

Title: The Curious Case of Maxixe Dancing: From Colonial Dissent to Modern Fitness

Journal: *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents*

Special issue: African Heritage Couple Dances in and beyond the Circum-Atlantic World

Editor: Ananya Jahanara Kabir

Author: Cristina Fernandes Rosa*

Filiation: Department of Dance, University of Roehampton, London, UK

Email: Cristina.rosa@roehampton.ac.uk

Bio: Dr. Rosa is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Roehampton's Department of Dance. She has previously taught at University of California Riverside, Tufts University, Reed College, Florida State University, Tallahassee, CalArts and, from 2012 to 2013, she was a research fellow at Freie Universität's International Research Center "Interweaving Performance Cultures" (Germany). Rosa has been published in peer-reviewed journals, such as TDR, and edited books, such as *Performing Brazil* (2014) and *Moving (Across) Borders* (2017). In her book *Brazilian Bodies and Their Choreographies of Identification: Swing Nation* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), Rosa examines how movement qualities cultivated across the black Atlantic contributed to the construction of Brazil as an imagined community. Rosa earned her PhD from UCLA.

* Cristina.rosa@roehampton.ac.uk

The Curious Case of Maxixe Dancing: From Colonial Dissent to Modern Fitness

Abstract:

The primary goal of this article is to shed new light on the meteoric rise (and fall) of maxixe dancing, from Rio de Janeiro's practices and performances in the late 1800s to its international explosion in Parisian venues in the 1910s, and subsequent codification in US's dance manuals published in 1914. Drawing on my previous scholarship, I examine how different kinds of bodies have articulated maxixe at four distinct scenarios, paying close attention to the positionality of female partners. I particularly address a) how this partner dance *functioned* at the bodily level (i.e. how it was executed or described), b) the (socio-political) *roles* it assumes and c) the *effects* it produces (from discourses to affects). The article closes with few considerations on why maxixe dancing lost momentum after WWI era and gradually faded into anonymity, or perhaps *how* it continued to mutate into other non-hegemonic ways of dancing.

Keywords: Maxixe, Brazilian Tango, Afro-Brazilian aesthetics, coloniality, exotic dances, physical culture.

Introduction

“Remember that night when we tossed worry to the wind and, dressed in our wedding clothes, decided to spend an hour at the Café de Paris which was the turning point in our lives.”¹

The silent motion picture *Whirl of Life* (1915) recounts the life and romance of Vernon and Irene Castle, the husband-and-wife team who fueled a pre-World War I dance craze in America. A climactic scene of the film takes place in a Parisian café when, upon request, the couple (playing themselves) gets up and gives the movie goers a glimpse of their modern

moves. In an effortlessly poised manner, Vernon slides his right arm around his wife's lower back and, in close embrace, they glide across the dance floor with swift footsteps. As they transfer their weight from side to side, the couple manages to sustain an upward alignment of the spine, while gracefully curving their bodies into a long crescent shape from head to toe. After a few steps, Vernon leads a quick turn and, as if blown by the wind, Irene leans back against his supporting hand, dropping her head out in abandon. They repeat the novelty, by now grabbing the attention of everyone in the room. The married couple then executes a few other equally exciting figures by simply switching the position of hands and the direction of feet. In the end, despite the lateral curving of the spine, the swapping of hands and the shuffling of feet, they move in a harmonious unison throughout this one-minute sequence, displaying a graceful affinity and supple complicity that ultimately evokes a fairy-tale, happy-ever-after, romance.

[insert Figure 1: Series of screen shots from the motion picture *Whirl of Life* (1915)]

At first sight, everything seems to fall into place in this picturesque, yet proper, waltz of sorts. However, as I research further, comparing this historical footage to the Castles' extensive teaching materials and photographs, I come to realize that this "Cinderella meets prince charming" couple dance is nothing but a textbook example of what the Castles call "The Tango Brésilienne, or Maxixe." *Maxixe?* -I ask myself in disbelief-, for the footage and the printed dancing lessons of these renowned master teachers produced bore little resemblance to the partnering dance style that emerged at the turn of the twentieth century in Brazil and whose wide popularity led to its extensively representation, from short stories and illustrations of its time (see figure 2 and 3 below). In his *Maxixe: a dança excomungada* (*Maxixe: the excommunicated dance*, 1974), for instance, the historian Jota Efegê provides an

extensive account of the “scandal” this way of dancing provoked in the press. In fact, it’s characteristic gyration of the hips places it closer to the 1980s *lambada*,² than to the Castles’ *mise en scène* at the Café de Paris in 1910s. Puzzled by these discrepancies, I began to wonder: Does this North American interpretation may be qualified as an innocent mistake or is it the product of a carefully constructed deviation? What were the intent and motivations behind the Castles’ enactment and mass-mediation of this modern dancing from Brazil in this particular manner? And, most importantly, how did we get here?

[Insert Figures 2 and 3:

Figure 2: Figure 2: “Maxixe.” Illustration by K. Lixto (Calixto Cordeiro), originally published in the magazine *Século XX*, May 1906. Legend reads: “If you didn’t know (before), be aware of the maxixe now.”

Figure 3: “*O Maxixe Bem Rebolado*” (The Hip-wiggling Maxixe). Illustration by K. Lixto (Calixto Cordeiro), originally published in the magazine *Revista Fonfon*, 1907.]

In order to answer these burning questions, I must first set the record straight. In *Musica, Doce Música* (1934), the ethnomusicologist Mário de Andrade postulates that the so-called “maxixe” (then uncoded, hence in lower case) first emerged around 1870s within Rio de Janeiro’s dance halls. Similar to European ballroom dances in vogue at the time, e.g., Waltz and Polka, that style was danced in a close embrace. Yet, as Efegê (1974) and Tinhorão (1969, 1986) point out, in Brazil maxixe first emerges in black neighbourhoods such as Lapa and Cidade Nova, nicknamed *Pequena África* (*Little Africa*), as an improvised way of dancing to musical rhythms in vogue at the time. Contrary to the Eurocentric pomp and etiquette the Brazilian elites imported into their fashionable enactments of sociability, maxixe dancers were in tune with a series of aesthetic principles cultivated across the Black Atlantic,

starting with the *polycentric and polyrhythmic body*.³ As I have previously demonstrated (Rosa 2015), this polycentric and polyrhythmic way of organizing bodies to move enables dancers to articulate first and foremost a combination of percussive footwork, which follows a basic rhythmic pattern or meter (often 2/4), and isolated gyration of the hips, which may come in-and-out of sync with said pattern. This *syncopated* way of moving is pervasive to several Afro-Brazilian forms (e.g. *jongo, umbigada, samba, frevo, capoeira, coco*, etc). Hence, rather than a homogeneous and indiscriminate “fusion” of different cultures, nineteenth-century maxixe dancers appropriated, quite specifically, an Eurocentric organization of social bodies in space, i.e. partner dance in close embrace. Meanwhile, these local dancers collectively subverted this imported macrostructure with an underlying system of bodily organization and knowledge production grounded in Africanist aesthetic principles.

The primary goal of this article is to shed new light on the meteoric rise (and fall) of maxixe dancing, from Rio de Janeiro’s house parties, dance halls and musical comedies in the late 1800s to its international explosion in Parisian cafés, cabarets and burlesque venues in the 1910s, and subsequent codification in US’s dance manuals published in 1914, such as the Castle’s *Modern Dancing*. As I have previously noted:

Initially maxixe was not considered a distinct genre of music or dance, but rather a lascivious (black) “way of dancing” to popular ballroom rhythms, such as polka, tango, and habanera. Named after *burr gherkins*, at the time the cheapest vegetable on the market, maxixe dancing was practiced at establishments of “questionable reputation” located in working-class neighborhoods. It was initially despised by the European-aspiring elites of Brazil. Yet, in a turn of events similar to what happened to the Argentinean tango (Savigliano, 1995), soon after distinguished maxixe dancers made their debut in Paris balls around the 1910s, this now properly “tamed” and codified dance became an auto-exotic sensation amongst the local elites in Brazil.⁴

Departing from my previous scholarship, below I take a closer look at how different kinds of bodies have articulated maxixe within four distinct scenarios,⁵ often adapting, stylizing, and/or distilling the foundational qualities of movement and choreographic patterns of this Afro-Brazilian way of dancing to their (socio-cultural) environment. In doing so, my investigation pays close attention to how this social dance changes, in terms of form and meaning, as it migrates from one space to another.

