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**Creolization as balancing act in the transoceanic quadrille:**

**Choreogenesis, incorporation, memory, market**

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**Abstract:** This examination of quadrille dancing in the Caribbean and the Mascarene archipelagos offers an embodied theory of creolization as cultural process. Through close reading of French, Creole, and English sources, field research, and attentiveness to the pleasures of social dance, I reveal the creolized quadrille as a balancing act between choreogenesis, or the emergence of new segments within the quadrille's multi-part structure, and the fractal incorporation of such segmentation within that structure. An incompatibility with the logic of the market results, which, over the *longue durée*, is balanced by the creolized quadrille's postcolonial memorialization within a festival economy. I emplace these arguments in a transoceanic frame through which we grasp together broader developments in the Indian and Atlantic Ocean worlds that connect Europe and its (post)colonies. The creolized quadrille then emerges as a transoceanic leisure form that sheds light on creolization as an economic and cultural force within global modernity.

Keywords: creolized quadrille, transoceanic creolization, choreogenesis, fractal logic, postcolonial memory, Seychelles, St Lucia, Indian Ocean, French Antilles, festival economy

*'Do you have a national dance?' I asked my driver. It was the first day of my seven-island fieldtrip through the Caribbean Sea, and I was being driven across St Lucia from its airport towards my hotel in Marigot Bay. Steep, lush ravines lush flashed by as he pointed out nutmeg and banana trees. Ladies sat at porches of creole-style cottages, memory-triggers for snatches of Derek Walcott's poetry. On my right, the curving road revealed fishing villages hugging the shoreline below. It was his description of one of those villages, Dennery, as 'the home of an African style of music and dance'-- a reference to the globally popular music genre 'the Dennery Segment', that prompted me to ask the question. 'Yes, of course we have*

*a national dance as well’, he answered. ‘The quadrille. We dance it on Creole Day. Everyone dresses up in madras; we serve callaloo soup with crab in a calabash. If you speak in English on Creole Day, you can be arrested!’<sup>1</sup>*

*These remarks transported me to the annual festivities around World Creole Day (27<sup>th</sup> October) on another island, in another archipelago, in another ocean: Mahe in the Seychelles. There, I had seen Seychellois dancers, alongside troupes from the islands of Mauritius, Rodrigues, and La Reunion, perform the quadrille as part of their Indian Ocean Creole heritage and identity. Like St Lucia, Mahe is rugged and volcanic, its green and humid mountainsides plunging dramatically to the water. On both islands, I met people whose features challenged commonly-held preconceptions of racially bounded phenotypes; heard them speaking French-based Creoles as well as English; saw examples of Creole architecture, replete with shuttered windows, lambrequin fringes, and shady verandas; and ate food that combines French techniques, African-diasporic roots and tubers, and Indian spices and condiments.*

*‘Balancement cadencé’: the quadrille as rhythmic swinging, a balancing act across Creole worlds...*

The quadrille’s elevated place in postcolonial island societies such as Seychelles and St Lucia reiterates the lively extra-European life of this quaint-sounding dance, which was consolidated through its global popularity from the latter half of the nineteenth century onwards. Wherever Europeans had settled and created colonial societies, the quadrille was danced with vim, vivacity, and vigour; it was, in a way, the nineteenth century’s rock-and-roll. However, the quadrille was not merely reproduced in these colonial settings: it was transformed in keeping with the cultural material of African-heritage population groups that circulated alongside that of their European counterparts. The motives behind such

transformations were multiple: survival, mimicry, resistance, self-fashioning, self-assertion. But underlying and uniting them was an *innovative adaptability* which is a fundamental characteristic of creolized culture. The quadrille may well have lapsed into relative obscurity in contemporary Europe, but in the circum-Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds, on the Western and Southern African littorals, and in the gaucho cultures of South America, it has flourished in the nineteenth century and beyond-- initially as a performance of creolization and then, increasingly, as its own memory.

In this essay, I use quadrille dancing to articulate an embodied theory of creolization across the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, that takes into considerations questions of *value*.<sup>2</sup> By creolization, I signal the emergence of new cultural products through the unexpected and innovative assemblage of pre-existing cultural practices. Frequently applied to the encounter between Europeans and Africans in the Americas, Cape Verde, and the Indian Ocean,<sup>3</sup> creolization is a useful heuristic tool for analysing dances that emerged out of the violent and coercive interactions of different peoples that occurred during European imperialism. The term enables me to foreground the relationship between the European and African elements of these dances as dynamic and dialectical, and the dances themselves as cultural products that must be assessed for their newness rather than for their retention or preservation of those elements. Following Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, I use creolization as a barometer to understand ‘how cultures change’ where contact occurs under extreme conditions of inequality.<sup>4</sup> Like them, I lever analysis away from concerns with sources, origins, and authenticity to probe the conditions and consequences of creolization as cultural change. In so doing, I respond to Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s understanding of creolization as ‘a miracle begging for analysis’.<sup>5</sup> I analyse this ‘miracle’ by calibrating the aesthetic, socio-political, and epistemological factors underlying *choreogenesis*, or the processes whereby creolized dances gain new steps, variations, and terminology. These processes reveal the creolized

quadrille as produced during a phase within capitalism's deep history, which was defined by a particular socio-cultural parity across the Indian and Atlantic Ocean worlds. Postcolonial mobilizations of the creolized quadrille perform the collective memory of that phase.

This 'social life' of the transoceanic quadrille as performance reveals it as 'not-quite-commodity', formed through exchange of cultural codes within the Plantation economy as the crucible of creolization.<sup>6</sup> Its value derives from its enactment of 'standardized patterns of interaction',<sup>7</sup> whereby social, cultural, and aesthetic equilibrium was maintained within the Plantation's destabilizing violence: what one 19<sup>th</sup> century commentator called 'balancement cadencé', or a delicately swaying balancing act.<sup>8</sup> This essay's seven sections each showcase one such kinetically rich description of quadrille dancing in two archipelagos, the Antilles and the Mascarenes: a Creole song lyric from the French Caribbean, a dance manual in Seychellois Creole, three accounts in French from colonial commentators in both archipelagos, and Katherine Dunham's observations from the field in Martinique. I also examine visual material accompanying musical scores. I revivify these textual attestations with my embodied investigation into creolized quadrilles during travels through the Caribbean and Mascarene archipelagos. Fieldwork consisted of immersion in everyday Creole cultures, participation in dance classes, parties, concerts, and festivals, and conversations with practitioners, cultural gatekeepers, and guardians of patrimony. I thus read the archive together with the repertoire.<sup>9</sup> I analyze the textual and visual material through literary critical techniques that unpack metaphors, ambivalences, aporias, and repetitions, paying special attention to mimicry as the catalyst for choreogenesis, and to the contrasting temporalities of narrative and dance. Furthermore, my experiences of dancing, observing, and analyzing creolized quadrilles were directed by a social dancer's curiosity about how the highly structured quadrille can be *enjoyed* as kinetic, collective, social practice, and how that enjoyment continues today under vastly transformed socio-economic conditions.

Through this methodology, I theorize creolization as balancing act—between oceans, between empires, between metropole and colony, and between different groups of divergently-(dis)empowered people (masters, the enslaved, freed slaves, whites, blacks, mulattos, and so on).<sup>10</sup> I explicate the regimes of value predicated by this dance’s very structure as creolized product, the postcolonial utility of creolization as historical process, and the particular role played by performance within memorializing strategies. This, the first theoretical consideration of the creolized quadrille within a transoceanic frame and into the postcolonial moment, uncovers a *fractal* archipelagic logic which systematically incorporates the newness generated through creolization within pre-existing structures. The creolized quadrille’s tendency towards what I call *incorporation* has led to two consequences: its circulation within a specialised postcolonial festival economy that memorialises the archipelagic episteme as generator of para-capitalistic regimes of value, and its corresponding incompatibility with the global economy of commodified leisure. Thus, structural constraints explicate its continuing social life as not-quite-commodity. They also shed contrasting light on the market-led, transnational circulation enjoyed by partner-hold couple dances and solo genres that emerged from the same history of creolization, but which *segmented* into forms more amenable to commodification by *breaking away* from incorporative forces.<sup>11</sup>

### **Kadry-la pe komansé: the quadrille as a new structure of pleasure**

Kavalyé o dam, atansion!

