

Mobilizing the concept of intersectionality in the light of the work of Lélia Gonzalez: three case studies in dance

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the trajectory of three Brazilian black dance artists seeking to understand how the social markers of class, race and gender have operated in the constitution of their careers, favoring or disfavoring social and professional mobility. It presents a reading of the concept of intersectionality based on the work of the black intellectual Lélia Gonzalez, establishing relationships with dance research in search for a decolonial praxis.

Keywords: dança; interseccionalidade; Lélia Gonzalez; racismo; corpo negro.

Beginnings

In November 2021, a time of expectation for the pandemic to be over, the event entitled *Inclusion and Intersectionality Symposium*¹, had as one of its main purposes to articulate the concepts of intersectionality, inclusion, and accessibility to the production of knowledge in dance. The event started off with some questions: How does dance include and exclude? What

¹ Event organized by the *Society for Dance Research, C-Dare/Coventry University* and *Candoco Dance Company*, virtual and in person in the UK, on November 19th and 20th of 2021. We participated in a lecture entitled *Brazilian black dancers' researches: the concept of intersectionality between north and south through dance practices*, the starting point for writing this article. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuegveiTX_E&t=4s

bodies, narratives and dance practices do we produce, promote, and engage with? Which bodies are discredited in favor of dominant and normative characteristics such as whiteness, skill, masculinity, and straightness? How can intersectional thinking expose the “non-performativity” of institutional commitments to inclusion and diversity, topics that are discussed but not always so easy to put into practice? As Sara Ahmed (2012) points out: how to put into practice what we name? Authors such as the North American Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), the Greek philosopher Anna Carastathis and the Anglo-Australian researcher Sara Ahmed (2012) were among the three references indicated by the symposium, marking the role of female authors in thinking about intersectionality in the Anglophone context, and their possible associations, mobilizations, and applicability in the dance sphere. Our participation as a research group formed by Brazilian, black and white artists, and researchers, aimed to offer the event a vector of intersectional thinking anchored in the work of Lélia Gonzalez², relating it to our dance research in Brazil. Thus, in this article we aim to analyze the trajectory of three black Brazilian dance artists: Ingrid Silva, Rui Moreira, and Iara Deodoro, in the light of the concept of intersectionality, seeking to understand how the social markers of class, race and gender have operated in the constitution of their careers, favoring or disfavoring social and professional mobility. We chose a methodological approach inspired by the descriptive case study, since it presents the case studied in detail, it is not guided by hypothetical or preconceived generalizations nor motivated by a desire to formulate general hypotheses (ROY, 2003). We also refer to the multiple case study (YIN, 2001), without the intention of establishing comparative analyses. We emphasize that these case studies are part of three studies carried out within the scope of the Postgraduate Program in Performing Arts, at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. This collective text seeks to account for the voices of different researchers. In this polyphony, some voices express themselves more eloquently in the analysis of each case.

Lélia Gonzalez: actions and thoughts towards intersectionality

In general, intersectionality, as an analysis tool that has been used in academic research of urgent themes, seeks to account for “the need to think about race on the continent, gender in an expanding informal war scenario and the permanently colonial character of the State [...]” (SEGATO, 2021, p. 16). For the author, it is necessary to understand “who we are” as an object of analysis oriented towards the field of justice and reparations for memories affected by multiple colonialities, considering the conquering of America the pivot of our history. The

² Born in 1935 in Belo Horizonte, in a low-income family, the penultimate in a family of 18 siblings. She died in 1994 in Rio de Janeiro. She graduated in History and Philosophy, obtained a master's degree in social communication and a doctorate's degree in Anthropology, in addition to training in Psychoanalysis. She was a leader in the most important black movements. See Ratts (2010).

concept of intersectionality can be essential when it manages to break through the monolithic look of analysis to think about inequalities with a decolonial approach³.

