most importantly *gome* was one of the precursors to highlife, the hugely significant first pan-African music that had a seismic influence on the development of all subsequent popular genres across the continent. Yet, in Ghana *gome* is widely regarded as a traditional drum-dance of the Ga ethnicity. The Ga are a creolized people who are fishermen and live on the coast around the capital city, Accra. They are a small ethnic group in terms of their numbers, but have considerable influence culturally because of their proximity to Accra. The dominant ethnicity in Ghana is Akan (45.3 %). A Creole language is not spoken and the dominant religion is Christianity (CIA World Factbook: 2011). Owing to the Akan dominance, Ghanaian society is not truly Creole.

Ultimately *gome* in Ghana has been indigenized: the music is now seen as a specifically Ga tradition (Bilby pers. comm. August 2011). Later smaller frame drums associated with *gome* became known as *konkoma* drums in the 1930s and were used in

the local brass band style of the same name. *Konkoma* highlife had even spread as far as Western Nigeria by the 1940s. This process is not unlike what happened in Guinea Bissau, where *gumbé* has also become a signifier of tradition and identity. However in Guinea Bissau the trans-Atlantic history of *gumbé* is acknowledged, whereas in Ghana this history is forgotten. Both *gome* and *konkoma* in Ghana constitute indigenization via the divorcing of each style from the Creole history of *gumbé*.

In approximately 1900 *gome* was introduced to Ghana by Ga artisans who had previously been working in the Cameroons and Belgian Congo area (Collins 2001: 3). It is most likely that the Ga migrant workers learned *gome* from Sierra Leoneans who were also employed in the Belgian Congo. Indeed, “the very oldest Ga *gome* songs are sung in Pidgin English” which was the lingua franca of approximately 5,000 English speaking West Africans employed in the Belgian Free State from 1885 to 1908 (Collins 2001: 3). *Gome* would also have spread to Ghana over the years 1947 to 1954 by returning Ga fishermen who had been working on the island of Fernando Pó in Equatorial Guinea where there was a long established settlement of Sierra Leoneans.

*Gome*'s influence on neo-traditional styles in the early twentieth century is evidence of its influence upon modern Ghanaian culture despite its unknown roots. *Simpa* music was created in the 1930s and fuses together traditions of the Dagomba ethnicity with *gome*, early highlife and western influences (Collins 2001: 4). *Gahu* is a drum-dance that originated in Cotonu (Benin) and then spread to the Nigerian coast, before being transported to southern Ghana by migrant Ewe fishermen (Collins 2001: 5). *Konkoma* music is an Akan highlife style that featured hand held *gome* drums and was popular from the 1930s to the late 1940s (Collins 1997: 54). One guitar band led by Appiah Adjekum included three *gome* drums (Collins 2001: 6). Frame drums were also used in some of Ghana's other emergent guitar band tradition of the 1940s. This embryonic highlife style, or ‘palmwine’, often included frame drums. After the Second World War popular bands such as E.T Mensah and The Tempos favoured a smaller sized ensemble and blended swing-jazz, calypso and Afro-Cuban percussion into their sound. Other groups began to imitate this set-up and the “palmwine highlife groups of Ghana evolved into larger post-war ‘guitar bands’” (Collins 2001: 1). In 1949 E.K Nyame left Appiah Adjekum's band and subsequently rose to fame with an ensemble composed of guitars, drum kit and Afro-Cuban percussion but no *gome* drums. Interestingly Nyame recalls his decision to exclude the *gome* drums from his ensemble as ‘modernisation’ (In Collins 1985: 23).

