

[Article] Struggling to be Creole: A Case Study of Musical Contextualization in the French Caribbean Evangelical Churches



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“Neither Europeans, nor Africans, nor Asians, we proclaim ourselves Creoles” (Bernabe 1993, 75). This famous claim of the Creolists¹ is a useful way to begin any critical discourse in the field of creole identities. African slaves, European colonizers, and Indian and Chinese free workers have all shaped a plural and multiracial society in which descendants of slaves and their owners, the colonized peoples and the colonizers, share the same geographical space: the Caribbean archipelago.



Fig. 1. Guadeloupe island in the Caribbean

Guadeloupe is an island² in the Caribbean Sea and, like the surrounding islands, has experienced slavery and colonialism. Consequently, the population is diverse. As Caribbean scholar Trouillot remarks,

¹ In 1989, three Martinican novelists, Jean Bernabé, Raphaël Confiant, and Patrick Chamoiseau, wrote a manifesto entitled *In the Praise of Creoleness*. As they scrutinized the meaning of their cultural identity and looked for the place of their culture in the world, they forged the concept of *créolité*. Since that time, this group of writers has been identified as the Creolists.

² Guadeloupe is an archipelago of five main islands: the two largest (Grande-Terre and Basse-Terre) are connected by a bridge, while Marie-Galante, Désirade, Les Saintes (formed by two islands), and Saint-Martin are accessible by ferry or plane. In this paper, “Guadeloupe” refers to Grande-Terre and Basse-Terre.



Caribbean societies are inescapably heterogeneous . . . the Caribbean has long been an area where some people live next to others who are remarkably distinct. The region—and indeed particular territories within it—has long been multi-racial, multi-lingual, stratified, and some would say, multi-cultural. (Trouillot 1992, 21)

Most Guadeloupeans are primarily of African heritage and mixed with European colonizers. East Indians, Lebanese, and Syrians who arrived during the post-emancipation period of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries represent a significant proportion of the population.³ More recently, immigrants from neighboring Dominica, St Lucia, and Haiti add to this multiethnic society.

Politically, the island became integrated into the Republic of France in 1946, and since 1957 it has been considered a European territory. Departmental status has brought an end to underdevelopment but has also resulted in strong economic dependency on mainland France; freedom of action has been limited.⁴ Above all, the French State has modeled this insular society without initially providing room for either cultural idiosyncrasies or ethnic diversity.

This points to the dilemma of being oneself in a culture that's both hybrid and under domination. The questions raised include, How do Guadeloupeans reconcile the self (Creole) with the other (French)? To what extent can Guadeloupeans free themselves of the presence of the other in order to move from being-for-others to a consciousness-in-oneseelf-for-oneseelf? According to the psychiatrist and theorist Frantz Fanon, one needs to struggle before being freed, for it is only through “encountering opposition from the other, [that] self-consciousness experiences desire, the first stage that leads to the dignity of the mind” (Daily 2015, 33). However, Édouard Glissant, an Antillean novelist and heir of Fanon's work, took a rather more pessimist position. He argued that the emergence of such desire is highly unlikely and explained that “the very social, cultural, psychic, and linguistic reality they lived was and remained colonized” (44).

From these sociopolitical remarks, I will discuss the cultural complexity of creole society and then put forward ideas of the creoleness movement as a response to the conflicting anthropological situation of Guadeloupean. These preliminaries considerations will help us understand some of the reasons for what I call the “creole dilemma,” or the struggle to be creole. From there, and in the principal part of this paper, I will turn to a case study of worship music in evangelical churches and the challenges they face in developing a more indigenous (or contextualized hymnody). The paper concludes with an anthropo-theological reflection in terms of social transformation and reconciliation, as well as of dynamic creativity and prophetic worship.

Mapping Creole Society

³ Since the French government does not keep record of this population's ethnicity, we cannot provide an exact number of the ethnic composition of Guadeloupe.

⁴ For an extensive analysis of the politico-socio-economic situation in Guadeloupe since 1946, see Jong de Lammert, Dirk Kruijt (ed.), *Extended Statehood in the Caribbean: Paradoxes of Colonialism, Local Autonomy and Extended Statehood in the USA, French, Dutch and British Caribbean* (Amsterdam: Rozenberg Publishers, 2005).