In the 1980s, in the legal and intellectual context in the United States, intersectionality was systematized, advocated, and disseminated by Kimberlé Crenshaw⁴ (1989;1991). In Brazil, later than in North America, black feminism gained strength with the dissemination in Portuguese, in the 2000s, of the works of American black feminists such as Angela Davis, Patrícia Hills Collins and bell hooks. Brazilian authors such as Carla Akotirene (2019) and Djamila Ribeiro (2017) have propagated the notion of intersectionality through accessible production.

If feminists in the Americas credit Crenshaw and Collins (ASSIS, 2019) with disseminating the concept of intersectionality, it is important to emphasize that Lélia Gonzalez, before the advent of the internet, had already articulated this notion through what she considered the *triple oppression* by gender, class and race, supporting a fruitful discussion about the place of black women in society crossed by racism, sexism, and class. Thus, although Lélia Gonzalez did not coin the term intersectionality, the genesis of the concept was already in her work and in her political action (RATTS e RIOS, 2010; CARDOSO, 2014). In one of her numerous interventions in the 1980s, she stated:

There, we find that, due to the mechanisms of racial discrimination, the female black worker works more and earns less than the white female worker who, in turn, is also discriminated as a woman. [...] For these reasons and others, black women remain the most exploited and oppressed sector of Brazilian society, since they suffer triple discrimination (social, racial, and sexual) (GONZALEZ, 2020, p. 217)

Lélia Gonzalez led the reorganization of the anti-racist political struggle during the military dictatorship (1964-1985). In 1976, she taught the first course on black culture in Brazil (RATTS, RIOS, 2010) and was a key figure in the formation of the Unified Black Movement (MNU) alongside Abdias Nascimento, Hamilton Cardoso, among other important names, as Domingues emphasizes (2007).

During this period, among popular, union and student movements, the black movement reorganized itself through different social groups, entities, and the black press. Black intellectuals such as Lélia Gonzalez and the politician and playwright Abdias Nascimento and artists such as the dancer and choreographer Mercedes Batista, the actresses Ruth de Souza

³ Decoloniality is a thought addressed by the Modernity/Coloniality Group, led by Latin American intellectuals such as Walter Dignolo and Anibal Quijano, which links the idea of modernity to the concept of coloniality. It points out that the world capitalist order, founder of the Modern/Colonial World System, is intrinsically linked to colonization, hence the enslavement and imposition of hegemonic thinking from the northern hemisphere to the southern hemisphere. The concept presupposes an epistemic and political radicalism in the restoration of colonized societies based on the thought forged in the resistance to the violence perpetrated by coloniality (see Ballestrin, 2013).

⁴ The term emerged in a lesser-known article in 1989 entitled *Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: a black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics*; it was later elaborated in the article *Mapping the margins: intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color* (1991).

and Zezé Motta and the poet Oliveira Silveira, among others, played important roles in the strengthening of black culture and the anti-racist activism. In different ways, these intellectuals were fundamental to instrumentalize black youth about the current situation of the anti-racist movement by exposing the countless violent actions produced by racism in the Brazilian context. Regarding dance, in this same period, as Amélia Conrado (2006, 2018) points out, groups that promote visibility to black culture through dance and music emerged in Brazil, such as *Afro-Brazilian Cultural Center*, *Malê Cultura and Arte Negra Society*, *Grupo Negô*, *Grupo de Teatro Palmares Inaron* and the afro carnival blocks, such as *Ilê Aiyê*, all in Bahia. In Recife, the *Balé Popular do Recife* is created. In Porto Alegre, the *Afro-Sul Group of Music and Dance* emerged in 1974, known in the capital as “Afro-sul” (ALVES NETO, 2019). These settlements affirmed in their political and ideological genesis the anti-racist movement.

