

# Creolization in the Caribbean

Heliana Portes de Roux

For most Americans the Caribbean evokes an image of sunny, fine sand beaches lapped by crystalline waters. For many, it is a synonym for tropical music and fun, rest and relaxation, vacations and tourism. This stereotype, however, is a commercially motivated image that distorts the rich diversity of Caribbean cultures. The region encompasses a wealth of cultures that have evolved over centuries of complex, turbulent, and profound interactions—within a limited geographical area—among the indigenous peoples of the area, Europeans from several countries, peoples from West Africa, and in some cases, indentured servants from India and East Asia.

The Caribbean program at the Festival of American Folklife is but one of many ways to present Caribbean cultural traditions. The program traces the creative integration and synthesis of new cultural traditions from elements of diverse origin that had been juxtaposed or had previously coexisted independently. The music and ritual performances and foodways demonstrations do not merely trace the static persistence of indigenous, African, or European culture traits in the Caribbean, but instead illustrate their transmutation into a fresh cultural amalgam that forms the base of emergent identity. This emergence occurs not only in the Caribbean but also in the mainland United States, whose eastern cities have become havens for disinherited peoples of the Caribbean. The United States is no longer a mere

spectator or manipulator of distant Caribbean transformations, but also an arena for ongoing cultural innovation.

The program brings together folk musicians, ritual practitioners, folk performers, and cooks from the islands of the Antilles to demonstrate the interactions between native, European, African and even Asian cultures that have resulted in the creation of new cultural forms. In the Caribbean region people of diverse ethnicity live side by side. Though they do not indiscriminately share a uniform common culture, their lifeways crisscross and intermingle. If one is interested in origins, single elements of belief and practices can be teased out, but in most cases they cannot easily be attributed to any single place or time.

A visitor to the Caribbean program at the Festival might wish to listen to Puerto Ricans singing *décimas*, witness a Haitian Vodoun ceremony or learn how to make *bammies* from cassava, a root indigenous to the New World. Many can recognize the European instruments played by the *son* musicians; most can trace the Vodoun ceremony to an African past. Perhaps some visitors will recognize the Arawak indigenous presence as they observe the cassava cook. The Festival program only begins to trace some of the cultural traditions at the root of complex, unique and dynamic Caribbean expressions.

The Caribbean region is one of the most diverse and heterogeneous in the world. Such are its complexities that there is no



Maroon *abeng* player from Moore Town, Jamaica. This wind instrument was used during the 18th century war against the British and has retained sacred meaning to this day. (Photo by Heliana Portes de Roux)

consensus even on its geographic definition; this controversy is not necessarily esoteric. The broadest prevailing geographic definition of the Caribbean is that given in the *Atlas of the Caribbean Basin* (1984), which defines the Caribbean to include “the islands of the Caribbean Sea as well as the countries on its shores.” This definition includes 30 countries and a total population of nearly 400 million people since it encompasses the United States, Mexico, the five Central American republics, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, Belize, Guyana, Surinam and French Guiana. A narrower definition of the Caribbean includes only the 13 independent former British colonies of the West Indies, whose total population is slightly over 6 million. Between an overly broad Caribbean

Basin definition and an overly narrow West Indies definition there are other alternatives. One uses the concept of the Caribbean archipelago, which stretches from the Bahama Islands at the north to Trinidad and Tobago. In another view the Caribbean is thought to be constituted by the islands of the Antilles chain and by Surinam, Guyana, French Guiana and Belize. Common to all of these places was a plantation economy sustained by the labor of slaves of African origin. We must not forget, however, that the social history of the Caribbean region shares much both with the South American mainland societies stretching from Brazil northward and with the Gulf Coast and Atlantic seaboard of the United States.