Avansé-- pou kadriy-la pe komansé

(ladies and gentlemen, attention! Advance—for the quadrille is about to begin)

‘Kavalyé o dam’, Kassav’

The quadrille is a *multi-part* music-dance genre for groups, constituted through couples that interact in various ways through the duration of the dance. Meaning and pleasure is generated through the dynamic interface between the dancing group, the dancing couples, and the musicians who render that interface audible through their production of melody, rhythm, and declaimed instructions or ‘calls’. The epigraph above, taken from a song by the French Caribbean group Kassav’,<sup>12</sup> cites one such call (in an Antillean French Creole version): an announcement which traditionally alerts assembled people to the start of a quadrille, so that they can arrange themselves into required positions. Furthermore, the quadrille denotes a grouping together of dance genres into sets, or ‘suites’, of five figures. These suites have to unfold in a particular sequence and, ideally, without losing any of their constituent parts. Thus, the quadrille is a highly structured, formalized, even ritualized social performance,<sup>13</sup> where subordination of parts to the whole, within different dimensions of the performance, is key to its organisation and aesthetics. Successful participation in the quadrille and full appreciation of it, whether as dancer, musician, or observer/ audience member, depends on the knowledge of this complex structure and an acceptance of its logic of multi-scalar subordination. For those dancing the quadrille socially, who need to know how to execute its steps and choreography vis-à-vis each other on two levels (the couple and the group), it implies immersion in a milieu where such kinetic prowess is valued and enjoyed.<sup>14</sup>

The social world of European courts at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, where the quadrille first crystallized, was such a milieu. To understand the quadrille’s salience within this world, we need to consider the dances of early modern Europe which it superseded. On the one hand, there were popular group dances that assumed specific formations-- circles and facing rows, single or double;<sup>15</sup> on the other, the French courts favoured ‘open’ couple dances (where male and female partners synchronised, but without touching each other): these, such as the minuet, gavotte, and rigaudon, were famously

hierarchical and stately.<sup>16</sup> Social upheavals trigger changes in taste; hence ‘the spread of bourgeois capitalism in the late 1700s’ and ‘new democratic ideals’,<sup>17</sup> particularly following the French Revolution, catalysed demands for group dances which combined the geometrical organisation of the popular dances and the open couple format of their courtly counterparts. In response, by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the group dance called ‘contredanse’ or ‘contradanza’ (derived from the English ‘country dance’) spread across Europe and its colonies, cutting across social classes as well as linguistic and imperial boundaries. In the contredanse, men and women arrange themselves in a specific shape-- typically, facing lines of potentially infinite length. The pair facing each other at the top end of the line, or the head couple, initiates patterns or figures ‘concordant with a segment of the music.’<sup>18</sup> Their bodies linked through mirrored placement and movement around an axis, initiated by either by eye contact or leading by the hand, this danced unit of two executes prescribed steps, which are repeated by other couples.

The consequent mode of group interaction, both structured and flowing, created an affective shift from the formal and stiff open couple dances made fashionable by the French court. The contredanse began to be elaborated along a contrasting principle of inter-personal communication within the service of an overarching harmony. The linear (‘longways’ or ‘cotillion’) format started varying with a newer arrangement of four couples within an idealized square. Furthermore, sequences of contradances became aggregated into ‘sets’ which extended the timeframe of a constituted group’s interaction, while preventing monotony through alternation of tempos, dance time, and mood. A ‘caller’ or ‘commandante’ had the responsibility of organising the dancers through formulaic ‘calls’ announcing changes of figures and the beginning and end of sets. By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, therefore, set dances stabilize choreologically in two ways: firstly, through the idealized square formed by four couples, and secondly, through a fixed suite of five figures, respectively named ‘le pantalon,

‘l’ete’, ‘la poule’, ‘la pastourelle’, and ‘le boulanger’ or ‘finale’.<sup>19</sup> The figures were differentiated according to time signature and steps, with changes of music and calls signalling movement from one to the other. This five-part suite in quadrilateral format receives the name ‘quadrille’.<sup>20</sup> Moving between courts as an inter-European cultural phenomenon, it spread through rural areas of Europe and also to European colonies worldwide.<sup>21</sup> European colonizers introduced this dance-music system to settlements and plantations across the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. In these spaces—Brazil, Louisiana, Cape Verde, the Caribbean, Goa, Sri Lanka, the Mascarenes—the quadrille flourished, developed, and also diverged from its continuing life on the European continent.<sup>22</sup>

### **Les jetés-battus étourdissants: The quadrille escapes Europe**

La simple et fidèle description des cavaliers et des dames qui composaient la société du bal dont je parle, doit faire comprendre combien nous sommes loin du bamboula et de son tambour. Ici, en effet, nous étions en plein dans les manières élégantes ; et les nègres, ce soir-là, parlaient tous le français.

L’orchestre jouait du Musard le plus pur, sauf les fautes d’orthographe. Ces messieurs et ces dames figuraient à deux quadrilles, et glissaient en dansant, avec des charmantes minauderies, ni plus ni moins qu’aux bals de liste civile. Cependant il y en avait quelques-uns qui paraissaient regretter l’ancienne danse de Vestris, comme un moyen désormais perdu de développer ses grâces. Ceux-là répudiaient la glissade, et se livraient à des jetés-battus étourdissants.

This simple and faithful description of the gentlemen and ladies who make up the society of the ball I’m discussing makes it plain how far we are from the bamboula

and its drum. Here we were deep in elegant manners; and the Negroes, that evening, all spoke French. The orchestra played the purest Musard, copying errors apart. These ladies and gentlemen took part in two quadrilles, and glided as they danced, with charming simpers, no more or less than happens in the balls of the civil list. However, there were some who seem to be missing the old dance of Vestris as a means, henceforth lost, of improving their gracefulness. These people rejected the glissade, and gave themselves over to some astonishing jetés-battus.

Adolphe Granier de Cassagnac, c 1841, Martinique

Reporting on ‘the society of the ball’ in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Martinique, Parisian journalist Adolphe Granier de Cassagnac was struck by the faithful reproduction of European music, dance, and manners in the colony: the ‘negroes’ speak French, the orchestra interprets in the ‘purest’ fashion the famed musician Philippe Musard, the manners are ‘elegant’, and the quadrilles are danced with flirtatious energy, ‘more or less’ as in the metropole.<sup>23</sup> This extra-European popularity of European set dances, including the quadrille, was no new phenomenon. Ever since the earliest European settlements in both Indian and Atlantic Ocean worlds, dance and music had been crucial to the colonial replication and adaptation of social structures in initially unfamiliar spaces. Contredanses, minuets, and other courtly dances were the rage in colonial balls, whether in the pre-Revolutionary Saint-Domingue described by Moreau de Saint-Méry or in the Ile de Bourbon (La Réunion) described by De Freycinet and Lescouble.<sup>24</sup> Within this society of the ball, as Granier de Cassagnac asseverates, one danced whatever was *au courant* in Europe. But his prose is sprinkled with some telling details about the deviations that accrue in transoceanic spaces. The Antillean musicians can’t help making ‘copying errors’, while some of dancers flamboyantly disrupt metropolitan protocols— here signalled by the reference to the famous 19<sup>th</sup> century French dancer,

Auguste Vestris. Turning Vestris upside down, they insert balletic leaps into the quadrille in an ‘astonishing’ (‘étourdissant’) manner. The metropolitan gaze is bewildered and seduced by the quadrille’s transformations. What has happened to it in Martinique?

A clue is provided by Granier de Cassignac’s pointed reference to the ‘bamboula and its drum’, which his rhetoric presents as the expected entertainment of the ‘negroes’ (rather than the fine airs and graces he notes them exhibiting). This phrase takes us back to the earliest European commentators on colonial life, usually missionaries and travellers, whose accounts of the ‘lascivious’ dances that the enslaved indulged in during regulated moments of leisure named, alongside the calenda/ kalenda, the chica, and the lundu(m), a dance performed to the ‘bamboula’ drum.<sup>25</sup> These commentaries arose during the phase linguist Robert Chaudenson designates as the ‘homestead society’, when the cultures of the enslaved and their masters co-existed, even interacted, but did not yet give rise to the new products we would label as ‘creolized’—as evinced by the frequent observation that, at this time, the male and female enslaved did not dance in pairs, but in gender-specific groups. Granier de Cassignac, however, is reporting from a subsequent phase of cultural elaboration, that which Chaudenson distinguishes as ‘plantation society,’<sup>26</sup> within which different categories of cultural agents proliferated. To the stock of ‘Creoles’, or all people born in the Colonies from the homestead phase onwards,<sup>27</sup> were being added new entrants, bringing with them developments in lifestyle and fashion, including dance and music both through the graphic record of dance manuals and sheet music, and as embodied knowledge. Those who travelled between continents or arrived for the first time in the colonies, including dance masters brought in to coach young people on the threshold of initiation into formal colonial society,<sup>28</sup> passed on that knowledge through social events. Simultaneously, new groups of enslaved Africans were replenishing the cultural stock with their own embodied musicality and structured dance movements.<sup>29</sup>

The processes whereby these diverse cultural heritages led to creolization is well-explicated by Chaudenson's division of plantation society into linguistically differentiated concentric zones: A, the French perpetuated in homestead society; B, constituted by an approximative French spoken primarily by Creoles, also available for use by speakers of Zone A; and C, the zone of non-French, comprising the language of 'recent immigrants' who aspire to enter Zone B.<sup>30</sup> Chaudenson further subdivides Zone B into B1, consisting of 'house slaves', or domestics who interacted regularly with the Whites and spoke close approximations of the colonial French *koiné*, and B2, which includes 'field slaves, who did not interact regularly with the whites', but who could communicate with those in Zone C.<sup>31</sup> Granier de Cassignac's prose reveals how this spectrum of linguistic creolization takes on features of a 'contact zone', shaped not merely over time but, more crucially, *across* colonially ordered space.<sup>32</sup> Thus Chaudenson's B1 and B2 zones are reflected in Granier de Cassignac's differentiation between the urbanized 'house slaves', who dance the quadrille, and 'field slaves', whose forte is the 'bamboula and its drum'.<sup>33</sup> Although the quadrille-dancing 'house slaves' are placed 'far from' the bamboula-dancing 'field slaves', Granier de Cassignac invokes for both categories the 'high affect' kinetic virtuosity of African retentionist dances.<sup>34</sup> Discourse thereby articulates both colonial order and its inability to prevent creolization, revealing the libidinal economy that is reflected in the balancing act. The 'astonishing jetés-battus' introduced into the quadrille, and the 'contortions' retained in the bamboula, enact the cultural seepage between Chaudenson's B1 and B2 zones which defines the creolized quadrille till today.

### **Quelque chose qu'on ne voit pas à Paris: the bamboula ballroom**

La salle de bal, parquetée de verdure, tapissée de bambous et de lianes entrelacées, n'avait pour tout lustre que des torches de résine et quelques lampes d'huile de coco ; les étoiles, scintillant au ciel, brillaient à travers les cribles du feuillage et répandaient sur l'ensemble du tableau, peint et encadré par la seule nature, leur douce lumière. Autour d'un orchestre rauque et criard, mais qui pourtant ne manquait pas d'une certaine mélodie, une foule compacte de nègres et négresses se livrait à toutes les excentricités du bamboula... Je m'étais caché derrière un arbre, et j'observais curieusement ce singulier spectacle dont la folie m'attristait... Enfin, j'étais parvenu à voir quelque chose qu'on ne voit pas à Paris, et, à la suite de mes deux bals, je pouvais rêver en blanc et noir.

The ballroom, parqueted with verdure, carpeted with bamboos and intertwined lianas, had for all lustre only torches of resin and some lamps of coconut oil; the stars, glittering in the sky, shone through the screens of foliage and spread over the whole table, painted and framed by nature alone, their soft light. Around a raucous and discordant orchestra, but which nevertheless did not lack a certain melody, a compact crowd of negroes and negresses indulged in all the eccentricities of bamboula ... I hid behind a tree, and I was curiously observing this singular spectacle, the craziness of which saddened me. At last, I had managed to see something that was not seen in Paris, and, after my two balls, I could dream in black and white.

Charles-Hubert Lavollée, 1843

On a balmy April evening in 1843, the Frenchman Charles-Hubert Lavollée disembarked in Saint-Denis, Reunion, *en route* to China. The *escale*'s social whirl included a glittering ball at

the Governor's residence. Quadrilles, waltzes, gambling games, and the latest fashions in dress and deportment made him feel peculiarly at home even while so far away from it. Desiring escape from this uncanny presence-in-absence of Europe, he exited the ball in the middle of the night-- only to stumble, instead, upon another 'ballroom', whose décor and lighting was 'painted and framed by nature alone.'<sup>35</sup> Lavollée had chanced upon an alfresco nocturnal gathering. Deep in the tropical forest, a group of the enslaved were using their restricted free time to dance, sing, and drum together. This event Lavollée terms the 'bamboula'— using the very same word through which, as we saw above, Granier de Cassignac had described the recreational pursuits of Martinique's 'field slaves'. Like their Antillean counterparts, the Mascarene bamboula dancers are depicted as prone to extremes of collective expression: the 'contortions' derided by Granier de Cassignac are echoed by Lavollée's description of the dance as 'eccentricities' complementing a 'raucous and discordant orchestra'. At the same time, recalling Granier de Cassignac's 'étourdissant', that oscillates between fascination and outrage, Lavollée's aesthetic castigation of the bamboula conveys its irresistible pull as exotic spectacle, antithetical to the ennui of the colonial ballroom: at last, he declares with some relief, he has witnessed 'something not seen in Paris'.

Yet it was surely something he would have *read about* in preparation for his voyage. That Granier de Cassignac was writing in 1841, a mere two years before the publication of Lavollée's travelogue, suggests the efficient transoceanic circulation of descriptive vocabulary for 'African dance' within colonial discourse. As we saw in the previous section, the 'bamboula' had first appeared in Antillean accounts of enslaved people drumming and dancing written during Chaudenson's 'homestead society' phase. In the famous early 18<sup>th</sup> century description of Martinique by Père Labat, for instance, as well as in Moreau de Saint-Méry's account of Saint-Domingue, the 'bamboula' refers to a kind of drum used by the

Bantu-descendant enslaved.<sup>36</sup> By the time of Chaudenson's 'plantation society' phase, 'bamboula' additionally applies to the 'eccentric' dances performed by slaves to the bamboula drum's polyrhythmic beat, as Granier de Cassignac's account, cited above, confirms. And by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as we see in Lavollée's account, the 'bamboula' entered parallel accounts from the Mascarenes. Since Bantu elements had radiated outwards through migration from central to both coasts of sub-Saharan Africa, it is not impossible that enslaved Mascarene populations had evolved this same term to describe their dancing and drumming. However, veracity is hardly the plumb line here. On stumbling onto hidden revelry, Lavollée reaches for a word he has picked up through works that were the go-to handbooks for metropolitan subjects aspiring to travel through the Outremer (both East and West of Europe). His choice of 'bamboula' is motivated by its function as a recognisable signifier rather than what was being 'actually danced'. This act of linguistic inscription perpetuates the violence of colonial discourse. To Lavollée, 'bamboula' transmitted a powerful, condensed *idea* of what *nègres*, whether in the Antilles or the Mascarenes, danced.

The transoceanic migration of the word 'bamboula' reveals how colonial discourse around dance assumed a regulatory, rationalizing function in the midst of epistemic chaos.<sup>37</sup> Dominique Cyrille detects a similar function of the Antillean creolized quadrille as 'performative dialogue,' pointing out that contredanses and quadrilles enabled 'mulattoes, newly freed blacks, and domestic slaves to make their performance of the European court dances a powerful statement about social rights, race, and privileges in colonial Martinique'.<sup>38</sup> I contend that it was specifically the quadrille, *a multi-part structure celebrating regulated dynamism through collective negotiation in bounded space and time*, which performed best a balancing act that was itself a product and necessity of newness. A balancing act is also what Lavollée's description of the 'bamboula ballroom' aspires to, yoking together elements from tropical jungle with those from Plantation architecture. But

discourse about creolized dance works differently from the dance itself. The moment the latter enters language, whether through European pens or Creole, it is differentiated into putative 'European' and 'African' constituents which the linearity of prose must string out as a series of events, while constraining these constituents within a rhetoric of equivalence. This linear unravelling of performance is mimicked by Lavollée's journey from one 'ballroom' towards another. Yet the disorienting shimmer of familiarity and estrangement, which the repetition of 'ballroom' conjures up, leaves him with a hallucinatory scramble of 'dreams of black and white.' This, then, is a journey of 'becoming creole'.

### **Le Séga perfectionné: creolization and choreogenesis**

Tout ennemi que je vous l'ai fait voir des règles et des conventions, le Séga se modifie pourtant au contact des autres danses bien certainement ses cadettes : le barbare se civilise. Voyez-le dansé par les nouveau-venus qu'un navire débarquait hier sur le rivage : il est d'une énergie sauvage, d'une vérité saisissant, mais trop peu vêtue ; c'est la traduction encore audacieuse, cynique, d'une passion brutale qui ne songe qu'à ses désirs et s'inquiète peu d'offenser les regards d'un public. Puis comparez à cette farouche simplicité le Segá perfectionné tel que pourront vous le danser quelques jeunes couples créoles : il s'est transformé sans perdre toutefois son caractère passionné, car alors ce ne serait plus le Segá (.)

Although I have presented the Segá as an enemy of rules or conventions, it modifies itself when in contact with other dances that are certainly its junior: the savage civilizes himself. Look at it danced amongst those newly disembarked on the bank

yesterday; it is of a savage energy, of a gripping truth, but too scantily dressed; it is still the audacious and cynical translation of a brute passion which considers nothing but its own desire rather than concern itself about offending an audience's gaze. Then compare to this wild simplicity the perfected Sega as danced for you by some young Creole couples: it has transformed itself, yet without losing its passionate character, as otherwise it wouldn't be a Sega any more (.)

Pierre de Montforand, c.1880

What, then, is the relationship between the quadrille, representing the 'European' element of colonial society, and the bamboula, representing its 'African' counterpart? Colonial discourse's machinery of 'Manichean allegory' places them in opposed moral, aesthetic, and economic realms.<sup>39</sup> Simultaneously, the economy of colonial desire pulls them together through various rhetorical sleights of hand,<sup>40</sup> so as to make one 'ballroom' mirror the other. In the prose hall of mirrors, 'bamboula' and 'quadrille' reflect each other in an endless relay of mimicry. This sense of a relay across a period of time recurs in scholarship on the creolized quadrille. At least three stages of a process are implied by Cyrille's observation that 'people of African descent whom the Europeans had forcibly introduced to the Caribbean appropriated the dance and transformed it to fit the new environment', following which, '[o]nce [it was] performed by people of African descent, everyone, and whites especially, had to reinterpret the dances'.<sup>41</sup> In setting up an agonistic discursive relationship between the quadrille and bamboula, therefore, the archive introduces a time lag that insists one must forever journey from one to another without ever closing the gap. I contrast this never-ending journey of 'becoming creole' to the action of repertoire, of 'being creole'. [The master imitating] the enslaved imitating the master [imitating the enslaved] gives rise to the creolized quadrille. However, it is through mimicry not as relay but as a performed, kinetic,

act, that the encounter between ‘quadrille’ and ‘bamboula’ becomes the ‘creole quadrille’. This performance of mimicry confounds distinctions between the ‘original dance’, the ‘imitation’, and the ‘original imitator’, particularly when notions of ‘antiquity’ and ‘modernity’, ‘older’ and ‘newer’, are being chiselled through commentary on dance as a creolizing encounter.

