



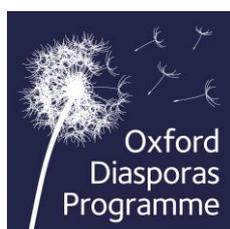
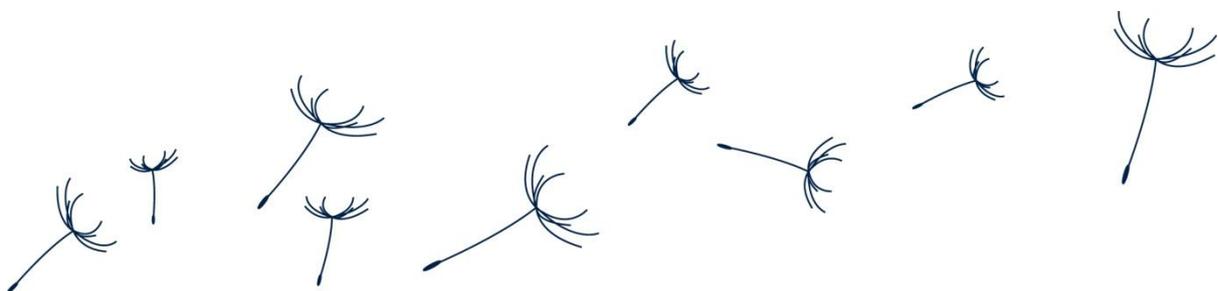
# Working Papers

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## Quotidian creolization and diasporic echoes:

Resistance and co-optation in Cape Verde and Louisiana

Olivia Sheringham and Robin Cohen



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## Abstract

Expressions of popular culture (here we consider music and carnival) have often been analysed as manifestations of indirect resistance to oppression. Alternatively, they can be seen as displays and practices that dominant political and social elites can easily co-opt. Using a combination of published material and fieldwork observations in Cape Verde and Louisiana, we show how a complex interplay between resistance and co-optation arises. As prior or incoming cultures are creolized they become nationalized, officialized or commercialized, thereby becoming subject to mechanisms of ‘destructive tolerance’. However, processes of appropriation are continuously challenged by internal dissent, demands for authenticity and fresh creative inputs. Such inputs are frequently drawn from original (or imagined original) societies and emergent diasporic practices and identities, which we have deemed ‘diasporic echoes’.

**Keywords:** Creolization, diaspora, resistance, co-optation, music, carnival

**Author:** Olivia Sheringham, International Migration Institute, University of Oxford, olivia.sheringham@qeh.ox.ac.uk; Robin Cohen, International Migration Institute, University of Oxford, robin.cohen@qeh.ox.ac.uk

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# 1 Introduction

‘Creolization’ is a highly contested term, used in multiple contexts and in largely inconsistent ways. While there is a general consensus among scholars that its utility can extend beyond the study of creole languages and linguistics, there remains an unresolved debate around the extent to which creolization can be applied outside its initial associations with colonisation, slavery and the plantation system in the New World. Indeed, for some, creolization refers specifically to the violent encounters between the cultures of colonisers, slaves and indigenous people in the New World – and more specifically the Caribbean – and to use the term beyond such contexts risks undervaluing or disregarding the highly politicized circumstances within which the terminology emerged (Palmié 2006; see also Mintz 1996). At the other end of the spectrum are those who hail the universal qualities of creolization, using it as a rich metaphor to analyse myriad contexts where inter-cultural interaction and new cultural expressions have developed, thus lending credence to Hannerz’s (1987) assertion that we live in a ‘creolizing world’.

We are, on the whole, cautious proponents of this latter view and believe that creolization can be usefully applied to new contexts, yet only if the differential power positions embedded in all inter-cultural relations are acknowledged. We are thus mindful of Hall’s (2010: 29) warning that within creolization ‘questions of *power*, as well as issues of *entanglement*, are always at stake.’ Keeping these power dynamics in mind, we argue that the concept of creolization enriches the analysis of agency, creativity and resistance on the part of subordinate cultures. Our concept of power, which we call ‘elusive power’, derives directly from elucidating such shifts from below.<sup>1</sup> *Elusive power comprises the subtle, discreet but undeclared social changes that slowly but cumulatively generate decisive shifts in social conduct, opinions and consciousness. In addition, elusive power is fleeting, hard to recognise and difficult to accumulate and routinize.* As Cohen (2007: 370) argues:

Behind the deafening nationalist, fundamentalist, and monocultural noises are the soft but pervasive sounds of diversity, complexity, and hybridity. The globalisation of military, financial, and economic power is paralleled by forms of cultural globalisation (I focus here only on creolization), that are less visible but provide a radical and subversive alternative to other forms of power. This is akin to what Bauman (2000: 14) described as ‘the new lightness and fluidity of the increasingly mobile, slippery, shifty, evasive and fugitive power’. In contrast to the naked, brutal, heralded power (say, of the Pentagon), fugitive power stresses the hidden, subtle, sub-rosa, *elusive* (i.e., difficult to catch or detect) forms of power found in collective shifts of attitudes and social behaviour.

More specifically, our aim in this paper is to explore how elusive power, seen in popular cultural expressions like music and carnival in the creole societies of Louisiana and Cape Verde, can at once be co-opted – by nation-states or cultural elites – and at the same time represent avenues for the expression of hidden and potentially resistant forms of creolization. While there are other examples of popular cultural practices that have been appropriated for the purposes of nation-building, heritage-construction or tourism – such as cuisine, dance, crafts, art, oral and written literature, theatre and religious practices – we have chosen to focus specifically on music and carnival because we feel that they best illustrate this dialectic between resistance and co-optation and offer suggestive possibilities for comparison between our two contexts.

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<sup>1</sup> In Cohen (2007), Baumann’s near synonymous notion of ‘fugitive power’ was used, though this caused some confusion because of the misleading association with ‘escaping’. We use ‘elusive power’ in preference.

## 2 Resistance and co-optation

To theorize creolization as subversive or resistant is, of course, nothing new. Whatever direction it has taken, the term emerged in the context of colonisation and slavery. It is now widely recognised that the languages, religions and cultural practices of colonised or enslaved people were not fully submerged into the cultures of the dominant elites, but were rather constitutive of the formation of new, creolized languages and cultural practices (see, *inter alia*, Baron and Cara 2003; Bolland 2010). What is less understood is a dialectic response by governments or cultural elites seeking to appropriate creolization and Creole as part of their nation-building projects and/or in the formal elaboration of a group's heritage. However, as with the contested attempts at total cultural hegemony on the part of colonisers, people creatively adapt those impositions to embellish their own beliefs and practices. We must therefore be wary of assuming that the appropriation of 'creole' cultural practices implies the permanent quelling of elusive power from below.

By using the term 'quotidian', we seek to move beyond the primarily abstract, conceptual realm that has prevailed in discussions of creolization, to explore some of the concrete *practices* of creolization that influence, and are influenced by, people's everyday lives and identities. Our focus on practices draws, in part, on the work of de Certeau who, in his seminal book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, points to the possibility of ordinary people resisting dominant norms and structures through their everyday practices or 'ways of using' the 'products imposed by the dominant economic order' (de Certeau 1984: xiii). Using the example of the practices of indigenous people in the Americas in the context of Spanish colonisation, de Certeau suggests that the indigenous people were able to subvert the 'rituals, representations, and laws imposed on them ... not by rejecting or altering them, but by using them with respect to ends and references foreign to the system they had no choice but to accept' (de Certeau 1984: xiii). We thus return to the question of power relations: while the dominant cultural or economic order may define how certain spaces, products or languages should be used, the everyday practices of 'users' may – albeit unintentionally or unconsciously – transform or adapt these official uses, thus gradually shifting the balance of power.

Such ideas have been elaborated in a number of contexts. For example, Genovese (1974) argued that, despite attempts to dehumanize slaves in the antebellum American South, religion, music and a painfully constructed popular culture allowed slaves to create an alternative mode of being, a dignified world of their own. Scott (1985, 1986) looked at everyday peasant resistance, particularly in Asia and Latin America, by choosing to focus not on the great rebellions or revolutions, but rather on the 'silent and anonymous forms of class struggle' (Scott 1986: 9). Similarly, Cohen (1980) documented the salience of informal and hidden forms of resistance among African workers in a number of countries. Drawing on such insights, in this paper we want to highlight not the visible forms of resistance to power, such as the War of Independence in Cape Verde or slave revolts in Louisiana, but rather the ways in which creolization as cultural creativity can be 'counter-hegemonic' and, perhaps, quietly 'revolutionary' (Baron and Cara 2003: 5). In a global context of resurgent expressions of nationalism or monochromatic identities, we argue that everyday forms of creolization can subtly, if perhaps unintentionally, resist dominant discourses by providing counter narratives and social practices.