The Caribbean is not only a geographical



## Santería

Enslaved Yoruba from southwestern Nigeria, brought to Cuba in great numbers between 1790 and 1865, carried with them numerous powerful divinities called *orisha*. In Cuba the Yoruba were called the Lucumí, and their worship of the *orichas* (Spanish spelling) came to be known as La Regla Lucumí, La Regla de Ocha, or Santería. Santería appeared in Cuba not as a static survival or retention of African practices but as a dynamic Afro-Caribbean religion shaped by the needs of creole communities that emerged and changed in slavery and freedom. At first Santería was the exclusive religion of colonial Cuba's Lucumí "nation" (ethnic Yoruba and their early direct descendants), but it evolved as a spiritual path available to all Cubans in the 20th century. Santería also flourishes in Puerto Rico, Miami, New York, New Jersey, Illinois, and California, in communities of Cuban migrants. Its adherents now include White and Black Americans and other immigrants from the Caribbean.

In the 19th century the emerging creole religion creatively borrowed or remade Catholic elements, icons, ritual, and mythology within an Afro-Cuban ethical context. As Santería grew up inside the larger society, the Lucumí *orichas* came to be celebrated on the feast days of their Catholic saint counterparts—a creative use of the Church calendar as an armature to reconstitute the sacred festival cycle. Spanish military attire and courtly costumes and crowns, which had earlier entered Afro-Cuban carnival processions, appeared in the sacred Lucumí initiation process called the coronation. Saints' images, votive candles, and flowers appeared on altars alongside Yoruba-derived beadwork and sacrificial offerings. Ornate porcelain soup tureens came to contain the *orichas'* sacred objects—stones and cowrie shells embodying the *orichas'* power (*aché*). Layers of European-derived materials adorn and guard a secret, essentially African, sacred core.

The *orichas* are understood as so many refractions of a distant, incomprehensible Supreme Being or Creator. Each *oricha* is



Domestic shrine for *orichas* and saints with offerings, Guanabacoa, Havana, Cuba, 1986. Saints' images traditionally stand above the porcelain *soperas* (tureens) containing the deities' "secrets." (Photo by David Brown)

seen to own or control a domain of nature and human experience; is distinguished by legends, attributes, colors, and favored foods; and is praised with distinct drum rhythms and chants in the Lucumí ritual language. Santería's principal ritual goal is the effective tapping and channeling of the *orichas'* power for the health and benefit of the community, within a moral context sanctioned by the ancestors (*egun*). This task belongs to corps of specially initiated and trained priests or *santeros* who, as mediators of ritual power, discern the *orichas'* will through sophisticated divination systems and solicit the *orichas'* aid with proper tribute and sacrifice (*ebó*). As the *orichas'* servants, they act as "mounts" or "horses"—mediums of spirit possession—when the gods come down in the heat of drumming celebrations to dance, eat, and prophesy.

Santería ritual practice centers in the "house of Ocha," which refers to both the place where a shrine is maintained and the ritual family of Santería worshippers—a circle of "godchildren" initiated by an elder "godparent." The ritual family provides mutual support to its members; godchildren owe respect to their ritual elders and are obliged to assist in house rituals such as drummings and initiations. In their homes initiated priests establish altars for their ancestors and *orichas* and conduct consultations and spiritual cleansings.

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unit: it is a region with a common history rooted in the interplay of European powers in their efforts to gain political and economic control over land, sea lanes, people and potential resources. In the Caribbean many complex relationships developed because of this historical experience. The Caribbean was the first gateway to the New World, from which Spaniards organized their invasion of the American mainland and conquest of its native peoples. Throughout the colonial period it was the bridge between Spain and its new viceroyalties on the mainland. As England, France and Holland successfully challenged Spanish domination of parts of the Caribbean, new plantation systems were established, especially for growing sugar cane. The region, already significant in political terms, became important economically as well.

The history of the Caribbean is the expression of unique circumstances in each particular island nation and also the expression of a number of elements common to all. The region is considered by anthropologist Sidney Mintz as a "societal area" precisely because it shares social structural and economic characteristics, common historical patterns of conquest and expansion of Europe, patterns of colonization, peonage or slavery, development of a plantation economy and development of multiracial and multicultural societies. Although in broad outline these processes were common to all, each Caribbean society is unique, and generalizing about the entire area does not address adequately the distinctive characteristics of each.

