

# A Drum's Trans-Atlantic Journey from Africa to the Americas and Back after the end of Slavery: Annobonese and Fernandino musical cultures.

**Isabela de Aranzadi**

*Group of Reserche MUSYCA  
(Música sociedad y Creatividad)  
de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid.  
Email: [isadearanzadi@terra.es](mailto:isadearanzadi@terra.es)*

## *Abstract*

*Musical instruments are an intrinsic part of culture accompanying people as an essential factor in shaping the identity preserved through memory. In Equatorial Guinea there are some ethnic and social groups: Fang, Bubi, Ndowe, etc. It is in relation to the Annobonese and the Fernandinos musical culture, that the concept of "Return trip to Africa" becomes meaningful. This paper discusses this focusing on instruments such as cumbé, kunkí, and dances such as cumbé or bonkó, which constitute an African legacy that has returned and has become a part of Equatorial Guinea's musical culture. The paper's main point is that the identity given by the African elements has remained active until today.*

**Keywords:** *Gumbé, cumbé, kunkí, Fernandino Creoles, Annobonese, Equatorial Guinea, musical instruments, slavery.*

## Introduction

Musical instruments are an intrinsic and living part of the material culture that travelled with people in their historical development. These material objects have accompanied communities which have travelled in the course of history, migrating for different reasons. These instruments are an essential factor in the shaping of identity preserved through memory, and they also form part of their spirituality. In the American continent, ritual musical objects as symbolic reinterpretation have played a role in granting not only identity but also security to communities after their brutal uprooting from their original social and physical environment. These objects have provided memories, allowing self-representation and relocation through a search of stability in the home.

The search to recreate a “home” during slavery had an influence in the transmission and reproduction of instruments and music and material culture; for example, following the abolition of slavery at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, African musical culture was enriched by contributions from newly-freed African slaves from the Americas. It entailed the return of a new sort of “African” culture to the African continent after exposure to European influences on the other side of the Atlantic. The return leg of this journey which began in the nineteenth century, spanned the twentieth century (with genres such as the blues, swing, reggae and Afro-Cuban) and continues to the present day with popular urban music in Africa drawing increasingly on external influences in a globalised world (Aranzadi 2009:36). The *gumbé*, a drum-dance which the Jamaican maroons “gave back” to the African continent in 1800, is the earliest example of a “return trip” phenomenon that shows all the features of African-influenced American music (Collins 2007:1).

There are social groups that have built their identities with contributions from elements that have made a return trip across the Atlantic; examples will include: the Annobonese and the Fernandino Creole people, both inhabitants of Fernando Poo (today’s Bioko) and the island of Annobón respectively (Spanish colonies), the inhabitants of Clarence-city (founded in 1827), settlers from Sierra Leone and other African social groups like the Santomeans and Jamaicans (Usera 1848:18). One can also include Cuban settlers who were emancipated and deported from Cuba on many occasions between 1861 and 1897 (Unzueta y Yuste 1947:206-211) (Castro Antolín 1996:45). There is a continuous communication by sea between the little Island of Annobón and the Island of Fernando Po and this does have a profound influence on their musical culture. Of all these possible influences on Fernando Po and later on Annobón, the most important trans-Atlantic cultural currents were those that ran between Jamaica, Cuba and Sierra Leone (influences from the Deep South of the United States would also arrive in Sierra Leone).

In the case of Equatorial Guinea, two elements constitute this journey: one is the *cumbé/kunkíl/kunké*, a square frame-drum adopted by Fernandino and Annobonese, which comes from Freetown Krio culture formed by three groups: Jamaican Maroons,

U.S. settlers and slaves recaptured from different ethnic groups in Sierra Leone and other parts of Africa. The second element is the *bonkó* or *ñánkue* among Fernandino and latter adopted by the Annobonese, which came from Nigeria via Cuba (where the slaves preserved and transformed it), and directly from Calabar in Nigeria.

These musical objects are not only a reflection of a culture; they are also constituent parts of the processes of self-representation and belonging in a dynamic process of interaction of material culture and societies in motion. They represent a reconfiguration of the Atlantic culture in a complex process of social relations by the coming together of peoples in the colonial situation after the abolition of slavery. In this paper, this “return trip” is explored. The specific focus is the drum and in discussing this, attention is paid to the music that accompanies it. Both are also discussed in some passages within the context of the rituals in which they are used. The paper starts with the discussion of the *gumbé* and expanded in latter sections to include other drums, music and rituals.

## 1. The *gumbé* from Jaimaica

The first reference to the *gumbé* drum in Jamaica was made in 1774 by the traveler Edward Long, an English planter who lived on the island from 1757 to 1769 (Long 1774 Vol. II: 423), and is mentioned again in Freetown in the 1820s (Harrev 2001:3). Hutchinson (1861:112), the British consul at Fernando Po from 1855 to 1858, describes the *goombee* as one of the “immoral” dances of the inhabitants of Freetown.<sup>1</sup> It is known by different names: *gome* (Ghana), *gube* (Mali), *goumbe* (Côte d’Ivoire), *kumbeh* (Nigeria), *maringa* or *malinga* (Congo), etc. In the Bahamas, Trinidad or Jamaica it is known as *gombe*, *gombay*, *bench drum*, *gumbá*, *goomba*, *goombah*, *gamby*, *goombeh*, *goombey*, *goombay*, *gumbay*, *gumbe*, etc. (Aranzadi 2009:144). The *gumbé* supplied an important building block for various 20th century African acculturated popular music genres such as the *makossa* of the Cameroons, or Yoruba *juju* music (Collins 2007:181).

In Fernando Poo (now Bioko), we can attempt to find the Jamaican legacy in two contexts: through Jamaicans who came to the island or as a result of the contribution of the Krio culture which was taken from Freetown to Clarence (today’s Malabo). The black Jamaican missionaries who landed at the Island with John Clark (who supported the repatriation of Jamaican blacks to the African continent) were qualified schoolteachers prepared to educate the population (Martín del Molino 1993:103). They lived in many parts of the island between 1844 and 1846 (Sundiata 1972:170).