We need also to explain our interpretation of co-optation. It is rare that states, local authorities, ruling elites or factory owners can control the populations under their sway with brutally repressive measures alone. Some degree of consensus is fashioned to permit a modicum of acceptance, or at least forbearance, on the part of the dominated section of the population. Allowing

selective political mobility into the ruling class is one strategy of co-optation classically described by Mosca (1939), as is manufacturing consent in a contemporary factory, when workers are given an ‘illusion of choice’ by asking them to devise better ways of stimulating efficient production (Burawoy 1979).

In this paper we need to focus on how those who define the dominant norms either blunt or capture the elusive power manifested in popular counter-hegemonic practices and cultures. We can start with a prosaic example. A photograph of the Argentinean revolutionary Che Guevara at a funeral service is one of the most famous in the world, but through its prolific reproduction on posters and t-shirts, the force of his convictions and his militant role in the Cuban revolution have been largely emptied of significance – in effect, his face has been annexed and subordinated into a banal, defused and commercialised youth culture. As Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007: 137) argue, ‘a key premise of co-optation theory is that the capitalist marketplace transforms the symbols and practices of countercultural opposition into a constellation of trendy commodities and depoliticized fashion styles that are readily assimilated into the societal mainstream.’ They address the case of organic food, which, over the course of three decades, morphed from being a ‘totem of the 1960s anti-establishment, anti-corporate, anti-conformist, hippie counterculture’ to ‘being a cultural symbol of the cultural creative professional class’ (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007: 135). The mass market retailer Wal-Mart’s adoption of organic food as one of its many ‘own-label’ products was apparently the final collapse into the mainstream. However, this was not the end of the story. Forms of community-supported agriculture have, the authors suggest, now manifested themselves in response to corporate commercialization and seek to reclaim the counter-cultural character of the organic food movement (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007: 137 *et seq.*).

This dialectic between elusive power and co-optation is particularly evident in forms of artistic expression and, in our case, the study of music and carnival. Here there can be an elision of creative energy through co-optation, often of a benign-looking kind. The process is tellingly described by Wind (1985: 88):

Benevolent neutrality eliminates friction and keeps the forecourt of art safely closed to disturbance. When an experience is exceptional, it must be multiplied; and soon it will cease to be exceptional. Baudelaire foresaw that this *destructive tolerance* would one day be hailed as a form of ‘progress’: in this complacent receptacle, a friendly abyss, the anarchic energies of creation would be soaked up into nothing.

In preference to the better-known idea of ‘repressive tolerance’ developed by Marcuse (1969), which centres particularly on the appropriation of political discourse for oppressive purposes, we have adopted Baudelaire’s expression ‘destructive tolerance’, which more pertinently alludes to art. In this paper, *destructive tolerance refers to the ways in which creative expressions, performances or artefacts are borne into the public domain in order to blunt social criticism, build a nation, attract tourists, or fabricate a heritage.* In short, for us resistance is about the exercise of elusive power, while co-optation is about the mechanisms and stratagems of destructive tolerance. How they interact with another in music and carnival at our chosen sites form the remainder of this paper.

### 3 Cape Verde and Louisiana

The dominance of the Caribbean as a site for the analysis of creolization has led to the assertion by Aisha Khan (2001: 272) that the region has come to represent a ‘master symbol’ for creolization, a ‘particular fiction that invents’ it. This so-called synonymy between ‘creolization’ and

‘Caribbeanness’ has eclipsed other parallel processes of creolization elsewhere, and has led to a tendency to overlook more concrete expressions of creolization on the ground. We counter these tendencies by focusing on quotidian forms of creolization in two very different – though with some strong parallels – contexts, namely the mid-Atlantic islands of Cape Verde and the North American ‘Creole state’ of Louisiana.

Cape Verde was arguably the ‘first creole society in the Atlantic world’ and, owing to its geo-strategic position between Africa, Europe and the Americas, it became the ‘capital of the trans-Atlantic slave trade for the first century of that trade’s existence’ (Green 2010: 157). Given that this island nation came into being through conquest and settlement by European colonisers and through the import of slaves from several African countries, it is unsurprising that creolized cultural practices and identities emerged in a context in which a collective memory of cultural ‘roots’ prior to colonisation had little chance of survival. Indeed, when asked what creolization and ‘creole’ meant in their opinion, several interviewees in Cape Verde responded that they had not realised that it referred to other places; they thought it referred only to Cape Verde, to the uniquely *Crioulo* – mixed – culture of the archipelago (fieldwork notes, February 2013). As one interviewee remarked, ‘It’s our way of being. It encompasses everything’ (interview with JF, 4 February 2013), while another added, ‘creolization for us ... is something that is neither African nor European but culturally in the middle’ (interview with KL, 7 February 2013).

Yet, despite the indisputably creole nature of Cape Verde and its people, the search for a national identity – particularly since achieving its independence in 1975 – has been marked by contradictions between Africanness and Europeanness, somewhat paralleling the tension between tradition and modernity (Rego 2008: 150; see also Challinor 2005). Thus, the cultural and literary movement *Claridade*, which emerged in the late colonial period, sought to defend the unique creole cultural and linguistic identity of Cape Verde, yet *mestiçagem* – or creolization – was put forward as an expression of the ‘cultural Portugueseness’ of the archipelago (Vale de Almeida 2007: 10; see also Challinor 2005). The policies of the post-independence government of the PAICG and PAICV,<sup>2</sup> by contrast, were aimed at a recovery of the nation’s African heritage, in part through a revalorisation of the culture of the *badius* – descendants of runaway slaves who lived in the remote regions in the interior of Santiago and who, according to Lobban (1995: 61), ‘came to represent a romantic symbol of the twentieth century struggle for Cape Verdean legitimacy, authenticity and even independence’. In a counter move, the subsequent government of the Movement for Democracy (MpD) emphasised the Europeanness of Cape Verdean identity, going as far as changing the country’s flag and national anthem to create a sense of distance from Africa.

All three examples outlined above represent attempts – by cultural elites or government institutions – to define what ‘authentically Cape Verdean’ is and to determine the strength of the different components of creolization on the islands. Yet missing from these ‘top-down’ efforts to define Cape Verde’s cultural identity are the more hidden forms of creolization on the ground as well as its ‘projective character ... as a form of surpassing nationalism, ethnic exclusivism, and racism’ (Lobban 1995: 129). There is also a tendency within these definitions of authentic Cape Verdeanness

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<sup>2</sup> PAICG is the African Party for the Independence of Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau. The struggle for independence in Cape Verde was fought in Guinea-Bissau and involved a strong alliance between anti-colonial forces in the two colonies. Following a coup in Guinea-Bissau in November 1980, five years after independence was declared in Cape Verde (it had been declared in Guinea-Bissau in 1973), relations between the two countries became strained, and the party was renamed the African Party for the Independence of Cape Verde (PAICV). See Lobban (1995: 92–113) for an in-depth discussion of this period in Cape Verdean history.

to look to the past, to essentialize Cape Verdean identity through a quest for roots. As well as ignoring the dynamic history of Cape Verde and its ‘deep creolization’ (Spitzer 2011: 44), which in fact implies an absence of roots (Vergès 2003), such discourses about authenticity also disregard the powerful influence of the Cape Verdean diaspora, which, if one includes second and third generation emigrants, almost outnumbers those residing on the island. As Challinor (2005: 32) argues, ‘if the line between the past and the present were to be drawn differently, then what are perceived as “intrusions” upon Cape Verdean culture may equally be seen as contributions towards the ongoing processes of cultural production.’ Following this line of argument, we seek to redraw the line between past and present, to explore how beyond the authentic versions of Cape Verdean identity put forward by cultural elites or the nation-state there are dynamic and powerful, though perhaps less visible, processes of cultural change from below.

As Cape Verde represents a heartland and the original wellspring of insular creolization (despite Caribbean claims to the title), so Louisiana represents the most notable and important example of creolization on a mainland. To a degree, the original character of creole society had similar roots – French Louisiana was somewhat cut off from Hispanophone America to the southwest and Anglophone America to the northeast. Two of the component cultures were African and European and the language evolved into a superstratal French Creole, paralleling the dominant vocabulary of Portuguese in Cape Verdean *Krioulu*. As in Cape Verde, there was a strong predominance of Catholicism and a history of slavery, and again a phenotypically intermediate group emerged (known as *gens de couleur libres*, free people of colour or Creoles of colour), not only in New Orleans, but also in the Cane River area, as well as in Pensacola, Mobile and along the bayous and prairies of Louisiana (Dorman 1996; Kein 2000; Mills 1977).<sup>3</sup>

While the resemblances do not disappear, the evolution of creolization in Louisiana was considerably more complicated. Unlike in many uninhabited or sparsely inhabited islands where creole societies took root, a significant set of Native American communities thrived in pre-European Louisiana. When French settlers penetrated the area in 1700 there were six Native American nations – the Atakapa, Caddo, Tunica, Natchez, Muskogean and Chitimacha – with Choctaw being a commonly-spoken lingua franca. Within these nations, were smaller bands or ‘tribes’ (the vocabulary to describe the social unit is contested), whose names survive in current place names. For example, the Opelousa band (part of the Atakapa) inhabited the area now known as Opelousas, while the Natchitoches (a sub-group of Caddo) lived near the present-day picture-postcard city of the same name (Folse 2005: 6). While tuberculosis, smallpox, measles and influenza took their toll, Native Americans remained substantial elements in the creole mix (a Creole with visible Native American origins is still referred to as *os rouge*, red bone).

Those of African origin were mainly West African slaves – Mandinkas,<sup>4</sup> Wolof or Bambara. But the key fissure among African migrants was between those who arrived directly from Africa and those who came via the French colonies of Saint-Domingue (modern-day Haiti) and, to a much lesser

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<sup>3</sup> Bayou is a Choctaw word alluding to the marshy stretches of water frequently found in the Mississippi delta, often difficult to penetrate. The bayous provided a rich marine life (crawfish, turtles and catfish) and were conducive to remote community formation on a very small scale, thus resembling the intermittent patterns of isolation and connectedness found in many creole island communities (see Cohen and Sheringham forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> See the discussion of ‘mandingas’ in Cape Verde below, where they assume a more wraithlike and less literal form.

extent, Martinique and Guadeloupe. The Caribbean group were already Creoles, used in the sense that they were born in the New World and had already evolved a creolized culture. Though all Creoles, they were divided roughly equally into white, mixed (*gens de couleur libres*) and black status groups. By 1804, when the revolution in Haiti resulted in independence, some 9,000 refugees from that country had arrived in New Orleans, a third of the total population of the city (Hall 1992).

We have alluded to the white Creoles from the French Caribbean, so it is perhaps useful to indicate that, in Louisiana, the word ‘Creole’ initially followed the Iberian New World use – that is it referred to whites who were born in the colonies, not in the metropole, and who, to varying degrees, had become culturally and socially localized. ‘Localized’ refers to wider forms of interaction, but it is also a euphemistic way of alluding to the informal marriages (*plaçage*) or more casual sexual relationships between white French Creoles and people of other phenotypes. Their reluctance openly to recognise exogamy was brilliantly portrayed in the controversial novel by George Washington Cable, *The Grandissimes: A Story of Creole Life* (1880/1880), which excoriated hypocrisy on the part of white Creoles and demanded justice for *gens de couleur*. Cable’s honesty was too searing for some to bear and he was forced to leave his native Louisiana and spent the rest of his life in Massachusetts. It is important to add that the European population was by no means confined to the French. The Spanish (who ruled ‘Luisiana’ from 1762 to 1802 as part of New Spain) largely neglected the area, but Spanish traders and soldiers, and artisans from the Canary Islands, fashioned distinct Hispanic subcultures. One can add to the European mix, German settlers from the Rhineland, Italian plantation workers, and English settlers, to nominate some obvious candidates.

Though all groups contributed to the creation of a regional creole cuisine (Folse 2005), for purposes of studying the Louisiana’s music, the most salient of the European sub-ethnicities are Cajuns, an Anglicisation of ‘Cadien’, which, in turn, is a contraction of ‘Acadien’ (Mattern 1997: 159). Drawn from French Acadia (the Maritimes of modern-day Canada) they were expelled by the British military authorities over the period 1755–63 and settled mainly in the southwest of Louisiana. Although Cajuns frequently claim an authentic and unadulterated heritage from Acadia, the leading Cajun historian, Brasseaux (1987), has made it clear that not only did Cajuns have other roots, but once they arrived in Louisiana they also effected intimate ties with black, Spanish, Méti (European–Native American descendants), Native Americans and other francophone groups.

With apologies for the pun, creolization in Louisiana took on a whole new complexion with the sale of the territory by Napoleon to the USA. As Dollar (2011: 1–2) recounts, at the acquisition ceremony at the Place d’Armes, New Orleans, in 1803, American officials witnessed Spanish and French troops, Creoles of colour, other Creoles, slaves and Native Americans. They confronted a ‘gabble of tongues’ and an array of complexions, ‘ivory, café au lait, copper and ebony’. The process of Americanizing this bewildering assortment of humanity into the standard American binary of white and black caused considerable social conflict and much resentment and resistance, which persist to the present day. As late as 2006, a Creole-speaker in Natchitoches vehemently claimed that ‘it was all alright until the Americans came’ (interview with MC, 8 May 2006). By this we understand that although there were many social fissures in pre-1803 Louisiana, the continuous processes of quotidian creolization were thought to be abating them. After the Louisiana Purchase, so our informant thought, there was simply no way of bridging the gap between American bi-racial and Creole multiply-stratified or non-racial *Weltanschauungen* (world views).

## 4 Music and carnival as expressions of creolization

It may seem surprising that in our attempt to move beyond ‘top-down’ notions of creolization, we have chosen to focus on cultural practices that may belong to the realm of cultural elites, or that have been instrumentalised to promote nation building or heritage projects, or to attract tourism. Yet, it is precisely this tension between destructive tolerance and elusive power that we wish to explore. We argue that the appropriation of a popular cultural practice from above does not end resistance from below; rather, both processes can take place sequentially or synchronously. Thus, while music represents a major cultural ‘export’ in both Louisiana and Cape Verde – and has arguably been commercialized and packaged as part of the world music market – musical creativity continues to play an important role in people’s everyday lives in both contexts, with new influences forming part of the dynamic evolution of their cultures.

In a similar way, there is little doubt that carnival (Mardi Gras in the case of Louisiana) in both contexts has become an increasingly globalised phenomenon with the emphasis more on attracting tourists than creating a liberating space for creativity to flourish. Thus, for example, many people lament the Brazilianization of carnival in Cape Verde as it increasingly becomes a ‘tourist product’ competing in what has been labelled the ‘carnival industry’ (Chantre 2011). Yet, despite these signs of commercialization and external influences within the official parades, the unofficial festivities in the streets, in rural areas and in unsupervised public spaces show how elusive power evades total order and official approval. As Abrahams (2003: 78) suggests, while events such as carnival can become ‘nation-builders for tourism’, for those who have taken part in these festivities throughout their lives, ‘they become counter-festivities in the most extreme formulations, ones that comment negatively on the official ways of celebrating.’

### 4.1 Music in Cape Verde

*‘Cabo-verdianidade is in one form or another intimately linked to the role of music in the process of consolidation, preservation and extension of what is Cape Verdean, whether in the archipelago or in the diaspora.’ (Monteiro 2003: 1, quoted in Sieber 2005)*

As suggested in the above quotation, there is clearly an intrinsic link between music and Cape Verdeanness, both on the islands and in the Cape Verdean diaspora. Indeed, music has formed an important part of nation-building projects in the archipelago and in the struggle to determine the contributions of Africa and Europe to definitions of Cape Verdeanness (Sieber 2005). While the origins of most Cape Verdean music genres remain contested, there is general agreement among scholars about their creolized nature in that they are ‘rooted in a trans-Atlantic complex of hybridised Euro-African musical forms varying from island to island and from northern to southern island groups’ (Arenas 2011: 45; see also Lobban 1995; Sieber 2005).



**Figure 1: Mural depicting different Cape Verdean musical styles in Praia, Santiago (Photo credit: Jason Cohen)**

The musical style known as *Morna* is, as Lobban (1995: 78) asserts, ‘regarded as one of the most characteristic and quintessential expressions of national culture’. Its origins are unclear, with some drawing attention to the echoes of the Portuguese *Fado*, while others emphasise the African origins of the genre and, in particular, the style known as *Lundum*, which emerged in Brazil but has Angolan origins (Sieber 2005: 142–3; see also Arenas 2011: 65). Indeed, the debates around *Morna* are reminiscent of the debates around Cape Verdean identity and the complex processes of creolization that have given rise to this identity, a unique identity that defies obvious references to particular roots. As Vergès (2003: 184) asserts, ‘creolization is about *bricolage* drawing freely upon what is available, recreating with new content and in new forms a distinctive culture, a creation in a situation of domination and conflict. It is not about retentions but about reinterpretations.’ As a creolized musical form, the precise origins of *Morna* are untraceable, representing a singular ‘reinterpretation’ of musical styles in the new situation. The themes of the lyrics are rooted in the struggles of the archipelago, in particular that of departure, *saudade* (longing), or the sea as a key motif representing an enabler for emigration, as well as a space marking separation (fieldwork notes, February 2013; see also Arenas 2011: 69).