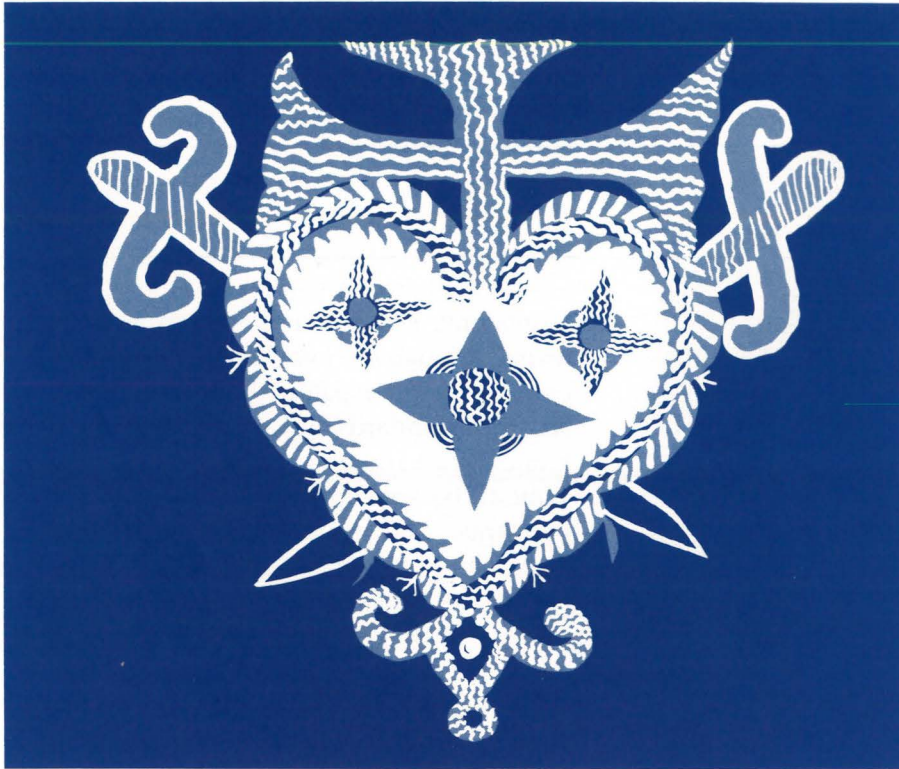
The interactions that occurred in the Caribbean initiated a process of creolization that acquired unique characteristics within each context, depending on the cultures that came into contact. New systems of communication, new melodies and rhythms, and new forms of religious expression were born. The distinctiveness of this process in the Caribbean region stemmed from two significant factors: 1) the determining role of the creative expressions of Africans, and 2) the progressive "conquest," from bottom to top, of social, legal, and political domains by the subject classes. The latter often involved

African slaves' and their descendants' creative use and transformation of European cultural institutions, products and patterns (and, to a lesser extent, those of Asian and Native American origin). Creolization—a process to which people of African heritage contributed greatly—was a fundamental factor in determining the basic fabric of each Caribbean society.

The term "creole" was used from the 16th to 18th centuries to denote people born in Spanish America of Spanish parents, distinguishing them from those born in Spain itself. It has since been used with various—often conflicting—meanings. In the Spanish colonies, Creoles were generally excluded from high office in both church and state, although by law Spaniards and Creoles were equal. Creoles led the revolutions that achieved independence from Spain in the early 19th century, and after independence, they entered the ruling class. In various parts of Latin America the term "creole" has different referents: it may denote any local-born person of Spanish descent, or it may refer to members of urban Europeanized classes, as contrasted with rural indigenous peoples. In the Antilles, the word was used to denote descendants of any European settlers, but now it refers more generally to all the people, of whatever class or ancestry, who share in the Caribbean culture.