As noted above, maxixe was initially a slang term given to a *way of dancing* popular in black environments at the end of the nineteenth century. In this first scenario, local polycentric and polyrhythmic bodies improvise dances that appropriate elements of Euro-Brazilian culture (e.g. partner dancing in close embrace) into their repertoire of cultural resistance and sociability. Through this innovative approach, they collectively choreograph renewed processes of identification, from a place of otherness.⁶ As maxixe dancing gains popularity across town, its “inebriating moves” (*galopes assás inebriates*)⁷ are publicly condemned as a social/moral disease, yet secretly sustained through “illicit” encounters between race/class divides. As I explain below, around the turn of the twenty-century this way of dancing migrates, or is appropriated, into a musical comedy genre known as *teatro de revista* (i.e., revue theatre), where white-looking actors stage stylized choreographies of maxixe. In this second scenario, maxixe comes to represent or “speak for” hypersexual marked identities or *Otherness* (Spivak 1988; Hall 1997; Lopes 2006), but without blackface. In sum, these unique characters “look White” but “act Black”. The third scenario takes place in 1910s Paris, when Caucasian Brazilians further tame and re-brand maxixe as an exotic dance style similar to the Argentinean Tango. Through a combination of private lessons and public exhibitions, “*le vrai Tango Brésilien*” (the real Brazilian Tango) becomes a Parisian bohemian activity that promotes what Mônica Velloso calls a “spectacle of the senses.”⁸ Finally, during the pre-World War I dance craze in America, the Parisian Maxixe is further

codified as a modern (social) dancing form, far removed from the way it was once danced in black urban spaces in Brazil. In this final scenario, I argue, “The Brésilienne Tango” becomes a sanitized product that promises to deliver physical health, mental wellbeing and “honest” leisure.

Across these four distinct scenarios, I pay close attention to the positionality of female dancers, from the (unnamed) or *maxixeiras* listed in nineteenth century advertisements to key historical figures such as the Italian (naturalized Brazilian) Maria Lino and the North-American Irene Castle. At the same time, I take into consideration what their performances make possible or set in motion (Desmond 1997). That is, departing from a historical excavation of how this partner dance *functioned* at the bodily level (i.e. how it was executed or described), I further examine the (socio-political) *roles* it assumes and the *effects* it produces (from discourses to affects). To paraphrase Marta Savigliano, taking maxixe dancing as a case study, across this article I question the “recognition and validation of aesthetics, pedagogies, and skills and even manners and motivations that are compatible (i.e., assimilatable) to the established Dance field,”⁹ as well as those that are erased or made invisible, as this non-hegemonic way of articulating ideas through movement crosses over to “the other side of the line” of what Boaventura de Sousa Santos denominates a “modern abyssal thinking.”¹⁰ The article closes with few considerations on why maxixe dancing lost momentum after the First World War era and gradually faded into anonymity, or perhaps *how* it continued to morph or permutate into other non-hegemonic ways of dancing.

First scenario (1870s –1900s/Rio de Janeiro)

*“Dance sets politics in motion, bringing people together in rhythmic affinity where identification take the form of histories written on the body through gesture.”*¹¹

We might never know exactly what maxixe really looked like in its early stages. The recriminating tone with which (white, male, Christian, upper-class) writers describe these “lascivious” bodily actions in archival documents of the times (see Efege 1974; Tinhorão 1986; Chasteen 2006) tends to obfuscate both these improvised enactments and the social actors promoting them. Within nineteenth-century newspaper articles, for instance, maxixe is condemned as a “vulgar”, “indecent”, or “grotesque” behaviour, unsuitable to “honest” women.¹² Based on the available scholarship and visual records (see figures 2 and 3), however, it is safe to assume that maxixe dancing cultivates, as previously mentioned, a distinct way of organizing moving bodies to think and act, within the realm of partner dancing. At the heart of this Afro-Brazilian system of organization is a particular dynamic of bodily syncopation triggered between the vigorous shuffling of feet and the isolated swaying of hips. In Brazil, this syncopated dialogue between hips and feet is commonly known as *ginga*.¹³

When framed into a close embrace, this syncopated way of dancing demands from the dancers a constant rearrangement, (swing, shuffle, evasion) of their erect and upward posture, to accommodate the polycentric and polyrhythmic dialogues between feet and hips. In other words, the swaying of the hips triggers the spine to undulate. Furthermore, departing from a “get-down” posture (downward stance with heels on the ground, knees bent, and torso tilted forward) and a flexible undulation of the spine, the close embrace between dancers pushes them to dislocate their intertwined gravitational centres into high-affect juxtapositions. More often than not, as K. Lixto’s 1906-7 drawings illustrate (see figures 2 and 3), dancers bend their polycentric and polyrhythmic bodies under and over each other’s kinesphere. In doing so, maxixe dancers break their bodies down into zig-zag figures, as they construct spiral pathways in time and space. Additionally, similar to other partner dances grounded on Africanist aesthetics, such as the Argentinean Tango and the Cuban Habanera, maxixe’s

coupling of polycentric and polyrhythmic bodies in tight embrace by the waist line disrupts Western codes for social behavior from within, that is, at the bodily level. In addition to challenging and dismantling aesthetic concepts cultivated in Eurocentric forms, such as upward linearity (torso as a unit), radial mobility (outward linear extension of limbs), and geometrical dislocation (Cartesian pathways), maxixe's emphasis on improvised dynamics of movement, including the call-and-response interaction with musical rhythms, kinesthetic dissonance, and apartness in movement, further push their dancing endeavours away from metronomic counts. The result is the abandonment of the upright vertical posture, rhythmic regularity, controlled manners, and sensuous modesty, expected of nineteenth-century European styles of social dance imported into Brazil (e.g., Waltz, Polka, Mazurka). Together, these innovations give maxixe dancers a wider range of motion, or "freedom" of articulation of different parts of their bodies, in relation to variables such as time/rhythm, space/place, weight/gravity, and flow/dislocation.

Maxixe dancing first emerged when Brazil started its long and controversial process of abolition of slavery (1871 – 88). It is also worth knowing that at that time, Rio de Janeiro was the biggest slave port city in the Western World. For the (largely black and mixed-raced) populace, urban dances such as maxixe were embraced with a "sense of cultural pride, moral self-esteem, and social dignity,"¹⁴ for it recuperated-cum-invented cultural values connected to their African heritage. The cultivation of black dances in Brazil promotes, the social science scholar Muniz Sodré proposes, "an unequivocal demonstration of resistance against the social imperative of reduction of black bodies to a production machine and as an affirmation of the continuation of the African cultural universe."¹⁵ As an embodied practice of sociability anchored on ethno-cultural heritage that generates psycho-somatic pleasure and amusement, I argue, the enthusiasm towards this improvised way of dancing in contexts of coloniality resonates with the concept of *buen vivir* (to live in plenitude) that permeates

various processes of cultural resistance across Latin America (see Gudynas 2011; Vázquez 2012).

A few months prior to the abolition of slavery (1888), the Afro-Brazilian writer Machado de Assis captures the essence of the way locals danced to “inebriating” local black musical scores (often a hybrid of polka, lundu, and maxixe rhythms), with ironic verses published at *Gazeta de Noticias* (1/20/1887):

“It’s simple, four bars	<i>“É simples, quatro compassos</i>
And a lot of hip wiggling	<i>E muito saracoteio</i>
Waist trapped in the arms	<i>Cinturas presas nos braços</i>
Ties smelling of breast”	<i>Gravatas cheirando a seio.”¹⁶</i>

At the same time, it is no surprise that Rio’s local printing press at the end of the nineteenth century framed this attitude towards partner dancing as immoral and denigrating, and thus improper to “honest women.” For the European-aspiring elites, in particular, the growing popularity of maxixe dancing during Brazil’s *Belle Epoque* (1889 – 1922) undermined their utopic aspirations of turning Rio into a “tropical Paris.” The vivacity with which this way of dancing spread across Brazil’s imperial capital and the passion with which the upper-classes (attempt to) chastise it clearly reflects the uneasiness with which the elites of Brazilian society dealt with its deep-rooted African cultural heritage. Most importantly, as the country prepared to transition from a longed-lived agricultural economy based on slave labour (1660s – 1888) to a wage labour model fuelled by new waves of European migration, the cultural re-Africanization of Brazil’s urban centres such as Rio de Janeiro was feared as a “contagious” social disease to be eradicated.¹⁷ Which is not to say that men, despite their class, ethnicity, or place of birth, reframed from crossing the city’s race and class lines to partake in these “licentious” and “distasteful” acts.