On the island of Jamaica, the maroons (slaves who had escaped to the mountains) used a drum known as the *gumbé*. They formed communities which preserved their own culture for two-hundred years in a constant struggle for survival in the face of British rule. The city of Freetown, founded in 1787 in order to accommodate the emancipated slaves, received a group of 550 of these maroons in 1800 (Rankin 1836 Vol. I: 108).



Jamaican *Gumbé*. Photo: Kenneth Bilby

Having been betrayed after a peace treaty, they were taken by the British to Nova Scotia in 1796 and to Freetown four years later.<sup>2</sup> The *gumbé*, a square drum with legs, is an important cultural symbol for these maroons as it is associated with the invocation of their ancestors (Bilby 2007:15), and played an important role in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in their fight for freedom against the British. It was used for the communication of messages and also to warn them of future attacks being planned by the British. The sound of these drums provoked a trance from which these premonitions were made (Lewin 2000:160).

The *gumbé* is still used today by the descendants of the maroons in Jamaica. Currently the *gumbé* enjoys a continuing presence in Krio culture in Sierra Leone. This drum is also still used in Freetown to enter into a trance and predict the future in events such as baptisms and weddings.<sup>3</sup> *Goombay* has also been influential on three of Sierra Leone's 20<sup>th</sup> century popular dance-music styles: namely *assiko*, *maringa* and *milo jazz* (Collins: 2007:180).

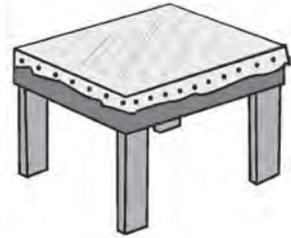


BAND at the JAVY—EDNE JOHN—CANDÉ.  
*Fig. 1. Jamaica — Aug. 1836.*

*Gumbay* in Jamaica  
 (Belisario 1836)



Jamaican *Gumbé*  
 Photo: Helen Roberts 1913  
 (Natural History Museum New York)



Jamaican *Gumbé* 1920 (Cuba)  
 described by Fernando Ortiz.

Of the two possible routes of Jamaican influence, the most likely is that the Annobonese *cumbé* dance-drum arrived via Sierra Leone, since the Annobonese playing technique of using the heel of the foot is not the norm in Jamaica, where it is held between the knees. In Sierra Leone, according to Van Oven, the drum is currently played both ways (Harrev 1998 [1987]: 11). The possibility of a direct route is unlikely due to the prohibition of drums and dances by the Baptists in Fernando Po (Lynn 1984:273), however, it is clear that the *gumbé* spread from Freetown to several other African countries just as the Krio language (Pidgin English), which also spread from Freetown. In relation to the Krio language, one needs to mention that Equatorial Guinea has its own distinctive Pidgin (Morgades 2007:31). However, in the twentieth century, the pidgin language remained an important vehicle of communication in Bioko: “only a few spoke Spanish [in 1917]” (Bravo Carbonell 1917:46) and over 120,000 workers, mostly Nigerian (Igbo, Ibibio and Efik) were imported from the 1940s to the mid-1960s (Sundiata 1996:181-182).

## 2. The *Cumbé* in Annobon

Owing to the uninterrupted influx of workers and especially of artisan carpenters<sup>4</sup> Equatorial Guinea would be added to the list of countries to which the *gumbé* would spread. It is a drum with legs and a double frame and wedges on the back to hold the drum skin taut. It is made using modern carpentry techniques with screws on the side to hold the drum skin to the frame. In addition tools such as the saw have been

used in various countries as musical instruments including Equatorial Guinea where the Fernandino used a saw accompanying the square drum with legs<sup>5</sup>. The *cumbé* is part of the traditional Annobonese musical culture and was known as *kunkí* by the Fernando Poan Creole people. The Bubi who live in the north of the island have been influenced by the Fernandino, and have used and called it *kunké*.<sup>6</sup>



Annobonese *Cumbé* (with larger *cumbé*, little *tambalí* and *chin*)

Photo: Isabela de Aranzadi

As mentioned earlier, the *gumbé* spread from Freetown to different countries in Central and Western Africa. Among these countries was Ghana where it has become absorbed into different musical styles as ‘gome’, the neo-traditional *simpa* music, the neo-traditional *gahu* music and was introduced into *konkoma* highlife groups” (Collins 2007: 181). A specific example would be a musical group called “Kpehe Gome Group” in Ghana which used the drum. The group was formed in 1954 with the *Ga* fishermen who returned from Fernando Po (Collins 2007:5). In fact, according to Hampton (1979) the *gome* was taken to Ghana by *Ga* workers returning from Santa Isabel (Malabo). It was introduced via Fernando Po in the 1940s and 50s. The songs that were accompanied by the use of the drum were in Pidgin English, sung by workers of multiethnic origin in Fernando Po, and were meant as entertainment on the day of rest, usually, Sunday (Hampton 1979:5). The Ghanaian workers learned the use of the drum and the songs from the Sierra Leonean and other West African workers who were in the city of Santa Isabel. The *cumbé* drum from Annobón is exactly the same as the *gome* of Ghana and the *gumbé* of Freetown, where it still constitutes a sign of identity among the *krio* people. A musician from Sierra Leone (grandson of the great musician Ebenezer Calender who played the *gumbé*), who listened to some recordings of the Annobonese *cumbé*, confirmed that this resembles the “old style” of *goombay* music in Freetown.<sup>7</sup> Maringa,

associated particularly with the late famous Freetown guitarist Ebenezer Calender, utilises the giant goombay frame-drum upon which a player sits (Collins 2007: 180).



Gumbé in Sierra Leone  
Photo: Kenneth Bilby

Annobonese Cumbé  
Photo: Isabela de Aranzadi

Gome in Ghana  
Photo: Flemming Harrev

Comparing the scores of the Ghanaian *gome* (Rentik 2003:35) and those of the Annobonese *cumbé* (Aranzadi 2009:138), we may deduce in both, the use of the afro-Caribbean rhythm patterns employed in many Cuban rhythms. In the case of the Annobonese *cumbé*, the *katá* (two sticks which are struck against each other and which accompany the *cumbé*) produces the pattern. As far as the *gome* is concerned, the pattern is longer and is played by a bell.