By extension, "creole" came to refer not just to people but also to languages and to cultures that were born in the New World; "creolization" refers to the process by which a new synthetic language or culture develops. In the Caribbean people from diverse backgrounds, cut off from their homelands, made a virtue of necessity by synthesizing disparate elements of their past and present environments to produce a new cultural manifestation, a creole culture. The process of creolization is not a uniform and monolithic one that follows the same course everywhere and produces the same results. Instead, creolization takes in a wide range of cultural transformations and amalgamations, each specific to a local area and a particular historical situation. Because the Caribbean program at this year's Festival of American Folklife focuses on traditions from Puerto





Maize-flour drawing, or *vèvè*, for the Haitian *loa* Erzulie. (Illustration by Andras Goldinger)

Rico, Jamaica, Haiti and Cuba, the following considerations of creolization will concentrate on how that process has occurred in those countries.

### **The Creolization of Language**

The Caribbean area is marked by the emergence of characteristic language forms distinct from the indigenous languages, from African languages, and from the languages of the colonizing European countries. This development began in the most oppressed sector of society: African slaves and their descendants, who spoke a number of distinct languages. They needed a common language to speak to one another, and their European masters (who also spoke various languages) needed to communicate with them. Pidgin languages arose, with simplified grammars and greatly attenuated vocabularies, suitable for basic communication despite being artificial constructions. These pidgins were second languages for everyone who spoke them. As generations passed and the pidgin languages were used more extensively, they re-incorporated vocabulary from the parent languages and developed complex grammars. Now used in all

spheres of life, they became mother tongues or first languages, completing their transformation to creole languages.

During the period in which creole languages began to develop in Caribbean societies—after the swift extirpation of native populations—there were sharp differences between African slaves and their descendants and free Europeans who assumed themselves to be racially and culturally superior. The creole languages were associated with slavery and to make matters more complex, the national elites began to regard themselves with the eyes of their metropolitan cohorts, turning their back on the emerging languages, customs, and beliefs as if they were stained. Creole languages were thought to be negative cultural and ethnic expressions and considered as primitive and malformed languages.

The creolization of language did not occur homogeneously throughout the Caribbean. Creolization was determined by a variety of factors depending on the specific history of each area. In Hispanic colonies such as Cuba, Santo Domingo, and Puerto Rico, Spanish became the standard language because these colonies were always linked





The Vodoun altar at Madame Nerva's *bounfor* in Jacmel, Haiti, incorporates chromolithographs of Catholic deities. (Photo by Heliana Portes de Roux)

to the same metropole. The nature of the colonial enterprise was also different: as R.W. Thompson (1957:353) explains, "a more serious effort was made by the Spaniards and Portuguese to plant their New World territories with peasants of European stock. As a result, their subjects of African descent did not greatly overwhelm in numbers those who spoke a European language in conformity with native usage." However, ritual languages of African origin such as Lucumí were conserved in Cuba and elsewhere, and Spanish became imbued with intonations and variations, idioms and inflections, variations of pronunciation and style, as well as new local terms.

The situation was different in other areas with different patterns of colonial domination, including the introduction of indentured servants, prisoners of war, and criminals who were forced to emigrate from their countries of origin to become part of the

plantation's social milieu. These immigrants came into contact with slaves who had arrived earlier from various African nations who worked as domestic servants, skilled craftsmen, and field laborers. This variety of backgrounds in the Caribbean is responsible for the birth of new language forms in various settings. As linguist Mervin Alleyne (1985) explains, in Guyana, Antigua, Montserrat, Jamaica, and St. Kitts, different levels of language evolved, ranging from a creole speech or patois to intermediate forms of standard English. In Haiti and the French West Indies, a French based creole came to be spoken by a majority of the inhabitants. The creole of Surinam drew its vocabulary primarily from English during the initial period of colonization, and was later influenced by Dutch, eventually developing into dialects such as Saramaccan and Sranan. Conditions on Barbados favored a close approximation to English; thus Bajan, one of the Barbadian creoles, is quite similar to English. In Trinidad a dialect derived primarily from English, a French-based creole and a non-standard Spanish evolved. Papiamentu in the three Dutch islands of Curaçao, Aruba and Bonaire blends Spanish and Portuguese language elements.