During the 1970s a number of bands that mixed Ga ‘folk’ traditions with electric guitars rose to popularity. Such ensembles were known as Ga cultural troupes. The instrumentation typically included giant (bass) *gome* drums, guitars, traditional percussion, bamboo flutes and gongs. Common repertoire included Ga and Liberian sea shanties, *gome* songs, and Ga recreational songs such as the *kolomashie* and *kpanlogo* (Broughton et al. 1999: 42). The first group to pioneer this style were called Wulomei. The band released their first album *Mibe Shi Dinn* in 1974 followed by *Walatu Walasa* in the same year. Both albums feature the *gome* drum throughout. Wulomei's entire

image is based upon representing Ga tradition; their songs are mostly sung in the Ga language, they feature 'traditional' Ga drums and the name Wulomei itself refers to the traditional Ga chief priests. Band leader Nii Tei Ashitey commented on the aim of the band, to enable the Ghanaian youth to "forget foreign music and do their own thing" (Collins 1996: 142). Clearly the band purposefully represents traditional Ga culture, of which the *gome* drum is a part. It is interesting that Ashitey discourages 'foreign' music, yet *gome* is a product of foreign contact. E.K Nyame and Nii Tei Ashitey's perceptions of the *gome* offer an insight into issues of identity in twentieth century Africa. Sentiments of modernity and authenticity were variously prized at different points; the former during the 1940s to 1950s, a period marked by a struggle for independence, and authenticity in the post-independence era, a period marked by celebrations of indigenous African identity. Furthermore the garbled history of colonialism meant that styles such as *gome* were sometimes inaccurately considered to be traditional and capitalized upon or symbolically discarded accordingly.

*Gome* in Ghana was one of the main roots of highlife, which was one of the first seminal styles of pan-African popular music. As a result, *gumbé* (via highlife) has indirectly reached many parts of Africa. The last point is particularly pertinent as the manner in which the inter-ethnic highlife genre fused together African, Western and Islamic musical flavours has had an immeasurable influence on the subsequent development of popular music across Africa. Some other genres that follow the highlife template include; *mbaqanga* from South Africa, *chimurenga* from Zimbabwe, *benga beat* from Kenya, *soukous* from Central Africa and *makossa* of the Cameroons (Collins 2001: 1). Despite this important trajectory and because of the absence of a truly Creole society, *gome* proper does not survive in broad Ghanaian society as it has been variously indigenized, as per the *gome* (Ga), *konkoma* (Akan) and *simpa* (Dagbon).

### **The *asiko* in Senegal**

In Senegal the word *asiko* refers to a hand-held square frame drum and a dance style (Benga 2002: 78). A truly Creole society does not exist in Senegal; Wolof is the dominant ethnicity and makes up approximately 40% of the population (CIA World Factbook: 2011). Wolof is also the lingua franca of Senegal and a Creole language is not spoken.

Until the 1950s *asiko* music was popular with the Senegalese youth. Popular groups such as Sonar Senghor et les Siccos featured *asiko* drums. During the latter half of the twentieth century, the rise of Cuban influenced bands such as Orchestra Baobab and the success of mbalax music pioneered by Youssou N'Dour, overshadowed *asiko* music. As a result, *asiko* is no longer a widely popular style. Yet the drum is not completely extinct and is still included in the line up of some contemporary bands, such as Siko Band Gorée.

Siko Band Gorée performs with an ensemble of the hand-held frame drums ("Kewogo", available from <http://www.kewego.dk/video/iLyROoafYvPu.html> accessed 1 August 2011). Much of their repertoire is closely based upon the music of Sonar Senghor's ensemble. Flemming Harrev suggested to me that *Siko Band Gorée* provide an example