With their militancy and intellectual production, Lélia Gonzalez and the black movement strongly opposed the myth of racial democracy, which was based on the idea that the contact between Portuguese colonizers with indigenous and Africans in Brazil would have been “harmonious”, erasing the violence and inequalities that permeate these relationships and denying the existence of racism. Linked in part to the thinking of Gilberto Freyre (2006), crystallized in the book *Casa Grande e Senzala*, first published in 1933 and adopted by the military that ruled the country, the myth of racial democracy persists as a strong symbol of Brazil's national identity, propagating a harmonious vision of the nation. The questioning of the myth of racial democracy also favored the review of historical narratives about the black presence in Brazil.

Lélia Gonzalez tenaciously and consistently articulated the difficulty of becoming black in a country that announced and spread democracy among racial groups, but at the same time propagated social whitening and established social places based on attributes conditioned by color and sex. In numerous interventions and lectures, Lélia Gonzalez denounced the oppression and exploitation of black Brazilian women. With a fluent transit between the black movement and the feminist movement, Gonzalez was critical of both. Crossing the oppression of race, class and gender, she anticipated some approaches that were later called intersectional.

At the same time, she affirmed the importance of spreading positive images of these women. The genius of her work lies in identifying and promoting forms of resistance and subversion of this stereotyped and negative view of black people, and especially black women, built by dominant groups. For Gonzalez (2020), consciously or not, figures such as *Mãe Preta*, or Black Mother⁵, and *Pai João*, or Father John, passed on elements of African culture to

⁵In addition to the stereotype of the “black mother”, others such as the excessive eroticization of black women through the figure of the “mulata” or the “maid” were a focus of her research.

Brazilian culture. More precisely, Lélia Gonzalez indicates that it was the Black Mother, who was primarily responsible for the Africanization of spoken Portuguese, or *Pretuguês*⁶ (a combination of the words “preto”, black, and “portuguese”), emphasizing the influences of African languages, especially the Bantu language, on the language spoken in Brazil. Lélia Gonzalez understood the subaltern as a subject that promoted changes in language and culture, thus engendering phenomena such as the *pretuguês*. In this way, the place of victim could not be considered fixed and immutable, and the great transformation could have started in the cultural sphere.

According to somewhat hasty opinions, the black mother would represent the shabby type of the accommodated black woman, who passively accepted slavery and responded to it in a more Christian way, offering her face to the enemy. This is not necessarily something to be accepted as true. Especially when one considers that her life was marked by a lot of pain and humiliation. And it is precisely for this reason that it cannot be disregarded that the black mother developed her forms of resistance: passive resistance whose dynamics must be addressed in more depth. (Gonzalez, 2021, p. 198)

Gonzalez fought for the organization and emancipation of black women, but also of indigenous, peasant and *quilombola* women. Incorporating the voices and narratives of these women, she coined the term *amefricanas*, a combination of “american” and “african”. Understanding that sexism, classism, and racism were hallmarks of the culture of colonial domination, she once again advocated that cultural language had to be subversive.

Lélia's expressive intellectual production took place at a time when the insertion of black women in the university environment was almost inexistent, hence the importance of recovering her work in current research, especially those involving black women. Her theoretical production did not have the repercussion and reach it deserved at the time. The recent re-edition of her works (GONZALEZ, 2020) is extremely important, as aspects of social inequalities addressed in her research are unfortunately still current. Her ideas and *mestiza* slang that echo today in the voices of musicians like rapper Emicida are a readjustment to the urgency of the times.

In the 1980s, her political articulations and connections with Latino and black intellectuals in the Americas⁷ have had repercussions to this day. In 2016, when Angela Davis⁸ was in Brazil for the first time, she urged the public to read Lélia Gonzalez. After all, as Flávia Rios (2019) points out, Lélia Gonzalez's legacy is paradigmatic in Latin America, showing her

⁶ The term *pretuguês* that Lélia Gonzalez coined sought to emphasize African influences, especially the Bantu language, in the Portuguese language spoken in Brazil.