In the 1870s, the Réunionnais writer Pierre de Montforand turned to Enlightenment Stadial Theory to report on a dance that was being called ‘séga’ in commentary from the French Indian Ocean colonies.<sup>42</sup> Like ‘bamboula’, this term of non-European etymology emerged as a catch-all descriptor for ‘music and dance of enslaved people of African heritage’.<sup>43</sup> Unsurprisingly, Montforand’s account of sega recalls the bamboula’s characteristics. Its ‘savage energy’ and ‘wild simplicity’ distinguishes it from the fashionable European dances which renew the colony’s stock of *savoir-faire* with each ship that docks at the port. Drawing on the trope of the noble savage in his rude simplicity, Montforand additionally personifies the sega as the older sibling to the European dances that were part of on-board entertainment.<sup>44</sup> He even stages an encounter between two personifications: the scantily-dressed sega, powered by brute passion, and the newly-disembarked dances which, we infer, are more grandly but also more fussily clad, with the air of Paris still clinging to them. On the liminal zone of the quayside, the sega ‘modifies itself’ through ‘contact’ with the metropolitan dances, civilizing itself in the process. A new form of dance, the ‘séga perfectionné’ (the perfected sega) results. The young Creole couple who dance this sega perform yet again the balancing act of creolization, channelling judiciously the ‘passion’ that both mars and redeems the sega’s wild simplicity. Although Montforand does not articulate what the ‘native’ sega confers in turn to the ‘disembarked’ dances, one imagines that it this passion which the senior dance has passed on to the ‘junior’ (‘cadette’) dances while absorbing the latter’s ‘rules and conventions’.

While ‘rules and conventions’ govern European dances, the sega is an ‘improvised pantomime’ conducted under ‘the devouring sun of Africa’. The violence of the colonial encounter is obfuscated by this reinterpretation of choreological tendencies as character traits of initially distinct, newly proximate population groups. Montforand presents creolization and choreogenesis as mysterious osmotic processes whose catalyst is the mere fact of ‘contact’. However, to see the other dance is to want to dance like the other. Mimesis and alterity work hand in glove here.<sup>45</sup> If contact instigates mimicry, mimicry implies ‘adaptation’, ‘modification’, and ‘transformation’— all words used by colonial observers of creolized quadrilles in the Antilles and the Mascarenes. These accounts present ‘nègres’ as the first imitators. As Granier de Cassignac notes, ‘The Negroes, who believe they are obliged to imitate everything, have imitated French dances’ and consequently, ‘dance the quadrille as they do at Court’; yet, recalling the ‘copying errors’ of the Orchestra, they ‘*walk* the quadrille.’<sup>46</sup> Discourse, however, betrays a two-way flow of desire. It is the metropolitan Lavollée who is drawn irresistibly to the ‘bamboula ballroom’; and it is the White Creole writer, Montforand, who finds in the ‘primitive’, ‘barbaric’ sega a corrective to the declared artificiality of European dances, associated with ‘the beauty spot and powder’, and ‘salons perfumed with verbena and gloved in white’. His prose concludes with the most extravagant metaphor for the perfected sega that results: its ‘contained stampings’ are no less than the ‘volcano’ that ‘vividly blazes’ under ‘the thin cover of flowers and grass.’

### **L’impulsion de dieux marins: insular bioscape and creole sensorium**

Dans cette foule innombrable, c’est le mélange, c’est la confusion, c’est la houle, out les yeux ne peuvent démêler les danseurs d’une même quadrille, pendant les deux premières figures. On croirait voir des vagues de masques

qui se gonflent, montent, descendent, se heurtent sur une mer agitée par une tempête de musique, sous l'impulsion de dieux marins soufflant furieusement dans leurs conques. Mais a troisième figure se produit un coup de théâtre magique. Brusquement l'orchestre se tait ; la clarinette seule lance une note aigue. A ce signal, les masques s'alignent par quadrilles, en rang presse. Un second signal retentit. Le silence se fait, l'immobilité règne. Alors l'orchestre attaque un rythme bizarre qui imprise a cette foule un même balancement cadence. Ce n'est plus une mer désordonnée, c'est un champ de blé que le vent fait fléchir harmonieusement.

In this innumerable crowd, it's a mix-up, it's confusion, it's a surge, in which the eye can't disentangle the dancers of a single quadrille set during the first two figures. One seems to see waves of masqueraders, swelling, rising, falling and colliding on a sea stirred up by a storm of music, driven by sea-gods blowing furiously into their conches. But in the third figure there's a magical coup de theatre. The orchestra stops abruptly; only the clarinet blows a shrill note. At this signal the masqueraders align themselves into quadrille sets, in tightly-packed rows. A second signal resounds. Silence falls, immobility reigns. Then the orchestra launches into a bizarre rhythm which imposes a very measured rocking on the crowd. No longer a disordered sea, it's now a field of wheat swaying harmoniously in the wind.

Louis Garaud, 1888

This 'séga civilisé', both constrained and impetuous, is the Indian Ocean's creolized quadrille.<sup>47</sup> During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, musical scores used 'quadrille creole' and 'séga' interchangeably within their titles. Auguste Roussin's compendium *L'Album de la Réunion*,

within which Montforand's account was published, includes one such score.<sup>48</sup> Its cover depicts an arrangement of the African instruments also circulating in the Mascarene world: the bobre (a one-stringed bow), the tamtam or tambour (a vertical drum), and the kayamb (an ideophone).<sup>49</sup> Banana and palm trees rise up on either side of the page. Connecting these arboreal columns is a bay backed by a volcanic cone. Centred within this natural frame are the instruments and, above them, the typography naming the music, 'séga, ou la quadrille créole', and its author: 'F.A.'. This visualised symbiosis between the insular bioscape and the music of sega as a creolized quadrille composition is supplemented by a striking illustration within Roussin's *Album* which mobilizes the creolized quadrille's kinetic dimension.<sup>50</sup> Entitled 'séga creole', it recalls Montforand's evocation of a creole couple dancing the 'perfected sega'. Unlike that description, which pulls the sega towards European signifiers, this illustration bestows on its dancers Africanized features and hair, and the bent knees, bare feet, and dissociated torso typical of African-derived dance. Nevertheless, they are clad in European-style clothes which constrict their bodies, echoing the musical notation within which the sega is 'captured'. Emphasizing this effect is the long scarf, narrowed rope-like through tension, that the woman draws up from below her buttocks up through her raised hands.

Most importantly, the dancers are depicted within nature, in the 'bamboula ballroom' rather than the 'quadrille ballroom'. Arboreal framing columns reappear as European-style topiary complementing the lawn they stand on. This visualisation of 'séga creole' thus rearranges the ingredients constituent of the creolized product which Montforand had signalled through his metaphor of volcanic lava barely concealed by the flower-sprinkled lawn. Here, those 'volcanic' elements—which refer to the geology of the Mascarene Islands—are transferred on to the physical body of the dancing couple. On the musical score cover, in contrast, they are diffused throughout the picture plane (tropical trees, African instruments,

insular topography), jostling for semiotic supremacy with a marmoreal typography: a bold deictic act that nevertheless destabilizes its authority by diverting the European act of naming (and also framing) to proclaim a creolized genre, the ‘sega’. These multiple signifiers of an insular bioscape at moments of semiotic instability populate and distend the graphic record of the archive, attesting to the island as a compacting space that forces together different cultural heritages in the continuous play of power and desire. Nature and culture interact to produce the creolized quadrille as new insular sensorium. Tellingly, high up on the picture plane, stretched across the trees and echoing the horizontal line of the mountain slope, is a spider web. This gratuitous detail is a pointed reminder of the ‘sticky web of copy and contact’—the operation of mimesis and alterity within colonial-era contact zones through which newness is generated.<sup>51</sup>

In the words of the metropolitan observer Louis Garaud, which provide this article with a title, the creolized quadrille is a ‘balancement cadencé’: innovation as sway and balancing act, nourished by the insular bioscape and animating the creole sensorium.<sup>52</sup> These registers of the newness of creolization mark its relationship to particular archipelagic worlds. Garaud’s account of a grand masked ball in Martinique, cited above at the beginning of this section, even brings forth a creolized marine cosmology through signifiers of an Antillean bioscape. Sea gods reminiscent of Neptune wield not tridents but conchs, that iconic autochthonous instrument of the Antilles,<sup>53</sup> blowing them furiously to whip up the dancers’ passions into a stormy sea that makes distinct quadrille sets impossible to discern. This marine metaphor, reinforced by the conch as metonym, is restricted to the mood and movements of the quadrille’s first two figures. As the third figure commences, the sensorium is penetrated by another wind instrument— this time of European origin: the clarinet. Its sharp, clear note decisively restores order. The impassioned crowd reassembles into distinctive groups of eight; the tumultuous sea concedes space to European wheat fields

swaying harmoniously, even decorously, in the temperate breeze. These amassed tropes reveal how the quadrille's multi-part structure facilitated choreogenesis under creolization. The quadrille set's division into figures incorporated specific elements from the music and dance traditions of Europeans and Africans, while reassembling them into separate parts that constitute a new whole. The creolized quadrille functions as a structure for their co-existence, a rationale for their distinctiveness, and a performance of the history that gives rise to this newness. Instead of prioritising any of its constituent elements, it is a collectively performed expression of a complex cultural memory.

### **The sixth figure: the creolized quadrille as fractal tessellation**

'The beguine can be danced in two manners. One, a two-step with a very tricky little movement from side to side with head and shoulders, while the lower body swings to each side on slightly bent knees. This is beguine taken from the sixth figure of the 'contre-danse', or the 'haute-taille', Martinique versions of the European contre-danse and quadrille. It is still the beguine of the salon, and now and then at the Boule Blanche a couple will separate, and with mincing steps advance toward and recede from each other before closing in the conventional beguine. But that is rare. The real beguine of the Boule Blanche, the beguine-beguine, is a work of muscular art, with no particular floor pattern.'

Katherine Dunham, 'La Boule Blanche', 1933

This relationship between the quadrille suite and its constituent figures performs an embodied phenomenology of creolized dance. Although performances of the quadrille and verbal accounts of those performances both unfold in time, the temporality of performance elicits

interpretative skills different from those needed by a ‘reader’ or ‘listener’. Unlike narrative logic, the quadrille’s logic demands non-teleological apprehension of its segments. Its figures communicate the diverse traditions it draws on and distinguishes from each other through a combination of repetition and alternation: of tempos, musical genres, and, in the words of one commentator, the stiffness (‘raideur’) of some figures and the unbridled (‘debridée’) eccentricities (‘excentricités’) of others.<sup>54</sup> Such segmental organisation reflects on one level ‘the antithetical polarization of two discourses, let’s say one of power—sugar-- and another of resistance—the slave, the maroon, the agricultural proletariat’, that Antonio Benítez-Rojo finds ‘governing the Caribbean with uncommon violence from the sixteenth century’; but, on another level, the Caribbean is also ‘a cultural sea without boundaries, as a paradoxical fractal form extending infinitely through a finite world.’<sup>55</sup> Extended to the Mascarenes, Benítez-Rojo’s fractal ‘isla que se repite’ (the ‘repeating island’), explicates beautifully the dynamic and reduplicating symmetry of the creolized quadrille.<sup>56</sup> Its fluid geometry generates patterns that agglomerate into constituent figures as the kinetic equivalent of self-reproducing, *tessellated* patterns. Although the violent telos of ‘the binary opposition’, which is the ‘reduction characteristic of modernity’,<sup>57</sup> underwrites Mascarene and Antillean *descriptions* of the creolized quadrille, its *performance* is organized through a logic of fractal tessellation.

Through this logic, the multi-part structure of the quadrille creolizes by generating new segments, which are incorporated within the overall structure to maintain the status quo— as illustrated by the quotation heading this section. Describing the Martinican dance ‘beguine’, it is an extract from a short story by African American choreographer Katherine Dunham following her visit to the French Antilles.<sup>58</sup> The bent knees and polycentric movements of her beguine dancers recall the ‘séga créole’ dancers of Roussin’s *Album*. Like its artist, Dunham evokes ‘a muscular art’ *entre deux* rather than geometrical ‘floor patterns’

for groups of eight. Nevertheless, a connection with the quadrille persists. The beguine constitutes ‘the sixth figure’ of the ‘haute-taille’, a local name for the creolized quadrille quite of Martinique, which departs from the five-part European quadrille in accommodating a sixth (and possibly more) figures.<sup>59</sup> More important than precise number, however, is the reorganization of the figures into a performed meta-history of creolization. In both the Antilles and the Mascarenes, the final figure (here, the sixth) is the space within the existing structure which incorporates new dances, including local forms that have arisen through fresh phases of creolization.<sup>60</sup> The ‘sixth figure’, then, is the segment that catalyses creolization’s tessellating turn, even as the *principle of incorporation* reproduces pattern as order. The creolized quadrille’s final figure is the segment that is placeholder for the incorporation of ‘local’ i.e. newly creolized forms (e.g. the haute-taille as a dance). Over time these incorporate other forms to expand into a new suite of multiple figures (this is when the haute-taille becomes a suite). In turn, the haute-taille suite’s sixth figure gives rise to a new form, the beguine.

The principle of incorporation produces a layered nomenclature whereby the same term describes various stages within the creolized quadrille spectrum. For Dunham, ‘beguine’ names both a dance within the haute-taille suite, and a dance that had started to be performed independent of it. Garaud’s ‘quadrille’ designated the group of eight that dances the quadrille, the dance itself, and the music for the dance. ‘Séga’ in Roussin’s *Album* is a synonym for ‘quadrille créole’ as a genre of music and of dance; for ‘séga créole’ as mediating between African and European dances, and for a ‘dance of Cafres (Africans)’, performed to music played on bobres, caiambes, and tam-tams (all instruments visualized on the cover of ‘F.A.’s ‘quadrille creole’ score).<sup>61</sup> In the Antilles, new Creole-language names for dance and music genres equivalent to ‘séga’—‘gwoka’, ‘bèlè’, and of course the ‘beguine/ biguine’—exist alongside ‘quadrille’ (‘lakadri’, ‘kwadril’), as well as Creole-language equivalents of the

French-language names borne by the quadrille suite's figures. As with 'séga', these Antillean names are sometimes synonyms of the creolized quadrille, sometimes assigned to its stated opposite (the African dances aligned to the bamboula), and sometimes one of its figures.<sup>62</sup> This polysemy constellated around creolized quadrilles indexes the absence of any single, authoritative form across the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Rather, a proliferation of performances mediates across social, racial, and spatial divides even while discourse attempts *and* fails to stabilize these embodied, performative calibrations. The polysemy that makes quadrille nomenclature appear confusingly repetitive thus derives from the same fractal tessellation that generates the creolized quadrille as epistemic system, and the segment's signature duality as being both part of *and* independent from an overarching structure.<sup>63</sup>

**'bann ladans salon ki nou apel kanmtole': newness, segmentation, and incorporation**

Nou apel lanmizik ek ladans tradisyonel Seselwa, sa bann lanmizik ek ladans ki nou'n erite avek bann kolon eropeen ek leslav afriken. Lo kote eropeen nou'n erit bann lanmizik ek ladans salon ki nou apel kanmtole, e lo kote lesklav afriken/malgas nou'n erit bann danse oplenner. Kanmtole se en lansamm ladans ki ti popiler lerop ver lafen 18e syek. Sa bann ladans se vals, kotis, polka, mazouk, berlin, kosez, pad kat, e kontredans. Pli tar lezot danse in ganny azoute parey djaz, rumba. Nou'n osi erit bann romans (sanson lamour) ki nou sante dan en resepsyon maryaz e osi mars pour laserenad en maryaz. Pour zanfan nou annan bann sanson ronn. Lo kote ekslav afriken/malgas nou'n erit sega, moutya, tinge, e lezot sanson.

Thomas V. Alexis, *Ladans salon/ Kanmtole*

We consider as traditional Seychellois music and dance, all the music and dance genres that we have inherited from the European colonisers and African slaves. From the Europeans, we have inherited *the music and dance genres of the ballroom that we call 'kanmtole'* [emphasis mine], and from the African/ Malagasy slaves, we have inherited the dances of the open air. Kanmtole is an ensemble of dances popular in Europe around the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The dances are waltz, schottische, polka, mazurka, berlin, ecossaise, pas de quatre, and contredanse. Later, other dances were added such as jazz [and] rumba. We have also inherited the romances (songs of love) that we sing during wedding receptions, and marches for wedding processions. For children, we have songs in the round. From the African and Malagasy slaves, we inherited sega, moutya, tinge, and other songs.

Thomas V. Alexis, *Ladans salon/ Kanmtole*

Within the creolized quadrille lexicon, the generation of newness demanded new names for additions to two categories of movement: the quadrille's constituent figures, and the agglomerated suites.<sup>64</sup> Within both categories, however, existing names (including their linguistically creolized forms) and completely new words (e.g. 'sega', 'haute-taille', 'beguine') circulated unpredictably between taxonomic levels. As I argue above, this lexical profusion is compatible with the logic of fractal tessellation that organised knowledge in creolizing archipelagic worlds. But it is incompatible with the logic of the market. The appearance of new names within a lexicon signals the naming society's recognition of a new cultural product which needs to be distinguished from others similar to it. But only when the new cultural product enters a market economy as commodity must the naming practice ensure a *consistent* relationship between the name and the named. This process, akin to 'speciation' in taxonomy, is essential for commodification; through commodity speciation,

different categories of that which is consumed are marked off by name to prevent consumer confusion. In the creolized quadrille, in contrast, naming practices respond to fresh phases of creolization by incorporating them into pre-existent tessellated structures. The resulting polysemy enacts the balancing act of creolization. On the edges of the creolized quadrille suite, however, incorporation increasingly co-exists with an emergent tendency towards speciation: ‘while the beguine of the *salon* remains attached to the haute-taille,’ therefore, ‘the ‘beguine-beguine’ of the *boite de nuit* is danced independent of it’.<sup>65</sup> This uneasy co-existence reveals how the archipelagic episteme manifested in the quadrille suite’s incorporative drive grapples with the speciating inclination of capitalism’s branding practices.