Cumbé

Gome

Score by Songa Rentina

The Annobonese *cumbé* is a dance with a clear element of courtship, present in Europe since the age of “courtoisie” in the Middle Ages, a markedly Western phenomenon. In 1826 there is reference to a dance whose only accompanying instrument was the *goombeh* (*gumbé*) drum. Williams describes it in Jamaica in 1826 as a kind of bolero, a “dance of love” as they called it (Lewin 2000:94). The *cumbé* is usually danced by couples (Aranzadi 2009:144) but on the African continent it is more common for dances to be either exclusively for men or exclusively for women.



Annobonese couple dancing the *cumbé* in Palé (Annobón)  
Photo: Isabela de Aranzadi

It is a slow dance. It begins with all participants standing still on flat ground, forming a circle, and in pairs. One of them leads the dance and can be either at the centre or in a pair in the circle. At the start of the dance men and women stand in a circle, alternating between men and women. The *cumbé* drum is played with only the hands until the moment known as the *punt*, marked by the rhythm of all the drums (the leader of the dance is called *pe punt*). From that moment onwards it is also played with the heel of the foot and the music acquires a greater dynamism and energy. At that moment, the women turn around and stand facing the men in pairs, when the leader of the dance gives the signal. This dance is practiced at festivals (especially on Saint Anthony’s Day) and commemorations and often takes place in the town square of Palé, the most important village on the island situated in the north of Annobón (Aranzadi 2009:145).

For the Annobonese it constitutes a sign of identity and they respect it as the tradition of their elders in the same way as the other major traditions in Annobón such as *sanguitá* or *dadj’i*. This is a mixed age group. They perform the *dadj’i* dance in weddings and funerals of some members of the same age group (Aranzadi 2009:128-

143), (Panadés 2007:117-124). In *dadji* funerals, they dance with stick of the same size as the deceased's. The stick is brought out in the final death ceremonies" (Elá 2005:15). The only instrument in this dance is the little tambourine, the *tambalí*.

For decades many Annobonese have migrated to the island of Bioko in search of work and they have preserved the dances of *cumbé* and *dadji*. Recently incorporated into Christian rites are some instruments such as the *tambalí* or drums from *mamabe / bonkó* of Annobon such as the *rolin*, singing in *fa d'ambô* with their own rhythms. In the "Claretianos" church (Malabo) one can witness the Annobonese mass today. Each ethnic group has its own mass in its own language rhythms and musical instruments (Fang, Bubi, Kombe, Creole-Nigerian).



Annobonese *Cumbé*. Photo: Isabela de Aranzadi

The accompanying instruments are two drums, the *cumbé* which provides the base rhythm and whose sound is deep and powerful (large in size, it is played with the hands and with the heel of the feet) and the *tambalí* square tambourine of a similar construction as the *cumbé* which is played with two thin sticks (*öpá tomböl*). The *tambalí* that is used is the *doblá*, whose sound is higher-pitched. To accompany the drums they use two idiophone instruments; the *chin* (iron sheet which is struck), and the *katá* (two thick sticks which are struck against each other). When they do not have a *chin*, they use bottle to produce a beat<sup>□</sup>. The *cumbé* provides the base rhythm and the *tambalí* makes the solos, playing polyrhythms over the ostinatos produced by the *chin* and the *katá*.

The Annobonese especially admire the elegance of the older generations in the *cumbé*-dancing. The songs have been adapted and are sung in *fa d'ambô* (a Creole Portuguese). They are composed by a member of the community and are incorporated into the traditional body of popular folk songs. The transmission of knowledge to do with the handling of instruments has an initiation component, managed by a "dad" who is familiar with the rhythms and who must "bless" the person being initiated. The person

being initiated carries an offering and will be summoned to play the *cumbé* from that moment onwards. “Papá Pavil’a”<sup>3</sup> was the master and initiator of the few musicians who currently play this drum in Annobón and Malabo.

### 3. The Bubis have no Drums but Bells

There has been some authors such as Crespo (1950:150) and Manfredi (1949: 104-108), who describe a square drum in the 1950s among the Bubi. However, in Bubi tradition the drum has not been used. Although in some cases such as in the Aymemi dictionary, the term “drum” is translated as *ribetté* (1928:313), this Bubi word was used to designate the log or *mölëlo* used in the funeral ceremony of the same name, accompanying the songs of praise. The life of this trunk was short as it only lasted as long as the funerals. The *mölëlo* began at sunset, firstly with the sounding of the spirit’s name by the sacred trumpet. The *mölëlo* ceremonies lasted between four and sixteen days depending on the importance of the dead person’s spirit. The trunk or *ribetté* or *mölëlo* was played furiously so as to make it “talk” and at the end of the funeral rites came the “smashing” of the trunk into pieces which was then thrown into a hidden ravine. The total disappearance of the *mölëlo* indicated that all memory of the spirit’s material presence in the world had been wiped out (Martín del Molino 1989:139-142).



The *elëbbó* (Bubi bell). Baumann 1888

The Bubi drum that these authors describe in detail was therefore an acculturation from the Creoles due to the influence of a powerful group existing on the island. The Bubi have no drums, but bells. According to the inhabitants of Moka, in the south of Bioko, the drums carried by West African workers coming to the island, “bothered” the spirits

and were banned by the elders of the village. The *elëbbó* (Bubi bell) is characteristic of the spirit represented by each priest. It is an identifying spiritual element and is used in the dances. It cannot be found in any other culture.□

These authors refer to the same drum that is currently played in Annobón. The *tambalí* is used as a tambourine, it has no legs and it is smaller than the *cumbé*. It has one drumskin and two frames held in place by wedges. In Ghana and other African countries like Mali, we find a drum identical to this and with the same playing technique, called the *tamalin* or *tamlin*.



*Tambalí* and *cumbé* Annobonense. View of the back of *tambalí*.  
Photos: Isabela de Aranzadi

The *Museu de la Música* in Barcelona holds two examples of tambourines from Spanish Guinea dating from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (which are slightly larger than current ones). The Fernandino Creole people used this square tambourine to accompany the large, square *kunki* drum in the *kunki* dance. This small drum is known by different names in other parts of Africa: *sikko* (Sierra Leone), *samba* (Nigeria), *sákara* (Liberia), *konkoma*, etc. *pletia* (Ghana), *tamelin*, *tambourim*, *konkoma* (old Ghanaian word), *ashiko*, *assiko* (Senegal), *asiko*, *siko*, *samba* (Nigeria), etc. (Aranzadi 2009:205).