Here it is worthwhile considering that the term *maxixeiras* (or *machicheira*), collectively designating (sexy) female maxixe dancers, precedes the use of the term “maxixe.” In fact, the word “maxixeiras,” in the female plural form, first appears in print at an advertisement for a ballroom event in 1880 at Rio de Janeiro’s newspaper *Gazeta da Tarde*. In that historical advert for the First Catete Society ball, the maxixe historian Jota Efege explains, words such as “*parati*” and “*capilé*” give away the vulgarity of the event and, by extension, confirm the “questionable reputation” of its “machicheiras.”¹⁸ From a colonial/patriarchal point of view, adverts such as this functioned as a call for elitist (newspaper reading) males to come dance with “no strings attached,” and then return to their “honest” lives within their patriarchal households. Implied in such commercial propositions was the notion that maxixeiras were shameless objects of desire, widely available to provide ephemeral social (and sexual) encounters, without further commitment. As one may expect, it was not rare for (white, upper class) gentlemen to wander through these black dancing spaces, observing and (progressively) learning their *way* of being-in-the-world. Hence, whilst the sensuality that maxixeiras conveyed with the swing of their hips was publicly condemned as a “dishonest” behaviour, its hypersexual availability continued to be (secretly) fetishized and consumed.

Hence, if in theory maxixe dancing offered different kinds of bodies and, subsequently, of genders, ethnicities, and classes, an opportunity to interact culturally (if not sexually), in practice that racist and sexist society continued to foster the articulation of power relations between unequal parts. In its worst-case scenario, maxixe dancing choreographed physical bondages between lower-class (largely black-mestizo) females and upper-class (white) males. In doing so, I imagine, these historical dance encounters conjure up slippery *scenes of subjection* (Hartman 1997) and *resistance* (Savigliano 1995) between fleeting attempts to recuperate-cum-invent different ways of knowing and acting in the world

and the overbearing racism and sexism that ultimately placed a heavy burden on the acting body of (non-white female) followers.¹⁹ Above all, this contextual type of entanglement privileged the assertive control and leadership of the (white, male, Christian) colonial gaze, tinted by Western/patriarchic codes of morality and a division of labour based on a modern idea of race. This type of maxixe dancing reproduced what Walter Mignolo (2007) entitles the darker side of Western modernity, i.e., coloniality: a discourse that moved in-and-out of colonial/Christian moral codes, but whose fixed choreographic roles sustained the gendered, raced, and sexual divisions of labor established in the sixteenth-century. In the end, the push-and-pull of maxixe dancing across various dance halls in Rio de Janeiro dilutes, but never completely erases, the epistemic violence with which intersecting gendered, racialized, and sexualized bodies were marked in that socio-economic space. Overtime, what is certainly erased is the contribution of these female dancers as cultural agents and producers of cultural goods and ideas. They remained on the other side of modernity's abyssal line, invisibilized by a geopolitics of knowledge production anchored on a modern idea of race.

Second scenario (1900s/Rio de Janeiro)

“Social relations are both enacted and produced through the body, not merely inscribed upon it.”²⁰

At the turn of the twenty century, despite its ongoing recrimination, maxixe dancing spills over into Rio de Janeiro's entertainment industries such as the *teatro de revista* (revue theatre). In this scenario, this local black way of dancing is now performed to maxixe music (often dubbed “Brazilian Tango”) in order to enact and produce, in Desmond's words above, certain social relations on the Brazilian body politics.²¹

Briefly, the *revista* was a light-hearted theatrical genre that followed the modes of the Portuguese “revue of the year.”

Over time, Rio's revistas increased their musical scenes, capitalizing on young showgirls, often European immigrants, performing tantalizing dancing acts.

Nicknamed the "hip-shaking theatre" (*teatro do rebolado*), revistas constructed a fascinating and overwhelming world of fantasy, playfulness, and (available) sexuality catered largely to a male audience (Lopes, 2001). At the height of its effervescence, revistas (re-)created Brazil as an exotic locale infused with innate roguery and shameless women. At the revistas, everything was resolved with, or culminated in, a carnivalesque lasciviousness.²²

Whilst the improvised choreographies that took place in the social dances at *Pequena Africa* contributed to the construction of renewed processes of identification in urban settings, the maxixe dancing staged at the revistas becomes a fixed choreography that stood for local blackness and hypersexuality. Fueled by these populist musical comedies, and their reverberation during the carnival season, maxixe dancing gradually came to be understood as a local black/mulato dance form that was picturesque and unique to Rio/Brazil (a proto-image of national identity that is later fully-fleshed by samba dancing the 1930s). At the same time, while maxixe's characteristic wiggling of hips and the shuffling of feet was identified with the local Afro-Brazilian culture, the revistas were essentially an Eurocentric space and everyone on stage looked white. Thus, in this scenario, whilst maxixe was applauded and consumed, it continued to be regarded as a local "second class" product of comical effect. It is also worthwhile noting that many of revista's actors were the sons and daughters of Europeans, whose recent migration to Brazil (to replace the slave labor) was financially supported by the Brazilian government. Hence, while their parents took the jobs of Blacks and mulatos, their offspring corroborate to erase their black bodies from view and make their cultural contributions invisible.

In this unique scenario, the casting of European/Caucasian actresses to perform the role of sexy *mulatas* dancing maxixe (or *maxixeiras*) without blackface produced figures that were racially undefined, thus sexually appealing to the (white, male) audience, but whose morality (or distinction of taste) remained vulgar and “dishonest”, thus undervalued in the narrative.²³ Through a process of ethno-cultural translation, as Antonio Herculano Lopes proposes, “the white and mixed-raced middle class in Rio was dealing with their fantasies, through these white actors representing black roles.”²⁴ Lopes concludes that

the response of the carnivalesque intelligentsia was that indeterminacy was not the problem, but the solution. It was the ambiguity that allowed the dream of a society without classes and without races. It was the ambiguity and ambivalence that made it possible to deal with the complicated relations between blacks and whites, Europe and Africa, rich and poor, order and disorder, the values of the Christian capitalist West and its frightening, but attractive Other.²⁵

Similar to the objectification of the “real” *maxixeiras* first orchestrated by (white upper-class male) partners on dancing floor of “questionable reputation,” through a process of sublimation revistas’s playwrights inscribe burlesque *maxixeiras* into veiled scenes of subjection. In last analysis, the staging of maxixe dancing by actresses who looked white but acted black choreographs indefinite, yet tangible, *difference*. Eventually, these stereotyped performances of maxixe dancing by ambiguous *maxixeiras* become a foundational symbol within the collective figuration of Brazil as an imagined community (Anderson 1983). At last, the fetish constructed within and around a black dance staged in an otherwise white space promotes, to borrow Savigliano’s examination of Tango’s auto-exotification in Argentina, “the need for Identity and assures that it cannot be attained.”²⁶

The trajectory of the Italian actress Maria Del Negri, better known as Maria Lino (or Lina), is perhaps one of the best examples of this process. Born in 1880, Lino migrated to

Brazil at the age of fourteen and, preceding Carmen Miranda's life path, developed a close connection with the local (Afro-Brazilian) culture. While the actress had trained in ballet in Milan, in Rio de Janeiro she became well known as a maxixe dancer. In this scenario, she found what Curt Sachs later on proposed modern European dances had once lost:

“multiplicity, power, and expressiveness of movement.”²⁷ From 1897 to 1900, Maria Lino was the dance partner of Machado Careca, performing Chiquinha Gonzaga's maxixe *Gaúcho* (*Cowboy*, 1895) – a composition later known as *Corta-Jaca* (another nickname given to maxixe). Given its widespread success, in 1906 this musical duet was included in *Maxixe*, a revista written by Batista Coelho and Bastos Tigre. Maria Lino also shone in other highlights of that same musical comedy, dancing and singing Bastos Tigre's and Arquimedes de Oliveira's hit song *Vem Cá Mulata* (*Come Here Mulata*, 1902). With her acclaimed success came further opportunities and, in 1910, she embarked on an international tour across Europe.