The historical events and the political context paved the way for the emergence of a plural, complex society of men and women with multiple identities. This new “chaotic” humanity is marked by both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, the encounter of Europeans and Africans with the Indigenous Native and later immigrants from China, East India, and the Middle East has produced an extraordinary cultural diversity held together by a vitality of creativity and innovation. On the negative side, the colonial powers and the adoption of French language and French values, along with the non-integration and rejection of traditional values (orality, especially), led to an alienated society.

Creativity and Creolization. Creativity is found in the organic, dialectical development of the culture. Moved from their cultural home, Africans have been forced to reinvent “life” (languages, races, religions, customs, ways of being). The trauma of chaos and the struggle for survival became a source of positive creativity. This aspect can be observed, for example, in the fields of language and of music. Slaves coming from various parts of Africa speaking different mother tongues created a pan-African culture while adopting (and adapting to their own thought-patterns) the languages of their masters to communicate. Although slavery restricted the possibility of the slaves practicing their musical traditions with the original instruments, some of these traditions survived and over time blended with European musical styles. Today, the wide variety of musical practices⁵ and traditional instruments, like banjo, violin, accordion, African drums, and European tambourines, which can be heard in Guadeloupe are witnesses of a dynamic re-creation process shaped by a dialogue of power and resistance in which assimilations, syncretisms, recomposition, transformations are continually renegotiated.⁶ What appeared to be the loss of tradition or of purity was its renewal. This process is known as “musical creolization.”⁷

Alienation and schizophrenia. Social life in Guadeloupe is organized in the “in-between” of two languages (Creole and French), of two states of thought (conceptual and symbolic), and of two traditions (oral and written). In addition, the colonial administration, rooted in class hierarchy,

⁵ On the subject of musical practices in Guadeloupe, one must refer to the proceedings of the following conference: *Les musiques guadeloupéennes dans le champ culturel afro-américain, au sein des musiques du monde*, sous dir, Office régional du Patrimoine guadeloupéen ^aParis: Éditions caribéennes, 2008).

⁶ Hybridization is usually used to describe this kind of process of acquisition, integration, reinterpretation, and finally, to give raise to a new identity. In this paper, we prefer the term *creolization*, which has been used and redefined by philosopher and essayist Édouard Glissant in the *Discours antillais* (1981). Creolization is defined not only by its process but by the unpredictability of the result. Creolization is beyond the common understanding of *métissage* and can only be approached by the imaginary. “What I call creolization is the encounter, the interference, the clash, the harmonies and disharmonies between cultures, in the accomplished totality of the earth-world [*monde-terre*]. My proposal is that the whole world is becoming an archipelago and becoming creolized” (Glissant, Poétique, 4. *Traité du Tout-Monde*, Paris: Gallimard, 194). See also https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E_LHOM_207_0017--writing-the-self-in-the-antilles.htm.

⁷ “The musical borrowing and reinterpretation characteristic of Creole regions is an integral part of the creative process: thus, the term creolization was born. The transformation of original elements and the substitution of others, changes in function, attempts to retain ancestral customs, the borrowing of some expressions of modernity and the denunciation of others, the reinterpretation and consequent recreation of certain musical genres—all of these traits serve as reminders of how deeply Martinique [or Guadeloupe] is anchored in a Creole identity” (Monique Desroches, “Créolisation musicale et identité culturelle aux Antilles françaises,” *Revue canadienne des études latino-américaines et caraïbes*, 17/34, 1992).

generates a pernicious situation of assimilation and alienation.⁸ “Self-withdrawal, mimetism, the natural perception of local things abandoned for the fascination of foreign things” (Bernabe 1993, 82) were the forms of alienation.