#### 4. The *Kunkí* between the Fernandino

There are two elements of Fernandino musical culture which have experienced the “return trip to Africa” phenomenon, a journey which was also completed by the *gumbé* – *cumbé* – *gome* – *kunkí* – *kunké*. The *kunkí* dance was accompanied, by the *kunkí* (a square drum with legs), by people who conserved the traditions originating in Sierra Leone, from 1827 (foundation of Clarence city), onwards. The Fernandino had a continuing relationship with Sierra Leone and sent their children to school in Freetown (Navarro 1859:73). The *koonken* or *koonking* (the English spelling) was danced in 1830 Freetown by the settlers and has been described by some authors. It is described by the traveler

Rankin (1836: 268) and Sibthorpe in his *History of Sierra Leone* (1970[1868]:52). It arrived from Nova Scotia (Canada) in 1792 with the 1131 freed slaves who had taken part in the American War of Independence on the British side and who had originated in Virginia and South Carolina Rankin (1836:82-87). Some of their songs were brought with them from America and others were created in Freetown and were often satirical in nature and on such subjects as love and loss, and also contained allusions to known (and also white) people (Walker 1976: 310-311), (Rankin 1936:288).

The contradiction operated in memory of its musical culture as a repository of different identities and always in relation to “other.” Following the need to assert their Africanity in relation to “other” Europeans in America, which represented numerous prohibitions on the use of drums prior to 1700 (Epstein 2003 [1977]: 30), in their return to Africa they continued to maintain a differentiation in relation to “other” Africans they considered inferior (under the influence of colonizers):

“...We rejoiced at the thought of returning to the warm and fruitful land of our race, able to draw from its inexhaustible resources the treasures of which our negro brothers who dwelt there were so ignorant; and we felt a pride in considering that we were blacks about to revisit the country of savages, with some small ‘stock’ of education, and that we might lead others to improvement.” (Rankin 1834:87).<sup>12</sup>

The word ‘stock’ is significant and describes the content (in) material that they brought with them in as a privileged social group facing the black Africans. The *kunkí* survived in Santa Isabel (today’s Malabo) until the 1970s and was part of the culture of the descendents of the first Sierra Leoneans. It was sung at major events such as weddings, baptisms and *komodja* (old Yoruba term used to describe the traditional christening or *pulnadö*, which now comes from pidgin for to pull out of the door, i.e. the newly out-born-out of the door, literally). The *pulnadö* is the initiation ceremony for social integration of a newborn between de Creoles in Malabo.<sup>13</sup>

The Fernandino accompanied it with three square drums: the *kunkí* (this was a large drum, fifty centimeters across, and had four legs one meter in length) and two small, square tambourines (of fifteen and twenty centimeters across) built in the same way, called *tambalí*, one of which was higher in pitch so as to produce lively rhythms and polyrhythm’s, and the other as accompaniment. It was also previously accompanied by an accordion, a saw and a bottle. Women wearing long dresses of a single solid color that came down to the ankles performed the dance in circular formation (as in Freetown), while the men played the instruments. It is similar to the Annobonese *cumbé* dance, but this one has a more “fiery” rhythm.<sup>14</sup> In 1971 there were three women’s associations, since for the Fernandino this is a women’s dance (as in Sierra Leone in 1830). The square *kunkí* drum was played (as is the case today with the *cumbé* and the *gome*), with the drummer sitting astride the four-legged drum.

## 5. The Bonkó From Nigeria/Cuba To Fernandopo

The other element of Fernandino musical culture that was involved in the “return trip to Africa” phenomenon is the *bonkó* or *ñánkue*, ritual–dance that is practiced today from mid-nineteenth century in Bioko, later introduced in Annobón at the beginning of the twentieth century, under the name of *mamahé*. This dance can be found on the island of Annobon for three generations, introduced in the early twentieth century from Santa Isabel, by Ton Bale. It is a ritualistic dance that comes from the Efik people in Calabar (Nigeria) and transformed in Cuba before come back to Fernando Poo. Both the *bonkó* and the *ñánkue* refer to the same dance and came to Bioko<sup>15</sup> directly from Nigeria with the Efik and indirectly from Cuba with the deportees and freed Cubans. According to some members of the secret society of Bonkó, including their descendants, Daniel Nathaniel Kinson took the dance in the mid-nineteenth century to Santa Isabel. He married Sara Robinson, an Efik Nigerian woman dancer who introduced elements of the rite. She was initiated in Efik rites in Calabar and their son Samuel Norman bought a high grade in the *Ekpe* hierarchy. He was initiated in Nigeria. According to Diego Kinson, (great-grandson of Daniel Nathaniel Kinson):

“They went to Duala and traded in palm oil. Betoté Akwa was a Duala, the first king of the Akwa, and his sister married Kinson [her was the first wife]...” There were two kinds of Sierraleoneans. Some brought American traditions such as the *kunkí* (they also danced the Charleston), and others (non-slaves from Sierra Leona), they danced the Basá *ñánkue*. The creoles called it the *ñánkue* of the Basá”... “They all came from Sierra Leone, but with different status”... “They wore a raffia costume similar to the *mekuio*”... “My father knew the rituals of Nigeria and belonged to the *Ekpe*. The black loyalists founded the masons to which the great grandfather and the grandfather belonged”... Daniel Nathaniel Kinson<sup>16</sup> brought Mendé people (a tribe from there)”<sup>17</sup>

The Sierra Leonean people practiced as teachers (along with the Fanti of Ghana) of newly freed slaves as they arrived to the island after being rescued from captured slave ships (Martín del Molino 1994:62).<sup>18</sup> Most of these slaves, recaptured during the 1820s and 1830s, were from the region of Calabar in southern Nigeria (Lipsky 2004:9). Migrations from Sierra Leone also drastically increased the population of Fernando Poo.