of *asiko* music's continuing relevance to young people in Senegal and so undermines my thesis of the Creole connection to *gumbé's* survival (Harrev pers. comm. 2011). Whilst little biographical information is available on Siko Band Gorée, I propose two reasons why, despite the absence of a dominant Creole culture in Senegal, this band still finds it relevant to practice *asiko* today. Firstly although Senegal is socially and politically dominated by the Wolof ethnicity, there is a valid and existent Creole culture in the coastal regions of Southern Senegal and on Gorée Island. These were the areas where Portuguese colonizers settled and inter-married with local Africans. The Portuguese's involvement in the slave trade also resulted in Africans of varying origins being transported in and out of these bases, adding to the cultural mix. Furthermore, as hinted by the inclusion of the word "Gorée" in their name, the *asiko* is symbolic of the band's general interest in Creole culture. Gorée Island is located just two kilometres at sea from Dakar and was a trading point and a major place of departure during the slave trade. Many slaves of varying African origin departed from Gorée for the New World. Gorée was first settled by the Portuguese in 1444. Over the next two hundred and thirty three years, the United Netherlands, Dutch and British both captured and ruled the island at different points. But it was the French that exerted the longest rule on the island from 1677 until independence in 1960. Because of their long residence on the island, during the eighteenth and nineteenth century Gorée also became home to Franco-African Creoles. Gorée is now and has long been a tourist attraction. It is a UNESCO heritage site and its slave house is now a museum and an important monument to Gorée's role in the dreaded slave trade. The island has a population of approximately 1,000 people. Whilst *Siko Band Gorée* may or may not actually be from Gorée, the inclusion of the island's name in their title hints at their interest in Creole culture in general, which explains their inclusion of the *asiko* drum in their music.

Secondly, the *asiko* drum as found on Gorée Island is derived partly from the Freetown *gumbé*, but is also, and perhaps more closely, derived from the Portuguese *adufe* (Koubaka 2011: 1). The *adufe* is a traditional square frame drum covered with goat skin. The *adufe* was introduced to the island by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century, some three hundred years before the arrival of *gumbé* to Freetown. Gorée Island was one of the first places to be settled by the Portuguese in 1444. So the *adufe* had an established cultural presence long before the Sierra Leonean frame drums. The seated *gumbé* bass drum has largely disappeared and is not used by *Siko Band Gorée*. The alternative history of the *asiko* combined with an understanding of coastal Creole culture in Southern Senegal and on the island of Gorée, goes some way in explaining why *gumbé* has survived in small concentrated areas, despite the absence of a society dominated by mainstream Creole culture.

### **The *gūbe* in Mali**

The population of Mali is dominated by Mande ethnicities: it is estimated that the Maninka, Soninke and Bambara peoples make up 50% of the current population (CIA World Factbook: 2011). French is the official language and Bambara the most

widely spoken language. During the colonial era France ruled Mali as part of the colony, French Sudan. In 1959 French Sudan and Senegal united to become The Mali Federation. In June 1960 The Mali Federation was granted independence. Senegal withdrew shortly after. A Krio language is not widely spoken and the society is by no means truly Creole.

Symptomatic of *gūbe*'s large-scale disappearance in Mali, there is very little literature on the topic. Claude Meillassoux's 1968 ethnography of voluntary associations in Bamako is the only English language text known to me at this time. A section of Meillassoux's ethnography concerns a *gūbe* association. According to Meillassoux, *gūbe* associations were popular throughout Bamako and healthy rivalry often existed between groups from different city wards (1968: 117).

The grouping of people into associations is a manifestation of traditional living that is common between Mande and Fula ethnicities. Since Mande ethnicities dominate, their traditions have shaped the social construction of Malian society. The groups provided a civil vehicle for dispossessed urbanites to improve their social status and conditions. During the 1970s the number of associations declined. By the time of Meillassoux's publication in 1968, associations were already being replaced by less restrictive organizations called clubs (Meillassoux 1968: 49).

The *gūbe* association Meillassoux observes is principally concerned with performing *gūbe* music and with courtship. Meillassoux (1968: 117) describes the ensemble,

On one side, sitting in a row, four or five boys between the ages of fourteen and sixteen beat square-shaped drums and a big battery (a round modern beat drum, as found in modern jazz).

The "square-shaped drums" are no doubt related to Freetown *gumbé*. Evidently and much like the *gumbé* of Jamaica, the Bahamas and Sierra Leone, the Malian *gūbe* were often played in ensembles with other drums. Meillassoux describes how the group regularly performed *gūbe* music and dance to the public (Meillassoux 1968: 14). From this information we can observe that *gūbe* was not just considered as a pastime but was performed as entertainment. He also informs the reader that membership of the association was not based on ethnicity but was granted or refused according to the attractiveness of the applicant (Meillassoux 1968: 115). *Gumbé* was the preserve of an urban youth culture that was based upon recruitment via criteria that, like the drum itself, was decidedly inter-ethnic.