This Eurocentric framework has enforced a suspicion that Blackness, such as Creole language or music influenced by African traditions, is somehow inferior, thus leaving the Guadeloupean not only in a perpetual quest of identity and self-validation but also in a destructive state of linguistic and cultural schizophrenia.⁹ Where he is, who he is, where he comes from, where he goes—the Guadeloupean does not always know. He finds himself navigating different loci: interiority (of actuality) and exteriority (of aspirations). In the prologue of *In Praise of Creoleness*, the authors explore this interiority and exteriority, for the Martinican in particular and for the population in the French West Indies in general. This new understanding sheds light on the reasons for such a complex world and at the same time shows how the Guadeloupean is trapped in a triangle of beings and aspirations: Africa, the “ideal or mythical country” (*le pays rêvé*); “the real, geographical and anthropological country” (*le pays réel*); “the official” (or administrative) “country” (*le pays légal*)¹⁰ represented by the French political and cultural domination.

our truth found itself behind bars. . . . We are fundamentally stricken with exteriority. . . . We have seen the world through the filter of western values, and our foundation was “exoticized” by the French vision we had to adopt. It is a terrible condition to perceive one’s interior architecture, one’s world, the instants of one’s days, one’s own values, with the eyes of the other. . . . we were deported out of ourselves at every moment of our scriptural history. In spite of a few positive aspects, did nothing else but maintain in our minds the domination of an elsewhere. (Bernabe 1993, 76)

Creole society can be defined as a world marked by fluidity and complexity. Thus, one of the continuing challenges in postcolonial culture is to overcome the cultural and psychological alienation, whose lasting effects are always lying dormant in Creole countries. In the last decades and currently, contemporary Creole intelligentsia address this “complexity” issue, bringing new understanding. That period of cultural and literary movement is known as “cultural awareness.”

Re-forming the Cultural Consciousness of Guadeloupeans

⁸ “The oppressor, through the inclusive and frightening character of his authority, manages to impose on the native new ways of seeing, and in particular, a pejorative judgment with respect to his original forms of existing” (Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964, 38).

⁹ The reader must keep in mind that the sociolinguistic norm in Guadeloupe is that of using two languages and that the linguistic question in a Creole nation is inevitably tied to cultural alienation combined with psychological violence. Still today, the ban on the “in-between” is demonstrated in the brutality of the following statement expressed by the teacher or parent: “Si ou pa konêt, pé,” meaning: if you don’t know how to say it in French, shut up.

¹⁰ Charles Maurras was the first to theorize this distinction between “pays légal” and “pays réel” (*Enquête sur la monarchie*, 1900). In Glissant’s poetry, “Le pays rêvé” contrasts with “le pays réel” (*Le pays rêvé, le pays réel*, 2000). See also, Frantz Fanon, *Black skin, White masks* (New York: Grove Press), 212–13.

As early as 1981,¹¹ the writings of Guadeloupean and Martinican intellectuals stressing anthropological concepts such as *antillanité* and *créolité* caused major changes in cultural policy and education.¹² Most of all, it affected how people view Creole language and rural customs.¹³

Many Guadeloupeans (as well as Martinicans) have grown up with the understanding that their everyday language is inferior, and that what comes from outside is of greater value. To this distrust the Creolists assert,

French ways forced us to denigrate ourselves: the common condition for colonized people. It is often difficult for us to discern what, in us, might be the object of an aesthetic approach. What we accept in us as [such] is the little declared by the Other as aesthetic. . . . our artistic expression has always taken its sources from the far open sea. And it was always what it brought from the far open sea that was kept, accepted, studied, for our idea of aesthetics was elsewhere. (Bernabe 1993, 86)

According to these authors, to create the conditions for authentic self and self-acceptance, two steps are required. First, “exorcise the old fatality of exteriority,” and second, place Creoleness at the center of creativity.

In the 1970s, some Catholic leaders had already encouraged their congregations to proceed with the first step of exorcism and liberation. This necessary beginning was what Father Chérubin Céleste insisted upon:

After three centuries of cultural domination, believers had been alienated to the point of despising their own culture, language, music and even themselves. They had to re-appropriate all of this if they were ever to truly be a Guadeloupean church. This work of liberation from a dominant culture was the ground upon which would rest the newborn: a true Guadeloupean church. This had to come from the people themselves, it had to be their own doing, one that would reach into the psychological depths and ongoing effects of colonial tutorship and slavery that had shaped the personality of Guadeloupean. (Cherubin 2002, 203; author’s translation)

The call has been heard and the challenge accepted. Cultural awareness of Caribbean culture and the promotion of creole language, whose influences did not remain confined solely to the people’s social life, spread throughout the religious realm of Catholics and, more recently, evangelical churches. It marked the beginning of a turning point in musical liturgy, from importation and imitation to contextualization and innovation (Celebration in a Catholic Church, <https://youtu.be/Q1mVbGCJqo0>; Worship in Bethel Evangelical Church, <https://youtu.be/oNz8iSDRGRs>). Our case study provides further insight.