The secret society *Ekpé* from southern Calabar met in the Nigeria-Cameroon frontier area before borders were established (Sosa 1982: 32,62), and was exported by slaves to Cuba, where it became known as *Abakuá*. Thanks to the *cabildos*,<sup>19</sup> the language, traditions, musical culture and rituals were maintained among the African slave population. The *cabildos* were the heirs of the religious *cofradías*<sup>20</sup> of Seville and they allowed unity among the “negros de nación” (blacks of the same origin). The feast of the Epiphany (Three Kings’ Day) was the most important religious and cultural for blacks in Havana. The

funeral ritual of the secret society *Abakuá* is known as *nánkue* or *ñankpe* in Cuba. In Nigeria *nyankpe* is one of the highest ranking positions in the secret society *Ekpe* or *Egbo*. Holman (1834:393) also mentions the position of *yampai*<sup>21</sup> as high-ranking in the Nigerian society called *Ekpe*, or *Egbo*, described by some other authors in the 19th century as Goldie (1901:30) and Mary Kingsley (1897:532) among others.



*Bonkó* dance in Malabo (Bioko). The *ñankue* mask. Comparison with Nigeria/Cuba. Photos Malabo and Annobón: Isabela de Aranzadi. Nigerian: [www.afrocubaweb.com](http://www.afrocubaweb.com).

In the *bonkó* dance ritual there are many elements inherited from the ritual of the Nigerian secret society *Ekpe*, transformed and known as *Abakuá* in Cuba where there are the funerary rite *ñánkue*, which celebrates the secret society. The *Abakua* is a hierarchical society and therein, the *irimes* or masks also represent the ancestors and spirits performing different ritual functions in some ceremonies (Cabrera 2005 [1959]:9, 16, 261). On the other side of the Atlantic, among the Fernandino creoles, the whole development of the dance in Malabo is carried out over the Christmas period, with the Epiphany being a very important day, as it was in Cuba. In Santa Isabel “deported Cubans practiced *ñánkue*. It was a kind of demonstration against the colony”.<sup>22</sup> The dance finishes with a salute to the authorities. It is these days taken by the President Obiang but in the Spanish colonial era would have been taken by the governor (as in Havana). One of the *bonkó* masks in Malabo, with three African faces, *Papá fero*, represents evil. They carry this character tied with a chain to symbolize that evil is not to be part of the community, like among the Cuban *Abakuá* where the *irime* is tied and led by *Enkrikamo*. The word *irime* comes from the Efik word *idem* (mask).



*Papá Fero* tied to a chain following young people in the city of Malabo.  
Photo: Isabela de Aranzadi

The costumes in Nigeria are adorned with small bells called *enkaniká* (Miller 2005:25).<sup>23</sup> The *ñánkue* is in Bioko the main character and dancer of the Fernandino Creole people who has bells dangling around his waist, and makes them sound, like a symbol of power, and the dance acquires greater energy through his skill. It is called *bonkó* in Malabo and some Bubi villages. It was also exported to Rio Muni and is practiced in some Fang villages under the name of *abakuya*.<sup>24</sup> The mask has evolved depending on the village. They have a president and the members of the association are initiated by a person versed in the rite, song and dances and there are many women who sing in Pidgin English. The rhythm is different and has been adapted to the Fang style.<sup>25</sup>

The town of Santa Isabel received exiled *Abakua* as well as Efik merchants who were Ekpe. In 1828 Great Duke Ephraim, in 1861 King Eyo III and in 1874 the trader Efik Joseph Hensaw (Miller 2009:127). Muñoz y Gavia describes this visit (1950: 208-210). Many workers were later to the island.

“In contemporary Calabar, the memory of those who left for Fernando Po to find work on plantations in the nineteenth century remains strong. In the 1980s, a group of Ekpe musicians recorded this popular phrase:

<i>Ete unyeneke ubok utom</i>	<i>you say you are unemployed</i>
<i>Anana ubok utom di ika Panyá.</i>	<i>If you are jobless let's go to Panyá.</i>

Panyá is a rendering of the name España (Spain) into some local English varieties of Nigeria and Cameroon” (Miller 2009:128).

The dancer (*ñánkue*), is accompanied by the five *bónkó* drummers who play vigorously and engage in dialogue with the dancer in the centre. The *ñánkue* has an uncanny similarity with the Cuban *írime* of the *Abakúa* society, described and recorded at the time.

We can observe the evolution of the costume and mask of the dance by comparing

four moments in history on both sides of the Atlantic: in Nigeria, Cuba, Anobón and Malabo. In Nigeria the tradition survives today of using a pointed hood that is also observed in the engravings and pictures in Cuba in 1870 and in the early twentieth century (Landaluze 1881:141) and (Roche Monteaugudo 1908). In the 1900s and 1910s Jones described it in the same way (1962:243). Subsequently there is testimony of the transformations in Malabo involving the addition of some “tentacles” called “horns” and there are some descriptions in 1950s (Álvarez 1951:222). The hood can still be seen in Annobón, although some small “tentacles” have been added to the head. The *bonkó* (*mamahê*) reached this island one hundred years ago and as a result of isolation, the evolution was less notable (ships visited the island once a year). Finally we see the evolution in Malabo, where the transformation results in a pointed hood filled with much more “tentacles” or “horns” and many bright Christmas decorations and many small mirrors. In the costume one can also see the influence of the *Abang* female dance in the prominence of the back part, from which many handkerchiefs hung. Its body is covered with plant fibers and this is observed as early as the 1920s (Arija 1930:137). In Annobón the costume has been conserved just as it was formerly used in Malabo, according to the Annobonese who had lived on both islands.

Another term of Efik origin is the word for the bell used in the rituals, a bell without a clapper, which is played with an iron rod, accompanying the drums and producing a rhythm distinctively Caribbean in character. Among the Fernandino it is called the *kön-kön* (Aranzadi 2009:166, 261). In Efik the term is *a-kañ-kañ* (Sosa 1982:403).