There are no visual records of how this Italian-turned-Brazilian actress danced maxixe. From reviews of her dancing acts as well as photographs of her partners (see figure 4 and 5) and her contemporaries, however, we can deduce that one of the sources of her stardom was her ability to clean up the steps of maxixe, making them more “graceful” and “elegant”. I can imagine her ballet-trained torso standing upright, her right arm extended outwards to meet her partner's hand and the other gently resting on his shoulders. I picture her gliding across stage on the tip of her toes, quick to follow the syncopated rhythms of maxixe music with unwavering elegance. It is likely that she swayed her hips softly from side to side, in close proximity to her partner, as she shuffled her feet, but I presume their pelvises never quite touched. She probably tried to bend her torso at the waist line, despite her taming corset, creating soft curves with her upper body. As a professional dancer, it is even possible that Lino knew how to “get down” like the folks at *Pequena África* did, bouncing with her

knees bent, torso forward, and tailbone out; wiggling her hips apart from the rest of her body with great vivacity. It is unlikely, however, that she danced like *that* at the all-white musical comedies and elitist dance halls. While she was immersed in Brazilian culture since her adolescence, she was probably equally aware that when the so-called “Negro dances” such as maxixe were executed to its full potential, they could be seen, as Curt Sachs put it, as a “*grotesque* distortion of the entire body.”²⁸ Hence, not appealing to her European-aspiring patrons. Therefore, I conclude, her acclaimed maxixe dancing was most likely stylized, balletized, whitewashed. Ultimately, whilst these theatrical performances featured local black musical compositions in their maxixe scenes, the “whitening” of this way of dancing by dancers such as Lino tames, irons out and shaves off the core aesthetic values of this Africanist structured movement system, starting with the polycentric and polyrhythmic body. As a result, I imagine, maxixe’s voluptuous and inebriating syncopation is heard by the audience and felt in the air, but never fully realized on stage, as it were when local dancers “got down” on the dance floors of *Pequena África*.

Third scenario (1910s/Paris):

“Exoticism is a way of establishing order in an unknown world through fantasy; a daydream guided by pleasurable self-assurance and expansionism... Perhaps all peoples have practices exoticism of one kind of another, but Western exoticism accompanied by worldwide imperialism has had the power to establish Eurocentric exoticism as a universally applicable paradigm.”²⁹

While maxixe dancing continued to gain wider visibility in Rio’s revistas as a marker of *difference*, some of the most successful acts made their way to Europe. In Parisian cabarets and burlesque theatres, in particular, performers such as the Italo-Brazilian Maria Lino and

Duque, her new partner, gain notoriety performing their theatrical version of maxixe to the local elites. In this scenario, these white-looking Brazilian dancers body forth the notion of dance as an expression of their (foreign/exotic) land. Detached from its original context, nevertheless, in these international stages, maxixe is no longer understood as a process that choreographs identification or represents local *Otherness*. Rather, once this way of moving is transplanted from an urban center with a strong African presence and further “cleaned up” from its foundational aesthetic values, maxixe becomes a “spectacle of the sense,”³⁰ catering to physical, sensorial, and emotional *experiences*. That is, it is translated as a modern process or means through which the European bohemian upper-middle class could undergo and be *moved by*, tasting different kinds of fleeting feelings and sensations in leisure. Meanwhile, through a process similar to the Argentinean tango, maxixe becomes both a floating signifier for exotic/erotic otherness and a vehicle through which to momentarily extend one’s body into exotic dancing *shoes*, and *their ways* of being-in-the-world. As further discussed below, these practices and aspirations continues to feed the modernity/coloniality paradigm.

Before I unpack all that, let’s first retrace the steps through which maxixe dancing migrated to Paris in the 1910 (see Efegê 1974, Tinhorão 1988, Witkowski 1990, Velloso 2006, Lopes 2006, Shaw 2018). Antonio Lopes de Amorim (1884-1953), better known as Duque (*Duke* in Portuguese), was a dentist from Salvador (Bahia’s capital) who abandoned his short-lived practice to pursue a performing arts career in Rio de Janeiro. After few acting roles, Duque gains popularity as a maxixe dancer and choreographer in Rio’s revistas. In 1909, Duque travels to Paris and finds work as an exhibition dancer at cabarets and dancing halls such as *Café de Paris*, *Alhambra*, *Olympia*, *Alcazar d’Été*, *Chantecler*, and *Théâtre des Capucins*. At the time he meets Maria Lino, also on tour across Europe, and together they become Paris’s latest sensation. Banking on the effervescent popularity of the Argentinean Tango, the couple successfully rebrands their theatrical version of the maxixe as the “real”

Brazilian Tango across Europe. In 1913, for instance, they win the first prize in the *Elegant Welte*, a dance competition in Berlin and perform at Paris' *Olympia* and London's *Hippodrome*. Branching out into an entrepreneurial role, in the same year Duque opens his own dancing hall, the *Tango Duque Cabaret*, on *Rue de la Fontaine* in Paris. In 1914, Lino finally returns to Brazil and, at the height of maxixe fervour, Duque and Gabi (his new partner and wife) inaugurate the *Dancing Palace* at Luna Park, an amusement park near Porte Maillot, and later is invited to direct the venue and teach dancing lessons.

[Insert Figure 4 and 5:

Figure 4: Cover of the music sheet of J. Storoni's "Le Vrai Maxixe Brésilien, Amapa, Maxixe", featuring the Brazilian master dancer Duque. Published by Chappell & Co. in New York, 1913. Courtesy of Lester L. Levy Sheet Music Collection.

Figure 5: Cover of the music sheet of Ernesto Nazareth's "Bregeiro; Rio Brazilian Maxixe; Tango Bresiliene", featuring the Brazilian master dancer Duque. Published by Jos. W. Stern in New York with an introduction by Delirio & Luis. 1914. Courtesy of Duke Digital Collection.]

Whilst Duque went on to perform with different partners, it is safe to assume that much of his fame derives from his early partnership with Lino, nicknamed in France as "the queen of maxixe." Here I invite the reader into another leap of imagination, to reconsider how this blonde, ballet-trained, and graceful dancer from Italy, might have exhibited the "true" Brazilian Tango, in close embrace with a savvy showbiz man dressed in top hat and tail coat (see figure 4). To give a hint, in the press Lino was compared to a Greek statue, making her closer to modern dancer Isadora Duncan than the "lascivious" maxixeiras of Rio's black neighborhoods. Now imagine how their dance exhibitions might have been perceived in 1910s Paris, a vibrant and unique context characterized, amongst others, by the

decline of the corset and the emergence of physical culture, women's social emancipation and artistic empowerment, and the unprecedented valorization of black culture, or *negrophilia*, through a wide range of art forms, from music (e.g. jazz) and dance (e.g. Charleston, Tango, Beguine) to visual arts, literature and boxing.

It is safe to assume, for instance, that the upper-middle class women who circulated within Montmartre's cabarets and dancing halls could easily identify with Lino's whiteness and, from there, dare to picture themselves *as* maxixeiras; free to experience heightened bodily expression and intimacy in close embrace. Through their exhibitions, local audiences are exposed to different rhythmic patterns and aesthetic values cultivated in far-away lands and, subsequently, invited to empathise with their exotic/erotic sensations. Through dancing lessons, furthermore, they are able to taste exotic/erotic Otherness first hand, sharing out loud their secretive fantasies and imaginations about the far-away places of Europe's (former and current) colonies, without ever leaving their homelands.

Ultimately, the systematization and stylization of maxixe dancing in Paris displace its foundational role as a choreography of identification, be that fixed or flexible, and transform it into a tamed-yet-tantalizing prescription or score of modernity/coloniality. Instead of a set of guidelines that produces intersubjectivity or represents Otherness, the codified maxixe danced in Paris functions as a typed of prescribed journey that transport local dancers and audiences alike to an exotic realm or locale where they can forget or abandon their sense of selfhood (for a song or two).