¹¹ Édouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais* (1981), Dany Bebel-Gisler, *Le défi culturel guadeloupéen* (1989), Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, *Éloge de la créolité* (1989).

¹² Since the 1990s, schools and universities have been offering courses and curriculum in creole, and numerous conferences have been organized to promote different aspects of creole culture.

¹³ Such as Gwoka music: drumming/singing/dancing nocturne manifestation that were kept during slavery times by the Maroons, escaped slaves who lived a much more African lifestyle outside the plantations, hidden in the bushes.

Cultural Awareness in Church: Three Periods

The material in this section is based on fieldwork conducted in Guadeloupe (participant observation, focus group and individual interviews, questionnaires, and song surveys) from 2008 to 2014, with three groups of churches: the Association of Evangelical Churches, Baptist Federation, and unaffiliated evangelical churches.

The beginnings: 1947–1970 (implantation and assimilation)

From the beginning of evangelical missionary work on the island (around 1947), hymns from the Western world were sung, accompanied by instruments played by the missionaries: trumpet and pump organ. By the end of the 1970s, most of the churches owned harmoniums, shipped from the USA. They soon came to be regarded by the locals as the instrument of choice for use during worship services.

The French hymnbook *Sur les ailes de la foi*¹⁴ was adopted. All the songs were in French and composed in four-part harmony. In the local culture, music is an important part of daily life. People sing to celebrate happy events, they sing to mourn, they sing during heavy labor work, they sing to protest. However, people do not sing in harmony nor in major or minor tonality as such, but rather in unison or call-and-response. Moreover, melodic and rhythmic syncopation defines the music, in contrast to the traditional Protestant hymns, which are homophonic in a regular metric frame.

With a Catholic background that used Gregorian chant in Latin, Guadeloupeans had genuine love for these French Protestant hymns; at least they could understand the lyrics, and some of the melodies were closer to their musical traditions.

I liked what the priest was saying . . . but when I went to an evangelical church, everything was different. In Catholic church, it was in Latin, but here . . . everybody was singing and I was able to understand the words.¹⁵

In the hymnbook, *Sur les ailes de la foi*, there are many songs. When you start singing . . . when the music plays, you have to move. Especially when the music starts. . . . There are many, many songs in the French language that are lively rhythm tunes.¹⁶

Although the church was shaped by poorly contextualized missionary work, there was a true enjoyment of this introduced music genre. In fact, in recent years, searching for sound theological material to sing, some churches are returning to those hymns. However, hymns may be interpreted quite differently in Guadeloupe, with loud singing, rhythmic movement, and syncopation.

¹⁴ Hymnbook from the end of nineteenth century edited by Ruben Saillens, pastor, evangelist, composer from France. *Sur les ailes de la foi. Chants anciens et nouveaux*, Nogent-sur-Marne, IBN, 1924/1983/2000.

¹⁵ Maxime (interview).

¹⁶ Adrienne (interview).

The Next Generation, 1970–1980s: Resistance and Appropriation

In the 1970s, the second generation of believers was not comfortable with this type of music. They used guitars and small percussion instruments, creolizing the beats with more syncopation, thus rendering the hymns closer to their own cultural environment. Some young people have translated hymns into Creole; others composed songs with lyrics both in French and in Creole, imitating the music that was fashionable both in Christian circles and in the culture (kompa, kadans, cadence-lypso, cadence-rampa). This affirms the young generation's resistance to a hymnody that's foreign to their musical and linguistic sensitivities. A songwriter from the evangelical church in Guadeloupe remembers:

Singing in Creole is different than singing in French. In Creole it's like the song is getting deep inside of me. There is another energy: it's strong, violent, pure. With French, you get another feeling. When I started writing my songs in Creole, I was surprised to discover something different. You feel there is another energy in Creole. There is a vibration that I don't have if I compose in French.¹⁷

As I was collecting songs from that period and interviewing that generation of believers, I was surprised to discover that the majority of these local compositions were never used in a worship service setting. Most were sung only during special services or wedding festivities. People explained that the church leadership felt that such lively music, and even more, in creole language, was inappropriate for worshipping God.