One of the drums which they use in the *bonkó* or *ñánkue* dance is called the *rolin*. According to the Fernandino, this drum arrived on the island with 19<sup>th</sup> century Cuban deportees. These Cubans lived in *Barrio de los Congos* and later, by 1873, had been assimilated into the Fernando Poo Creole English-speaking population (Díaz Matarranz 2005:118). One of these Cubans wrote that there were some musicians among the group of his fellow deportees with him, on the same boat (Bravo Senties 1869:99,103). By 1891 there were some Cubans within the landowning class (Sundiata 1972:231).<sup>26</sup> Esteban Montejo ex-slave and Cuban maroon recounts that some *ñánigos* (members of the *Abakuá* secret society) were taken to the Island of Fernando Poo from Cuba (Barnet 1966:90). In 1869 the deportee Juan Saluвет described dances that he saw in Fernando Poo that resembled those of the Cuban *cabildos*, with their drums, rattles and castanets (Saluвет 1930[1892]:144). Another Cuban deportee compares Sundays in Santa Isabel with the Epiphany in Havana (Valdés 1898:67).



The ñañigos in Cuba in 19<sup>th</sup> century. Roche y Monteagudo (1925[1908]:99)

The Cuban deportee Manuel Miranda speaks of a significant number of *ñañigos* who arrived in 1897, singing in *ñañigo* and using spoons to play jars and plates. He also describes how Cubans and Sierra Leoneans gathered together in a the same *balele*<sup>27</sup> in the city (Miranda 1903:12-16, 31). The word *ñiñigo* is used by the Fernandino creole people in the rules of the *ñiñigo ñánkue*<sup>28</sup>. The sense of the sacred, the search for the Africanity, the spiritual consideration and the connection with the ancestors is common to both sides of the Atlantic. This dance of funerary origin has a component, of memory, of remembrance, and is intended to honour ancestors<sup>29</sup>. The objects (drums), are part of this symbolic and ritual content.

Fernando Ortiz states that the drums that Mary Kingsley describes in Fernando Po in 1897 (Kingsley 1897:67). were of the “Duala type”, similar to those of the Cuban *ñañigos* and introduced by the Afro-cubans.

“... when many of them took their liturgical dances with them to Fernando Poo, such as the dance which today is known as the Fernandino *yangué*, which is a funeral dance originating in Calabar (*ñánkpe* or *ñánkue* means “death” in the *ñañigo* language), and which the people of that nation brought with them and established in Cuba. Their children, many years later, having adopted this tradition, would later return it to Africa.” (Ortiz 1996 [1952]: 322).

The *Ékue* society uses the *Ékue* drum which, as Fernando Ortiz describes (1995:5), is a friction drum with a sound box and a drum skin held in place by wedges and rods. The *Ékue* drum is rarely seen and it is only known to certain initiated members. It is recognized by its rough and mysterious sound that evokes the terrifying roar of a leopard or the deep voice of great mystery. Hugh Goldie notes that at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Efik people of southern Nigeria believed that the *Ékue* (*Ekpe* or *Egbo*)<sup>30</sup>, which means leopard, occupied the highest spiritual rank and supreme territorial power. Its name cannot be uttered, its voice sounds like the growling of a ferocious animal, and it is never seen because it is brought out from the woods hidden in a sort of small shed (Goldie 1901:30-32). Similarly, Mary Kingsley, in her chapter on secret societies, amongst which we find the *Ukuku* ndowe and the *Egbo* in Calabar, she describes the

sound of this “hidden” being that represents the highest rank in the spiritual hierarchy (Kingsley 1897:534). These societies have played a judicial role (Perrois 1979:47) of social regulation in the same way as the *Mekuio* (Ndowe) (Aranzadi2009:99) or extinct *Ngil* (Fang) (Alexandre 1958:63).

The *Ekue* drum is used in the Cuban secret society *Abakuá*, for whose members the most important objects are symbolic drums which perform a ritualistic function. It is the sacred instrument, where the voice of the divine spirit is heard. It is also used in certain ceremonies of the Fernandino Creole people. The society of *bonkó* has a special fiction drum that is used in the *crai Egbo* ceremony (where they lament the death of a brother, a member of the *bonkó* society).<sup>□</sup>

## 6. Processes of the Reception of Musical Elements

On the island of Bioko, formerly Fernando Po, there are processes of reception and appropriation of musical elements such as rites, songs, instruments, and clothing for dancing, etc, as symbols that give an identity sought for its direct relationship with a powerful group which, when it modified the social space, exerted its influence through culture. This is the case of the Fernandino creoles in a historical position of authority in the social structure for its socio-economic power. In 1843 they formed the City Council and Lerena gave them wide powers of control over Santa Isabel and in the surrounding area (García Cantús 2004:175). In 1840 they lived in the town 900 “civilized” blacks and only 15 Europeans (Guillemar de Aragón 1852:61). In 1897 the Fernandino Daniel Nathaniel Kinson who, according to the Fernandino, brought the dance of *bonkó*, belonged to the “Consejo de vecinos” (he was second mayor) in Santa Isabel, and is described by one of the deported Cubans (Valdes 1897:35).

“Its community extended from the city of Clarence, later Santa Isabel and Malabo nowadays, around the coast of the island during the nineteenth century. The Fernandino would be the pioneers of trade on the island by establishing trading posts and plantations of tropical crops, a point of attraction, a symbol of progress and a factor that would make Clarence and later Santa Isabel a cosmopolitan city.” (Sundiata 1996:182).

In some Bubi villages in the north (Baney, Rebola, Basakato) or near Luba (Barrio Las Palmas, Batete) they have introduced the rite of *bonkó*, characteristic of the Fernandino Creoles in a acculturation that occurred by the continuous contact between the two cultures in the mid nineteenth and early twentieth century, the period in which this ritual dance starts and develops on the island. There are testimonies in 1890 of the ritual dance “as a manifestation of non-Westernization of this community, in a letter from a Creole Fernandino called Barleycorn” (Sundiata 1996:151). Also, the use of the dual frame, four legged drum called *kunké* expands amongst the Bubi people of these towns

and in the city itself, through contact with an influent group in the social structure.

We see the “return trip” phenomenon in the case of the *bonkó*, since Efik culture (of the region of Calabar in the south of Nigeria) arrived in Fernando Po via Cuba, where Efik people were taken as slaves. The Annobonese *mamahé* dance comes directly from the *bonkó* or *ñánkue* dance of the Creole people retains some ritualistic elements<sup>□</sup>.