The internationally acclaimed singer Cesária Évora brought Cape Verdean *Morna*, as well as the faster paced *Coladeira*,<sup>5</sup> to the global music market. These musical exports drew international attention to Cape Verde, arguably contributing to the successful careers of several other Cape Verdean musicians. According to Arenas (2011: 102), this small archipelago is ‘securing an identity and a

<sup>5</sup> Often described as a faster paced *Morna*, with influences from Latin American rhythms such as the Colombian *cumbia* (interview with Margarida Brito Martins, 5 February 2013; see also Arenas 2011: 67).

niche within the world music industry’ (see also Gonçalves 2006).<sup>6</sup> Yet, despite what may be described as the ‘commodification’ of Cape Verdean music within the global music industry, and the fact that many Cape Verdean musicians have made a career beyond the bounds of the archipelago, to focus solely on these aspects would be to ignore the ways in which popular music has formed, and continues to form, a powerful instrument of resistance to the seemingly hegemonic forces of cultural globalisation. In the following paragraphs we will briefly outline three main ways in which popular music in Cape Verde can be identified as a marker of resistance.

First, the emergence of African-derived musical forms in the colonial era – and in their re-emergence in the postcolonial one – represents one way in which music became a means of exercising elusive power. Take the case of the *Batuque* (or *Batuku*), most probably the oldest musical style in Cape Verde, which emerged on the island of Santiago (Gonçalves 2006: 17). It is a music, song and dance that is performed almost exclusively by women who are gathered in a circle known as a *terreiro* (Gonçalves 2006: 17; see also Arenas 2011: 81). One cannot help but note the semantic link with the *terreiros de Candomblé*, the sacred spaces used for services and ceremonies by practitioners of the Afro-Brazilian *Candomblé* religion. One interviewee explained that the Portuguese word ‘*terreiro*’ actually referred to the great open areas on the plantation where the coffee was dried and where slaves would meet, and it has taken on different meanings across the lusophone world (fieldnotes, February 2013). The *terreiro* – both for Brazilian *Candomblé* and Cape Verdean *Batuque* – signifies a space outside, a sacralised space that was the domain of slaves. Thus historically, the *terreiro* represents a space separated from the space of the dominant power, which allows for the possibility of creativity and resistance.

During a *Batuque* ‘session’, the lead vocalist sings a verse, which is immediately repeated in unison by the rest of the group (interview with Margarida Brito Martins, 5 February 2013). These verses, known as *Finaçon*, usually consist of improvised proverbs, which contain themes that range from quotidian scenes to social criticism (Brito 1999). Simultaneously, the lead player (*batukadera*) sets up the rhythm for the other members of the group – they respond by beating their knees or a piece of rolled up cloth between their legs – while one of the players goes to the centre to perform a dance. The *Batuque* performance is in two parts, the first as a kind of call-and-response,<sup>7</sup> the second involving all singers and players executing the same rhythm and singing the same refrain. The *Batuque* is usually accompanied by someone playing the *cimboa*, an instrument that, although uniquely Cape Verdean, bears a strong resemblance to instruments used on the west coast of Africa (interview with Margarida Brito Martins, 5 February 2013).<sup>8</sup>

Both *Batuque* and *Funana*, a style that emerged much later than the *batuque* but also regarded as having strong African elements, were repressed during colonial times because their song lyrics and dances were regarded as too subversive and the style too ‘African’ (Arenas 2011: 80). Indeed, this repression was particularly strong in the authoritarian years of Portuguese rule during the *Estado*

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<sup>6</sup> During fieldwork in Cape Verde, several interviewees spoke quite bitterly about Cesária Évora. While conceding that her success had brought international attention to Cape Verde and its music, it was argued that she had abandoned her compatriots and that her success had monopolized the Cape Verdean music scene and marginalized other, equally talented musicians.

<sup>7</sup> This call-and-response pattern is common in African music and also forms an important component of music developed in the USA, field hollers, work gang chants, boat songs and spirituals being the most obvious examples.

<sup>8</sup> See Gonçalves (2006: 16–27) for an in-depth discussion of *Batuque*.

*Novo* (1926–74) (Gonçalves 2006). Yet, despite this history of marginalization, *Batuque* and *Funana* continued to be practised in the remote interior regions of Santiago and are closely associated with the culture of the *badius*. According to local historian Moacyr Rodrigues, women played on their knees or on wrapped up cloths because the Portuguese authorities prohibited the use of the African drum (interview with MR, 5 February 2012). Hence, rather than the prohibition leading to the suppression of the *Batuque*, practitioners adapted their practices to the circumstances, thus demonstrating both a resistance to these attempts at suppression and the gradual evolution of a musical style.

Since independence, Cape Verde's African-derived musical styles have re-emerged as important elements in the nation's musical culture, as well as valid subjects of ethno-musical research. Indeed, the promotion and celebration of these two genres was a crucial element in the 're-Africanizing' project of the post-independence government of the PAICV, regarded as an 'authentic Crioulo cultural tradition' (Lobban 1995: 78). Furthermore, having been practised after work in the fields or at special ceremonies such as weddings or baptisms, contemporary *Batuque* groups are often invited to 'perform' in more formal settings such as cultural centres or theatres, both in Cape Verde and internationally (Lobban 1995: 82). Although this emergence into the mainstream has arguably led to some loss in their original social meaning, a form of destructive tolerance, some scholars argue that they continue to represent channels for political expression and, indeed, party politics. For example, Arenas (2011: 80) writes that 'these musical styles underscore the distinctiveness of Santiago's *badiu* culture characterised by its unabashedly independent and rebellious spirit rooted in the history of slavery on the island.'

More recent musicians, such as Lura or Mayra Andrade,<sup>9</sup> have created inspired fusions of Cape Verdean styles with other musical genres. Thus, like their predecessors, contemporary musicians adopt and adapt the rhythms and styles available to them to create new Cape Verdean sounds, further 'creolizing' these already hybrid musical forms. Rather than merely becoming products of monopolizing nation-building projects and acquiring 'folkloric status' (Sieber 2005: 144), the revival – and evolution – of these creolized musical styles in Cape Verde and in the diaspora can in fact provide spaces for social criticism, for the exposure of past and present injustices, and contribute to the on-going evolution of a dynamic and unique Cape Verdean cultural identity.

The second potentially subversive characteristic of Cape Verdean music derives from the fact that nearly all of it is performed in Creole (*Krioulu*) as opposed to the official national language of Portuguese. It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into more depth about the debates surrounding the *Krioulu* language – the variations between the islands and the debates surrounding its officialization – but it is important to note the complex relationship between *Krioulu*, music and Cape Verdean identity.<sup>10</sup> As Arenas (2008: 49) argues, 'regardless of dialect differences, *Krioulu* is the primary galvanizing force within Cape Verdean culture. Given its constitutively oral nature, it has a symbiotic relationship to music; thus together they are the quintessential medium to express a sense of "Cape Verdeanness", both on the islands and in the diaspora.'

It would be a gross simplification to posit that *Krioulu* is, and has always been, a form of elusive power subverting official Cape Verdean culture. Representing both a convergence between the

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<sup>9</sup> Short profiles can be found on the web at the following links: <http://www.luracriola.com/> and [http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/worldmusic/a4wm2008/2008\\_mayra\\_andrade.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/worldmusic/a4wm2008/2008_mayra_andrade.shtml).

<sup>10</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the origins of *Krioulu* and debates around its officialization, see for example Meintel (1984), Quint (2000) and Rego (2008).

language and cultures of the colonisers and slaves as well as a form of differentiation and resistance to colonial rule, *Krioulu* was from the outset, as Rego (2008: 147) argues, ‘located, paradoxically, both within and outside the Portuguese language’. Yet, the continued widespread use of *Krioulu* in Cape Verdean music – it is regarded as a language better suited to express emotions – points to a desire to maintain a form of cultural distinctiveness and a rejection of the definition of their music as part of a wider ‘lusophone’ style (Sieber 2005: 138). Moreover, as Sieber notes, following Meintel (1984), the relationship between music and *Krioulu* also lies in the fact that both belonged to more intimate and expressive spheres, in contrast to the public spaces of the Church, the state and education dominated by Portuguese. This point is reminiscent of our earlier discussion of *terreiros*, suggesting that these musical, linguistic and religious practices emerged outside the sanctioned public sphere and were able to adapt, resist, or even destabilize, mainstream cultural practices.

The ‘symbiotic relationship’ between music and *Krioulu* thus also lies in their relationship to official discourses and spaces: their practice both within the confines of official culture – where they can be appropriated for particular means – and their ability to maintain a certain distance from the dominant order. Despite attempts to officialise *Krioulu*, which of course are widely supported both in Cape Verde and in the diaspora, and attempts to categorize and fix certain forms of Cape Verdean music, the practice and constant evolution – creolization – of both beyond the confines of these official spaces and discourses points to an on-going, subtle resistance to such co-optation.

The third way in which popular music represents a form of resistance lies in the use of *Krioulu* in Cape Verdean music among the extensive Cape Verdean diaspora (Sieber 2005: 141). Indeed, the fundamental role of the diaspora in the evolution of Cape Verdean culture and identity is apparent, despite co-optation into the world music market or attempts by the Cape Verdean state to support only what is regarded as ‘authentic’ Cape Verdean genres, namely the *Morna* or *Coladeira* or, more recently, *Batuque*, *Funana* and *Tabanca*.