Fig. 2. A musical group of young adults in Papin Church (1970–78). Credit: D. Chopard.

This protest against liturgical alienation was perhaps a call for a responsive and responsible discipleship role in supporting the work of local songwriters. However, local pastors and

¹⁷ Maximilien (interview).

missionaries missed an opportunity to promote an indigenous hymnology (in Creole)—“biten an nou” (what belongs to us)—to help the church engage with its cultural surrounding.

From 1980 to the Present: Awareness and Contextualization

In the late twentieth century, efforts were made toward the contextualization of worship and expressing the Christian faith through local music. Those attempts did not come from nowhere. I believe three events were catalysts. First, in the late 1970s evangelists from the Caribbean region were invited to preach the gospel. They spoke either English or Creole. Because in Guadeloupe people do not speak English, they preached and taught choruses in Creole. Many people were converted at that time. They were touched while listening to the gospel preached for the first time in their everyday language.

Second, in the 1980s some young people traveled to Switzerland and France and attended international Christian music festivals. Listening to Christian artists expressing themselves in their own musical traditions and in their mother tongues, they began to realize that back home they had been praising God far from the land, far from the community, far from the people’s heart language and heart music.

Finally, with the increase of new Church members coming from other Creole-speaking Caribbean islands, worship leaders began integrating songs in Creole, using traditional percussion instruments (Ka, ti-bwa, cha-cha, ziyak) to create a more Creole soundscape.

All these factors undermined old understandings of the dynamics between culture and Christian faith and raised questions about how to worship God without losing one’s cultural identity.

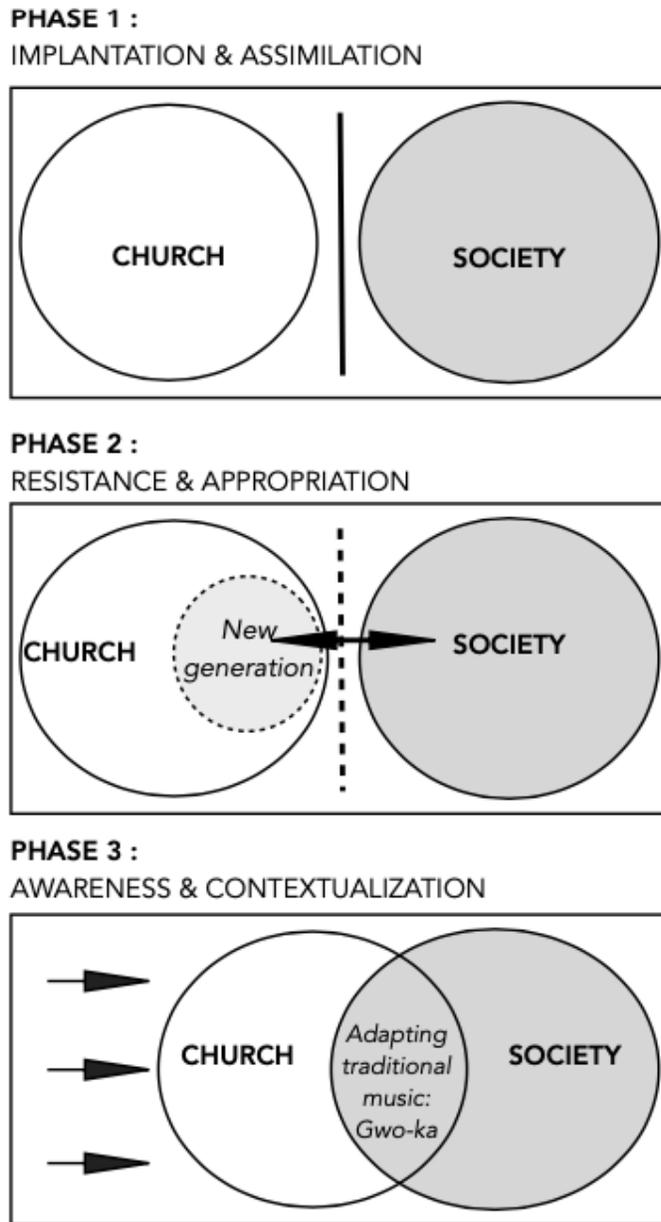


Fig. 3. Evolution of the dynamics between church and culture in evangelical churches