We also find loan words in musical terminology. The *rolin* is a drum that is used by some groups in Guinea. In Jamaica the maroons of Moore Town have a drum called the *rolling*. In Sierra Leone the same term *rolling* is used for one of the square drums that make up the *sikko* group of instruments. *Katá* is a term used by both groups (Annobonese and Fernandino creoles), to designate the sticks which are struck together as an accompaniment. In Jamaica, *katá* is the name of the sticks which accompany the drum among the *kumina* people (non-maroon African Jamaicans). In Cuba the term *katá* denotes two bamboo sticks which are struck together as an accompaniment. There are also some *efik* words in songs in Malabo. In Malabo songs (some in pidgin and others in Spanish), some terms are preserved from Efik such as *Abasí* (Aranzadi 2009 b:18). In the legend relating to their origin (Sosa 1998:317), the *Abakuá* refer to the princess Sikan, the daughter of the Efor people. One day she approached the river to collect water in her pumpkin. When she was filling it, she accidentally caught and killed the sacred fish Tanze, the voice of *Abasi* (the supreme deity) and holder of the great mystery (also called Uyo). As a punishment for her profanity, Sikan was ritually sacrificed and her skin was used to cover the first sacred drum (*Ekue*), which only a select few could see. Other term is *Dibo*, repeated in many moments during the procession. It refers to Divine Voice.<sup>□</sup> The *maringa* is a song of Cuban influence that the Fernandino sing at the end of the *bónkó* ritual-dance and the Annobonese sing at the end of the *mamahé* (it is the term in Annobón for the Fernandino *bonkó*). In Gabon the word *maringa* is understood to mean a large, square tambourine played with the heel and the same term is used for the songs and the dance that are accompanied by this drum (Pepper 1958:49). González Echegaray (1956: 26 and 1964:149) classifies the *maringa* as a Cameroonian-influenced guitar song with a markedly Cuban feel due to deportees and freed slaves who established themselves on the island. It is a dance practiced by the Fernandino, as Daniel Jones notes in his novel *Una lanza por el Boabí* (1950: 146) and as do other authors in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (José Más 1931 [1919]: 96). From the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards the *maringa* was practiced independently of the *bonkó*. At first with an accordion and later with the guitar always accompanied by the large, square *kunkí* with legs, and also by the small, square *tambalí* tambourines. Nowadays the dance of *bonkó* and also *mamahé* (is the *bonkó* in Annobón) are rounded off with singing *maringa*.

## Conclusion

Material culture elements such as instruments, dance and songs, have made it possible to maintain alive the memory of who they were, where they came from and who they were connected to. They have also helped establish a symbolic bridge to their original parentage. The identity given by the African element has remained active until today. Firstly, as we have seen, among the slaves in the Americas. Then, among the freed slaves when they returned to their “home areas”. This took place from the late eighteenth century onwards, as the multi-ethnic society that was originally created in Freetown,

“...when the Krio community embraced the church and other institutions introduced by Europeans there was little room for their own culture and the *gumbe* answered this need, becoming over the years the dominant musical style, serving to unite the different peoples from the Krio culture.” (Harrev 1998 [1987]:9).

Later, this identity lived on, when they expanded in Africa reaching Fernando Po from 1827, as a symbol of the Creole culture that was even exported from Santa Isabel to countries such as Ghana. Finally when, under the influence of this island, it also reached the remote island of Annobón and these elements became an important part in the Annobonese musical culture.

Peoples who are physically remote but close in their identity are connected (Jamaican maroons, blacks in the south of the United States, Settlers in Freetown, groups of recaptured slaves, Africans from different parts of the coast, Fang from Equatorial Guinea, Bubi from the island of Bioko, Fernandino creoles from Malabo, Annobonese from Annobón, etc).

On the islands of Bioko and Annobón there has been a “return trip” phenomenon insofar as dances and musical instruments are concerned. Although they have European influences, they are African in character (liturgical song, syncopated rhythmic patterns and with polyrhythms, dancing in circles, etc.). Instruments such as the *cumbé*, the *kunkí*, the *tambalí* and dances such as the *cumbé*, the *kunkí*, the *bonkó*, the *mamahé* and the *maringa*, constitute an African legacy that has returned from America, a “return to Africa” within Equatorial Guinea’s musical culture.

**Dedication:** To my father, Íñigo de Aranzadi, who lived with the fang, learning their language and recording their traditions, and who was made an adoptive son by Etó Mebimi from Abere Esatop.

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## NOTES

1. The quotes are mine.
2. The ethnomusicologist Kenneth Bilby gathered oral testimony over three decades on this event in the past, recounted by Maroons elders in Jamaica (Bilby 2008: 378-390).
3. Seydu (a musician from sierra Leona) in personal communication 2010.
4. Flemming Harrev (1993: 6), (2001:7) and in a personal communication in 2008, pointed out to me the contact and the possible cultural influences between workers in West and Central Africa. "In the Belgian Congo alone 5,000 West Africans were recruited in the 1890's to construct the railwayline from the Atlantic port city of Matadi to the present day Kinshasa. He points back to Freetown - the capital in the first half of the 19th century of all the British West African territories (Banjul, Freetown, Fantiland, Lagos and Fernando Poo), and its unique, at least to Africa, Krio (or Creole) culture - as the focal point for the development of these early styles of urban music and dance". It is also quoted by Collins (2007:184). Clarence City was rapidly built with the wood brought by Owen from Freetown (Ríos 1844:61). The only craftsmen were carpenters in the 1840s (Usera: 32). I consider this factor to be very important because the African workers with their expertise in carpentry were the ones who were and are versed in such a sophisticated technique as the construction of this drum (in Malabo today there is a carpenter and musician named Hipólito Teruel who builds this drum). Freed slaves and creoles possessed this knowledge involving many technical skills, learned from the Europeans who hired them in different parts of Africa during the early colonization.
5. The saw was also played in Annobón with the box, the *tambalí* and the bottle. Juan Murcia (President of the cumbé) still plays it today.
6. Aranzadi (2009:37, 74,137,160,205,261,278) and Elá (2005:32).The Bubis also use the word *kunké* for a little square drum similar to a tambourine called *tambalí* by the Annobonese people.
7. Seydu is a musician from Sierra Leone, the great musician Ebenezer Calender was his grandfather who played *maringa* and the old style of *goombay* music in Freetown. (Personal communication 2010).
8. This rite is a Christian syncretism which originated as a spiritual need as a response to the abandonment by the Portuguese for many decades during the colonization on the island. See Zamora Lobo (1962), Caldeira (2005:10) and Aranzadi (2009:128-130).
9. In Malabo they play the *bottle* making the same rhythmic pattern as the *katá*. The big *cumbé* with legs is larger than in Annobón, where it is similar in size to the Jamaican *goombay*.