⁷ Considered the first black woman to leave the country to publicize the country's situation in the 1980s, Lélia was a special guest of the UN in several events (RATTS, RIOS, 2020)

⁸ During the boom of national feminist movements, Angela Davis was in Brazil and her work *Women, Race & Class* (2016) was translated into Portuguese.

strength in the transits between theory and praxis, between the feminisms of black and indigenous women, added to her knowledge of the Western Marxist tradition, and its relevance among international and Latin studies on racism. Thus, her work was fundamental in the construction of the movement of black Brazilian women who sought to face sexism, racism and class inequalities.

Lélia Gonzalez's view of coloniality and colonialism as social markers that must be integrated into analyzes of Brazilian and Latin American society demonstrates the decolonial character of her work and the pioneering spirit of an intersectional perspective. Her legacy is fundamental in several areas, and we hope it can be echoed in researches in arts and dance. The diffusion of her work helps us to understand Afrocentric and diasporic perspectives.

It is in this sense that seeking a positive representation of black women becomes fundamental and urgent. In the 1980s, Lélia Gonzalez (2020) already highlighted the importance of making black beauty visible and theorizing about it. Among so many examples narrated by her, the creation and performance of the Afro group *Iê Ayê* stands out, which, starting from the slope of Curuzu, promoted a small Afro-Bahia cultural revolution with so many of its actions, especially the night of the Black Beauty, becoming a reference for many other associations in Salvador and Brazil.

As we will see in the case studies that follow, we need to blacken our research in universities through curricula, practices, knowledge and analysis that take into account the perspective of intersectionality permeated by Gonzalez's propositions.

Ingrid Silva and the dance shoes that conquered the world

The research developed by the black artist and researcher Anielle Lemos, aims to analyze the trajectory of black Brazilian dancers working in highly visible professional dance companies in Brazil and abroad. Based on the ideas developed by Lélia Gonzalez, the research discusses how the concept of intersectionality operates in the field of dance in Brazil. To do so, she examines the initiation, insertion, and permanence of black dancers within professional companies. In the scope of this article, we discuss the case of dancer Ingrid Silva.

Ingrid Silva was born in Rio de Janeiro and had her first contact with dance at the age of eight in the social project *Dançando Para Não Dançar*, which offers free classical ballet training to young people who otherwise could not afford dance lessons. She later continued her dance studies at the Maria Olenewa Dance School⁹ and won a full scholarship at the Debora Colker Movement Center. At the age of 17, she joined Grupo Corpo as an intern (SILVA, 2021). In 2007, through a video selection, he won a scholarship to the *Dance Theater of Harlem School* and joined this company professionally in 2008.

⁹ The Maria Olenewa State Dance School belongs to the Municipal Theater Foundation of Rio de Janeiro.

Since then, Ingrid Silva has danced in several leading roles. She has become the principal dancer of the *Dance Theater of Harlem* and began to use the influence and visibility gained through dance to act as an activist for feminist and black movements. In 2018, she was invited by the United Nations to speak at the *Social Good Summit* and discuss how women are leading the world and how to act to “leave no one behind”. She is co-founder of *Blacks in Ballet*, a project that aims to disseminate the work of black dancers and share their stories. She also works on the *Brown girls of ballet* project, which encourages black girls to study ballet.

Since mid-2015 Ingrid Silva has been gaining space on social media and in print and electronic media, with emphasis on her appearances on magazine covers¹⁰. In 2017 Ingrid Silva was the first black ballerina to appear on the cover of *Pointe Magazine*, lavishing her curls in a ponytail and her blackness on top of her pointe shoes, expressing herself as a symbol of black professionalism in one of the most important magazines in the universe of classical ballet in America.

In 2019, Ingrid Silva was highlighted in global media, after numerous email exchanges with the dance shoe manufacturer *Chacoot*, for being the first black ballerina to receive a pair of brown ballet shoes, to match her skin tone. After 11 years of painting her shoes with makeup according to the image that appears on the cover of her book *The dance shoes that changed my world* (Silva, 2021), her claim to manufacturers to produce diverse shoes was successful. In 2020, in the city of Washington, her old Afro pointe shoes, the same ones that for years were painted in dark tones with makeup, became popular when they were displayed at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture¹¹.