Some creole languages, though developed by subjugated peoples, have gradually begun to win for themselves social and even legal acceptance in the societies in which they arose. Of course, the European colonists not only controlled the economy but also imposed their own forms of cultural colonialism. Europeans considered all the cultures with which they came into contact in the New World—the indigenous, African, and Asian cultures—to be uncivilized. Since creole society primarily grew out of enslaved groups, it was associated by the European colonists with backwardness and lack of education. Thus, the status creole languages gained in the Caribbean society was opposed to the European ideal that the elites inherited.

Creole was designated the official language (along with French) in Haiti; and in Martinique it was approved for elementary school education in areas where it is the main language. In addition to such "official"



Arada or Vodoun drums with painted *vèvès*. Note the variety of artistic carvings in the base of these Dahomey-style drums. (Photo by Heliana Portes de Roux)



Master drummer of Madame Nerva's *bounfor* plays the *manman* or *bountor* drum, the largest of the ensemble, using one bare hand and one stick. (Photo by Heliana Portes de Roux)



## Jah Music: Rhythms of the Rastafari

The Rastafari are among the most African-oriented members of Jamaican society, but they are also among its most creative synthesizers. This is illustrated by Rastafari music, both in its "roots" form, Nyabingi, and its popular form, reggae. Reggae is linked with the internationalization of the Rastafari Movement from the late 1960s onward and shows ongoing fusions of local folk music with popular strains from abroad. Nyabingi, by contrast, is more esoteric—a drum music central for some four decades to the worship of Jah, the Rastafari creator. Both reflect widespread borrowings and cross-overs of musical forms.

Early Rasta music was largely European in form, reflecting cultural links shared with Afro-Christian revivalism. Songs from the Sankey hymnal and the Book of Common Prayer were adapted to Rasta needs and sung at street meetings to a rhythmic accompaniment of rhumba boxes, maracas, graters and scrapers. By the mid-1940s an emergent style of drumming became increasingly important to Rasta ceremonies in the camps and yards of West Kingston. This drumming style, Nyabingi, reflected the fusion of *buru* and *kumina*, two African-derived recreational musical styles. Early Rasta master drummers adapted the three-part *buru* ensemble (bass, funde, repeater) to suit their individual styles and needs. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s Nyabingi music continued to be influenced by the folk musical experience of the Rastas. These influences grew out of the rural-urban connections of brethren who moved freely between country areas and the urban camps of Trench Town, Back O' Wall, and the Dungle, as well as rural migrants who joined the ranks of the Rastafari Movement.

Since the late 1960s island-wide Nyabingi ceremonies have increasingly been

held in rural areas. At these religious celebrations brethren and sistren gather in thatched tabernacles to "praise Jah and chant down Babylon." Typically, drumming and spiritual dancing take place throughout the night, punctuated by formal speechifying by leading orators. Elders recognized for their ritual knowledge officiate the week-long celebrations. As the Nyabingi traditions gained visibility in rural areas, younger members of the island's Maroon and Kumina groups have come to identify with the Rasta Movement without abandoning their own cultural expressions. Their involvement with multiple traditions will no doubt make itself felt in the further cross-fertilization of musical styles.

Reggae is a complex musical fusion that developed in the late 1960s from a combination of popular Jamaican styles (ska and rock-steady) and American rhythm and blues, with influences from other island folk traditions. Although reggae overlaps more with Jamaican popular music than does Nyabingi, they share an emphasis on African self-determination. Disaffected and radicalized youth (including Bob Marley) who entered the Movement during the political turmoil of the 1960s straddled the folk and popular musical spheres and gave reggae its cutting political edge. The "conscious" lyrics of many reggae compositions address the social and political circumstances of the masses in Jamaica and elsewhere, and popularized Rastafari throughout the world. Today reggae can be heard in metropolitan Black communities in the Caribbean, North America, Europe and Africa. Influenced both by local folk forms and Afro-American rhythm and blues, reggae is now a vehicle for political commentary as well as an artistic form.

John P. Homiak



recognition, Haitian Creole has gained in status as an expression of traditional culture; it is valued by nationalist movements in an effort to reaffirm their cultural identity as separate from French culture. Papiamentu is spoken regularly in the Dutch Antilles during the course of many daily activities and although English is the official language of Jamaica, local movements supporting the Creole dialect have developed.