An Earlier Example of Inclusive Contextualization: Nature

Around this time, Bertrand Maricel, a young man from Guadeloupe who had studied theater and drumming, started a music group called Nature. The group comprised two guitarists (acoustic and electric), two traditional percussionists (ka and ti-bwa), and four female vocalists. Songs, poems, and musical plays, most of them written in Creole, were composed by Maricel.

We did not want to impose the Ka in the Church versus piano. We were simply eager to play music, not to do politics. We wanted to use all of our instruments without discrimination. Our inspiration came from our environment: we wanted to be true and natural. We were not

complicated, but looking always for excellence. I believe this is the reason we had the respect of other artists of the community.

Here are examples of their two most famous compositions.

Élévé Papa-la: “kaladja” (usually used to express suffering or unhappy love); <https://youtu.be/0AJz070DXHE>.

É - lè - vé Pa - pa - la, glo - ri - fyé Pa - pa - la.

5 An-nou le - vé lan - men pou nou pé sa glo - ri - fyé Pa - pa - la.

9 Lou-wé'y é - pi ka - la, lou-wé'y é ti - bwa - la, lou-wé'y é cha - cha -

14 la, lé - vé lan - men, glo - ri - fyé Pa - pa - la glo - ri - fyé Pa - pa - la.

Translation (first stanza):

Lift up the Father, Glorify the Father / Lift up your hands and glorify the Father.

Praise him with the Ka / Praise Him with the ti-bwa / Praise Him with the cha-cha

Lift up your hands and glorify the Father.

Apiyé asi Wòch-la: “menndé”; https://youtu.be/wmxo8R__raM

This song is also written in Creole and includes idiomatic expressions. Guitar and ti-bwa convey different rhythmic formulae which are typical of Gwo-ka music (menndé). The lyrics say that even if life is hard or you have a difficult job, just stand firm on Jesus who is the Rock, and on the Holy Spirit; this is how we have to walk in Jesus.

Guitar

Ti-bwa



(Melody and lyrics are on the following page.)

Ni dé moman ki moman sou - frans _____ ni dé moman ki pou _____
 Mo-man soufrans,

4
 jwi _____ sans _____ mé a-dan tout si-ti-ya syon an tout man-név mwen ka pô -
 mo-man ré-jwisans oh oh _____ oh oh _____

7
 té _____ Mwen _____ tou-jou vlé ma-ché pou Jé - zi. _____ Sé kon -
 ma-ché pou Jé - zi. _____

10
 sa _____ Sé kon-sa pou nou ma-ché kon - sa pou nou ma -
 kon-sa, kon - sa, oh oh oh oh _____

13
 ché A-pi-yé a-si _____ Jé - zi a - pi-yé a-si _____ lès-pri. _____ A-pi-yé a-si wòch - la.
 A - pi - yé. _____ a - si. _____ wòch - la.

This musical and linguistic rhetoric opens a new space for liturgical innovation that combines African and European influences. Each performance in nonreligious space has always been welcomed by the local population. Although this pioneering experiment offered a more coherent

Guadeloupean musical liturgy, it was received with mixed reviews in the church. As the leader of the group explains,

I could feel that people were looking down on us, because we were singing in Creole and at that time, playing the ka was considered to be practiced by non-desirable individuals. Respectful person could not be associated with “tanbou”: tanbou sé bitin a vié nèg (le tambour c’est pour le nèg de mauvaises fréquentations).¹⁸

This testimony reveals that for many in the church, Creole is still a folk language and cannot be taken seriously. It may echo the prevalent idea that to speak Creole is to admit that one has no education, intelligence, or ambition.