In 2020 she was in the cover of *Vogue Brasil* magazine; with short, curly hair and displaying a large pregnant belly, she once again broke the taboos related to the romantic, European, and ethereal figure of the porcelain ballerina, namely, thin, slender, white and immaterial, as she herself points out:

In the uninitiated's imagination, and in the reality of professionals in the field, the dancer's body is that of an extremely thin woman, tall, with thin limbs, long neck, small head, small breasts, without apparent muscles, without a large gluteal, plus all that is expected from facial appearance, that is, a biotype completely different from mine. I would never reach that standard in a healthy way. And therein lies the danger. (SILVA, 2021, p.74)

Thus, we can see that Ingrid Silva's initiation, insertion, and permanence in the field of dance and, more specifically, ballet, was only possible due to institutions and social projects, scholarships and support from some artists who made it possible for her to leave Brazil. As

¹⁰ Ingrid Silva is constantly featured in media and featured articles in magazines such as *Vogue* and *Glamour*, *Teen Vogue*, *Allure Magazine*, *Refinery29*, *The New York Times*, *Huffington Post*, *Dance Magazine*, *People Magazine*, *Essence*, *ESPN Women*, *Bustle*, *Claudia*, *Health*, *BET*, *The Globe*, etc.

¹¹ Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture in Washington, United States.

she narrates in her book (SILVA, 2021), it was mostly her mother who offered support so that she could escape the barriers of Brazilian structural racism.

Despite being a country where most of the population is black and brown, casts made up of white women and men predominate in professional dance companies in Brazil, reproducing the structure of social inequalities in terms of color or race highlighted in research by some Brazilian institutions. If we take as an example the indexes related to the labor market, we will see that 68.6% of managerial positions are held by whites. Similar percentages are found in the indexes related to political representation: 75.6% of elected federal deputies are white and 24.4% are black or brown (IBGE, 2019).

In the same way, there are few examples of black Brazilian dancers who manage to find gaps to work in ballet companies, considering that these institutions reproduce the oppression of race, gender and class, both in terms of the teaching structures of the dance (the training path) as for auditions (the access route). Seeking greater representation and diversity in professional dance casts is urgent. In this regard, it is necessary to review the access to training for dance professionals, as well as the entry into professional dance companies and groups.

The experience of exclusion in her own country, where there were no job opportunities or examples to follow, led Ingrid Silva to work abroad, where she achieved visibility. In addition to this, her position of leadership and stardom as an international artist, allows Ingrid Silva to provoke discussion about structural and institutional racism in the field of professional dance in Brazil:

Let's look at the facts. The *Municipal Theater of Rio de Janeiro* is 112 years old, and, throughout all that time, there were only 13 black dancers, two of which had darker black skin. In *São Paulo Companhia de Dança*, there were only 10 black dancers and only two had darker black skin. These numbers are alarming and speak for themselves. (SILVA, 2021, p. 165)

Such facts explain how racism persists in our institutions. Thus, it is urgent to mobilize the concept of intersectionality to reflect about black women who try to overcome the obstacles of their own collective history to develop a career as professional dancers. Unfortunately, the provocation Abdias do Nascimento made to Mercedes Baptista in the late 1940s remains current:

[...] so, when a black woman appears in the corps de ballet at the Municipal (Municipal Theater of Rio de Janeiro), she stands out, right? Because there never was one, I was always fighting publicly and in the institution because of this crazy failure that in a black country, in the corps de ballet, there was no black dancer. And I slowly poisoned Mercedes' mind so that she went there and tackle this situation of a black woman amid all the white dancers. (MONTEIRO; SANTIAGO, 2005).