I want to elaborate on this point through the Seychellois ‘kanmtole’. Although sometimes described as an Indian Ocean version of the creolized quadrille suite,<sup>66</sup> the kanmtole is better understood as a conceptual hold-all into which is incorporated all Seychellois dances that have their origin in European dance cultures of the salon and the ballroom, as the above quotation explains.<sup>67</sup> The kanmtole excludes dances whose formal structure and social function prevent them from entering the creolizing process enabled by the quadrille form: whether those be of distinct African heritage (which, in the Mascarenes, is usually mediated through Madagascar), or the European genres of ‘romances’ and ‘marches’. Hence, ‘kanmtole’ is a Seychellois epistemological category that encompasses the European end of the spectrum of creolized dances, and, in this incorporative function, it corresponds to the Antillean haute-taille. Unlike the latter, however, it incorporates without speciation European dances distinct from the quadrille that emerged around the time of its ascendancy: mazurka, schottische, waltz, polka, and variations thereof. The kanmtole also includes dances whose names recall figures within the original quadrille suite, such as ‘laboulanzer’ (le boulanger); variations on the quadrille suite, such as ‘lansye’ (lanciers), and quadrille calls

such as ‘men gos men dwat’ (main gauche main droit), ‘dozado’ (dos-a-dos), and ‘galo’ (gallop). While retaining the multi-part structure of the quadrille, the kanmtole distends it immensely through incorporation, a process that continues through the 20<sup>th</sup> century to include post-quadrille partner dances such as the rumba and the jazz one-step.

The kanmtole reinterprets these dances as new figures, rearranging them into meaningful sequences that nevertheless preserve the creolized quadrille’s fundamental principle: a multi-part structure which performs the history of its creolization. Under what conditions might this vastly extended version of the quadrille suite be comfortably performed? Some guidance is offered by Thomas Alexis, veteran Seychellois musician, choreographer, and cultural administrator, and author of the quote above. Alongside the musical scores for typical specimens of the kanmtole’s figures, he provides pragmatic information about a kanmtole party (‘en bal kanmtole’). Firstly, this party requires an orchestra (‘en lorkes’) comprising two violins, a mandolin, a triangle, an accordion, a banjo, and two types of drums.<sup>68</sup> A caller who knows the repertoire’s kinetic demands and knowledgeable dancers are also needed,<sup>69</sup> as well as stamina on the part of everyone involved to complete even a single kanmtole set of c. 20 figures. A single set, however distended, would hardly a party make; hence implied, too, is a venue which makes available the time and space for several kanmtole sets. That it was the Seychelles government which published Alexis’ explanatory booklet as recently as 1996 reveals something about the occasions during which such a complex repertoire is enjoyed today, the practical limits and possibilities afforded by these occasions, and their influence on the kanmtole’s performance. Such investment by the postcolonial state in the kanmtole allows us to probe, through the pragmatic consequences of incorporation, the relationship between the structures of exchange within which the creolized quadrille emerged, and those within which it circulates today.

## **Le bon vye tan: The creolized quadrille and postcolonial festive time**

*Kanmtole appears twice within the official DVD promoting Seychelles' annual Festival Kreol. While the kanmtole competition is 'the ideal activity to showcase and promote the most appreciated kanmtole moves,' the closing bal asosye is 'an all-night traditional dance with a live traditional kanmtole band.' While the former enables 'the most accomplished kanmtole dancers from all over the islands join together to offer you a selection of the most gracious and synchronised dances', in the bal asosye, the divide between audience and performers dissolves so as to allow everyone to dance socially together. The camera confirms this distinction. The kanmtole competition dancers, in co-ordinated, slightly old-fashioned formal wear, dance on a stage. The bal asosye involves a throng of informally-clad revellers, laughing, eating, drinking, and dancing as much as is possible in a jam-packed space.*

*I recognise the bal asosye's venue: the Lenstiti Kreol (Creole Institute), housed in a former Plantation 'gran kaz' (Big House). I peer at the screen, seeking evidence that— as I had been reassured repeatedly during fieldwork, this is an occasion for the quadrille to be danced socially and spontaneously in Seychelles. The footage, however, presents a different picture. Is it the lack of space, a lack of expertise, the focus on food and drink, or the mere constraints of editing, that makes it impossible to discern the patterned and synchronised dancing in groups that one would associate with any kind of quadrille dancing? I hear snatches of kanmtole music and calls, and glimpse some people turning while others move towards and away from each other-- kinetic fragments of a lost larger whole?*

*I remember the kanmtole competitors I saw dance during the 2017 Festival. 'kavalye o danm!' announces the CD of music from La Reunion I'm playing as I write. 'avance pou la pwemye fidji!'*<sup>70</sup>

The kanmtole competition within the 2017 Festival Kreol unfolded over two evenings on a large stage within the main venue, a converted outdoor car park abutting a public building. Dance groups from across the archipelago, vibrantly dressed in tropical floral motifs, competed by performing to pre-selected elements from the complete repertoire enlisted on a programme for the audience and judges. Abridging the kanmtole in this manner is the only way to accommodate all groups. This principle of abridgment recurred in the kanmtole performance curated for an evening event organised by Seychellois art musician, Patrick Victor, at the Reef Hotel. He had 'sourced' a family from Anse Royale village who still danced the kanmtole socially, and they performed a few figures, to live music with a caller, within a showcase of Creole culture that included food, drink, dance, and fashion. All such evening events are accessible with paid tickets, and confirming the Seychellois Ministry of Culture's claim that they are always 'sell-outs', those I attended were indeed filled by locals and a sprinkling of tourists and researchers. Other commercial activities included Creole food and drink stalls set up in the car park. Overall, though, the Festival is driven not by considerations of profit but rather the Seychellois State's strongly protectionist stance towards the Creole heritage, articulated through a studied simulation of an earlier, simpler time.<sup>71</sup> Hence, the car park complex is called 'Vilaz Kreol' (Creole Village); Sunday activities are labelled 'dimans borlanmer' (Sunday afternoon by the sea), the bal asosye is also called 'bal bobes' (party by torchlight), and Patrick Victor's event was 'le bon vye tan' (the good old days).

These events package the Festival Kreol as an immersive experience of how it used to be ‘back in the day’: a temporality anterior and alternative to, but also enclosed, bubble-like, within capitalist time. The abridged kanmtole of the competition, and the hopes for its full unfolding within the bal asosye, confirm this temporality’s aspirational and nostalgic dimensions. Indeed, the revivalist balls that close Creole festivals across the Mascarenes draw on a leisure complex characterised not by the commodification through which capitalism is powered, but by ‘play, chance, and sharing’.<sup>72</sup> This archaising temporality also marks contemporary performances of the creolized quadrille across the Caribbean. After the abolition of slavery, ‘a self-sustaining network of economic reciprocity’ and small-scale exchange which generated not monetary value but reputation as ‘the informal negotiation of authority’ were the contexts within which the post-Plantation quadrille was patronised and enjoyed.<sup>73</sup> Remnants of those contexts— for instance, families from villages that still specialise in quadrille dancing-- feed the festival economy and the tourism industry with which it is associated.<sup>74</sup> The showcasing of kanmtole within a state-subsidised festival economy that replicates older structures of conviviality thus parallels the performance of creolized quadrilles throughout the Caribbean and Indian Ocean during national and Creole Day celebrations. Those structures were in symbiosis with the creolized quadrille’s fractal logic, which incorporated new trends rather than encouraged their independent circulation under market(able) conditions. Kinaesthetically, this logic is manifested in its spectacular dimension-- the ‘kaleidoscopic designs, exquisite spatial configurations, and splendid complementary partnering’ witnessed, for instance, by Yvonne Daniel within a cockfight arena in Martinique-- which ensures its visibility at public social events throughout postcolonial archipelagic worlds.<sup>75</sup>

Privileged as a performed memory of creole cultural heritage, the transoceanic creolized quadrille today remains ‘fun to watch’.<sup>76</sup> But, my fieldwork and that of others

confirms, it is it is no longer danced *socially* in a way that can communicate its multi-part, collaborative kinetic structure. This change in its social life has been attributed to the collective trauma of post-slavery and postcolonial societies: ‘identity confusions among young people,’<sup>77</sup> that produce ‘ambivalence’ towards cultural expressions of pronounced European provenance.<sup>78</sup> This a partial explication at best. Various roots movements have certainly nourished the social propagation of cultural heritage from the Africanist end of the creolizing spectrum. But creolized dances based on the European partner hold, from salsa to kizomba to lindy hop, have successfully entered the transnational market economy despite similar ‘ambivalence’ born out of their relationship to histories of slavery; indeed, their lyrics often draw attention to those histories. The real question then, is: why, despite the vast transoceanic arc of the quadrille’s creolization, and despite its massive 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century popularity precisely as a social dance, was the creolized quadrille unable to enter a market economy that would ensure its circulation, development, and evolution?<sup>79</sup> I answer through two, related propositions: firstly, its changing social life is connected to the gradual dissolution of those economies of reciprocity and non-monetary exchange which have now been enfolded within the festival economy; and, secondly, the quadrille’s incorporative choreology, which emerged when dance was not (yet) a commodity, predicates that structure’s fundamental resistance to commodification.