### **The Creolization of Religion**

Enslaved Africans in the Caribbean restructured their ancestral religions in ways that reaffirmed their ethnic identity or served as vehicles for resistance to European domination, while simultaneously satisfying their spiritual needs. Some of these religions, such as those of Yoruba origin (which found in Cuban Santería and in the Shangó of Trinidad their most important expressions in the Caribbean) have drawn essential content from their African ancestry. This is evident in their rites and pantheons as well as in their priestly organization. In Haiti, where there was practically no White population after the early 19th century, Vodoun evolved to constitute not only an African religion, but also a national one.

Slavery cut off religion from its former place in African social and political structures and forced Africans to separate it from its original environs to fit it into an unknown world governed by a different logic—that of European masters. Thus, for example, they had to adapt their own religious expressions to a European religious chronology, sometimes shrouding African content in Christian forms. The identification of African deities and Catholic saints evolved in part from the slaves' need to disguise their ceremonies. This process yielded a number of different collective representations. Thus, myths of deities such as Omolú could be related to parables of the Scriptures such as that of the Prodigal Son; popular Christian legends could be linked to the *orishas* (deities) of Santería; and Biblical allegories could contribute, as they did in Haiti, to a new mythology that replaced the African mythology.

Vodoun, the religion of the Haitian people, is a good example of how a new

form of religious expression evolved from French-influenced Catholicism together with a diversity of West African religious traditions. Michael Laguerre (1980) refers to it as a folk religion that developed as a result of the incorporation of West African slaves into colonial Haitian plantation society. He explains how Vodoun developed from household-based ritual into an extended family-based ritual that after independence in 1801 became and has remained the main religion in the island. Vodoun is part of Haitian creole culture and represents the very particular way in which African and Christian religious elements came together to form a belief system that permeates almost every aspect of Haitian life.

Vodoun—the word itself is Dahomean in origin and signifies “spirit” or “deity”—is applied to all the activities of religious life, from the ritual of the temple to the songs and dances. The Vodoun practiced in Haiti consists of rites, beliefs, and activities of a number of religions such as the Congo-Guinée, the Ibo-Kanga and others. These become integrated in Haitian practice; according to Harold Courlander (1960) this integration demonstrates how Haitian Vodoun draws from the common inheritance of all these African faiths.

Nevertheless, whatever the content of the beliefs brought by the slaves from Africa might have been, when practiced in the New World, they were influenced by external factors: the laborers' daily activities in the plantation, the intermingling among people from various backgrounds, a new language for communication, new types of housing, new diet, new patterns of social organization and political power, and a new calendar of events that reflected Catholic feasts and the colonizers' national holidays. All these variables, added to the synthesis of African sacred beliefs, made for the emergence of a Haitian belief system.

The songs, essential to the Vodoun ritual, reveal the creolization process. Sung primarily in Haitian creole, some contain words from African languages and some are simply borrowed from the Catholic church. This is not surprising, for many Vodoun practitioners are baptized and attend Mass in the Catholic





Playing the small *rumba* box or *quinto*, a drum-substitute which has been traditionalized as part of the Afro-Cuban percussive repertoire. (Photo by David Brown)

Church. The following portion of the litany *Djo* (prayer from Guinea) in Haitian creole, collected in Port-au-Prince, is important in showing how Roman Catholic and West African traditions come together in Vodoun:

Lang di seniè di ta Marie  
 Kèl consévoa an Jézi Kri  
 Lètènitè la choazi li  
 Il a konsi di Sintespri.

An angel of the Lord said to Mary  
 That she will give birth to Jesus  
 She has been chosen since the beginning  
 of the world  
 She will give birth by the operation of the  
 Holy Spirit. [Laguerre 1980:155-156]

In the Caribbean, then, there exists a sort of pendular movement in which African elements were introduced into Christian practice, while Christian elements were absorbed

and reinterpreted in African terms. These elements are not just fused together, they are incorporated in the creative process of forming a new religious system with new meaning.