Not only does Cape Verde embody a diasporic space from its very origin, as the uninhabited islands were populated by people displaced (either forcibly or voluntarily) from their original homeland, but massive waves of emigration since the beginning of the twentieth century have also given rise to what Sieber (2005: 123) labels ‘today’s deterritorialized transnation’. The vast spread of the contemporary Cape Verdean diaspora, spanning multiple countries and involving waves of emigration due to diverse socio-political circumstances (Carling 2004), means that there are many Cape Verdeans whose lives and cultural practices are, physically at least, outside the confines of the nation-state. Thus, given Cape Verde’s long history of emigration – and indeed immigration and return – it is not surprising that music in the archipelago is, and has always been, strongly influenced by those who live outside the archipelago but who remain closely connected with people and events there. The sense of ‘double loss’ – of original roots and then of lives in Cape Verde – has long been a key motif in Cape Verdean popular music.<sup>11</sup>

Several interviewees remarked that one cannot talk about creolization in Cape Verde without referring to the diaspora (fieldwork notes, February 2013). One interviewee argued that creolization in

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<sup>11</sup> This is the theme of Cesaria Evora’s famous song, *Sodade* (Longing), which is virtually ubiquitously known in the diaspora. Its haunting character is hardly captured in this translation: Who will show you / this distant way? / Who will show you / this distant way? / This way / to São Tomé? // The longing, the longing / The longing / For this land of mine, São Nicolau // If you write me letter / I will write you back / If you forget me / I will forget you. // Until the day / You come back. (This translation found at: <http://lyricstranslate.com>).

Cape Verde was more influenced by the practices of emigrants – who lived all over the world – than by Portugal (interview with CF, 6 February 2013). Yet, despite widespread acknowledgment of the fundamental role of the diaspora in cultural processes in Cape Verde, there were still many who lamented what was seen as the influx of external influences and felt that Cape Verdean culture needed to be protected from such pressures (fieldwork notes, February 2013). There was a sense that the new musical styles emerging among the Cape Verdean diaspora posed a threat to what was ‘authentically’ Cape Verdean (fieldwork notes; see also Hoffman 2008).

One example of a recent musical style that has emerged in the diaspora is *Cabo-Zouk*, a genre that derives from Antillean *Zouk* music and that emerged in the 1980s among Cape Verdeans living in France and Rotterdam.<sup>12</sup> While Rotterdam became the ‘epicentre’ of *Cabo-Zouk*, recordings are often mixed in Paris by sound engineers who have prior experience with Antillean *Zouk* (Hoffman 2008: 207). As Hoffman (2008: 211) notes, critics have argued that *Cabo-Zouk* is ‘simply not Cape Verdean’ and that the musical freedom experienced by musicians in the diaspora has meant that they have been able to ‘expand the boundaries of their music’ and, in the process, disregard what is ‘authentically’ Cape Verdean (see also Sieber 2005). On the one hand, one could argue that *Cabo-Zouk* emerged as a result of the homogenizing impact of globalisation on cultural processes, which threatens cultural originality and distinctiveness and has led to second- and third-generation Cape Verdean migrants losing sight of what it means to be Cape Verdean. On the other hand, it seems that the emergence of *Cabo-Zouk* – which is also widely popular in the archipelago – is an example of the ongoing creolization of Cape Verdean music and the resistance to being labelled just one thing or being categorized within the world music market as part of music from the ‘lusophone world’. As Guilbault (1993: 21) writes, ‘music not only reflects people’s reality but also “constructs” or shapes that reality’ (quoted in Sieber 2005: 146). Cape Verdean ‘reality’ is being constructed not merely by the top-down practices of states, cultural elites, or homogenizing processes of globalisation but, rather – or perhaps also – by the creative, counter-hegemonic practices of the nation’s people both on the islands and beyond.

## 4.2 Music in Louisiana

It is difficult to condense into a small section of this paper the massive array of creative musical genres associated with Louisiana. The roll call includes country rock, work songs, hot music, gospel, rural blues, swamp blues, Dixieland, jazz (jass in earlier spellings), ragtime, rhythm & blues, second line, LaLa and zydeco. To get an intellectual grip on this diversity, it is worth distinguishing in the first instance between music that has no obvious element of protest or resistance, compared with genres in which some element of social criticism or elusive power can be detected.

A useful initial contrast can be found between the sheet music written by Creoles of colour and popular folk songs. The former genre was produced by a number of composers, including Edmond Dédé, who worked as a theatre orchestra conductor in Bordeaux and wrote ballets, operettas, overtures, 250 dances and songs, six string quartets and a cantata, among other works (Sullivan 2000: 77). Although there is evidence here of personal and small group mobility, such Creole composers were essentially augmenting a classical European tradition, with little evidence of social protest or critique. This is in decided contrast to popular folk songs. Remarkably, Kein (2005: 120), following Marcus Christian, discovered that creolized slaves (already speaking Creole) improvised satirical

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<sup>12</sup> It is interesting to note the similar historical and cultural ‘roots’ of both Antillean *Zouk* and Cape Verdean *Cabo-Zouk*. As Hoffman (2008: 209–10) observes, Cape Verdeans related very strongly to this Antillean style, ‘not simply because of the similar rhythms, but similar colonial pasts, including slavery’.

songs as soon as they arrived on the auction block in New Orleans. This song (below, with a translation following) took a spirited pot shot at a prominent lawyer, M. Etienne Mazureau, whose job it was to record slave sales in his ledger (Kein 2005: 120–1):

Mitchie Mazureau  
Ki dan so bireau  
Li semble crapo  
Ki dan baille dodo.  
Mr Mazureau  
Who [is in] in his office  
He looks like a toad  
In a bucket of water.<sup>13</sup>

This open expression of derision derives directly from the African custom of praising or, better, satirising the powerful. Mockery could be hidden by language or by being part of a critical mass. Such a mass was found on Sunday afternoons in Congo square, the informal name for an area now enclosed by the Louis Armstrong Park. With food vendors, neat paths and organised concerts, the newly laid-out park can be seen as a long-delayed move at gentrification, though the dearth of adequate public funding has induced some sordidness and provided a temporary haven for street people (fieldnotes, January 2013). Between 1800 and 1862, slaves were allowed to assemble in the square after church on their day off. This was an attempt to contain earlier unregulated assemblies. In 1799, for example, a visitor to the city wrote of ‘vast numbers of negro slaves, men, women, and children assembled together on the levee, drumming, fifying and dancing in large rings’ (Donaldson 1984: 64). The ‘rings’ represented Africans of different ethnic origins. Thousands of slaves came to Congo square each Sunday. Donaldson (1984: 65) quoted a British engineer and amateur ethnographer tasked with building the city’s waterworks, who noticed

a most extraordinary noise which ... proceeded from a crowd of five or six hundred persons, assembled in an open space or public square. [Blacks were] formed into circular groups in the midst of [which] was a ring ... ten feet in diameter. [Two dancing women] each held a coarse handkerchief extended by the corners in their hands. ... [The music] consisted of two drums and a stringed instrument. An old man played a large cylindrical drum, and beat it with incredible quickness with the edge of his hand and fingers. Together with a second, smaller, drum they made an incredible noise.

These assemblies in Congo square attracted many whites to gape at the spectacle, but warily. The police dispersed the assembly at night in response to public fears and the music gradually lost some of its authentic African flavour. While this was a matter of regret for folklorists and Afrocentric scholars trying to recover an intact diasporic heritage in the New World, creolization is about invention not retention. It is thus not at all surprising to find that elements of the shared (creolized) African culture developed in the Congo square assemblies are found in surviving Bamboula and Calinda dances, in local Voodoo practices, in Mardi Gras songs and in the development of jazz, including the use of cross-rhythms found in ragtime (Collier 1984: 43). In many areas, the authorities banned drums and loud horns, as they surmised these might be used as signals for an impending slave revolt, remembering that white slave owners from Saint Domingue had fled from a successful slave revolt. The banjo (an African instrument) survived (Collier 1984: 17); we surmise that the European piano

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<sup>13</sup> Kein translates ‘crapo’ as frog, but we surmise the reference is to a cane toad, a large, ugly toad used in the sugar cane fields to control pests.

was turned from a melodic, to a melodic cum percussive instrument to supplement the restrictions on drumming.