### **Break-away: transoceanic quadrille, the key to archipelagic memory**

It has been suggested that the creolized quadrille’s survival today depends on the successful management of traumatic memory as manifested in the collective ambivalence of creole societies that have inherited it.<sup>80</sup> A more fundamental hurdle is arguably the quadrille’s structural, epistemological, and affective lack of fit with the drive towards commodification

demanding by late capitalist economy. If no ‘quadrillotheques’ of any kind exist— nightclubs and dance festivals where one can, in the manner of salsa, kizomba, and so on, pay to dance with people one does not need to know, it is because the joy of dancing in large groups of eight to complicated multi-part choreography in convivial, festive settings was overtaken by another joy— that of the partner dances in couple hold danced in relative urban anonymity, all features which were congruent with and indeed born out of the demands of the global market. Today, organising even a small quadrille soiree is a cumbersome enough affair as to render its practice as social dance the artificial resurrection of an archaic practice.<sup>81</sup> That the newer partner dances incorporated into the creolized quadrille’s final figure are termed ‘fasi’ (easy) reflects the relative ease with which they could be picked up and danced in public venues.<sup>82</sup> However, those very partner dances, using another term from the creolized quadrille lexicon, were ‘break-aways’ from the incorporative structure.<sup>83</sup> They floated free to enter the market economy as commodified social dances, gaining, in the process, recognisable and ring-fenced ‘brand-names’ through speciation. We can pin down this change to a few watershed decades of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that were, perhaps, the last moment of convergence for the creolized dance histories of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

In the nightclubs of interwar Paris, as new Antillean migrants mingled in crowded spaces with African Americans and colonial African subjects, the ‘fasi’ simplicity of the beguine, initially danced as part of the quadrille set, soon made its ‘break-away’ version the favoured dance within the cramped yet democratic spaces of the big city.<sup>84</sup> In the Indian Ocean world, at the same time, those ‘break-away’ African American and Caribbean partner dances propagated by urban modernity offered new, ‘fasi’, modes of danced entertainment, catalysing the movement of the Indian Ocean creolized quadrilles into the realm of folklore and, ultimately, the postcolonial festival economy we have been tracing.<sup>85</sup> The larger histories of creolized partner dances of the Caribbean and Mascarene worlds would

ultimately diverge in keeping with their divergent postcolonial geopolitics and economic arrangements. But their shared and contemporaneous history of the quadrille's creolization tracks the modulation of pleasure by the demands of form as well as the emergence and consolidation of global capitalism, which was, after all, its overarching transoceanic story. Today, in postcolonial island societies in both oceans, performance 'activates the memory' of those processes.<sup>86</sup> The creolized quadrille's structural resources enable it to continue performing a heritage that inherited many things from many places to create new Creole identities, even though that structure's inner logic prevents it from become a marketable commodity. This not-quite-commodity, embodiment of regimes of value that persistently evade the pressures of the market, is the key that opens the door-- not only of the Caribbean, as Kassav' sing in their homage to the creolized quadrille-- but of the transoceanic archipelagic episteme within which it once flourished and made kinetic sense.

*Maman ma trouvé klé-la/ klé-la pou ouvé pot-la/ pot-la si lakarayib* (Mother found me the key, the key that opens the door—the door of the Caribbean').<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'Madras' is checked fabric from South India, now emblematic of Caribbean Creole identity. 'The Dennery Segment' has developed during the past five years as an international EDM style from St Lucia. Creole Day is celebrated worldwide on 28<sup>th</sup> October following UNESCO policy.

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<sup>2</sup> Research on creolized quadrilles consist overwhelmingly of ethnomusicological studies of specific Caribbean islands; e.g. Guilbault, ‘Kwadril Evening’ (St Lucia); Miller, ‘Performing Ambivalence’ (Carriacou); Gerstin, ‘Reputation’ (Martinique); Lafontaine, ‘Musique’ (Guadeloupe). Cyrille, ‘Politics’ (Martinique), presents quadrille performance as historical process; Daniel, ‘Ethnographic Comparison’ and Swed and Marks, ‘Afro-American Transformation’, present comparative discussions: the former privileges quadrille as dance, but limits herself to the Caribbean; the latter unites creolized quadrilles from the Caribbean, Indian Ocean, South and North America, and West African littoral, but its article-length scope means it is little more than an inventory. Manuel, ed. *Caribbean Contradance*, provides the only book-length study of Caribbean quadrille and contradance traditions, while Chaudenson, *Creolization*, discusses Indian Ocean quadrilles under musical creolisation processes; for comments *inter alia* from the Seychelles, see Naylor, ‘Creolization’, and, from Reunion, La Selve, *Musiques traditionnelles*. Some commentary on quadrille from Mauritius is found amongst the discussion of sega in Deodat, ‘Troubler le genre’.

<sup>3</sup> See Cohen and Toninato, ed. *Creolization Reader*; Chaudenson, *Creolization*.

<sup>4</sup> Mintz and Price, ‘Anthropological Approach’, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Trouillot, ‘Culture on the Edges’, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Appadurai, ed., *Social Life of Things*; on the birth of the commodity through exchange, see *ibid.*, 9. Mintz and Price, ‘Anthropological Perspective’, 4-19, usefully set out the spheres of contact and exchange within the Plantation as cultural matrix.

<sup>7</sup> Mintz and Price, ‘Anthropological Perspective’, 19.

<sup>8</sup> Garaud, *Trois ans*, 339-46.

<sup>9</sup> Taylor, *Archive as Repertoire*.

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<sup>10</sup> I do not, however, offer a *history* of the creolized quadrille. For historical contexts see Cowley, ‘Historical Essay’, Cyrille, ‘Politics’, and La Selve, *Musiques traditionnelles*.

<sup>11</sup> I take a cue here from the developers of Dennery Segment, who signal the kinetic-acoustic equivalent of an abstract term, ‘segment’, that is usually materialised spatially. ‘Breaking away’ appears in local taxonomies of Caribbean creole quadrille; see below, n.56.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Kavalýé o Dam’, in Kassav’, *Yélélé* (GD 0202, 1984). I thank Madame Jocelyne Béroard of Kassav’ for explaining these lyrics to me.

<sup>13</sup> Cyrille, ‘Politics’.

<sup>14</sup> For an illuminating exploration of these issues of pleasure in a related creolized dance form, see Maddox-Wingfield, ‘The Dance Chose Me’.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel, ‘Ethnographic Comparison’, 28.

<sup>16</sup> Manuel, ‘Contradance and Quadrille’, 8; Buckland, *Society Dancing*, 72.

<sup>17</sup> Manuel, ‘Contradance and Quadrille’, 8-9.

<sup>18</sup> Cyrille, ‘Politics’, 47. On quadrille choreography, Manuel has little to say: see his ‘Cuba: Contradanza to Danzon’, 63-67, and *passim*. Daniel, ‘Ethnographic Comparison’, excellently analyses the spectacular effect of quadrille choreography.

<sup>19</sup> Manuel, ‘Contradance and Quadrille’, 16.

<sup>20</sup> Various quadrille sets emerged by the turn of the century—including the Albert Quadrille, Lancers, English Quadrille, etc. See Miller, ‘Performing Ambivalence’, 407.

<sup>21</sup> Buckland, *Society Dancing*, 71.

<sup>22</sup> Miller, ‘Performing Ambivalence’, 421. This vast geographical range is noted by Szwed and Marks, ‘Afro-American transformation’, and Daniel, ‘An Ethnographic Comparison’; but a detailed comparison of the quadrille all in these sites, particularly the Indian Ocean, remains a lacuna. However, note work in progress on Sri Lankan quadrilles by

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Radhakrishnan, 'Kaffringha', and my forthcoming essay on the Goan Mando as an Indic creolized quadrille: Kabir, 'Rapsodia Ibero-Indiana'.

<sup>23</sup> Granier de Cassagnac, *Voyages*, 220-24; cited in Cowley, 'Essai historique', 267, translation by Cowley, 'Historical Essay', 203.

<sup>24</sup> Saint Méry, *De la danse*, 26; on Lescouble and De Freycinet, see Chaudenson, *Creolization*, 205 and 210 respectively.

<sup>25</sup> Labat, *Nouveaux voyages*, 2, 54; 68; 401-404; Lafontaine, 'Musique', 100-101.

<sup>26</sup> Chaudenson, *Creolization*, 124-5.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 126; supported by Labat, *Nouveaux voyages*, 37.