In the Protestant Caribbean this syncretism took on different forms. Biblical texts were imposed upon slaves to encourage passivity and acceptance (such as the narrative of the submission of the Israelites to Egypt and the captivity in Babylon). Messianism, the expectation of a deliverer or savior, was a concept that Blacks adopted to serve their own needs. Another example is found in the reinterpretation of African trance, as occurred in many of the "Revival" religious sects in Jamaica. In the same country, churches such as the Jamaica Free Church lean towards Prophetism; in the Bongo faith, syncretic rites are celebrated in which Protestant chants and prayers take place while animals are sacrificed. These expressions often have a strong messianic sense, as does the Rastafarian movement, although the latter carries not only religious but also strongly political meaning.

### Music: Ritual and Social

Underlying the diversity of musical forms and styles in the Caribbean, as Kenneth Bilby (1985) has pointed out, are certain basic unifying characteristics. Caribbean musics, like the creole languages spoken in the region, reflect the region's historic development. The coming together of traditions from Europe, Africa, India, and China in the contexts of New World plantation economies led to the creation of new cultures, new languages, and new musical forms. The Caribbean has been and continues to be a crucible in which new musical forms have repeatedly been forged.

In the Caribbean, creolization contributed to the creation of a wide array of musical forms, ranging from those closely resembling the European patterns, to "neo-African" forms. Each colony created its own music within this Euro-African array. That is why the Caribbean can be treated as a single musical region despite the major variations found locally. Musical creolization has been expressed in events in which music plays a



key role: the fiestas or *fêtes*, sometimes linked to religious practices; work songs that were sung by slaves in the fields in call-and-response style; traditional carnivals that were originally related to European religious celebrations but which little-by-little were taken over and reinterpreted by the Black population. Both Whites and Blacks danced in the carnivals, and both African and European instruments were played. Creolization also occurred in European dances, as slave musicians tended to transform styles to correspond to their own aesthetic sensibilities.

The key role of drums in Caribbean musical forms points to their African ancestry. Also fundamental are the relationship between music and dance, the call-and-response style, the music's social and collective nature, and the presence of syncopated rhythms. These elements are found in the jook dance or jumping dance of the Bahamas; the Kromanti dance and Gumbe, Kumina, and Convince or Bongo rites of Jamaica; the ritual dances of the Rastafarians; the *kalinda* dance of Trinidad; the Santería and Abakuá rituals of Cuba; the *palos* of the Dominican Republic; the Vodoun ceremonies of Haiti, and the *bomba* of Puerto Rico, to mention just a few examples.

Among the styles that more closely reflect European tradition are marches, polkas, mazurkas, and other dances, sometimes played by small-town bands with instruments of European origin, using the harmonic system based on diatonic scales that came from Europe. Yet, even when the diatonic system and European instruments are used, the bands modify styles and forms and insert rhythmic elements from African traditions to free up the melodies from rigid structures.

During the first centuries of the colonial period Europeans viewed musical forms of African origin as a form of social control and a way to maximize labor productivity. They attributed a functional meaning to such music, consistent with their own interests. African-based music sometimes gained legitimacy in its own right. And over time African-based music made its way into the sitting rooms of Europeans. Musical styles and dances from Europe were transformed and Africanized through the infusion of African elements in



Sifting cassava flour for making *bammies*. Methods and utensils used in the processing and cooking of manioc or cassava derive from the indigenous Arawak people. (Photo by Heliana Portes de Roux)

the repertoires of music groups such as the town bands that played European harmonies with Old World instruments. Examples include the *merengue* of the Dominican Republic, the *son* and *danzón* of Cuba, the *mento* of Jamaica, and the *biguine* of Martinique. All of these arose as new styles of folk music, and became to some extent a part of those nations' respective national identities. In other words what is "creole," the new creation, is an important part of what is authentic to each country.

Along with historical changes in the Caribbean, including urbanization and the spread of modern communication media, music has continued to evolve, always maintaining its links to its origins. Trinidad's calypso, Jamaica's reggae, and salsa—which unites Cuba, Puerto Rico, and New York—have all resulted from that ongoing process of creation and innovation. These creole genres have become international popular musics appealing to African, European, American and global audiences with a built-in diversity of style that appeals to many different aesthetic systems.