Considering that the black woman is at the base of exploitation and inequality in Brazilian society, as shown by Lélia Gonzalez, the fact that Ingrid Silva occupies a place of social distinction and prestige in the sphere of ballet, one of the most sought after and restricted areas of dance, is a memorable achievement of courage and endurance. An exemplary achievement that can provoke a flexibilization of institutional spaces of power, such as the municipal dance companies in central Brazil.

It is for these and other reasons that, when researching Ingrid Silva, it is necessary to bring Lélia Gonzalez into the debate. In terms of research on black women, one cannot disregard the legacy of Lélia Gonzalez who, like no one else, could understand the intricacies of the oppression of black women in the face of patriarchy and racism in Brazilian society. By offering the *Amefricanity* category, it contextualizes diaspora experiences from local experiences and invites us to think about Latin and Brazilian feminisms from an intersectional point of view.

As we write this article together, we see in the media the images of Ingrid Silva at the 2022 Rio de Janeiro Carnival, eminent in the front commission of the *Escola de Samba Acadêmicos do Salgueiro* in the role of Mercedes Baptista. In short, an artist of multiple talents occupying the space of stardom and high visibility to promote her black activism by highlighting the pioneering spirit of Mercedes Batista.

Rui Moreira and his multifaceted mobility in the field of dance

For the research of the black dancer and researcher Luciano Tavares, discussing black men is, to a large extent, analyzing the Brazilian social structure, in which race, class and gender are intersectional, relational categories of analysis essential to determine social places, school training opportunities. Consequently, the specific training in dance, both in terms of access and in relation to permanence in the field of dance. Among the cases that his research analyzes is the renowned choreographer and dancer Rui Moreira, who has attended different social spaces in the field of dance for more than four decades. His luminous trajectory contrasts with social indicators that suggest that, in Brazil, an increasing number of young black people have been victims of violent death, perpetuating racial inequality that, unfortunately, does not seem to show signs of improvement. Young black men are the main victims of homicides in the country, which shows that black individuals share experiences of state violence because they belong to this racial group. (CERQUEIRA, 2021).

Born in 1963, Rui Moreira began his dance studies at the age of 15, in the city of São Paulo. He stands out as a choreographer, dancer, curator of dance festivals and researcher of cultures with a trajectory of more than forty years of activities. He is an icon in terms of dance performance in Brazil, recognized nationally and internationally. Rui Moreira has danced in the most important Brazilian companies such as: Cisne Negro Cia de Dança (SP),

Grupo Corpo (MG), Balé da Cidade de São Paulo (SP), Cia. Azanie (França), SeráQuê? (MG) and Rui Moreira Cia. de Danças (MG). Rui was 18 years old when he joined *Grupo Corpo*:

[...] in 1983, I was the first black male dancer to dance in Grupo Corpo and the first black female dancer to dance in Grupo Corpo was Regina Advento. It is worth pointing out that Grupo Corpo was born in 1975, with an Afro-Brazilian show called *Maria, Maria*, which addressed Afro-Brazilian symbols and was choreographed by an Argentinian and had no black-skinned men dancing. There were brown people, mestizos, but black skinned people only started to appear in the cast when the two of us entered [...] (MOREIRA, 2020).

Through dance, Rui Moreira has traveled the world dancing in the most important theaters and festivals, as well as in alternative spaces, which demonstrates his versatility and mobility within large and also small dance productions and makes him an artist with multiple talents. He has artistic and research relationships with Senegalese choreographers and directors, such as Germaine Acogny¹² and Patrick Acogny¹³, and with researchers from the African diaspora such as Funmi Adewole¹⁴. For more than two decades he has been articulating values associated with this diasporic belonging. In Belo Horizonte, in 2003, he started a curatorial cycle and artistic direction of the International Festival of Black Art (FAN), which lasted seven editions. He is the creator and one of the directors of the meetings of the *Rede Terreiro Contemporâneo de Danças* that have been taking place since 2009. These meetings, which take the form of festivals, discuss and promote the appreciation of contemporary, traditional, and heritage-oriented black or Afro-oriented dances, inducing the creation of event circuits for the appreciation and reflection of thoughts on the social, political and aesthetic consequences related to these artistic experiences.