Traditional Gwo-ka Music in a Gospel-oriented Context: Mazaltov-ka

The second example is the Christian group Mazaltov-ka, which uses a traditional form of music called gwo-ka. This musical genre is a legacy of the slave music tradition. It is organized around a drum-dance-responsorial singing. Traditionally, this musical performance was only performed in the rural areas of the island and at night. Until recently the gwo-ka was synonymous with lower class and dismissed as being related to thugs. With the emergence of the independence movement in the 1970s, gwo-ka music became an ally of social and politic activists and was heard everywhere in Guadeloupe, especially in open-air farmer’s markets. Today this music is enjoying a strong revival among the population (rural or urban) and is no longer associated with negative stereotypes. As mentioned by UNESCO, gwo-ka “is present at the high points of daily life, as well as at festive, cultural and secular events. . . . It strengthens identity and provides a feeling of communal development and individual pride, conveying values of conviviality, resistance and dignity” (UNESCO, Gwoka).

Although Mazaltov-ka integrates the threefold dimensions of this music, this is not an imitation but rather an adaptation and interpretation to fit the purpose of music for the church. The climax of this doxological orientation can be seen in the following comparison between the traditional Gwo-ka and what I shall call “Gwo-ka Gospel,” a fusion genre.

Mazaltov-ka uses the same drumming ensembles and keeps the same performing music codes (a song leader accompanied by a chorus alternating with solo of drums and dancers), but they adapt the traditional chest voice (inherited from West African traditions) to a more Western European style (head voice), so the message of their song comes out clearly and is more audible. They also allow less room for vocal or musical improvisations. Like the traditional gwo-ka songs, the lyrics of Mazaltov-ka’s songs reflect the challenges of Guadeloupean daily life. But contrary to the songs in a traditional setting, they all aim for the spiritual awakening of the society and, to a certain extent, the maturing of the church. Those elements of comparison are schematized in the chart below.

¹⁸ Maricel (interview).

	Traditional Gwo-ka	Gospel Gwo-ka (Mazaltov-ka)
themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • anecdotes from daily life (entertainment or moralizing) • political events (protest or ironic mood) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • personal faith testimonies • biblical stories • Christian virtues, divine attributes
text status (language, style)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creole • polysemic text • narrative discourse (humor, metaphor, politicized speech) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creole • non-polysemic text • narrative discourse (direct, concrete, religious content)
context status (setting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • open air, partially closed space • in a round (hemispheres + center) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • partially open or closed space • in a rectangular form (podium + room)
context status (time)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at dusk (léwòz) • any time of the day (kout tanbou) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • daytime (worship, evangelization, recreative) • evening (evangelization)
fonction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreational (entertainment, convivial, chronic) • Economical (helping hand) • Political and educational (protests, conflict, affirming identity) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious (proclaiming the Gospel & Christian testimony) • Prophetic (promoting Kingdom values) • Recreational (promoting fraternity)
performers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • musicians (makè, boulas, chacha, ti-bwa) • soloist and mixed choir • dancers, male and female 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • musicians (makè, boulas, chacha, ti-bwa) • soloist with mixed choir • dancers (optional)
audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • audience as performer • claps hands and repeats the chorus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • audience as spectator • applause

Fig. 4. Comparison of textual and performance elements of traditional gwo-ka and Gospel Gwo-Ka

The reinterpretation of those indigenous aspects of the culture within the religious arena (Christian music festivals, Christian weddings, gospel crusades) is precisely what generates the popularity of Mazaltov-ka all over the island. Paradoxically, rarely do they play on Sunday morning during a worship service; people are still divided over this genre of music that was long rejected. In addition, even if it now symbolizes the people’s reclaiming of their true identity, gwo-ka music may still be seen as “immoral music,” or at least worldly music.

Conclusion

How do we move forward from here, beyond this cultural struggle? How do we move to a church that fits the uniqueness of creole culture, to allow the Guadeloupean to feel at home as he sings and prays, and “to give Jesus a chance to be creole” (Montconthour 2006, 3:17)?

My intent is not to resolve this conundrum but to propose a pathway for overcoming the malaise many Guadeloupeans feel as they struggle for identity and seek to enjoy a worship that is no longer disconnected from who they are. Overcoming this identity crisis inside the church

requires commitment to a number of important tasks. I suggest three foundational tasks. The first is ontological and nonnegotiable. In her book on Creole culture and Christian faith, Palmyre states that “Creole community must develop a self-awareness. . . . To obtain freedom, one must act upon his desire and transform it into knowledge. . . . One must work out his freedom and challenge the content of his existence, namely alienation” (Palmyre 2007, 73). Such freedom from alienation will be achieved only from within, in the mind. Decolonization of the mind is about rethinking oneself in relation to others, and especially addressing the inferiority complex generated by both the French colonial politics and, to a lesser extent, missionary attitudes. It is also about exploring (knowing and reconnecting with) one’s multiple cultural heritage, including traditional music and arts. Finally, it is about calling for cultural respect for one’s differences and uniqueness.

The second task calls for the recognition of the “in-between” (*entre-deux*) identity rather than a binary identity. Caribbean intellectuals such as Edouard Glissant and the Creolists have vehemently criticized the binary logic that encloses creole culture into two racial poles, Black and white (Confiant 2000). More recently, anthropologists and linguists have developed a new understanding of what characterizes this nonlinear movement between the various cultural elements in a hybrid culture. Using the oscillation metaphor, the authors of *Métissage* describes this oscillation as “a trajectory which advances in spirals, enveloping, developing, redeploying and above all displacing, the components of literature, music, cooking and languages . . . from one cultural space to another” (Laplantine 2001, 8, 11).

This approach sees creolity (*créolité*) not as a problem to manage or a yoke to throw off but as an opportunity for artists in the church to create original configurations of worship songs that mobilize elements from Amerindian, European, and African provenance. These new songs, conceived in a “blending motion” (oscillation), open new avenues for reconciliation and solidarity between cultural elements and spheres which once were foreign to one another. Western hymns played with local drums, choir music composed in call-and-response form, or hymns texts translated with words and expressions that resonate with creole imaginary are examples that reflect the process of contextualization, moving from alienation and imitation to liberation and incarnation. In doing so, the Creole church will contribute to the enrichment and embellishment of the local hymnody.

Beyond this twofold contribution, this contextual expression of worship fulfills God’s ultimate design that the Pentecostal event points to. Harold Best describes this well:

Pentecost tells us that one artistic tongue is only a start and a thousand will never suffice. . . . No single one can hold the wholeness of praise and worship or the fullness of the counsel of God. . . . Thus, God does not want to hear only Beethoven and Ken Medema or see just Renoirs, Vermeers, and Wyeths. God does not want to be limited to Christian rap or Pakistani chant. . . . But the idea that God awaits and welcomes the countless kinds of music is not enough all by itself. . . . Pentecost tells us that each of us must live pentecostally—in the spirit of Pentecost—among the musics of the world. Living pentecostally means that each of us, as much as possible, should revel in the whole world of musical creativity—transculturally, trans-stylistically, and trans-historically. Since no one culture “says it all,” how fitting it is for

Christians to want to join the creative ways of other cultures, if no other reason than to fill out their praise! (Best 1993, 67–68)

It is clear from this exegetical argument that one way to help the church in Guadeloupe envision a Creole worshipping church is to connect the task of contextualization with hermeneutics. The Scriptures are the lenses through which the church understands the world, its values and its cultures. The Scriptures (Acts 2:1–12 or Revelation 7:9–17) provide biblical foundations for a sound theology of culture. In Bediako’s terms, “We need to allow Scripture to become the interpreter of who we are in the specific concrete sense of who we are in our cultures and traditions” (Bediako 2016). As our cultures pass through the prism of Scriptures, “the light and shade intrinsic to our cultures are revealed.” This last comment leads to the third task.

The issue at the heart of this paper will lead to questions beyond this Creole context of diversity and complexity. We live in a relational world, where new anthropological realities are created; and in our own multicultural communities, we are compelled to acknowledge that we can no longer worship from a single hymnological frame of reference without unduly stifling the multifaceted creativity stemming from our parishioners’ diverse cultural backgrounds. Valuing linguistic, poetic, and musical features that recognize the worshiper in his milieu could well be a “duty of humanity.” This concern is reflected in Fanon’s statement:

Humanity is waiting for something other from us than such an imitation. . . . But if we want humanity to advance a step further, if we want to bring it up to a different level than that which Europe has shown it, then we must invent and we must make discoveries. (Fanon 1963, 315)

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