The double-face of creole music, being both respectable and subversive, can also be seen in the evolution of jazz. On the one hand, parades, marches, funeral dirges, concerts and the sacralization of figures like Louis Armstrong and Mahalia Jackson show the co-opted side of the music. Although the political elite never permanently drew Armstrong's fangs (he suddenly denounced President Eisenhower over his inaction on civil rights), he accepted US State Department sponsorship to tour Africa, Asia and Europe and revelled in his nickname 'Ambassador Satch'. Trad Jazz had become officialized and nationalized. Mahalia Jackson was more vocal and explicit about the discrimination she experienced (as in her famous song 'I been 'buked and I been scorned'), but her memory was notably subject to destructive tolerance in the opening of the Mahalia Jackson Theater of the Performing Arts in Louis Armstrong Park, relaunched in 2009 in an official ceremony featuring, *inter alia*, Placido Domingo. On the other hand, there are some major jazz musicians whose lifestyles were so deviant that they escaped the fate of reputable incorporation. To mention just three, we think of Jelly Roll Morton, Billie Holiday and Charlie Parker.<sup>14</sup>

Creole music is also a rural music, the most buoyant example of which is zydeco, particularly associated with the southwest of the state. The origins of the name are obscure, and include theories that it derived from Atakapa music, is a corruption of *les haricots* (beans), or has more obscure creolized African origins, perhaps in the Indian Ocean (Ancelet 1996; Singleton 1998). There is common agreement that it is a blend of African, Caribbean and European music. More contested, is the sense that a predominantly African-derived genre is slowly being folded into Cajun music (sometimes this is designated as Cajun zydeco). Zydeco started as music of consolation and household recreation. The idea that its name was derived from '*les haricots*' is suggested by the common expression '*les haricots sont pas salés*' meaning not literally that the beans are not salted, but that there is nothing in the house to flavour the beans or, more clearly, people are being reduced to beans alone. Those with musical talents would hold LaLa house dance sessions in neighbours' homes. The percussion was provided by a washboard and, later, a dedicated zydeco *frottoir* (a rubboard with neck or shoulder straps). The accordion – probably imported from Germany – the banjo and fiddle completed the ensemble of instruments.

Though other instruments and English lyrics have now been introduced mainly for commercial reasons, 'the real stuff' is 'marked by exclusively French vocals and a percussive frenzy that clearly reveal that the style originated in the cultural creolization of Afro-Caribbean and Franco-American traditions' (Ancelet 1996: 139). 'French' is understood to be creolized and this link between language and authenticity directly parallels *Kriolu* vocals in Cape Verde. However, joint hostility to Anglophone influence did not suppress mutual suspicions between Creoles and Cajuns. Mattern (1997: 159) argues that from the 1960s, 'Cajun musicians led a Cajun cultural revival that succeeded in drawing attention to some of the problems of Cajuns, such as cultural assimilation, poverty, and ethnic stigma. It also succeeded in helping to partially overcome these problems.'

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<sup>14</sup> 'Jelly Roll' is black slang for a woman's labia. Morton's exploits were described as a 'litany of misadventure'. He was a 'pimp', 'hustler', 'poolshark', 'gambler', 'sensitive', 'ebullient', 'a braggart', among many other descriptions (Collier 1984: 95, 96). Billie Holiday was an alcoholic, insatiable drug-taker and masochist. Charlie Parker was addicted to heroin and died aged 34.



**Figure 2: Zydeco with Terry and the Zydeco Bad Boys – Live in Concert, 14 July 2012. Note the zydeco rub board and the (barely visible) accordion.**

Black Creoles felt that this recognition was at their expense, that cultural property had been appropriated and that Cajuns were engaged in a bid for cultural dominance (Mattern 1997: 159–60). This sense of injustice was particularly unfortunate as the music reflected their shared history of common misfortunes as poor tenants and common everyday practices opposed to American segregationist and bi-racial doctrines. Mattern (1997: 161–2) adds:

The musical sensibilities and lyrical themes of Cajun and zydeco music also have much in common, reflecting similar experiences and lives. Both, for example, contain strong blues inflections such as blues scales and vocal breaks evoking crying or sadness. Their lyrical themes emphasise economic marginalization, lost love, and unrequited love. Both zydeco and Cajun music nearly disappeared under pressure from Anglo assimilationist influences, going ‘backporch’ during the lean years of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s although not disappearing entirely.

The official attempt to manage these strands has been to amalgamate them all into an undifferentiated ‘gumbo’, a Louisianan stew of many ingredients derived from most of the state’s component cultures. Here is one example. Announcing that St Landry parish in west Louisiana provided ‘a gumbo for your soul’, the tourist brochure welcomed all to a place ‘where accordions are cool, boudin is hot and history is not just in textbooks. Our festivals’, it alphabetically continued, ‘celebrate art, blues, Cajun music, catfish, cracklins, etouffee, herbs, spices, yams and zydeco’ (SLPTC 2013).<sup>15</sup> We have argued that officialization and destructive tolerance do not always succeed in repressing new creative forms of resistance from below. This is true too of zydeco. Again, a small example must suffice. Two local radio presenters kick off their Swamp ‘n’ Roll Show warning that the zydeco music to be aired ‘contains adult language, nudity, and subversive political commentary’ (Fuller 2011: 60).

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<sup>15</sup> In Louisiana boudin is usually a white sausage, without blood. Cracklins comprise pork skin, refried in pork lard. Both are Cajun dishes. Etouffee is a thick shellfish sauce ‘smothering’ a base of rice, and claimed by both Cajuns and Creoles. Yams are associated with West Africa, but are sometimes confused with sweet potatoes in Louisiana.

## 5 Carnival as a creole event

Let us now turn to the phenomenon of carnival – or Mardi Gras in Louisiana – and consider some of the ways in which this creole festival provides examples of processes of simultaneous or oscillating co-optation and resistance in Cape Verde and Louisiana.

According to some accounts, carnival emerged originally in medieval Italy and the name ‘carnival’ stems from the Italian words ‘carne’ and ‘levare’, which would mean ‘to remove meat’. In this theory, for some two weeks before Lent (when Christians were enjoined to fast), there was a prolonged ‘letting go’ or ‘farewell’ to meat. In effect you succumbed to bodily pleasures because you know you would soon have to give them up. The philosopher and literary theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin, is widely recognised for his interest in the carnival through his theory of the ‘carnavalesque’. For Bakhtin (1984: 10) carnivals were subversive and liberating because of the dissolution – for that short period – of existing hierarchies:

Rank was especially evident during official feasts; everyone was expected to appear in the full regalia of his calling, rank, and merits and to take the place corresponding to his position. It was a consecration of inequality. On the contrary, all were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age. ... People were, so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations. These truly human relations were not only a fruit of imagination or abstract thought; they were experienced.

Thus, although carnival has taken on distinct forms in different places, since its origins it has come to represent a moment of release, a space where everyday life is put on hold and, as Crowley (1999: 224) suggests, a time for one ‘to determine to do all things normally impossible or forbidden in everyday life and perhaps even to fulfil oneself by trying out one of more roles or lifestyles, to be for a short time what one could never be in everyday life’. As we shall see in the discussions of carnival in Cape Verde and Mardi Gras in Louisiana, the liberatory potential of these festivities is sometimes overshadowed by the emphasis on glitzy, formalized parades and the desire to package them to attract tourists. However, as our examples below suggest, attempts to essentialize these events do not necessarily defy the possibilities for ordinary people to ‘use’ carnival – albeit in more subtle ways – as a space for performing new identities, taking on new roles, and putting their everyday lives on hold.

### 5.1 Carnival in Cape Verde

São Vicente is a tiny Brazil  
filled with joy and colour  
during those three days of extravagance  
there is no conflict, just carnival  
and unparalleled bliss

‘Carnaval de São Vicente’, Cesoria Evora<sup>16</sup>

Carnival represents one of the major events in the Cape Verdean cultural calendar and it takes place every year at the start of Lent. Although each island has some form of carnival, the carnival of São Vicente is the biggest on the archipelago and many residents from the other islands come to partake in

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<sup>16</sup> On the *Café Atlântico* album. Quoted in Arenas (2011:76)

the festivities, as well as large numbers of Cape Verdeans living in the diaspora. The Cape Verdean carnival dates back to the colonial period and its origins lie in the Portuguese *Entrudo* (or ‘entrance’ to Lent), which was celebrated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Rocha-Trindade 2012: 5). Yet, despite its Catholic and European origins, there is little evidence to suggest that it is a mere reproduction of the Portuguese festivities, for carnival in Cape Verde reflects the country’s history of creolization. Indeed, in a similar way to the musical examples outlined above, carnival can be seen as a staging of Cape Verde’s complex identity and its position at a crossroads between Europe, Africa and the Americas.

As the lyrics of Cesoria Évora’s song cited above suggest, São Vicente’s carnival is heavily influenced by the Brazilian equivalent both through the widespread propagation of Brazil’s carnival on the TV and other media and because many Cape Verdeans either live or have lived in Brazil. Several interviewees lamented the ‘Brazilianization’ of the carnival and Cape Verde’s participation in the ‘carnival industry’ (Chantre 2011), which means that rather than using locally-produced artefacts, they buy the costumes, materials and drums in Brazil. Floats have also become the most visible part of the event (fieldwork notes, February 2013). However, despite such influences, people made a point of reiterating that the São Vicente carnival remains fundamentally a uniquely Cape Verdean event. One interviewee also pointed out that the São Vicente carnival in fact preceded the carnival in Brazil, since the Portuguese brought it to Cape Verde first (interview with JF, 4 February 2013). The ‘Brazilianization’ of Cape Verde’s carnival can thus be seen as part of a long history of entanglement and cultural exchange within and across these two creolized spaces.