The lack of opportunities for education, work, good housing conditions, and consequently the lack of representation of black subjects in sectors of power is shamefully evident in Brazilian statistics. This gap has historical origins and persists over time. For a black man to dance in Brazil it is necessary to overcome all these adversities and find a way to access dance training. For Rui Moreira, the possibility of having a scholarship in dance schools was fundamental: “[...] I wouldn’t do any of this if it weren’t for a scholarship, because the process was very expensive.” (MOREIRA, 2020) This fact is also relevant in the trajectory of the author

¹² Germaine Acogny is a Senegalese and French dancer and choreographer, born in 1944 in Porto Novo, now the Republic of Benin. She developed her own African modern dance technique. Since 1998, Germaine Acogny and Helmut Vogt have directed the *École des Sables* in Senegal, one of the most important centers of contemporary African dance.

¹³ Patrick Acogny is a dancer, choreographer, teacher and researcher in dance. Son of Germaine Acogny, he is the Artistic Director at the *École des Sables*.

¹⁴ Funmi Adewole dancer, actress and choreographer of Nigerian origin, has a background in media, education, arts, and performance development, and she worked in Nigeria. She toured with physical and visual theater in African dance theater companies. She moved to England in 1994. She was president of the African Diaspora Dance Association in Great Britain (ADAD) from 2005 to 2007. Professor and Researcher at *Montford University*, UK.

of this investigation, who, also, had his dance studies, beginning in 1992, supported by a scholarship.

Therefore, the ethnographic character of this ongoing research leads to reflections that seek to identify characteristics and phenomena related to the trajectory of each artist researched, considering their specificities as social subjects of African ancestry working in the field of dance. Through observation and interviews, the study aims to understand the Aphrodisporic values present in the artistic practice of the researched subjects, which are recognized and related to the category of Amefricanity.

This category proposed by Lélia offers a reflection on an entire historical process of intense Afrocentric cultural dynamics that involves adaptation, resistance, reinterpretation, and creation of new forms of understanding and inclusion. Thus, we recognize aspects of Amefricanity when Rui Moreira reports experiences from his youth and recognizes this influence on his trajectory as an artist:

Inside the “balls”, inside the black religious manifestations. I had an ear for another music, which I didn't listen too much outside home, which was North American soul, samba and jazz. Which was the very drumming of black religiosity that I had every day. Whether through the lens of Afro-Brazilian religions, such as Umbanda, or through the connections with the *Congadas*, there was also an ancestral relationship. (MOREIRA, 2020).

Amefricanity, as an Afrocentric category, is closely related to those of Pan-Africanism, Negritude and Afrocentricity.

Therefore, Amefrica, as an ethnogeographic system... is a creation by us and of our ancestors on the continent in which we live, inspired by African models"... Yesterday as today, *Americans* from different countries have played a crucial role in the elaboration of that *Amefricanity* that identifies, in the Diaspora, a common historical experience that demands to be properly known and carefully researched. Although we belong to different societies on the continent, we know that our system of domination is the same in all of them, that is: *racism*, that cold and extreme elaboration of the Aryan model of explanation, whose presence is a constant at all levels of thought, as well as part and parcel of the most different institutions of these societies. (GONZALEZ, 1998, p. 77)

Rui Moreira's performance in the black dances tour shows a multiple artist who, moving in the field of dance in a diversity of productions, continues to act and seek places of creation. His connections in the national and international sphere in dance deserve to be credited, spread, and celebrated. However, we know that in dance the symbolic capital of fame, success and visibility within the field does not always correspond to the economic capital and financial stability that these artists deserve, as can happen in other areas such as music, for example. