

9 | Uncovering Hidden Histories of Meaning

Guadeloupe *Gwoka*

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Gwoka is a drum, song, and dance tradition from Guadeloupe, a small island in Eastern Caribbean that, shaped like a butterfly, has a population of some 400,000. From plantation colony to non-sovereign nation, Guadeloupe reflects a long, constant, ambivalent, and uneasy history of imperialism and inequality. *Gwoka* emerged out of and developed alongside that complicated past. As such, it provides an insightful model for unraveling and confronting the island's conflictual historical, cultural and political forms. Since the changing views, values, and conventions of Guadeloupean people are embedded in *gwoka*, this chapter traces its evolution and development and, in the process, highlights its position as a historical document. This chapter also indicates the critical contributions intangible cultural objects like *gwoka* can make alongside written sources as tools for research.

***Gwoka*: An Overview**

Gwoka (The Big Drum) refers to a set of hand-held drums as well as the music, song, and dance that these drums accompany. Evolving during slavery, it comprises three *kas* (drums), each played with bare hands. The two single-headed *boula* provide the basic rhythm; and the smaller single-headed *makè* is for solo playing. There exists seven traditional *gwoka* rhythms and dances, which are as follows: (1) *mendé* (a carnival or warrior dance that expresses collectivity); (2) *woulé* or *roulé* (a slow waltz-like dance with a scarf); (3) *graj* (a slow manioc work dance on a three-time tempo); (4) *toumblak* (a joyful love dance with a quickness); (5) *kaladja* (a sad love dance); (6) *pagenbel* (a joyful sugarcane work dance); and (7) *léwòz* (a complex incantatory dance with improvisation, wherein the *tambouyés* (drummers) play principally the *graj*, *léwòz* and *toumblak*). An eighth rhythm, *takouta*, was invented in 1976, with the three drums assigned separate roles: bass and rhythm play different ostinato patterns, while the solo drummer combines phrases from a dozen rhythms. *Takouta* as well as three other rhythms (more common in quadrille), *sobo*, *grap a konngo*, and *command léwòz*, are rarely played today.

A typical *gwoka* dance begins in *lawonn* (circular formation) in which each dancer pays respect to the drum by bowing with an extended right hand. The two deeper sounding *boula* supply the basic rhythm in unison and follow the dancer's steps. The higher sounding *makè* is played in a driving manner while accompanying the soloist and dancer by giving rein to improvisation. The soloist sings the verses and improvises while the *répondè* (choir) sings the choruses and claps their hands. The songs are sung in Guadeloupean *Kréyòl* (Creole), with the *swaréléwòz* (nightly *léwòz*) taking place typically in open-air spaces, where untrained musicians would play from ten at night until five in the morning. Anyone wanting to become a *ka* player had to observe and imitate the musicians they heard – a method of learning that changed considerably with the arrival of the phonograph record. The first 33 rpm vinyl recording was the 1963 'Vélo et son Gros-Ka' (Vélo and His Big Drum), which, featuring *ka* players Vélo and Arthème Boishant, and produced by Marcel Mavounzy (the younger brother of the clarinet player Robert Mavounzy), is pinpointed as the turning point in how *gwoka* was shared and learned.

The *ka*, having arrived from West and Central Africa on slave ships in the seventeenth century, were used not only for music-making: they were also a vehicle for communication, the instrument's different rhythms and tones able to transmit messages that could be heard over long distances. To counteract the effect and power of the *ka*, the colonial French government led a campaign to construct a negative image of traditional African culture among the enslaved Africans. In March 1685, Article 16 of the Edict of King Louis XIV of France, known as the Black Code, prohibited the gatherings of those slaves who danced to and played the *ka*. Sanctions were even imposed on the sugarcane plantation owners who failed to prevent the enslaved Africans from using the drum. Such restrictions, however, did little to stop the *ka* from being used as an instrument of communication, and its loud volume continued to carry far distances. The *nèg mawons* (the rebellious enslaved), for example, escaped to the hills with their drums, which they would use to announce clandestine meetings and organise slave revolts with enslaved communities across many plantations.

Inevitably, *gwoka* was banned by the French colonisers and denounced as obscene by the Catholic clergy. The colonial law and religious policy resulted in the music being exclusively played in the rural areas. Pejoratively labelled *mizik a vyé nèg* (vulgar Black music), *gwoka* became synonymous with the poorest and lowest social class in Guadeloupe's economic capital, Pointe-à-Pitre; while the inhabitants of the island's actual capital city, Basse-Terre, were less judgmental. Regardless, resentment

toward the *ka* and its artists escalated among the general Guadeloupean population and the French colonial administration. As a teenager, the *met ka* (master *ka*) player, Gérard Pomer, was harassed when he first played the *ka* at the village market with his friends. He remembered, 'In the 1950's, the gendarmes [parliamentary police] confiscated our instruments. They took the *kas*, put their feet on them and crushed them right in front of our eyes. Gradually, the combative spirit came. We mobilised; we wanted to advance the culture' (Badia 2015). A decade later, Marcel Mavounzy, the first local record producer of *gwoka*, dealt with the threat of being ex-communicated by a priest if he persisted in recording this so-called degenerate music (Mavounzy 2007, 26).¹ Guy Konkèt, known as *l'âme de gwoka* (soul of *gwoka*) and nicknamed the 'Bob Marley of Guadeloupe', would, too, experience this discrimination. In January 1971, he was arrested by the police for acts of subversion because he sang and played the *ka* during a strike by sugarcane workers in Baie-Mahault. Such abuses of power and acts of repression by the French government as well as the local clergy ignited widespread discontent, ultimately helping to mobilise Guadeloupeans around the common quest for independence and the organisation of labour unions, as well as nationalist and separatist parties.

The 1960s was a particularly troubling decade on Guadeloupe. An economic recession earlier in the decade saw the collapse of the sugarcane industry and the decline in living standards, with rigid import restrictions by France leading to products in Guadeloupe costing 50 per cent more than in France, the high cost of living compensated by giving French employees transferred to Guadeloupe a 40 per cent salary bonus. Moreover, on 27 September 1966 Hurricane Ines severely damaged the sugarcane and banana crops, killing some 40 residents, injuring over 600 and leaving over 15,000 homeless and 25,000 unemployed. From 20 to 24 March, 1967, riots erupted in Basse-Terre after a Guadeloupean shoemaker was attacked by a White shop owner's dog, while between 26 and 28 May the same year, in Pointe-à-Pitre, the French army killed 87 Guadeloupeans, and more than 100 were arrested, when construction workers went on a spontaneous strike to ask for a wage increase of 2 per cent. The difficulties of the 1960s are captured in *gwoka*, recounted in the lyrics of some of the greatest *gwoka* masters. Germain 'Chaben' Calixte, for example, debated the sufferings experienced by the Guadeloupeans after Hurricane Ines in his 'Zombi baré mwen' (Zombi Stopped Me), while Robert Loyson, in 'Ji a kan a la riches' (Sugarcane and Its Richness) reminded people 'to be mindful of the sugar cane harvest, the

¹ Mavounzy opened Disques Emeraude in April 1953.

same harvest that generates richness and employment' and Guy Konkèt, in 'La pli la' (The Rain), regrets the loss of work and possible pay that occurred because of both Hurricane Ines and the May massacre.

The 1970s were equally challenging. Neither the 1971 nor the 1975 general strikes addressing pay inequities had long-term impact. Sugar exports fell from 25 per cent of their export earnings in 1965 to almost zero in 1975. The sugar and rum distilleries closed down while France flooded the island with consumer goods and a metropolitan lifestyle. The independence movement, which gained momentum earlier in the decade, led to limited autonomy, with Guadeloupe declared a French region in 1974. Paradoxically, the steep price of the imported goods and the loss of jobs engineered by the French government and local White business owners resulted in Guadeloupeans relocating to France in search of employment. Included among them were musicians seeking to earn a living solely by their artistic creations, many of whom brought their *ka* as well as *gwoka* recordings. *Gwoka*, now taking root in France, transformed again in response to new global flows of people, ideas, and traditions. When in 2014 *gwoka* was recognised as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity site, this drum, song, and dance tradition, once celebrated for its perceived anticolonial position, was now formally recognised as a reflection of France's cultural heritage, giving rise to yet another complex and contradictory space of engagement. Critics against the UNESCO representation were concerned especially about *gwoka* becoming universal and losing its authenticity and Kréyòl soul.

In the upcoming sections, *gwoka* is detailed through the lives of specific musicians, each a popular *gwoka* master who has been responsible for bringing particular changes to the *gwoka* tradition. These sections serve as miniature snapshots into *gwoka*'s development, each providing particular insights into the island's social and cultural history.

The Vélo Phenomenon

Born Marcel Lollia in the countryside of Pointe-à-Pitre in 1931, Vélo is credited with elevating the status of *gwoka* to a national music. Vélo learned how to play the *ka* by ear, and during the 1950s, developed his drumming skill by participating in the annual carnival celebrations and *léwòz*. In the 1960s, Vélo joined Madame Adeline's folklore dance troupe, La Briscante, which performed for cruise ship passengers who would applaud the speed of Vélo's hands. In exchange, Madame Adeline provided

Vélo with boarding at her house, but he never received any payment from her.

Vélo's inability to receive payment for his work became a pattern. Having no skills, aside from playing the *ka* with dexterity and passion, he basically lived by his wits and music. As long as he had some rum, he could beat the *ka* nonstop for hours without eating a morsel of food. However, he did not respect the traditional *gwoka* rules of playing one rhythm at a time. Noticing this tendency, Carnot, Vélo's friend and fellow *tambouyé*, remarked to Marie-Céline Lafontaine (1986, 62) that 'Vélo never played a beautiful *léwòz*. He mixed it with the *kaladja* and *toumblak*; he mixed all the drum [rhythms]'. Hence, people saw Vélo as the precursor of different forms of modern *ka*.

In 1968, for the Raymond Célini Folklore series on the Ondes label, Vélo recorded his first single 'Lékol-la' (The School) and eventually the album *Anzala, Dolor, Vélo* with Auberge Yvon Anzala and Dolor Meliot. This was followed by 'Oh la lajan passé' (Oh, the Money Went) with Guy Konkèt for Henri Debs Production. Other recordings were 'Butterfly Island' with Fabiano Orchestre, the solo 'Atika' with Patrick Jean-Marie and 'La pli la' (The Rain) with Konkèt. In 1974, Michel Halley, Jean-Pierre 'Marso' Sabine, Addy Gatoux, Jocelyn 'Linlin' Hubbel, and Franz Camphrin invited Vélo to join their newly formed group Takouta (Michael Halley, personal communication, 2017).² When Takouta disbanded in 1977, Vélo experimented with the Mas St. Jean carnival rhythm. When this rhythm began to attract more people, Vélo and his fellow drummers developed their image by dressing in clothes made out of banana leaves. Out of curiosity, the public often approached them to ask the question, 'Mé a ki yo?' (But, who are you?). Not having a name, in 1978, they called themselves Akiyo, with Vélo and Michel Halley as two of their founding members. Both a percussion band and a social cultural association, Akiyo has grown to be one of the largest carnival bands. Yet, Vélo quit the group soon after, with Halley following in 1994.