Departing from Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "liquid modernity," I propose, the local European dancer of the exotic maxixe (and its audience) may be better understood as a modern *tourist*, that is,

A conscious and systematic seeker of experience, of a new and different experience, of the experience of difference and novelty – as the joys of the familiar wears off and

cease to allure. The tourists want to immerse themselves in a strange and bizarre element (a pleasant feeling, a tickling and rejuvenating feeling, like letting oneself being buffered by sea weaves) – on the condition that it will not stick to the skin and thus can be shaken off whenever they wish.³¹

The syncopated rhythms of maxixe music (whose music sheets were often commercialized as Brazilian Tango), one should note, orchestrates the abandoning of the metronomic structure of notes into harmonic arrangements for the exploration of a tonal syncopated “pulse,” with notes coming in-and-out of the main riff towards contrametric accents and oscillations (off-beat). Subsequently, maxixe dancers’ call-and-response interaction with said musical syncopation, tapping, shimming, wiggling, and wobbling different parts of their bodies as they move in closed embrace, led to a rupture of Cartesian ordering of bodies in time and space. Hence, despite stylization of its steps and figures, dancers of the Parisian maxixe were swayed to follow sensorial stimuli and seek individualized expressions in dancing, rather than to limit themselves to precise figures. Through sound, touch, smell and proprioception, the “inebriating” Brazilian Tango transported these dancers-as-tourists into (psycho-somatic) states of euphoria, excitement and sensuality. The close proximity, transfer of weight, physical warmth, hypnotic sweat, and sensual abandon of maxixe lead dancers, Velloso argues, to experience a different way of being-in-the-world.

In reinforcing the corporeal registers and the expansion of gesturality, maxixe dance put into question references of the dominant aesthetic code. Hence the social polemic that it triggers. It appears to at least strengthen other ways of thinking, experimenting and living the culture. Touch, smell, and listening gain expression.³²

In place of physical control and sexual restraint, maxixe dancing offered Europeans (the possibility of) individual expression and physical/sensorial pleasure (experienced through the body, even if not in an erotic sense). Yet modernity’s emphasis on “feelings,” “emotions” and

“bodily sensations”, Marta Savigliano points out, cannot be disassociated from Western (colonial/imperial) exoticism. In these (safe) white spaces of sociability, “*la matshishe brésilienne*” moves performers and audiences into a “seemingly harmless side of exploitation, cloaked as it is a playfulness and delirium; a legitimate practice of discrimination, where the otherwise secretive fantasies can be shared out aloud.”³³ At the Age of Tango, the exoticized exhibition and consumption of this (Afrocentric) South American way of dancing - in both its Brazilian and Argentinean stylized versions – amounted to, above all, “a territorial expansion coded as aesthetic discovery.”³⁴

The explosion of *le Tango Brésillien* in Paris provokes, in turn, a seismic shift in value attributed to this partner dance in Rio de Janeiro, especially amongst the elites. On January 11 of 1914, Shaw points out, the newspaper *Jornal do Basil* publishes an article about Duque’s inauguration of the *Dancing Palace* at Luna Park, under the heading *Paris adores the Maxixe*.³⁵ Praising the former dentist, the article portrays Duque as “our compatriot, who turned the Brazilian maxixe into a subtle and enchanting art, with which he conquered Paris.”³⁶ And further, “Duque and Gaby, joined together in a single harmonious movement, fascinate, unsettle, and entrance the patrons of the Dancing Palace.”³⁷

Two years earlier, one should note, the debut of the critically-acclaimed revista *Forrobodó* (1912) had already begun to transform public opinion’s toward maxixe. With compositions by the Chiquinha Gonzaga, this box office success written by Luiz Peixoto and Carlos Bittencourt and staged by the Teatro São José’s company was the first musical comedy to focus entirely on a maxixe event at *Pequena África* neighborhood. More importantly, *Forrobodó* represents a watershed mark from the old revistas, whose narratives typically exploited, but invariably mocked and downgraded, the African contributions to the local/national culture.³⁸ Conversely, *Forrobodó* represented a theatrical celebration of maxixe dancing, despite its picturesque set of stock characters (originally) interpreted by an all-white

cast. Instead of *difference*, in this particular case maxixe is portrayed as a core element of Rio's cultural diversity, i.e. a foundational symbol of local *identity*. It began to provoke, subsequently, a certain amount of local/national pride. The actor Asdrúbal Miranda, involved in the original production, states in the newspaper *O Imparcial* (1/2/1913) that, "the maxixe is a dance exclusively ours, as are the coffee and the thrush [bird]."³⁹

On the other side of the spectrum, Maria Lino seeks to establish, upon her return from Europe, a clear distinction between the local way of dancing practiced at *Pequena África's* balls, and subsequently staged in musicals such as *Forrobodó*, and *Le Brésilien Tango* she (re)created and perfected in Paris. Few weeks after Duque's inauguration of the dancing hall at Luna Park, the *queen of maxixe* gives an interview to the same newspaper, in which Lino sentences:

The maxixe is and isn't immoral. It all depends on the way you dance it. The maxixe can be a dance of the aristocratic dancehalls without the slightest offense to morality, decency, and do you know what? The waltz, the ideal waltz, can, at the will of [dancing] couples, provoke the blushing of the participants.⁴⁰

It is interesting to think that in 1914, at the cusp of WWI, the ethics or morality of this polycentric and polyrhythmic way of dancing continued to be a major point of concern. Whether the actual interaction between dancing partners was perceived as innovative, grotesque, exotic, elegant, or patriotic, at the crux of all arguments what remained to be resolved was the reputation of *maxixeiras*. Briefly, male dancers of all classes and ethnic backgrounds continued to enjoy a certain amount of freedom to explore and conquer -or at least gaze at- maxixe (as well as other new black dances of the Americas) and subsequently soak up their sensorial and expressive affects. Conversely, modern female dancers were still caught up in an impossible dilemma between the desire to partake in those movement experiments of euphoria, excitement and sensuality, and the fear of being judged or

recriminated for their expressive actions inside a patriarchal society. What remained most outrageous about maxixe dancing, even in its most tamed versions, was not its historical connection to blackness or its implicit association with sexual intercourse. The syncopated shuffling of feet, the isolated gyration of the hips, the undulation of the spine, the improvised spiralling across space in closed embrace and, above all, the playfulness with which maxixe was (expected to be) danced, all contributed to an explicit articulation of physical/sensorial pleasure *despite* intercourse. And, above all, whilst these improvised dancing encounters might have unravelled a breathing ground for promiscuity, its call-and-response aesthetic also gave (female) dancers an opportunity to think on their feet and actively participate in -or at least try out and rehearse- the construction of their autonomous pathways in social engagements. In the end, the system of bodily organization and knowledge production under which maxixe dancing was structured destabilized heteronormativity, even though most maxixeiras remained more or less trapped and led by their male partners. In doing so, the constraints imposed on women's bodies and their psychosomatic existence was equally destabilized or rearranged, even if momentarily, from inside out. From tailbone to mind.

Fourth scenario (1910s/New York)

“The vulgarity of a dance lies always as much in the mind of the dancer as in the steps, and a suggestive dance is inevitably the outcome of an evil thought, or a lack of knowledge of the finer and better way to dance”⁴¹

Contrary to the spectacle of the senses celebrated in European café-concerts and dance halls, in the United States the Parisian maxixe is rapidly reformed into a “decent” social activity that promotes physical health and mental wellbeing. Most importantly, its codification by master dancers such as Vernon and Irene Castle in the 1910s contributes further to refine and sanitize this “exotic” dance.⁴² Stripped of any vestiges of blackness (except for its

“authentic” music), such codification transforms it into a modern form of social dancing suitable to the “modern American girl.”⁴³ Instead of choreographing identity, representing otherness, or prescribing exotic sensations, in this scenario maxixe is appropriated into a trademarked regimen of training that offers, above all, physical culture, leisure, and youthfulness. Hence, beyond its possible references to sameness, difference, or exoticness, in pre-War I North-America this sterile brand of partner dancing profits from a capitalist regulation and commodification of *newness*, that is, that which “everybody’s doin’,” in the fleeting moment of the now. In the end, despite the emphasis on youth, fad and immediacy, in this scenario the dancing bodies are highly regulated by a series of rigid and dogmatic presets with which to “appeal to the moral sense as well as to the eye.”⁴⁴ In the last page of the Castles’ dancing manual, which includes an entire chapter on “*The Tango Brésilienne, or Maxixe*,” for instance, one finds the “Castle House Suggestions for Correct Dancing.”⁴⁵ In sum, the list reads more like puritan and whitewashed “No Manifesto” than an instruction on how to move to black rhythms:

Do not wriggle the shoulders. Do not shake the hips. Do not twist the body. Do not flounce the elbows. Do not pump the arms. Do not hop—glide instead. Avoid low, fantastic, and acrobatic dips. Stand far enough away from each other to allow free movement of the body in order to dance gracefully and comfortably.⁴⁶

To understand how we got here, let’s step back again, and retrace the Castles’ dancing endeavors. Circumstance leads us to believe that Castles learned to dance maxixe directly from Duke and Lino. In fact, their professional career runs so close to one another that it is nearly impossible to conceive that the two couples never met. Similar to Maria Lino, Irene Castle received formal training in dance and, comparable to Duque, Vernon Castle was already working in musical comedies when he met his dancing partner. Like the white Brazilian couple, the Castles travelled to Paris in the early 1910s and, upon arrival, worked at

the Café de Paris as exhibition dancers. There, they exhibited their version of the Cake Walk, the hugely popular North American black dance, which they rebrand as “The Castle Walk.”

Upon their return to New York in the fall of 1912, the husband-and-wife team centralised their branding on their legal status, presenting modern dancing as part of a “healthy married life”. The dancing couple exalted, therefore, the benefits of cultivating euphoric excitement, sensuality, and pleasure within the constraints of marriage. As I shall discuss below, their “method” sought to balance out the modern “freedom” evoked by black dancing rhythms with proper etiquette and choreographic restrained of mobility and intentionality. Two year later, at the imminence of WWI, the celebrated couple jumped full speed into a series of intertwined enterprises, which included the publishing of their dancing manual and the opening of three venues in New York: the dancing school *Castle House*, the restaurant *Sans Souci*, and the nightclub *Castles by the Sea* on the Boardwalk in Long Beach, NY. They closed the year of 1914 with their debut in the Broadway musical *Watch Your Step*. In all these instances, their performative connections to the upper-middle classes, staged by their glamorous outfits, “aristocratic manners”, and luxurious dancehalls, assured the success of this married couple team, whose wife’s reputation was safeguarded in the arms of her English gentleman husband. At the same time, whilst exhibition couples such the Castles align themselves with upper-class values, their (standardized) skills and method are packaged and sold through mass-mediated outlets (e.g. motion pictures, printed manuals, newspaper articles), thus extending them to the masses. In 1915, for instance, the Castles starred in the motion picture *The Whirl of Life*, which I began this essay.

[insert Figure 6: *Vernon and Irene Castle*. Photography by Frances Benjamin Johnston, circa 1910s. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LOT 11735.]

There is plenty of audio-visual materials on the Castles during the 1910s, including photos and video footage of the couple dancing their version of the maxixe (as noted in the introduction). Below, I cross-reference said footage in connection to its codification in their major instructional manual *Modern Dancing* (1914). Briefly, this historical manual offers invaluable information on their trademark version of the latest modern dances (namely Tango of To-day, the Castle Walk, The Brésilienne Tango or Maxixe, and Hesitation Waltz), most of which were rooted in Africanist aesthetics and accompanied by syncopated music. Yet, the manual “bleaches out” any residue of blackness of these dancing forms, starting with the replacement of the polycentric and polyrhythmic body with a *well-poised erect body*.⁴⁷ The woman, in particular, was to move “with her feet, not with her whole body,”⁴⁸ further hidden inside a high-waist dancing-frock covering everything from “the bust down to the ankle.”⁴⁹ Resonating with Lino’s conviction about the maxixe, their agent Elisabeth Marbury states in the Introduction that the manual “shows that dancing, properly executed, is neither vulgar or immodest, but, on the contrary, the personification of refinement, grace, and modesty.”⁵⁰ Beyond the description on how to dance each of those styles, the manual presents a series of guides and norms surrounding the art of modern dancing, divided in chapters such as “Grace and Etiquette”, “Proper Dancing-Costumes for Women”, “Dancing as Beautifier”, and “Giving a Thé Dansant.” As these titles suggest, whilst the manual offers guidance for both men and women, a strong emphasis is placed on policing and regulating female bodies through posture, manners, dress code, beauty tips, exercise, dieting and social settings. The manual closes with a chapter on “Dance and Health”, written by an unnamed “eminent New York physician”⁵¹ which connects the art of proper dancing with the (then) rising concern with physical culture, especially the re-education of muscles and the re-gaining of the control of the body.

In the chapter on “The Tango Brésilienne, or Maxixe,” the Castles codify this form with a list of figures, each consisting of a precise sequence of footsteps, mapped over a Cartesian grid, and executed according to a co-metric, rather than syncopated, tempo. The rest of the body is only mentioned in relation to where one should put one’s hand, assuming it should remain erected or undisturbed as a unit. As Desmond points out, “such revisions tended to make the dances more upright, taking the bend out of the legs and bringing the buttocks and chest into vertical alignment.”⁵² Later in the manual, the Castles profess, “the necessity of holding the body erect is good for the other muscles and nerves.”⁵³ They conclude their codification with a warning: “One last word about the Maxixe. Let your steps be as even and as gliding as possible. [...] and don't bend or twist unless you are sure you look graceful.”⁵⁴ Subsequently, this standardized choreography regulates not only how dancers position themselves in relationship to one another, but also police any “accidental” bodily oscillations as they move, or rather not move, to black syncopated rhythms.

The “proper” way of dancing advocated by the Castles and their North American contemporaries seeks explicitly to control the production (and consumption) of bodily motions and sensations. Far from the intrusive push-and-pull embrace that, as Machado de Assis insinuates in 1887, left “ties smelling of breast,” here dancers move in unison but at a respectable distance. Instead of the expressiveness abandonment of decorum through the exploration of the senses, furthermore, the Castles’ method offers systematic training of both body and mind with a controlled articulation of muscles, stances and manners. In doing so, the codification of steps, gestures and intentions enforces a strict set of guidelines with which modern dancers may also regulate their psycho-somatic states, thus taming the senses of euphoria, excitement and sensuality associated with the Parisian maxixe.

Along with other forerunners of modern dance such as Isadora Duncan and Loie Fuller, Irene Castle contributed significantly to the shaping of a new image of womanhood in

the West. Unlike Duncan and Fuller, however, much of Castle's prestige and esteem as a modern dancer was framed by her reputable partnership with her husband and the performative enactment of their "fairy-tale" marriage through partner dancing. That is, despite the liberties she took in the public sphere, dancing to (black) syncopated rhythms and embracing sensuality as a form of personal expression, the honour and reputation of this modern dancer remained safely guarded within her husband arm's length. In the end, the Castles remained an (inseparable) husband-and-wife dance team, whereby Vernon was invariably expended to lead, and Irene to follow.

Also contrary to other modern dancers, whose greatest contributions were achieved within the realm of theatrical dance, the Castles' introduced new ways acting in social everyday life, with illustrative examples and "how-to" instructions accessible to the lay person. More importantly, dancing manuals such as their *Modern Dancing* assume the role once held by (unwritten) social norms: that of shaping up social behaviour and preserving the reputation of "honest" women in social gatherings such as dancing parties. Moving away from the traditional "woman-as-mother" archetype, Erenberg points out, the modern role model Irene Castle impersonates on the dance floor and manuals ties the "new woman" in America to the modern pursue of eternal youthfulness. This ideal was (endlessly) sustained though physical exercise, dieting, and beauty supplies. For Erenberg, "[t]he Castles had transmuted potentially dangerous impulses into youthful fun and healthy exercise, reversing the nineteenth-century's view of women as frail and motherly, Irene symbolized the active, free, and youthful women of the twentieth century."⁵⁵

In 1916, Vernon served in WWI as a pilot and, two years later, tragically died in a plane accident in Texas. After the death of her husband, Irene continued to perform solo but was never quite able to regain the successful momentum they once created as a couple. Whilst it is hard to predict what might have happened to maxixe dancing had the husband-

and-wife team continued their social enterprise, it is safe to assume that in the absence of her “better half”, Irene’s pursue of modern moves faced a fatal setback.