Meillassoux suggests that the Sierra Leonean origins of *gūbe* were not known in Mali: "Everybody agrees that the *gūbe* probably came from Sénégal, but no one knows exactly when" (Meillassoux 1968: 117). *Gūbe* could certainly have arrived from Senegal during the nineteenth century as strong trade links existed between the two bordering countries. But *gūbe* would also have been transported to Mali by other migrant workers, 'returning' Africans who chose to settle in the area and migrant Freetown Krios. It is interesting that in Mali, Senegal and Ghana the Sierra Leonean and Jamaican origins of the *gumbé* drum have been forgotten. In all three countries an alternative history has

been constructed. These altered historical narratives have allowed for the indigenization and subsequent transformation of *gumbé* in each location. Furthermore in each of these locations, *gumbé* has been largely discarded during the latter half of the twentieth century, except in concentrated coastal areas where a Creole culture exists. In parallel, each of these locations has come to be dominated by one ethnicity during the twentieth century.

During the 1960s the first Malian President Modibo Keita set up national bands and dance troupes that fostered cultural practices and motivated many artists to turn back to their ‘roots,’ that is traditional Malian music for inspiration. In the 1970s Keita’s successor, Moussa Traore encouraged artists to explore their Malian and African roots further under a policy of cultural authenticity that mirrored similar campaigns implemented in Guinea and Zaire (Democratic Republic of the Congo). The ‘Senegalese’ *gūbe* was largely discarded during this era as artists turned towards more specifically Mande traditions. Popular bands such as The Rail Band favoured mixing guitars and western drums with local instruments such as the *bala* and *kora*, over the ‘foreign’ *gūbe*. *Gūbe* was adopted by the Bamako youth in the 1930s to 1950s as a symbol of cosmopolitanism that slotted in with a social structure based on Mande tradition. When attitudes shifted once again and a new genre of modern music that prized ‘authentic’ Mande traditions mixed with guitar band line-ups rose to prominence, *gūbe* disappeared. Symptomatic of the absence of a truly Creole society in Mali, I could not find any evidence of the *gūbe*’s survival there today.

### **The *asiko* in Nigeria**

Nigeria is the most populated country in Africa and houses over 250 ethnicities. The official language is English, and a Creole language is spoken widely across the country. Four African ethnicities dominate the population: the Fulani, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo make up approximately 68% of the population (CIA World Factbook: 2011).

In the 1830s large numbers of ex-slaves and krios migrated to Nigeria from Sierra Leone (Law 2004: 182). These immigrants undoubtedly brought with them the *gumbé* drum. Nigeria was also one of the most popular destinations for ex-slaves returning from Brazil. It is estimated that by 1881 there were around 1,500 Sierra Leoneans and 1,200 Afro-Brazilians in the coastal capital, Lagos (Ralston 1969: 577). Like in Senegal, the Brazilian returnees also brought a frame drum with them, the circular hand-held samba drum (Alaja-Browne 1989: 56).

*Asiko* music emerged as a style in the 1920s, and was subsequently absorbed into other popular music styles. *Juju* music emerged and drew on *asiko* music in the mid-1930s. It fused together highlife, *asiko* and *kru* guitar technique and had a deep and lasting influence on other subsequent Nigerian styles including *fuji*, *apala*, *afrobeat* and *afro-juju*. Currently, *asiko* is not a prevalent or mainstream popular style.