Falling upon hard times, Vélo spent nearly eighteen months in prison. Upon his release he roamed the streets of Pointe-à-Pitre, where he could be heard playing the *ka*. Whereas the *gwoka* aficionados were intrigued with the way he played, most of the population looked upon the drunken musician with contempt. Overwhelmed by sadness and destitution, the homeless Vélo fell into a downward spiral of alcoholism and mental illness while insisting that he could live totally from his music. As he resisted

² The then five adolescents spent a year on La Désirade where they founded the takouta rhythm.

efforts to help him, drumming remained his one link with reality. Yet, the combination of a poor diet and failing health eventually took its toll. In 1984, Vélo fell sick and was confined to his bed in Grand Camp. Halley visited him and took him to the hospital. There, Vélo was diagnosed with having advanced cirrhosis of the liver. On Vélo's behalf, Halley (2004, 39) went on the RFO and RCI radio stations to plead for monetary help from the public. Alas, the appeal was too late; Vélo passed away on 5 June 1984.

Before Vélo's death, Guadeloupean musicians had already begun to feel threatened by the invasion of foreign music and the presence of foreign musicians on their soil. Music became, as Jocelyne Guilbault writes, 'an arena for political confrontation' (Guilbault et al. 1993, 32). The traditional *gwoka* was reclaimed as a symbol of national identity and both young and seasoned musicians turned to the old *gwoka* masters such as François 'Carnot' Moléon, Napoléon 'Napo' Magloire, Gérard Pomer, Kristèn Aigle, Henri Délos, and the deceased Vélo's recordings to learn the seven rhythms. Even though Vélo was not actively involved in politics, the Union Générale des Travailleurs de Guadeloupe (UGTG – General Union of the Workers of Guadeloupe) claimed him as a symbol of resistance. He was seen as a revolutionary who gave up neither his own music nor his country.³

Not only did Vélo's funeral highlight the explosion of *gwoka* into the Guadeloupean national imaginary, it eliminated some of the negativity directed toward *ka tambouyés* by the local government and the Catholic Church. When Michel Halley and others approached the mayor of Pointe-à-Pitre, about holding the late musician's viewing and funeral at the largest church in the city, their request was initially denied. However, a spontaneous mass march through the city's streets forced the mayor to relent. Then Père Serge Plocoste and Père Chérubin Céleste, who began to serve mass in *Kréyòl* in 1972 and introduced *gwoka* into the Catholic service, officiated at Vélo's funeral and burial. Over 6,000 people viewed the body and attended the musician's regal funeral where the *ka* and transvestite dancing were performed in front of the casket.

Guy Konkèt, *Pilier* between *Gwoka* and Jazz

Like Vélo, Guy Conquête (or Conquette; in Creole, Konkèt) studied neither music nor voice in a formal setting. Instead, his musical education took

³ A statue of Vélo was erected on 5 June 2014 in downtown Pointe-à-Pitre.

place at the weekly *léwoz* that he attended with his mother Athénaïse Lodovique Bach Dino (a.k.a. Solange and Man Soso). Born in 1946 in Jabrun in Baie-Mahault, Konkèt followed his mother to find *le vrai ka* (the real *ka*) by learning the seven rhythms with the masters François Moléon Jernidier (aka Carnot), Robert Loyson and Vélo. His studies with the three masters led him to sing at various *veillées mortuaries* (funeral wakes) and to sing and play the *ka* with orchestras and for festivals in Guadeloupe and Martinique.

While perfecting his voice and showmanship, the young Konkèt considered *gwoka* to be a means to defend his political ideas. Like other *gwoka* singers, Konkèt used daily events as subjects for his songs. After Lycée Baimbridge in Les Abymes opened in 1968, Konkèt released 'Baimbridge cho' (Hot Baimbridge) with the *toumblak* rhythm. The lyrics criticised female students who refused to hitchhike to school in anything other than fancy cars driven by older men. Before the 1971 strike Konkèt had released 'La Gwadeloupe malade' (Guadeloupe Is Sick), questioning the export prices for sugarcane. The *kaladja* song was an indictment of local politicians and those in Paris and Brussels who met and made promises to improve the economy, but they never proposed any solutions to help their respective citizens. In retaliation, the French government banned 'La Gwadeloupe malade' on the official radio stations for almost ten years. Regardless, the popular song became one of the hymns for the workers and was played clandestinely in the privacy of people's homes.

During the 1970s, few concert venues in urban Guadeloupe featured live performances by *gwoka* musicians and singers. Because of the limited opportunities, in 1973 Konkèt relocated to Paris, hoping to become the first *gwoka* musician to live off his music. Upon his arrival he modernised the musical style and its accessibility to the younger generation by singing in venues around Paris and for numerous French Caribbean associations. Konkèt's concert at the Salle Wagram in 1975 brought him to the attention of the mainstream French press and the world beyond French Caribbean audiences. On 19 March 1977, the ninth congress of the Association des Étudiants Guadeloupéens (AGEG – General Association of Guadeloupean Students)⁴ declared *gwoka* as Guadeloupe's national music (Lockel 1981, 236).

⁴ Founded in Paris in 1958, the AGEG provided an audience through its promotion of *gwoka* among Guadeloupean students with the expectation that some of them would learn how to play the *ka*.

A detailed-oriented showman, Konkèt was attentive to the production of sounds, the fabrication of the *ka* and the technical aspects of improvisation. He liked performing in *Kréyòl* in a very forceful, bluesy voice, adhering to the conventional format of call-and-response between himself and the chorus to the accompaniment of the *makè*, *boula*, and *chacha* (maracas). However, this style did not prevent him from being open to experimentation.⁵ For instance, Konkèt sometimes created different sections within a single song and altered his response to the chorus. As early as the 1960s, he requested his musicians add in the repertoire Western melodic instruments like the flute, bass guitar, and piano.

Toward the end of his career, Konkèt became an avant-garde artist who embraced jazz. That is why he accepted the *ka tambouyé* Klod Kiavué's invitation on behalf of the jazz saxophonist David Murray to work on *Yonn-dé* in 2002. Murray, an African American often searching for multicultural projects, had previously spent two days (19 to 20 October 1997) in Guadeloupe to record *Creole* (1998) with the Gwoka Masters: Klod Kiavué and François Ladrezeau. With a short endorsement by Gérard Lockel in the liner notes, *Creole* showcased *gwoka* chants and rhythms, North American jazz harmonies, Martinican *bèlè* and Cape Verdean *morna*. However, the tracks by Murray and the Gwo Ka Masters were not solely representative of a fusion of jazz and *gwoka*.

Noting this oversight, and wanting to correct it, Kiavué invited Konkèt, who thought the project would represent the blues of the sugarcane fields in dialogue with the blues of the cotton fields. *Yonn-dé* featured eight original tunes and the 1985 single 'Yonn-dé' (One, Two) by Konkèt who, afterwards, toured with the Gwo Ka Masters for two years. In Konkèt's songs, the *ka* was the focal point, producing the melody the entire time. Murray commented on the *ka*'s adaptability: 'The instrument has tremendous range, an unusual timbre, and more melodic capacity than typical percussion. I can relate to the drum with my saxophone and clarinet and it feels very comfortable' (MacArthur 2003). Konkèt delivered his protest lyrics in a trance-like tone while the percussionist Ladrezeau's baritone added another dimension. The end result, as described by Paul J. MacArthur (2003), was an album filled with 'seriously hypnotic grooves, catchy, danceable melodies, instrumental solos from the bebop tradition, jazzed-up folk melodies and tunes that recall the blues'.

⁵ The call-and-response was no longer systematic with the singer, dancer, and *makè tambouyé* at the core of the performance (Dahomay 2012, 7).

G rard Lockel and *Gwoka Mod n*

In the late 1960s, having spent several years in France, the jazz guitarist G rard Lockel returned to Guadeloupe. In 1969, he opened a small club out of his house in Baie-Mahault. In 1977, the pro-independence activist Lockel released *Gwo ka mod n*, the first recording of his musical group of the same name in a box set of three vinyl records with a six-page manifesto. In the manifesto, Lockel proclaimed *gwoka* to be an atonal-modal musical model based on a succession of whole steps and minor thirds (Camal 2014, 350). Contrary to the traditional rules, Lockel declared the genre to be Afro-Asiatic rather than African. Calling his method *gwoka mod n* (modern *gwoka*), Lockel introduced a new scale and a new notational system for both melodic instruments and the drum (350). The stage in an urban setting, became the privileged space, not the circle, and the *ka* was supported by modern instruments, such as the electric guitar, piano, trumpet, saxophone, and drum-set. In his more than 500-page densely written *Traite de gro ka mod n: Initiation   la musique guadeloup enne (Gro Ka Modern Treaty: Initiation in Guadeloupean Music)*, Lockel explained *gwoka mod n* as an instrumental music with illustrations and numerous exercises for the *gammes gwoka* (*gwoka scales*).

For Lockel, *gwoka mod n* was a form of resistance against French colonialism and assimilation. As noted by J r me Camal, Lockel strove ‘to restore *gwoka*’s status within Guadeloupean culture and to enable the music by expanding its instrumentation and codifying the practice’ (2014, 351). Yet, Lockel was never able to attract a broad popular following. In fact, as he admitted in *Gwo-ka mod n, histoire* (Lockel 2011, 85), ‘For 39 years, until today, I have not received a subsidy from either a cultural or political organisation. My records have never passed through the official media, except by accident’. Despite the disappointment, he inspired and trained young musicians in his method, with particular attention on phrasing and rhythms for melodic instruments. Lockel, who preferred to perform an avant-garde jazz *ka* fusion on his own recordings, expected musicians to express their national identity. Not without controversy, explosive debates occurred between the *gwoka* traditionalists and *gwoka mod n* disciples. The debates manifested through Lockel’s own contradiction. He had constructed a career as a jazz guitarist in France, but he refused to acknowledge his debt to the North American musical genre.

Wanting to expose his method to as many people as possible, between 1969 and 1989 Lockel and his band gave free concerts. Until 2000, he also

offered *gwoka modèn* concerts in all the communes each Sunday after Mass. In *Traite de gro ka modèn* (Lockel 1981, 11–12), Lockel specified how the piano and the double bass simulated *ka* sounds. The pianist could play two melodies simultaneously, using the right hand for the phrasing of the cymbal and *toumblak* and the left hand for the phrasing of the *boula*. Lockel explained how the rhythmic sound of the double bass almost approximated that of the *makè*. Despite his efforts, and to his disappointment, the official television network refused to record his 1990 *gwoka modèn* concert at the Centre des Arts et de la Culture (a large concert hall in Pointe-à-Pitre).

Post-Lockel

With their own musical twists, Édouard Ignol and Georges Troupé adapted Lockel's *gwoka modèn* method. The trumpet player Ignol, professionally known as Kafé, had been one of the leading *biguine* players until he quit playing the *biguine* to focus on the *ka*. After a lot of experimentation, Kafé created the *batterie-ka* (*ka* drum set) by cutting the large drum in half to make two small ones to which he welded the Charleston pedal and attached the cymbals. In 1982, Kafe and his band Ka Lévé released the self-titled *Ka Lévé* with a mixture of Afro beats, *ka* rhythms, and Caribbean free jazz. The track 'Apré nou byen cheché' (After We Searched Well) is a hybrid of spiritual jazz and *ka* rhythms with a funky bassline. On *Gwoka Métamowfozys Mod* (*The Gwoka Mode of Metamorphosis*), released ten years later in 1992, Kafé used a different *ka* rhythm for each song with the bass and polymeric sounds. He also included oral chanting on the album to plead how 'Guadeloupean life is anchored to the *gwoka* as its primal source' (Berrian 2000, 229). For most of his tunes, Kafé relied on tonal chord progressions, and he enjoyed his friendship and collaboration with the African American jazz pianist Randy Weston.

In 1978, the band Gwakasonné was founded by the saxophonist Georges Troupé and the multi-instrumentalists Robert Oumaou and Edmony Krater, along with the temporary participation of Gérard Lockel. Gwakasonné mixed contemporary jazz with traditional *ka* rhythms and *gwoka modèn* with the synthesizer, saxophone, flute, and electronic keyboard. With the release of their first album *Gwakasonné* in 1984, the band's popularity rose with the songs: 'Algérie 62' and 'Tanbou' (Fleming 2007). Sung by Martine Sylvestre, 'Algérie 62' revealed how the absence of

a Guadeloupean soldier who fought in the Algerian War impacted his family. Contrasting sections with Sylvestre's repetitive vocals were interspersed with instrumental changes and some improvisation. The poly-rhythmic 'Tanbou' (Drum), interpreted by Gérard Élice on *Présumés coupables* (2000), recalled the passing of a bylaw in Pointe-à-Pitre on 27 June 1995, the terms of which banned public drumming following an assault on a passer-by. When a public uproar occurred, the bylaw was withdrawn with the conclusion that delinquency, not the *ka*, was responsible for the passer-by's assault.

In 1984, the saxophonist Georges Troupé, who had also performed for Ka Lévé, created the Atelier de musique Marcel Lollia dit Vélo school in Sainte-Anne: the first to teach children the history, culture, and rhythms of *gwoka*. While thinking about how to preserve the *ka* in written form, he founded Kimbòl, the first youth-only *gwoka* choir. For them, he patiently transcribed traditional *ka* and *gwoka modèn* notes for the instruments and rhythms. Some doubtful musicians resisted the new concept with the statement, 'Gwoka is a feeling which is transmitted from the mouth to the ear. Gwoka is the rhythm. It is not written' (Thétis 2004). Despite their complaints, in 1988, Troupé published the first edition of *La Méthode verte: Méthode d'apprentissage des sept rythmes du gro-ka: graphie et musique* (*The Green Method: Apprenticeship Method of the Gro-ka's Seven Rhythms: Graph and Music*). With Troupé's clear-cut method and examples, everybody could read and have access to the rhythms. 'Gwoka modèn', according to Troupé, 'isn't only the utilisation of new instruments but a development of phrasing while using what already exists to push it even further' (Thétis 2004). Before his death in 2009, Troupé updated the information in *La Méthode verte* three times and released Kimbòl's third CD *Konfians pou dèmen* (2004) on which his son Sonny brought another dimension to the *ka* with four original compositions, along with an intro and an outro.

Franck Nicolas and Jazz Ka

When he was ten years old, Franck Nicolas was bestowed a gift by his amateur percussionist-father Joseph Cafafa: a trumpet. One Sunday afternoon, the eleven-year-old Nicolas met the trumpeter Édouard 'Kafé' Ignol, who was to become his mentor. When Nicolas left Guadeloupe to study music at the Université de Paul Valéry in Montpellier, he focused on both the *ka* and the trumpet. While there, aged eighteen, he formed the

jazz-rock band Maggnetick with Gérard Poumaroux on bass, Sega Seck on drums, Fred Breton on keyboard and Thomas Fontvieille on guitar, while concurrently playing in the local clubs of Montpellier. Then, in 1997, Nicolas with Maggnetick recorded their only album *Spirit with Miles*. When Nicolas met Kafe again during a trip to Guadeloupe in 1998, Kafé encouraged Nicolas to seriously study Lockel's *gwoka modèn*. This reunion and his studying of *gwoka modèn* resulted in the creation of the Jazz Ka Philosophy albums wherein Nichola 'adjusted *ka* rhythms to the complexity of jazz harmony which demanded considerable intellectual work' (Lechenardière 2012).

In 2002, at Studio System Two in New York, Nicolas gathered together one American, one Martinican and four Guadeloupean musicians to create *jazz-ka* (a mixture of jazz harmonies and the sounds of traditional *ka*). This gathering resulted in *Jazz Ka Philosophy 1: 1848*, featuring Alain Jean-Marie on piano; Magic Malik on flute; Jacques Schwarz-Bart on saxophone; Sonny Troupé on the *makè*; Joby Julienne on the *boula*; Louis Allèbe Montjoly de Montaigne on percussions; Lonnie Plaxico on bass guitar; and Nicolas on trumpet. Six of the eight tunes confirmed the *gwoka* tradition of focusing on social politics. They pay homage to historical figures of the nineteenth century who fought for the abolition of slavery in Martinique and Guadeloupe: Louis Delgrès, Joseph Ignace, Capitaine Massoteau, Mulâtresse Solitude, Victor Schoelcher, and the *nèg mawon*. The seventh one is dedicated to Toussaint Louverture, the leader of the Haitian Revolution. The date of 1848 refers to the year during which the Second Republic of France decreed the final abolition of slavery in its overseas territories with the exception of Algeria.

Nicolas has since released nine more albums. For the 2011 *Jazz Ka Philosophy 3: Kokiyaj*, he continued his search for musical roots by turning toward the trumpet's ancestor: *la konk a lambi* (conch shell).⁶ Nicolas converted *Strombus gigas* (large shells) and smaller ones to play jazz and *gwoka* with a touch of John Coltrane and Miles Davis. By integrating the conch shell into his repertoire, Nicolas has plunged deeper into French Caribbean history to explore new artistic horizons. In 2012, he called upon Michel Alibo and Sonny Troupé for the *Trio Zalizé* album, based on the trumpet, bass and percussions. In 2013, Nicolas asked the pianist Grégory Privat and *ka tambouyé* Arnaud Dolmen to participate on *Psychedelick Trio*. Next, in 2015, Nicolas returned to the format of a trio to record *Jazz*

⁶ In the past and present day, the conch shell is played during carnival, for funerals, and as a morning call to the fishermen.

Ka Philosophy 9: Trio Soleil. This time the trio focused on the relationship between the trumpet, guitar, and *ka* (Nicolas on trumpet, Troupé on trap drums and the *makè* and the Brazilian Nelson Veras on guitar). Twelve tracks and a pedagogical section ‘La Méthode gammes guadeloupéennes’ (Method for Guadeloupean Scales), which discusses the traditional *gwoka*, *gwoka modèn*, and *jazz-ka*, comprise the album. Because Guadeloupean society is somewhat oral even today, Nicolas wrote down *les partitions* (scores), so the younger generation could learn them, and musicians would rediscover them for reinterpretation.

Jacques Schwarz-Bart and the Gwoka Jazz Project

Son of two well-known writers, the Guadeloupean Simone Schwarz-Bart and the French Jewish André Schwarz-Bart, Jacques discovered *gwoka* at age four when Auberge Yvon Anzala (one of the great *ka tambouyès*) taught him the seven rhythms. At age six, while living in Switzerland, he discovered jazz via the record collection of his best friend’s father; then, aged fifteen, he started playing the guitar. Fascinated by these diverse musical influences, Schwarz-Bart began writing original compositions with *ka* rhythms; then, aged twenty, at a friend’s house, the curious Schwarz-Bart picked up a tenor saxophone and practiced this instrument for the next three years.

In 1990, a twenty-seven-year-old Schwarz-Bart quit his career as a French government official in Paris to study music at Berklee College of Music in Boston, Massachusetts. After graduating in 1994, he played gigs with many jazz musicians in the Boston area before relocating to New York where he was invited to join Roy Hargrove’s Latin jazz band Crisol. In early 2000, the neo soul/R&B singer D’Angelo asked Schwarz-Bart to lead the horn section for his second album *Voodoo*. While working with D’Angelo, Schwarz-Bart began The Brother Jacques Project, composing songs based on a mixture of soul, jazz, and *ka* rhythms. Later, in 2003, Hargrove put together RH Factor for whom Schwarz-Bart wrote the music and English lyrics of ‘Forget Regret’⁷ for the *Hard Groove* album. When Schwarz-Bart left RH Factor, he invited Guadeloupean percussionists Olivier Juste and Sonny Troupé and the Serbian pianist Milan Milanovi to form the Gwoka Jazz Project. The men’s collaboration resulted in the recording of two

⁷ ‘Forget Regret’, which is about the fragility of love, became a successful single that was included on the soundtrack of the film *It Runs in the Family*.

albums for Universal France: *Soné ka-la* (*Time for Drums to Resonate*) and *Abyss*.

Recorded in both New York and Pointe-à-Pitre, *Soné ka-la* (2006) is the culmination of Schwarz-Bart's fifteen-year-long dream to merge the *ka* with jazz, soul, and hip-hop (Hunter 2007). The original thirteen songs are short, each averaging about five minutes and showcasing the seven fundamental *ka* rhythms and *takouta* with rich harmonies, jazzy, abstract syncopation and touches of funk and soul. According to Schwarz-Bart, "The songs "Papalé" [Don't Speak] and "Pé la" [Shut The Hell Up] are related to the fact that slaves were not to rise up and speak out. They had to be quiet and not look the master in the eye' (Schwarz-Bart, personal communication, 2015) Since becoming an overseas department of France on 19 March 1946, Guadeloupe (along with Martinique, French Guyana, and Reunion) has undergone *départementalization*. This means that Guadeloupe is part of France and a member of the European Union. Fully aware of this, Schwarz-Bart knows that Guadeloupe has shifted from a production-based plantation model to a consumption-driven import, tourist, and leisure-service-dominated economy.⁸ Bearing all of this in mind, Schwarz-Bart deliberately chose the instrumental 'Papalé', as the opening number. The lively tune is built around the uptempo *mendé* rhythm, featuring Schwarz-Bart on the tenor sax with a wah-wah pedal and the mouth drum. For 'Pé la', Schwarz-Bart uses the ending of 'Papalé' as the chorus versus the main theme, which resides in the sociopolitical lyrics uttered by the dancehall singer Admiral T.

Abyss (2008), Schwarz-Bart's second opus⁹ fusing jazz and the *ka*, is inspired more by the *takouta* rhythm. For him, *takouta* works better with the mystical emotions expressed in the compositions. Schwarz-Bart explains to *Coconews Guadeloupe* (Anon 2008) that he wanted to go ahead in his rhythmical counterpoint research among the *ka*, the bass lines, and the accompanied patterns of the guitar and piano. He even adds elements of Moroccan Gnaoua music on the soulful 'Big Blue' and the *woulé* rhythm on 'An ba mango la' (Underneath the Mango Tree) to preserve the feeling of a prayer. The latter, a tribute to his father who died in 2006, reveals how Schwarz-Bart carefully gave thought to its arrangement.

⁸ The country had an unemployment rate of 22.7 per cent compared with France's 8.1 per cent and the highest poverty rate in the European Union (Bonilla 2010, 131).

⁹ On this innovative album one hears guest performances by the Beninois guitarist Lionel Loueke; the African American bassist Mark Kelley; the Guadeloupean carnival *gwoka* vocalist Jean-Pierre Coquerel; the African American soul singer Stephanie McKay; the Guadeloupean *zouk* singer-guitarist Jacob Desvarieux; the Guadeloupean dancehall artist Admiral T; and the novelist Simone Schwarz-Bart (his mother).

He fondly recalls how much his father liked to sit under the mango tree while his mother had an insatiable need to eat the fruit. ‘An ba mango la’ opens with the mournful sound of the Gnaoua plucked on a guitar by the Senegalese Hervé Samb to imitate the thwacking bass sound of the *sinter* (a three-stringed bass lute). With the melancholic *woulé* rhythm for accompaniment, Simone Schwarz-Bart and Stephanie McKay repeatedly cry out, ‘Papa, I saw you seated under the mango tree’. Guy Konkèt chants verses associated with wakes for the dead in a phantom-like, gravel voice over the women’s voices while Schwarz-Bart responds with the sax.

Following the release of the two CDs, Schwarz-Bart has steadily built his career as an internationally acclaimed jazz band leader, composer, producer, and saxophonist. His interest in all kind of music and spiritualism has continued, as heard on other albums like *Rise Above* (2010), *The Art of Dreaming* (2012) and *Jazz Racine Haiti* (2014). An admirer of Lockel’s work about the opening-up of *gwoka* to other music, Schwarz-Bart maintains that his compositions differ from Lockel’s. Contrariwise, harmony plays a crucial role alongside jazz and classical techniques that are central to Schwarz-Bart’s compositions (Salin 2007). He therefore reshapes fundamental *ka* rhythms to give them a more sombre or different expression by addressing the spiritual without limits.

Sonny Troupé: *Makè Tambouyé*

Sonny Troupé of Sainte-Anne grew up under the influence of his father Georges Troupé, who shared his passion for traditional *ka* rhythms, *gwoka modèn*, *biguine*, Latin, and classical music. Hence, the *ka* became Troupé’s first instrument, when, aged four, he was given one by Robert Oumaou of Gwakasonné. While studying with his father at the École de musique de Volette Sainte-Anne, Troupé joined Kimbòl aged six as the *makè* soloist and studied the drum and vibraphone. At the same time, he listened to Max Roach and Art Blakely, classical music and *biguine*. To understand better the complexities and *ka* rhythms, Troupé was taken two or three times by his father to see Vélo perform. During these sessions, Troupé paid close attention to the sounds, intervals, and the ways in which Vélo played. Considering Vélo to be a genius, Troupé later studied Vélo’s *ka* techniques with excerpts of the musician’s songs in master classes. Troupé noted that ‘his way of playing the drum was extremely modern and melodious, which is rare for a percussionist. Even today one soaks up his phrases to learn this music’ (LeGros 2013).

In 1996, Troupé left for France to study psychology at the Université de Toulouse, music at the Conservatoire National de Toulouse and the drum at l'École de Batterie Agostini. When he completed his studies in 2002, his move from Toulouse to Paris coincided with many invitations to perform with French Caribbean and foreign musicians. The numerous concerts extended his interest in electric metal, funk, soul, rhythm and blues, and West African rhythms. He has since released three albums: *Voyages et rêves* (2013); *Luminescence* (2015); and *Reflets denses* (2017). *Voyages et rêves*. (*Travels and Dreams*) showcases a mixture of various music and sampling from Bob Marley, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Lance Armstrong. The acoustic call-and-response on percussion between Arnaud Dolmen and Troupé on 'Yè, pou Jòdi' (Yesterday, for Today) is masterful. Recorded on 22–23 July 2014 at Studio Meudon, the *Luminescence* album is an acoustic duet between the Martinican pianist Grégory Privat and Troupé on the *makè*. The first of its kind, the album introduces ten original compositions by two musicians who do not hesitate to experiment without a barrier to style, as can be noted in songs like 'On ka avé piano' (A Drum and a Piano), 'Pasaj' (Passage), 'Luminescence', and 'Improvising in Meudon'.

What is unique about Troupé is that he is at ease playing on the *batterie* (drum-set) and the *makè*. Depending upon the song and its composer, Troupé will play the drum-set on one number and the *makè* on another: all on the same album. Predisposed toward the musical elements of the *ka* from the start, Troupé describes his concept for *Reflets denses* (*Dense Reflections*): 'My idea was to take as the base the maximum *ka* melodies that one finds in both traditional and *gwoka modèn* to propose my own arrangements' (Caradee 2017). Since resemblance and duality are inherent in Troupé's personality, the fact his album took three years to finish illustrates a reflection so dense that it becomes 'a double reality' (Videmann 2017). Troupé revises Konkèt's 'Twa jou sa manjé' (Three Days without Eating) with Christian Lavisso on guitar and inserts a sample from Kimbòl's 1996 'Lyen étèwnèl' (Eternal Bond) on the ballad 'Une fin' (An Ending). "While listening between the lines", Troupé explains, 'primary materials become the object of a reinterpretation, creating diffractions of the same' (Sonny Toupé, personal communication, 2017). On the song 'Reflets denses', he switches from one rhythm to another on the *ka* and then repeats each of them in another vein on the trap drum.

In 2014, Hervé Samb called upon Troupé to join Lisa Simone, the daughter/singer of the late African American jazz singer Nina Simone.

Troupé agreed and participated on Simone's *All Is Well* (2014) and *My World* (2016) with the bassist Reggie Washington. He has since signed a contract to tour with Simone in and out of the United States. So, the spring and summer of 2017 found Troupé juggling the promotion of *Reflets denses*, through concerts with the Sonny Troupé Quartet Add 2, with performances with Lisa Simone. A prolific performer, Troupé maintains that music is his passion. After all, his name is listed on most of the Guadeloupean jazz albums as either a sideman or a principal musician.

***Ka*, Jazz, and Its Visibility**

The continued importance of *ka* as a symbol of Guadeloupean history and lived experience is evident. *Gwoka* is the intangible remnant of a host of historical, cultural, and political forces, making it a powerful model for unravelling dynamics of imperialism and inequality and their impact on Guadeloupeans themselves. Its repetitive call-and-response song structure has been transmitted from one generation to another; its sociopolitical songs, in particular, are viewed as a form of liberation from oppression and an integral part of Guadeloupean identity and popular memory. Moreover, *gwoka* is an extension of and a reconnection to the African past and heritage. Its analysis allows not only for a clearer understanding of Guadeloupe, but also how musical artefacts – like *gwoka* – can be used in research to highlight lived experiences of a community. Its study confirms the available historical knowledge that exists about the island, yet, it also invokes new arguments, conjuring new information otherwise hidden from view. When used in combination with existing written sources about Guadeloupe, the study of the *gwoka* tradition promises a wider and more complete examination of the Caribbean nation.

More recently, over the past decade, resistance to *gwoka* has been on a major decline in Guadeloupe, which has been responsible in part for the emergence of these contemporary experimentations and *gwoka* fusions. Since the 1990s, towns have appealed to *gwoka* groups to organise a *léwòz* or concerts during the patron festivals, and numerous schools and community centres are being named after *gwoka* musicians. The younger generation of *ka* players can be found on Saturday mornings performing on *la rue piétonne* (pedestrian street), not far from Vélo's statue. Two cultural centres Centre Culturel de Sonis in Les Abymes and l'Artchipel scène nationale de la Guadeloupe in Basse-Terre, host concerts by local and international artists, symposiums and classes to promote local and international jazz as well as

other Caribbean music. La Créole Jazz Club, Lakasa, New Ti Paris, L'Appart 971, and Kouleur Kréol are some of the small venues that host *gwoka* jazz artists. Then there are the musical festivals:¹⁰ the bi-annual December International Îlo Jazz held in Pointe-à-Pitre, Les Abymes, and Baie-Mahault; Terre de Blues Festival of Marie-Galante every May; Gwadeloup Festival in November; and the annual July Festival de Gwoka in Sainte-Anne.

In July 1988, the lawyer Félix Cotellon founded the free Festival de Gwoka with the Comité d'Animation Sportive et Culturelle (CASC – Committee of Sport and Cultural Animation), where different generations of music enthusiasts, musicians, and dancers come together. In July 2005, Cotellon created and became the president of the non-governmental organisation Rêpriz, centre régional des musiques et danses traditionnelles et populaires de la Guadeloupe (Regional Centre for Traditional Guadeloupean Popular Music and Dance) to promote the *gwoka* tradition with schools, festival organisers, musicians, and media outlets throughout the Caribbean region, Europe, Asia, and the Americas. For two years, Cotellon worked tirelessly with local politicians to have *gwoka* on the UNESCO World Heritage list. On 26 November 2014, he accomplished his mission, albeit after quarrels with the *ka* traditionalists and modernists. François Ladrezeau and Michel Halley, two traditional *ka tambouyés* and others were in opposition to Cotellon's campaign, seeing it as another example of how the French government establishes control of Guadeloupean culture. Vélo once stated, 'During slavery we submitted a lot, but with *gwoka*, we will finish submitting one day'. With *gwoka* a sonic record, the post-Lockel musicians' fusion of *gwoka* and jazz with melodic instruments, pan-Caribbean rhythms and African diasporic tones looks to be a step in that direction.

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¹⁰ In 2005, in Paris, Liliane Liseron and Guy Espaminandas of Reali Association founded the Festival Gwoka. Its name was changed to Festival Gwoka Jazz in 2009.

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