The notion of cultural entanglement is also an important consideration with regard to the traces of Africanness, the diasporic echoes, in this creole event. Typical figures in the São Vicente carnival are the ‘*mandingas*’ – people who paint their bodies black with a mixture of coal and cooking oil and who dance bare-footed in grass skirts, violently shaking a stick bearing a doll’s head, which is also painted black. These people were traditionally from Ribeira Bote, one of the poorest local neighbourhoods of Mindelo (São Vicente’s main city), though nowadays they come from all over the city (interview with MC, 6 February 2013). While the name ‘Mandinga’ – or Mandinka – refers to a West African ethnic group, the so-called *mandingas* of the carnival are in fact based on a different ethnic group from the Bissagos Islands just off Guinea-Bissau. According to Moacyr Rodrigues (cited in A Nação, 2013):

a group of people from these islands came to Cape Verde in the 1940s on their way to a Colonial Exhibition in Portugal. They performed a dance ... which remained in the collective memories of the people of Mindelo. And so people began to imitate them during carnival. And, since the Mandinkas were at the time the most well-known ethnic groups in Portuguese Guinea, this was the name they were given and it stuck.

Apparently, the figure of the *mandinga* has been adapted and recreated over the years and is now uniquely São Vicentean (see Figure 3).

While the *mandinga* was initially a figure that evoked fear and played tricks – its role is now primarily to dance and entertain, in many ways becoming part of the more formalized, securitized, nature of the Cape Verdean carnival. Yet, despite this apparent ‘co-optation’ of the *mandinga* figure, one could also argue that the way in which the figure has evolved – involving many more people from all over the city – is part of the on-going process of identity construction in Cape Verde, which, far from being merely ‘top-down’, is an expression of the changing demographic make-up of the archipelago – including increasing migration from mainland African countries – and the changing everyday practices of Cape Verdeans. Moreover, as well as their visibility during the official days of

carnival, *mandinga* ‘parades’, accompanied by groups of percussionists, take place every Sunday for two months prior to the carnival and the *mandingas* are often seen painted in colours other than the traditional black (fieldnotes, February 2012; interview with MC, 6 February 2013). The shifting *mandinga* figure – both within and outside the carnival – also raises important questions about Cape Verdean identity, about the relationship with Africa and the elusive power that arises through the creative play on this already creolized figure.



**Figure 3: *Mandingas* at the São Vicente carnival. *Mandingas* are young people who paint their bodies black with a mixture of coal and cooking oil and who dance bare-footed in grass skirts, violently shaking a stick bearing a black-painted doll’s head (Photo Credit: Emma Klinefelter)**

Several interviewees commented on the increasing ‘commercialization’ of the São Vicentean carnival and, in particular, the increased police presence during the official parades (fieldnotes, February 2013). While the police presence seems tiny compared with the Notting Hill or Brazilian carnivals, there is little doubt that on the days of the official carnival parades, some of the streets in Mindelo become heavily controlled and set out in specific ways for the official parades. Another recurrent theme among interviewees was the increased cost of the carnival – as costumes and floats become ever more extravagant and, for members of the diaspora who return, the price of food or staying in a hotel is inflated (fieldnotes, February 2013). Yet, despite this increased expense and formalisation, for many, the most important moments of the carnival take place outside the official parades – in the streets, which become spaces of spontaneity and resistance as normal life is put on hold and everyday norms are subverted. It is a time–space where ‘anything goes’: men are dressed as women; women are dressed as men; children masquerade as elderly people; others wear elaborate masks and disguises; people make up chants critiquing the Cape Verdean government or the global situation; or they create new games and tricks to awaken complacent observers (fieldnotes, February 2013).<sup>17</sup> It also represents a space where new cultural forms and practices emerge; through a

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<sup>17</sup> All these features appear at the Louisiana Mardi Gras, though the suspension of conventional gender roles is probably more noticeable; women, in particular, are given much more sexual licence (see below).

combination of dance, play, theatre and music, carnival becomes an example of creolization as ‘cultural creativity in process’ (Baron and Cara 2011: 3).

As well as the many participants in the parades and unofficial carnival play, vast numbers of other people, including locals, visitors from neighbouring islands and members of the diaspora, come to watch the carnival and to seek out a spot that will provide the best views. Again, the everyday uses of the city are subverted: buildings under construction, railings, walls and trees – however high – become ideal viewing points, as do the rooftops and balconies of hotels and restaurants where people arrive hours in advance to get themselves the best place (field notes, February 2013). Like de Certeau’s (1984: 91–110) walkers, who tactically move around the city in ways that do not fit with the strategic plans of governments or town planners, during the carnival period the city spaces take on new roles as their official uses are subverted by the practices of users. Yet, while these creative and ‘subversive’ uses of the city are concentrated on these few carnival days, their effect lingers. Carnival thus represents a staging, a making visible, a creative though spontaneous performance of the on-going processes of creolization in Cape Verde’s dynamic culture ‘in the making’.

## 5.2 Mardi Gras in Louisiana

Strictly, ‘Mardi Gras’ (Fat Tuesday) refers to the practice of eating richer foods immediately before the partial fast days commencing on Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. More broadly, Mardi Gras is the culmination of the carnival season and, as Mardi Gras parades now take place over a ten or twelve day period, the expression is nearly synonymous with ‘the carnival season’. Second to only the massive event in Rio, Brazil, the Mardi Gras carnivals in New Orleans and Mobile are the most celebrated in the world. In 2012, they attracted more than a million visitors to each of these cities. Weiss (2011: 20) estimated the net fiscal benefit to New Orleans of staging the Mardi Gras there at US\$ 13,108,538 (including ‘brand value’) and US\$ 7,771,095 (without brand value). Brand value refers to the downstream, reputational effects positively influencing tourist arrivals and expenditure at other times of the year. In short, Mardi Gras is big business and plays into what is known as ‘place marketing’, a phenomenon that Gotham (2002) analysed. He shows that because place marketing has become a key means of urban renewal in New Orleans, public officials and corporations have had to transform ‘a relatively amateur and informal activity into an increasingly professionalized, highly organised and specialized industry’ (Gotham 2002: 1735). For some, Mardi Gras demonstrates that consumption capitalism (based on leisure and spectacle) is replacing production capitalism. By corollary, ‘sign-value’ (the value of images and other semiotic objects) replaces use-value. Gotham (2002: 1752–3) insists that this turn to issues of signification should not obscure the hard-headed interventions of corporations and city planners:

New Orleans represents a prime example of ‘creative destruction’ as urban leaders and economic élites have attempted to strategically deploy Mardi Gras imagery and advertising to refashion the city into a themed landscape of entertainment and tourism. ... Moreover, major developers and real estate interests now regularly rely on Mardi Gras imagery and motifs to create commercial spaces including arts districts, historical areas, museums, casinos and gaming facilities, and shopping areas.

To service these interests, Mardi Gras has to be tamed, commoditised and sanitised. This is not always so easy. Take the apparently transgressive act of disrobement (exposing breasts, buttocks and genitalia), which frequently takes place at Mardi Gras. These acts are relatively recent (perhaps dating from the 1970s); they retain some degree of class, ethnic and gender order and are nearly always (women on high balconies are exceptions) enacted for the exchange of beads. Just as hundreds of

thousands, perhaps millions of beads have become *symbolic* forms of currency during Mardi Gras, temporary nudity, so Shrum and Kilburn (1996) claim, has become a *symbolic* act of rebellion against the established order. Of course, we need to make clear that to describe social behaviour as ‘symbolic’ does not render such an act meaningless or inert. Licentiousness, of which disrobement is an example, evokes pre-Christian Dionysian behaviour associated with intoxication, unruliness, frenzy and ecstasy, none of which sits comfortably with the managed, corporatized world of contemporary Mardi Gras festivities and parades.

A more explicit challenge to officialised and commercialised Mardi Gras comes in the survival of the Mardi Gras ‘Indians’, earlier known as black Indians. They are not Native Americans, but working-class blacks using the narratives of Native American resistance and mystical connections to the spirit world to oppose the social elite of New Orleans. As Lipsitz (1988: 115) argued, while the members of New Orleans ‘high society’

mask themselves in expensive costumes and ride motorized floats along the city’s main thoroughfares, throwing beaded necklaces and souvenir doubloons to crowds of spectators, the Indians subvert this spectacle by declaring a powerful lineage of their own, one which challenges the legitimacy of Anglo-European domination. Their costumes are made, not bought. They avoid the main thoroughfares and walk through black neighborhoods. They define the crowds along their route as participants, not just as spectators. Their fusion of music, costumes, speech, and dance undermines the atomized European view of each of those activities as distinct and autonomous endeavors, while it foregrounds an African sensibility about the interconnectedness of art and the interconnectedness of human beings.