## Creole Caribbean Cooking

The encounter of peoples in the Caribbean was also an encounter of food products and of transformations in the eating habits of those involved. With conquest came the rewards: gold, silver and precious stones, spices, fruits and cassava, cotton, indigo and tobacco. The Arawaks and Taínos, indigenous to the Caribbean, had knowledge of tropical fruits, corn, cassava, seafood and spices. These products, among others, provided the base from which new culinary processes evolved and represent today the silent contributions of the thousands of native peoples who died during the conquest and colonization of the islands.

Over centuries many food products were introduced to the regions—*ackee* from Africa, oranges and lemons from Spain, breadfruit from the Pacific, bananas, ginger, cloves, turmeric and nutmeg from Asia. The fertile soil of the Caribbean produced an abundance of useful plants, both native and introduced: cocoa and coconuts, avocados and eddoes, plantains and bananas, pineapples and pawpaw; soursops, sweetsops, guavas, mangoes, cassava and sweet potatoes; coffee, ginger, limes, grapefruits and other citrus fruits; and with much sorrow, sugar cane. Sugar cane has played a key role in the fortunes and misfortunes of the Caribbean. It was introduced in 1493 by Columbus and it was because of sugar cane that the slave trade flourished in the Caribbean plantations.

Many European crops such as wheat were not prominent in the Caribbean since they could not be successfully cultivated in a tropical climate. On the other hand, pork and beef were quickly incorporated into the Caribbean diet. Few of the traditional dishes of the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean

survived, and those of African origin were not often incorporated into the diet since slaves were given a ration and their food and taste preferences were not generally considered. At first male slaves were preferred to females, who had traditionally been the ones who prepared food. Also, in the initial stages of forced labor in the plantations there was little opportunity for culinary creations. For this reason, Europeans were the leaders in the early development of Caribbean cooking, adapting condiments and seasonings to newfound products.

As was the case in music and languages, conditions in the Caribbean nevertheless encouraged the development of creole foods. Fugitive slaves (*Cimarrones* or *Maroons*), pressed by need, created a stew or *puchero* that contained anything they could obtain. The “jerked pork” tradition of *Maroons* in Jamaica comes from the early days of their freedom when they hunted wild pigs. The abundance of sugar facilitated the creation of original desserts topped with fresh tropical fruit. The cooks, generally Black women, served as liaisons between the Afro-Caribbean population and slave owners, taking dishes prepared in their kitchen to the master’s table and diffusing newly learned European recipes among the Afro-Caribbean population. From this process of exchanging, borrowing and mixing, creole foods were created, based on local food products or those that were brought from other regions of the world and assimilated into Caribbean cuisine.

Today as in the past food is often prepared in the open air on a charcoal barbecue, giving the dishes the characteristic Caribbean flavor. Many islands claim specialties of their own—in Jamaica there is *ackee* and saltfish, the traditional cassava *bammies*, and



“jerked pork”; *ajiaco* and *lechón asado* in Cuba; *rognongs* in Haiti. Creole cooking has a unique flavor, with an immense number of dishes: curried goat and curried mutton, crabs and lobsters; *moros y cristianos* made with black beans and rice; fish cooked in coconut cream, stuffed avocados; pineapples filled with shellfish. In the end is Creole cookery that combines the flavors and ingredients of many peoples.

### Conclusion

Music, language, religion and food products were not the only results of Caribbean creolization. Similar processes of adaptation, assimilation and transformation are evident in literature, theater, dance, painting and crafts. These expressions constitute the results of re-creation and re-edition, accomplished by all those who willingly or by force populated the Caribbean (and their descendants); they have left a profound mark on the cultures of the region. As we approach 1992 and the Quincentenary of Columbus' voyages to the Caribbean, we consider the encounter in the New World of people from several different continents. The consequences of that encounter—both good and bad—continue to unfold, shaping contemporary life in the Americas. The creole traditions of the Caribbean invite us to think not only about our complex past, but our cultural future as well.

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