Some scholars have ignored the influence of *gumbé* in the area and simply link the samba drums used in *asiko* directly to Brazil (See: Alaja-Browne 1954; Fryer 2000). Whilst it is incorrect to completely disregard *gumbé*’s influence, we can conclude that



the samba drum had a deeper and more pervasive influence on Nigerian music. The profound Brazilian (as opposed to Sierra Leonean) influence on Nigerian culture during the nineteenth century is well-documented (See: Laotan 1943; Euba 1988; Fryer 2000). Brazilian ex-slaves would have also transmitted Portuguese and Spanish song and guitar styles to the area. Since these customs were introduced and practiced as symbols of Afro-Brazilian heritage, it is probable that samba drums were adopted with the same historical link in mind. This assumption is backed up by the striking fact that elderly Lagoasian's use the terms '*asiko*' and '*samba*' interchangeably (Alaja-Browne 1989: 58). Furthermore by the 1970s, the seated bass *gumbé* drum had disappeared from *asiko* and all *asiko*-derived styles, whilst the samba drum survived intact. The alternative Latin American roots of the samba in Nigeria echoes the story of the *gumbé* in Senegal. A complex interplay of Creole, African and Brazilian traditions is manifest in Nigerian *asiko*. It was indigenized via Christianity before being absorbed whole into successive popular genres, as such *gumbé* has not survived in Nigeria.

### **The *goumbé* in Côte d'Ivoire**

The dominant ethnicity in Côte d'Ivoire is Akan (42.1%) (CIA World Factbook: 2011). The official language is French and Dioula is also widely spoken. Several academics make passing reference to '*goumbé*' as the Ivorian manifestation of *gumbé* although none have done an in-depth study of the topic (See: De Aranzadi 2011; Harrev 2001).

A number of sources describe *goumbé* associations, similar to those documented in Mali in existence in Côte d'Ivoire during the 1950s (See: Little 1965; Ricard 1997). The French film-maker and anthropologist Jean Rouch has documented Ivorian *goumbé* associations in many of his works. One association is the subject of his film ethnography, *La Goumbé Des Jeunes Noceurs* (1967). In conversation with the ethnomusicologist Steven Feld, Rouch describes the film's subject as a "group of musicians and dancers who organised street dances every Saturday and Sunday in Abidjan" and "who came from Upper Volta" (Rouch and Feld 2003: 167). That the musicians came from Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) and relocated to the coastal city of Abidjan reveals their migrant status. Rouch elaborates, 'The *goumbé* became the dance of displaced peoples' (Rouch and Feld: 2003: 167). These displaced migrants formed Creole groups in coastal regions of Côte d'Ivoire and continued to use the *goumbé* drum within their associations. Creole culture in Côte d'Ivoire is more prevalent on the coast as it would have been frequented by colonizers, tradesmen, sailors and slavers more frequently than the interior. Indeed, there was a "fair share of assimilation as the Creole population of the coastal towns" bears witness' (Woods 1988: 95). Like in Mali such *goumbé* associations have largely died out in Côte d'Ivoire.

Today *goumbé* is not a dominant style but continues to exist where there is Creole culture. For example, the contemporary Ivorian group Zagazougou Coup are based in Abidjan and include a *gumbé* drum in their band. The group Les Frères de la Rue also originated in Abidjan and are proponents of a new style known as 'Reggae Goumbé'. Their music marries the traditional rhythms of *goumbé* with reggae styles derived from

Jamaican popular music.

This recent genre is especially significant when we consider that it represents the completion of the trans-Atlantic loop, “this Afro-Creole drum has symbolically come full circle” (Bilby 2011: 166). Reggae *gumbé* is a truly modern genre that germinated out of urban centres. Today, it represents particularly well the complex history of migration and identity issues in Africa. The music is an international and modern style, yet powerfully echoes the traumatic memory of colonialism.