10. Isidro Lisso Alzina was born in 1918-1920. Another master was Gregorio Lisso Muñoz, born in 1932 (Desiderio Lisso personal communication 2008).
11. Nuria Fernández (personal communication 2006).
12. The quotes are mine.
13. Morgades personal communication 200. This ceremony is described in Sierra Leone in the period 1827-1828, among Yoruba liberated slaves (Sibthorpe 1970) (1868: 52).
14. Described by Diego Kinson (Creole Fernandino descendant of a Sierra Leonean who arrived in Fernando Po in the middle of the 19th century), in a personal communication in 2008.
15. The first reference to the relationship between the “*yangüé fernandino*”, the “*ñāñigos cubanos*” and the “*Calabar inglés*” was made by Moreno Moreno (1948:83-84).
16. The Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs possesses the document signed by King Alfonso XII awarding the Medal of Isabella the Catholic to Daniel Nathaniel Kinson in 1902 when he was seventy three years of age. His son Samuel sued Mayo because they would not emancipate him, he being a son of a Knight of Isabella the Catholic.
17. Diego Kinson (personal communication 2010).
18. “Los sierraleonas [...] se erigieron en maestros (junto con los *fanti* de Ghana) de los nuevos esclavos liberados que iban llegando a la isla, tras ser rescatados de los barcos negreros capturados”.
19. In this Cuban colonial context a ‘cabildo’ denotes a group of slaves of common ethnicity, who maintain and transmit their traditions in the language of their ancestors and who would gather to celebrate on festive occasions according to the traditions of their places of origin.
20. Brotherhoods.
21. Observe the similarity between the words: *yampai=yampe=nyampe=ñankpe=nyankpe=ñānkue=yangüé*, etc.
22. (Teobaldo Kinson personal communication in 2007).
23. Ivor Miller, a research fellow in the African Studies Center of Boston University has made a re-encounter between Cuba and Africa. “That’s why it’s extraordinary that the *Ekpe* in Calabar can listen to a speech by the *Abakuá*, or music and chanting, and understand it and recognize the rhythm and many of the words. The *Ekpe* system has nine different grades. One of those grades is called *bonkó*. *Bonkó* in reality represents the universal mother, the myth of the woman in the origin of the legend”. See more on an interview with I. Miller (2007).
24. Note the similarity with the Cuban term!.
25. Felipe Osá (in a personal communication in 2009).
26. The Kinson were among them (Sundiata 1974: 98) and (Sundiata 1996:93, 169,

- 187, 217, 248). See also Clarence-Smith (1994:183).
27. Colonial term to describe the dances of the blacks.
  28. The *ñíñigo ñánkue* is the name appearing in the statutes of Bonkó society to refer to the Bonkó. With this term they refer to the dance as a whole: masks, drums and costumes.
  29. Homage is paid to the dead by the Bonkó on December 24<sup>th</sup> in the cemetery, December 31<sup>st</sup> in the old cemetery at Santa Isabel (under the asphalt of a street in the present-day Malabo) and on the morning of the 25<sup>th</sup> visits are paid to the houses of bereaved people belonging to the Bonkó society and Basilé wher many members of Bonkó society died in an accident some years ago.
  30. *Egbo* is the highest hierarchical grade in the *Bonkó* society. According to tradition, this post was occupied by one single person known as *big Egbo* (as with the Efik). It is currently a council comprising ten people. This council runs society, judges the members thereof and draws up the statutes.
  31. Teobaldo Kinson's personal communication.
  32. The initiation and the punishments are performed in the *Bonkó* is meted out over the five drums. In Annobón in January 2009 I observed that a long and supple saw is used to beat the soles of the feet. Those punished are the ones who did not attend the call after Mass to start the procession of *Mamahê* through the town of Palé. This event takes place in the big square hut used as a meeting place by *bonkól/mamahê* society, following the *maringa* songs and dance that closes the procession, the dancing and the singing. It presents a characteristic Annobonese jocund context, but no age or any other condition is excused.
  33. Miller (2009: 43, 56, 57, 180, 206. 211, 216, 238, 290, 349, 352).

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## Oral Communications

Borubú, Juan María: personal communication on the construction of the *kunké* drum (Bubi).

Cachina, Pedro: personal communication on instruments and dances (Annobonese).

Cervera Liso, Desiderio: personal communication on instruments and recordings Annobonese songs and dances.

Dougan. Ana María: personal communication on krio's history and culture in Bioko.

Jalloh Anthony Zachariah (Seydu): personal communication on kio's music in Freetown and gumbé played by his grandfather Ebenezer Calender.

Kinson, Diego: personal communication on *bonkó* rite and *kunki* dance of Fernandino creoles.

Kinson, Teobaldo: personal communication on rituals between Fernandino creoles.

Leon, Paulino (Lavi): personal communication on instruments and recordings songs and dances (Annobonese).

Makole, Felicísima: personal communication on funerary rite of *bonkó*.

Medina Bestué, Cornelio: personal communication on instruments and recordings Annobonese songs and dances.

Morgades Besari, Trinidad: personal communication on krio's history and culture in Bioko.

Meté, Dolores: personal communication on old Bubi customs.

Muatetema Muelachuá, Donato: personal communication on Bubi music.

Murcia, Juan: personal communication on instruments and recording Annobonese Cumbe dance.

Panadés, Cipriano: personal communication on instruments and dances and recording Annobonese songs.

Osá, Felipe: personal communication on Fang instruments and on *Abakuya* dance and songs.

Teruel Mandrá, Hipólito (Manga): personal communication on instruments and recordings Annobonese songs and dances.

Tomé, Santos (Pecua): personal communication and recording ritual and dance Mamahe (Annobonese).

Vivour Lolin, Bankole: personal communication on instruments, music, rites and history of Fernandino creoles .

Yayé Villalba, Abraham: personal communication and recording song at the Claretianos church.