Conclusion

“Only some dances taking place out there in the world attain the status of World Dance. They are ‘other’ dances that have the capacity to be assimilated to the Dance field: Exotic, and yet disciplined enough to be incorporated through translation into what counts as Dance.”⁵⁶

In the article “Worlding Dance and Dancing out there in the World” (2009), Savigliano poses some pertinent questions regarding the geopolitics of dancing knowledges, whereby only certain dances are considered worthy to be archived and, subsequently, analyzed, historicized, and/or theorized, while others are unaccounted for or otherwise made invisible in archives. In that sense, maxixe remains a curious case. As I have sought to demonstrate in this article, while this way of dancing makes a rapid ascension on the global stage at the turn of the twentieth century, by the time it is archived in Western dancing manuals and motion pictures the form had gone through so many transformations that it held little or no resemblance with what it once looked and felt like. In fact, after its uprooting from black spaces and migration across various scenarios, its (pejorative) name seems to be the only thing to have not vanished. In the end, whilst the dancing act that the Castles performed in the Café de Paris’s scene in *Whirl of Life* might have swept movie goers off their feet, it seems to be anything but the “devilish” maxixe dancing of Rio de Janeiro’s *Pequena África*.

Or is it? Who is to say that a dance style can or cannot evolve, adapt, or even lose all its “original” resemblance as it moves from place to place, from body to body? Meanwhile, what moves the political economy of trademark codification and mass-dissemination of dance forms, especially those cultivated by subaltern/dissenting bodies and their disruptive

dancing knowledges? More importantly, what are the benefit of appropriating a label yet completely redesigning its content to the point of excommunication of its foundational values and principles? What to do with a signifier that no longer matches the thing it once signified? What's in a name?






Though I arrive at the end of this article with no clear answers to this new set of questions, as I have previously demonstrated (Rosa 2015), the growing popularity of Samba after WWI and its state-sponsored promotion as Brazil's official national rhythm gradually overshadows the popularity Maxixe once held internationally as *the* Brazilian dance. It's equally safe to presume that its formal sterilization contributed to weakens its value in the long run. In the US, Micon Seigel argues, two factors mobilized both the rise and the fall of maxixe: American imperialism and its 'domestic racial conditions, particularly the ongoing fortification of Jim Crow violence against African Americans, which gained momentum from the end of Reconstruction and into the 1920s.'⁵⁷ And further,


Maxixe's case reveals the concrete workings of the often confusing, complex forces that operate to obscure Afro-diasporic elements of U.S. culture-that plant, in Toni Morrison's (1992) resonant phrase, an Africanist "absent presence" in a collective cultural subconscious, invisible to some but profoundly influential nonetheless.⁵⁸

But that is not how this story ends; where maxixe faded away, new Afro-Brazilian dances arose. Within national soil, polycentric and polyrhythmic bodies continued to improvise new ways of dancing in close embrace, dialoguing with renewed Afro-diasporic or hybridized rhythms and musical genres, leading to the sprouting of other regional styles, under different nicknames, from which the most recognizable ones today are (the already mentioned) *Lambada*, *Reggae de Dois*,⁵⁹ *Samba de Gafieira*,⁶⁰ and *Forró*⁶¹ (currently in vogue across Europe). Despite their differences, all these Afro-Brazilian partner dances share

the polycentric and polyrhythmic “breaking” of the upward linearity of the torso, coupled with other Africanist aesthetic principles such as the “get down” posture, bodily isolation or apartness in movement, call-and-response dialogues with syncopated rhythms, spiral pathways, high-affect juxtapositions, kinesthetic dissonance, serious play, and coolness.⁶² Black communities in Brazil continue to employ these aesthetic principles in the recuperation-cum-invention of their renewed processes of identification and cultural resistance within the matrix of modernity/coloniality. To borrow Jacqueline Shea Murphy’s critical aphorism, they “have never stopped dancing” (2007).

Figures: Thumbnails and captions

	<p>Figure 1: Series of screen shots from the motion picture <i>Whirl of Life</i> (1915).</p> <p>[copyright note: public domain]</p>
	<p>Figure 2: “Maxixe.” Illustration by K. Lixto (Calixto Cordeiro), originally published in the magazine <i>Século XX</i>, May 1906. Legend reads: “If you didn’t know (before), be aware of the maxixe now.”</p> <p>[copyright note: public domain]</p>
	<p>Figure 3: “<i>O Maxixe Bem Rebolado</i>” (The Hip-wiggling Maxixe). Illustration by K. Lixto (Calixto Cordeiro), originally published in the magazine <i>Revista Fonfon</i>, 1907.</p> <p>[copyright note: public domain]</p>
	<p>Figure 4: Cover of the music sheet of J. Storoni’s “Le Vrai Maxixe Brésilien, Amapa, Maxixe”, featuring the Brazilian master dancer Duque. Published by Chappell & Co. in New York, 1913. Courtesy of Lester L. Levy Sheet Music Collection.</p> <p>[copyright note: public domain]</p>
	<p>Figure 5: Cover of the music sheet of Ernesto Nazareth’s “Bregeiro; Rio Brazilian Maxixe; Tango Bresiliene”, featuring the Brazilian master dancer Duque. Published by</p>

	<p>Jos. W. Stern in New York with an introduction by Delirio & Luis. 1914. Courtesy of Duke Digital Collection.</p> <p>[copyright note: public domain]</p>
	<p>Figure 6: “<i>Vernon and Irene Castle</i>”. Photography by Frances Benjamin Johnston, circa 1910s. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LOT 11735.]</p> <p>[copyright note: public domain]</p>

Notes:

¹ Bailey, *Whirl of Life*.

² *Lambada* is a partner dance from the North of Brazil that mixes Native Brazilian, Afro-Brazilian, and French Caribbean rhythms and dancing styles. It first emerged in the 1980s, gained international visibility with the group Gypsy Kings, and faded away few decades later.

³ Gottschild, *Digging*, 8.

⁴ Rosa, *Brazilian Bodies*, 82.

⁵ In this article, I deploy Diana Taylor's notion of scenario, which she defines as "culturally specific imaginaries—sets of possibilities, ways of conceiving conflict, crisis, or resolution—activated with more or less theatricality" (2003, 24). Scenarios are, she adds, "meaning-making paradigms that structure social environments, behaviours, and potential outcomes" (26). Thus, they offer a better way to critically engage with complex contexts such as colonial encounters. "Simultaneously *set up* and *action*, scenarios frame and activate social dramas" (28). Firstly, scenarios demand, and draws attention to, embodiment. Whilst both scenarios and narratives insert bodies into frames, she argues, as a frame the scenario takes into consideration both verbal and non-verbal ways of meaning-making. In doing so, it shifts the focus of attention from scripts to actions/behaviours and interactions. Secondly, she proposes, as a system of interactions between different kinds of (available) bodies and (expected) roles, all scenarios are localized, or rather linked to a particular space and its specific practices. Therefore, their understanding is always already socio-politically and economically contextualized. At the same time, scenarios remain "flexible and open to change (29), thus allowing "degrees of critical detachment and cultural agency" (29) of all social

actors. Thirdly, Similar to Bourdieu’s notion of “habitus”, the scenario functions as a cultural frame that allows for “durable, transposable dispositions” (31), but whose outcome may be flexible and reversible. Fourth, the transmission of scenarios combines elements drawn from both archives and repertoires. Fifth, can be read or be understood in more than one way, thus forcing agents and spectators alike to acknowledge their positionality. Finally, scenarios collapse past and present “through reactivation rather than duplication” (32).

⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁷ Efegê, *Maxixe*, 26 (all quotes in Portuguese are translated by the author).

⁸ Velloso, *A dança*, 176.

⁹ Savigliano, *Tango*, 185.

¹⁰ Santos, *Beyond Abyssal*, 45.

¹¹ Delgado and Muñoz, *Everynight Life*, 10.

¹² As Dias (2001), Monteiro (2002), and Reis (2005) attest, since colonial times in Brazil the distinction between “honest” and “dishonest” activities were often evoked, but the exact position where one should draw the line dividing these two collections has been subject to interpretation. For a wider discussion of “honest” and “dishonest” black entertainment, see Rosa, *Brazilian Bodies*, 50-53.

¹³ Rosa, *Brazilian Bodies*, 38.

¹⁴ Ibid., 13.

¹⁵ Sodré, *Samba*, 12.

¹⁶ Wisnik, *Maxixe Machado*, 34.