<sup>28</sup> See Saint-Méry, *De la danse*, 40; La Selve, *Musiques traditionnelles*, 62-3; and Daniel, 'Ethnographic Comparison', 20.

<sup>29</sup> Chaudenson, *Creolization*, 199.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 124-5.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 124-5.

<sup>32</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*. See also the schema explicating 'spheres of contact' offered by Mintz and Price, 'Anthropological Approach', 13-14, and Trouillot's remarks on the Plantation as cultural matrix in 'Culture on the Edge', 15-18.

<sup>33</sup> Granier de Cassagnac, *Voyages*, 211-220, cited in Crawley, 'Essai historique', 268, and translated in Crawley, 'Historical Essay', 204.

<sup>34</sup> Dixon Gottschild, *Digging*, 13-16.

<sup>35</sup> Lavollée, *Voyage*, 66-67.

<sup>36</sup> Labat, *Nouveaux voyages II*, 51; Saint-Mery, *De la Danse*, 37-8.

<sup>37</sup> Other words perform similar functions: *chica*, *calenda/ kalenda*, and, in the Indian Ocean world, *sega*, discussed below. See Gerstin, 'Tangled Roots'.

<sup>38</sup> Cyrille, 'Politics', 44, 45, and 56; see also Daniel, 'Ethnographic Comparison', 29.

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<sup>39</sup> JanMohamed, 'Manichean Allegory'.

<sup>40</sup> Young, *Colonial Desire*.

<sup>41</sup> Cyrille, 'Politics', 43. See also Daniel's use of the temporal marker 'over time'; 'Ethnographic Comparison', 20.

<sup>42</sup> Montforand, cited by Roussin, *Album*, 189.

<sup>43</sup> On 'sega' etymology, see Wergin, 'T'shéga, Shéga, Séga', and Chaudenson, *Creolization*, 204-210.

<sup>44</sup> La Selve, *Musiques traditionnelles*, 62.

<sup>45</sup> Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*.

<sup>46</sup> Granier de Cassignac, cited in Cowley, 'Essai historique', 268, translated in Cowley, 'Historical Essay', 203.

<sup>47</sup> La Selve, *Musiques traditionnelles*, 208, argues that the local evolution of quadrille led to Reunionese sega.

<sup>48</sup> Prolific composers included Frappier de Montbenoist and Isaac Gueny. See La Selve, *Musique traditionnelles*, 57, 211, and *passim* for examples; and the work of Fanny Precourt and Guillaume Samson at the Pôle Régional des Musiques Actuelles de La Réunion. For the score under discussion, see Roussin, *Album*, 160-1.

<sup>49</sup> On these instruments, see La Selve, *Musique traditionnelles*, 17-19, 84-128.

<sup>50</sup> Roussin, *Album* (n.p: images and illustrations are inserted into the work as non-paginated plates).

<sup>51</sup> Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 21.

<sup>52</sup> Garaud, *Trois ans*, 339-46; reprinted in Cowley, 'Essai historique', 278; trans. Cowley, 'Historical Essay', 212.

<sup>53</sup> Lucrèce, 'Usage musical', 11.

<sup>54</sup> La Selve, *Musiques traditionnelles*, 212.

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<sup>55</sup> Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating Island*, 314.

<sup>56</sup> Miller, 'Performing Ambivalence', 408, describes the choreographic manifestations of this desire for symmetry as a series of patterns and counter-patterns on all scalar levels, which 'points to a European original in terms of kinaesthetic linearity'. However, Ron Eglash, in *African Fractals*, argues for the aesthetics of fractal logic as an important aspect of African culture. Developing this line of enquiry could take to a very interesting place the debate about European and African contributions to creolization.

<sup>57</sup> Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating Island*, 314.

<sup>58</sup> The story, 'La Boule Blanche', is preserved in Box 48 of the Dunham Papers held in Southern Illinois University. See Kabir, 'Plantation, Archive, Stage', 8-10.

<sup>59</sup> Szwed and Marks, 'Afro-American Transformation', 30.

<sup>60</sup> Guilbault, 'Kwadril Evening', 36, notes the 'fasi' dances (couple dances) introduced at the end of a set. Miller, 'Performing Ambivalence', 408, notes that the final figure in the Carriacou quadrille is called a 'break-away'. In the essay's conclusion, I show how these terms enhance a theoretical understanding of the epistemic and economic consequences of the quadrille's creolization.

<sup>61</sup> Roussin, *Album*, 160-61, 189-90, and 382. Radhakrishnan, 'Kaffringha', explicates the etymological relationship between Indian Ocean creolized quadrilles and the term 'Kaffir' of which 'Cafre' is an orthographic variation.

<sup>62</sup> See Szwed and Marks, 'Afro-American Transformation', 29; on polysemy around the Martinican bele, which includes 'several dances incorporating quadrille choreography', see Gerstin, 'Reputation', 389-90.

<sup>63</sup> When new names for dances are introduced, they signal the movement from *segmentation* to *breaking away* (from the fractal structure). Note Swed and Marks's suggestion ('Afro-American Transformation', 32, n. 13) that 'a much-accelerated mazurka of the French West

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Indies is the prototype of the beguine [sic]'. The mazurka's entry into the haute-taille's final figure possibly precipitated a new phase of choreogenesis that assumed the name of beguine.

<sup>64</sup> Daniel explicates this polysemy through looking at agency manifested in the African-descendant body, which leads her to emphasize the Africanist elements of Caribbean quadrilles at the expense of their European counterparts ('Ethnographic comparison', 20), but later (ibid., 31), she struggles to articulate the principles whereby a Creole society distinguishes between 'new dance creations' and 'veritable creole dances'. I consider the clash of pre-existing systems of value and emergent demands of the market as a more useful line of explication.

<sup>65</sup> Dunham, 'La Boule Blanche' (n.p.).

<sup>66</sup> Chaudenson, *Creolization*, 211; Szwed and Marks, 'Afro-American transformation', 31.

<sup>67</sup> Thus, Seychellois musician K. Valentin defines kanmtole as 'the umbrella of a series of tunes'; cited in Naylor, 'Creolization' (n.p.).

<sup>68</sup> Alexis, *Lanmizik ek ladans tradisyonel*.

<sup>69</sup> The caller had disappeared from St Lucian quadrille evenings by the 1980s, but the dancers remembered his function well; see Guilbault, 'Kwadril evening', 48, n. 9.

<sup>70</sup> The DVD in question (n.d.) is called *Festival Kreol*; it is produced and distributed by the National Cultural Centre, Seychelles (Sant kiltirel nasyonal). The CD is *Loulou Pitou et Benoîte Boulard : du quadrille créole au séga* (La Réunion : TAKA 0611).

<sup>71</sup> For an extensive examination of these issues with specific regard to the folklorization of a related Seychellois dance, see Parent, 'le moutiya'.

<sup>72</sup> Deodat, 'Troubler le genre', 148: 'Les bals zarico favorisent le jeu, le hasard, et le partage.'

<sup>73</sup> Gerstin, 'Reputation', 396; and 390-91, for the consolidation of post-abolition 'sware' culture (dance evenings hosted on a rotating basis by an informal network of households) in rural Martinique. See also Lortat-Jacob, *Musiques en fête*, 11, quoted by Deodat in her

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discussion of the *bals zarico*: ‘Il implique donc l’échange et donne l’occasion d’en multiplier les effets’.

<sup>74</sup> See Gerstin, ‘Reputation’, 391, 396; Miller, ‘Performing Ambivalence’, 428-433.

<sup>75</sup> Daniel, ‘Ethnographic Comparison’, 22.

<sup>76</sup> Miller, ‘Performing Ambivalence’, 404.

<sup>77</sup> Gilbault, ‘Kwadril Evening’, 45.

<sup>78</sup> Miller, ‘Performing Ambivalence’, 403.

<sup>79</sup> As Gerstin, ‘Reputation’, 394, notes: ‘bele remains marginalized, restricted to a small world of performers and aficionados’.

<sup>80</sup> Miller, ‘Performing Ambivalence’, 493.

<sup>81</sup> Guilbault, ‘Kwadril evening’, 35-37.

<sup>82</sup> As reported from St Lucia; *ibid.*, 36.

<sup>83</sup> Miller, ‘Performing Ambivalence’, 408.

<sup>84</sup> The beguine took Paris’s nightclubs by storm precisely when Dunham was experiencing it within Martinique; see Cowley, ‘Historical Essay’, 231-266, for the accelerated migrations from the Antilles to Paris between 1926 and 1928, and the subsequent mingling of Antillean and Jazz dance cultures in Paris which necessitated the move away from Antillean quadrilles towards more easily learnt (‘fasi’) couple dances,’ including the beguine.

<sup>85</sup> 1930s Reunion saw the folklorization of the creolized quadrille spectrum on the one hand, and the commercialisation of the ‘Anglo-American’ couple dances associated with modern leisure (*Loulou Pitou et Benoîte Boulard*, liner notes, 24).

<sup>86</sup> Apter and Derby, ‘Introduction’, xx.

<sup>87</sup> ‘Kavalyé o Dam’, Kassav.

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