Even in the wake of hurricanes Rita and Katrina, when flood waters devastated poor working-class areas, Mardi Gras Indians were active, even defiant. With names like ‘Creole Wild West’, ‘Fi-Yi-Yi’ and ‘Wild Tchoupitoulas’, the ‘tribes’ (not ‘krewes’, the more respectable name for the voluntary associations that organise floats and group parades) stalked the back streets of New Orleans on non-approved routes. They engaged in competitive song and dance, and call-and-response lyrics, with strong African resonances. The late ‘Tootie’ Montana (Figure 4), the legendary chief of the Yellow Pocahontas tribe, claimed that he dreamed up his remarkable costumes by evoking African rituals (Abrahams et al. 2006: 71–2).<sup>18</sup> Although ‘Tootie’ Montana was phenotypically black (not *os rouge*), he vehemently insisted that his cousins ‘looked like Indian’ (Roach 1992: 469). It is more than likely that his costumes were many-times reworked versions of those paraded in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West shows, which combined depictions of the tragedy with the degradation of vanquished Native American cultures. As Roach (1992: 478) perceptively comments, the performances of the Mardi Gras Indians were evocations of that pathos and ways of reimagining ‘a space, a continent, from which the white man and his culture have vanished. ... In other words, I believe that carnival in New Orleans permits, through the disguise of “masking Indian”, the imaginative recreation and repossession of Africa.’

As we have shown, Mardi Gras in New Orleans has not been totally co-opted, but we must remember too that the practice has spread throughout the state (and beyond). Carnivals along the Gulf Coast are particularly well established, and generally they are manifested by more local participation

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<sup>18</sup> This is all grist to our creolizing mill and displays a splendid recklessness in combining the plausible and implausible, or even weird. Pocahontas was not of course a tribe, but a person, the daughter of a Native American chief in the Virginia area. She married an Englishman and travelled to London, there being paraded as evidence of a ‘noble savage’ who could enter European civilization.

and fewer spectators. In Mobile, the oldest krewe, dating from 1867, depicts Folly chasing Death around a broken Greek column armed with a golden pig bladder. This may simply signify a Dionysian triumph, but may be a reference to the broken dreams of the confederacy – old plantation houses were often supported by Doric columns (Abrahams et al. 2006: 75).

In the rural southwest, a different tradition has evolved – the Cajun and Creole *courir de Mardi Gras*, or Mardi Gras run. Drawn from strong Acadian influences, riders on horseback or on flatbed trucks, or walkers, go from house to house, playing beggar-clowns and demanding *charité* before they leave. Chicken, sausage links and vegetables are especially welcome. If the householder is compliant, they are invited to join the revellers to eat the resultant gumbo and dance later that evening. Spitzer (1996: 88), who closely studied the rural Mardi Gras, observed that, despite sharing foodways, music and some common ancestry, Creoles and Cajuns have ‘ambivalent and sometimes hostile’ relations. Participating in the *courir de Mardi Gras* is a way of highlighting and perhaps resolving differences, or at the very least, using the clowning to examine, exaggerate, neutralize or invert the travails of daily life (Spitzer 1996: 95 *et seq.*). Although most of the revellers are male, *Courirs de Mardi Gras* have also become popular with women. They are particularly noted for the inventiveness of their masks, and for engaging in bawdy play and gender role reversals. They sometimes dress as hags or dolls, with ambisexual costumes, openly mocking conventional ideas of decorum and beauty (Ware 2001).



**Figure 4. Chief ‘Tootie’ Montana, who paraded with the Mardi Gras Indians for 52 years, died in 2005 at a City Council meeting, following accusations that police had roughed up black youths in the poorer parts of the city.**

## 6 Conclusion

Using the prisms of everyday creolization and diasporic echoes, we have sought to analyse music and carnivals at two sites, not hitherto compared. Comparison is not merely about identifying similarities, but deepening understandings of the unique through suggestive contrast. Among the common elements in the Creole stew, the gumbo, are African slaves, European slave holders, colonialism,

some degree of intermittent isolation and Catholicism. In both cases a new language evolved, *Krioulu* (with a superstratal Portuguese) and Creole (with a strong French vocabulary). Shared social customs and cultural products emerged in both cases – in cuisine, religious practices, art and literature – and, in the cases reviewed here, music and carnival. The key problem with stopping the analysis there, simply with a bland appreciation and approbation of ‘mixity’ or ‘hybridity’, is that the fault lines within each society are papered over, the differential valorisation of each element in the gumbo remain unrevealed and issues of power (remembering Stuart Hall’s admonition quoted earlier) are imperfectly addressed.<sup>19</sup>

For us, conflict is played out by subtle assertions of elusive power from below and less subtle exercises of co-optation from above – usually by national authorities, municipal authorities, companies and those fabulating ‘heritages’ for the purposes of fostering tourism. When we examined music and carnival/Mardi Gras practices at our two sites, we have undoubtedly biased the examples towards those where mimicry, social criticism, defiance, challenges to dominant élites, inversions of gender roles and other forms of resistance are evident. We need, therefore, to make clear that we do not argue that all forms of creolized music and carnival/Mardi Gras are intentionally about resistance or implicitly about elusive power. Many musicians and carnival organisers may ‘choose’ to be ‘co-opted’. They not only make the most of the situation, by participating they seek to influence the shape of officially and commercially sanctioned popular culture. There are more prosaic reasons for playing the official game too – musicians can become rich, or at least survive, while prominent carnival organisers can augment their cultural and social capital. As we have indicated, some music is produced for the fun of it, for recreation not for protest. Needless to say, not that many participants and spectators at the carnival have been sensitized by reading Bakhtin.

The thrust of our argument is not that all creativity is an act of resistance, as Hessel (2011: 37) asserted.<sup>20</sup> Rather, it is that creolization *permits* the creation of a counter-culture, one that is conditioned by relationships of domination and subordination and one that is renewed by iterations and nostalgic recreation – real, imagined, exaggerated, and embellished – of the diasporic experience. These are *echoes* of diaspora, not retentions. In extending Glissant’s arguments, Vergès (2003: 184) maintains:

Creolization is about *bricolage* drawing freely upon what is available, recreating with new content and in new forms a distinctive culture, a creation in a situation of domination and conflict. It is not about retentions but about reinterpretations. It is not about roots but about loss. It must be distinguished from cultural contact and multiculturalism because, at heart, it is a practice and ethics of borrowing and accepting to be transformed, affected by the other. In the current era of globalisation, processes of creolization appear in zones of conflict and contact. They are the harbingers of an ongoing ethics of sharing the world.

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<sup>19</sup> Not all uses of ‘hybridity’ are toothless. We recognise that one of the major advocates of the concept insisted that conflict was at the heart of the idea. For Bhabha (1985: 154) hybridity is ‘the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power.’ This parallels our idea of elusive power.

<sup>20</sup> ‘To create is to resist, to resist is to create.’ This is the inspiring, but exaggerated, sentiment at the end of Stéphane Hessel’s pamphlet, which energized the ‘Occupy movement’ (Hessel 2011: 37).

Can we perhaps tweak this a little? While Vergès maintains ‘it is not about roots, it is about loss’, we would concur that one cannot re-establish the past as some Edenic state. The Garveyite and Afro-centric movements of the 1960s could only, and did, reconstruct a continent ravaged by colonialism and the slave trade. Native Americans can no longer hunt the American bison over wide swathes of the American West. Acadiens (Cajuns) can no longer live by fishing and trapping alone. However, contrary to Vergès, we argue that such experiences can be mined to galvanize claims for distinct identities, and to re-energize creative impulses. This arises particularly in the interplay between destructive tolerance (which elides distinctiveness and imagination) and elusive power. Musical genres like zydeco and enactments like carnival provide a code, a language or a ritual that allows, but does not guarantee, the deployment of traces of the past into a critique of the present. And, as the discussion of the Cape Verdean diaspora demonstrates, the *diasporic present* also feeds into cultural expressions and the possibility of dissent.

Spector’s (2010: 404) extraordinary critique of the dominant norms of the USA expresses well how ritual may not be merely dull repetition but a vehicle of the imagination:

The community creates a relative safe container through music, rhythm and invocation. Once the spirits enter, however, *they* are in control, not humans. Their presence is indicated by spontaneous emotional expression. ... Successful ritual both requires *and* leads to a sense of community where diversity is respected, and exploitative or violent acts are seen for what they are: the behaviour of uninitiated people who never felt welcomed into the world.

Neither the mandingas in São Vicente nor Tootie Montana in the back streets of New Orleans could have said it better.

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