¹⁷ Across *O espetáculo das raças: cientistas, instituições e questão racial no Brasil, 1870-1930* (1993), Lilia M. Schwarcz explores a wide range of discourses at the turn of the twentieth century in Brazil, which adopted scientific racism and social Darwinism in

order to resolve the “racial question” in the country. As Schwarcz notes, for instance, criminal doctors and hygienists often factored race hierarchy and miscegenation in their diagnosis and posology of physical, mental, and moral diseases. Flávia Florentino Varella (2016) points out, furthermore, that historians such as Robert Southey (1774-1843) had long deployed the metaphorical use of medical terms connected to diseases, such as “infected”, “contagious”, and “pestilential” in their writings (3). She further notes that in Southey’s *History of Brazil* (1862), “Southey held that in the New World there were two different phenomena at play when it came to diseases... The second had to do with racial mixing, in that the ‘mixture and intermixture of three different races, the European, American, and African, has produced new diseases, or at least new constitutions, by which old diseases were so modified, that the skilfullest physicians were puzzled by new symptoms’ (Southey, 1862a, p.464-465). Thus, colonization and the intermixture of different races resulted in both a change in existing diseases and the development of new ones” (Varella, 2016: 5).

¹⁸ Ibid., 21.

¹⁹ Savigliano notes that female tango dancers are, in fact, “docile bodies in rebellion”. See Savigliano, *Tango*, 209.

²⁰ Desmond, “Embodying Difference,” 38.

²¹ Desmond, “Embodying Difference,” 38.

²² Rosa, *Brazilian Bodies*, 139–140.

²³ Rosa, *Brazilian Bodies*, 140-143.

²⁴ Lopes, *Um forrobodó*, 78.

²⁵ Ibid., 81.

²⁶ Savigliano, *Tango*, 75.

²⁷ Sachs, *World History*, 444.

²⁸ Ibid., 445 (my emphasis).

²⁹ Savigliano, *Tango*, 169.

³⁰ See note 7.

³¹ Bauman, *Pilgrim to Tourist*, 29. He further notes that, “in the tourist world, the strange is tamed, domesticated, and no longer frightens; shock comes in a package deal of safety [...] but also a do-it-yourself world, pleasiling pliable, kneeled by the tourist’s desires, made and remade with one purpose in mind: to excite, please and amuse” (29-30).

³² Velloso, “A dança,” 178.

³³ Savigliano, *Tango*, 169.

³⁴ Savigliano, “Worlding Dance,” 168.

³⁵ Shaw, *Brazilian Popular*, 73.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Lopes, “Um forrobodó,” 74.

³⁹ Ibid., 71.

⁴⁰ Efegê, *Maxixe*, 63.

⁴¹ Castle and Castle, *Modern Dancing*, 135.

⁴² Maxixe was included in four dancing manuals published in 1914. They are Vernon & Irene Castle’s *Modern Dancing*, Albert W. Newman’s *Dances of To-day*, J. S. Hopkins’s *The Tango and Other Up-to-Date Dances*, John Murray Anderson’s *Social Dancing of To-day*, and Maurice Mouvet’s *The Tango and the New Dances for Ballroom and Home*.

⁴³ Erenberg, “Everybody's Doin' It,” 155.

⁴⁴ Castle and Castle, *Modern Dancing*, 22.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 177.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 136.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 142.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 17.

⁵¹ Ibid., 173.

⁵² Desmond, “Embodying Difference,” 40.

⁵³ Castle and Castle, *Modern Dancing*, 155.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 131.

⁵⁵ Erenberg, “Everybody's Doin' It,” 164.

⁵⁶ Savigliano, “Worlding Dance,” 167

⁵⁷ Seigel, “Disappearing Dance,” 94.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 98.

⁵⁹ *Reggae de dois* is an Afro-Brazilian partner dance from the North of Brazil, danced to both Jamaican and Brazilian reggae music.

⁶⁰ *Samba de gafieira* is an Afro-Brazilian partner dance from Rio de Janeiro. This style differs from what the World Dance Sport Federation (WSDF) and the International Syllabus of Traditional Dance (ISTD) defines as *Samba* in their respective, Latin and Latin American Ballroom Dance syllabi.

⁶¹ *Forró* is an umbrella term given to an Afro-Brazilian partner dance from the Northeast of Brazil, connected to various musical rhythms such as *fórró pé-de-serra*, *arrasta pé*, *baião*, *xote*, *xaxado*. It gained national popularity in the 1950s and, in the last decades, attained international visibility, especially in Europe.

⁶² For a detail discussion of these aesthetic principles within Afro-Brazilian dance forms, see Rosa, *Brazilian Bodies*, 24-43.

References:

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Community: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London, New York: Verso, 1983.
- Bailey, Oliver D. *Whirl of Life*. Motion picture, 1915. Available online at the New York Public Library's *Digital Collections* [online]. Available at <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/ad1ed8f0-f875-0130-26af-3c075448cc4b>
- Bauman, Zygmund. "From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity." In *Questions of Cultural Identity*, edited by Stuart Hall, Paul Du Gay. London: Sage, 1996.
- Castle, Vernon and Castle, Irene. *Modern Dancing*. New York: Harpers and Brothers, 1914.
- Chasteen, John Charles. "The Prehistory of Samba: Carnival Dancing in Rio de Janeiro, 1840-1917." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28 (1996): 29 – 47.
- Delgado, Celeste Fraser and Muñoz, José Esteban. *Everynight Life: Culture and Dance in Latin/o America*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997.
- Desmond, Jane C. "Embodying Difference: Issues in Dance and Cultural Studies." In *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, edited by Jane C Desmond. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997.
- Efegê, Jota. *Maxixe: A dança excomungada*. Rio de Janeiro: Conquista, 1974.

-
- Erenberg, Lewis A. "Everybody's Doin' It: The Pre-World War I Dance Craze, the Castles, and the Modern American Girl." *Feminist Studies* 3, no. 1/2 (1975):155–170.
- Gottschild, Brenda Dixon. *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts*. Westport: Praeger, 1998.
- Gudynas, Eduardo. "Buen Vivir: Today's tomorrow." *Development* 54, no.4 (2011): 441–447.
- Hall, Stuart (ed.). *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*. London: Open University Press, 1997.
- Lopes, Antonio Herculano. "Um forrobodó da raça e da cultura." *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais* 21, no. 62 (2006): 69–83.
- Mignolo, Walter. "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality." *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3, (2007): 155–67.
- Murphy, Jacqueline Shea. *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing: Native American Modern Dance Histories*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.
- Rosa, Cristina F. (2015) *Brazilian Bodies and their Choreographies of Identification: Swing Nation*. London: Palgrave Macmillan
- Saidiya V. Hartman. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self- Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1997.
- Sachs, Curt. *World History of The Dance*, translated by Bessie Schonberg. New York: W. W. Norton, 1937.
- Santos, Boaventura de Sousa "Beyond Abyssal Thinking: From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledges." *Review XXX*, no. 1 (2007): 45-89.
- Savigliano, Marta. *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1995.

-
- . “Worlding Dance and Dancing Out There in the World.” *Worlding Dance*, edited by Susan L. Foster. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Schwarcz, Lilia M. *O espetáculo das raças: cientistas, instituições e questão racial no Brasil, 1870-1930* (1993). São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1993.
- Seigel, Micol. “The Disappearing Dance: Maxixe's Imperial Erasure.” *Black Music Research Journal* 25, no. 1/2 (2005): 93–117.
- Shaw, Lisa. *Brazilian Popular Performance, Transnational Encounters, and the Construction of Race*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018.
- Sodré, Muniz. *Samba: O dono do corpo*. Rio de Janeiro: Mauad, 1998.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Tinhorão, José Ramos. *História social da música popular brasileira*. São Paulo: Editora 34, 1986.
- . *O samba agora vai...: A farsa da música popular no exterior*. São Paulo: Editora 34, 1969.
- Varella, Flávia Florentino. Novas raças, novas doenças: a possibilidade colonizadora por meio da mistura racial em *History of Brazil (1810-1819)* de Robert Southey. *Hist. cienc. saude-Manguinhos* 23 (2016): 15-32 [online]. Available at http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0104-59702016000900015&lng=en&nrm=iso

Velloso, Mônica Pimenta. “A dança como alma da brasilidade.” *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos, Coloquios* 7 (2007): 155–182.

Viany, Alex. *Maxixe, a dança Perdida*, Motion Picture. SEAC/MEC; Embrafilme.

Wisnik, José Miguel. *Maxado Maxixe: O Caso Pestana*. São Paulo: Edifolha, 2008.

Witkowski, Ariane. “De la matchitche a la lambada: presence de la musique populaire bresilienne em France.” *Cahiers du Brésil Contemporain* 12 (1990) [online].

Available at <http://www.revues.msh-paris.fr>.