### ***Gumbé* in other African locations**

The patchwork nature of *gumbé*'s survival and its history is mirrored in the puzzle-like nature of scholarship, recordings and evidence that are available on the topic. In order to build anything like a consistent impression of where and what *gumbé* is today, a glut of widely disparate information located in dozens of different sources must be collected and deciphered. Despite the known existence of *gumbé* in several other African locations than those mentioned above, the desperate lack or non-existence of corresponding recordings and demonstrable literature on *gumbé* currently stifles accurate research in the following areas: Gambia, Guinea, Liberia, Togo, Benin, Cameroon, Angola and Gabon. Although an absolute judgement cannot be made, the missing information suggests that *gumbé* is not a current mainstream style in those locations.

### **Reflecting on the ethnographic survey**

*Gumbé* has survived as a prominent and widely practiced style in Jamaica, the Bahamas, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, and Equatorial Guinea. All five of these locations have a dominant Creole culture. In Senegal, Benin and Côte d'Ivoire *gumbé* has only survived in pocketed coastal locations where a Creole culture exists. In Nigeria and Ghana *gumbé* has largely been absorbed into concomitant musical forms. It has indirectly survived as a manifest influence heard in styles such *asiko* and high-life. In Mali *gumbé* has disappeared. Interestingly in Senegal, Benin, Nigeria, Mali and Ghana the transatlantic roots of *gumbé* have been largely forgotten. Evidently where a Creole culture is not prevalent, *gumbé* has either been forgotten or has been attached to a specific ethnicity and ascribed an incomplete history.

### **The concept of 'Creole'**

A consideration of the evidence and observations compiled above matched with a grounded knowledge of Creole theory offers a solution to the question: why has *gumbé* survived in some locations and not in others? We can conclude that *gumbé* has survived to a deeper extent in locations where a truly Creole culture, made from a specific trio of peoples, has emerged. Such creolization has occurred in urban locations which were once major slave trade posts, which explains the prevalence of *gumbé* in urban centres along the West African coast.

The instances of creolization outside of the Caribbean that are discussed in this project, and so necessary for *gumbé*'s survival, all occur via the combination of three

broad social groups: European colonialists, displaced ex-slaves of diverse African descent (who had been enslaved in the Caribbean) and local inhabitants. Although Creole may be formed by alternative components, for example in Latin America, it is this specific Creole context that is needed to ensure the survival of *gumbé*. This explains why the islands of Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe have been excluded from this study. They were not inhabited before the arrival of the Portuguese in the fifteenth century and so do not have a Creole society made from a combination of the necessary sociological trio. Another requisite of a truly Creole society is the emergence of a Creole language, such as Krio (Sierra Leone), Kriolu (Guinea Bissau), and Annobonese (Equatorial Guinea). The instances of Jamaica and the Bahamas are different: local inhabitants were not involved in or crucial to the process. The native populations of these Caribbean islands had been largely wiped out due to vigorous exploitation by early colonialists. It was the eradication of indigenous inhabitants, such as the Taino of Jamaica, by European dominators that spurred the slave trade into existence.

Where a truly Creole society has not emerged *gumbé* is not embraced but discarded in favour of other styles, as discussed above two prime examples of this are Senegal and Mali. Furthermore it is important to note that both the dominant Wolof (Senegal) and Mande (Mali) ethnicities are historically tied to the Islamic faith. We can postulate that the prevalence of Islamic faith in Senegal and Mali, both French colonies, provided a culture that was already impervious to that of European colonialism. As *gumbé* is inherently non-religious, it has been unable to penetrate the cultures of each country which are so fundamentally linked to Islam. Further research is needed to consider the link between Islam, French colonialism and the absence of *gumbé*.

### **North America: a missing link?**

Above I have noted the circumstances conducive to *gumbé's* survival in the trans-Atlantic world. These are creolization formed via the combination of three social groups (local inhabitants, displaced ex-slaves of African descent and Caribbean experience, and colonialists) in an urban environment under conditions of oppression. Where this state of affairs did not occur *gumbé* has not survived. Another location to which *gumbé* was introduced but did not thrive is North America and Canada. In order to build an accurate and well considered history of *gumbé's* trans-Atlantic journey it is crucial not to neglect this region. The failure to include North America and Canada is a common problem in many of the most respected works on *gumbé*.

Evidence of *gumbé's* existence in North America is provided in the classic slave narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Ann Jacobs (1861). The text includes a description of a Junkanoo festival in nineteenth century North Carolina and clearly references *gumbé*:

A box, covered with sheepskin, is called the gumbo box. A dozen beat on this, while others strike triangles and jawbones, to which bands of dancers keep time. (Jacobs 1861: 180)

The “gumbo box” is obviously related to the *gumbé* drum. Bilby has explored the

connection of *gumbé* to Junkanoo festivals and asserts that versions of the “square drum were found in almost all the places for which we have historical descriptions of Jankunu – including the southern United States” (Bilby 2007: 14). *Gumbé* was introduced to North America and Canada via the 550 Jamaican Maroons deported to Nova Scotia in 1796 and by slaves exported from the Caribbean to America and put to work on plantations. Yet, and in line with my central thesis, it is not surprising that *gumbé* disappeared in American locations such as Nova Scotia and North Carolina, as a Creole society defined by displaced ex-slaves of African origin and Caribbean experience, local inhabitants and foreign colonialists did not occur. Despite the presence of Native American inhabitants, since Columbus’ first landing on American shores in 1492, the country has been ethnically, politically and socially dominated by people of white European descent.

So far the disappearance of *gumbé* in America has been neatly explained in this article. However, the case of New Orleans, the ultimate Creole society, poses a problem. There is evidence that *gumbé* reached the Louisiana settlement yet it did not survive despite the presence of a valid Creole culture. In his 1819 publication diarist and traveller, Benjamin Henry Latrobe describes a visit to Congo Square, a recreational meeting place and site of music-making for slaves in New Orleans. Although he doesn’t name the drum, Latrobe’s description of “a square drum, looking like a stool, which made an abominably loud noise” patently refers to a *gumbé* drum (Latrobe 1819 [1905]: 181). Despite this reference, there has been no thorough investigation into the history of *gumbé* in New Orleans. Harrev feels strongly about the need for a re-consideration of this topic. He calls for a re-write of the early nineteenth century history in the region and argues “*goombay* must be recognized as part of the African American legacy in New Orleans” (Harrev 2001: 4). While Harrev is correct, a study of the reasons behind *gumbé*’s absence from the discipline is still a fruitful approach. New Orleans, although undoubtedly Creole, is not a society *necessarily* defined by the arrival of ex-slaves of African descent and Caribbean experience, and so does not meet the specific criteria for *gumbé*’s survival. Instead New Orleans Creole may be formed from multiple sources; from French, Spanish and British settlers, from Native Americans, Acadians, free blacks and from Caribbean refugees such as those arriving to the settlement after respective revolutions in Haiti and Cuba. Ultimately it is the blending of French culture and that of Africans taken directly to America to be enslaved, and not via the Caribbean, that constitute the founding elements of New Orleans Creole. This alternative Creole mix, which can exclude a Caribbean link, largely explains the disappearance of *gumbé* in New Orleans. This conclusion underlines my point that *gumbé* only survives in a particular Creole context.

### **Significance of this study**

Although it is a deeply challenging and controversial angle to explore, the notion of creolization is powerful as it allows agency to periphery cultures and peoples. In each of its locations *gumbé* is a tradition of marginalized and dispossessed strata of

society. It was born out of a culture of resistance in Maroon communities, before being transported to Africa where it was harnessed by a new Creole class who stood in awkward relation to their complicated African heritage, New World experiences, and to unjust colonial rule.

Ultimately and most significantly, considering *gumbé* in terms of creolization rewrites linear conceptions of the development of African popular music. Popular music was not simply introduced by the West via the introduction of the gramophone and recordings of Cuban music in the early twentieth century. Bilby (2011: 166) crystallizes this sentiment perfectly when he notes:

Africa 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.

Thus, an understanding of *gumbé* —the proto Afro-Caribbean music— crucially informs and revolutionises the way modern academia has portrayed the history of popular music culture in Africa.

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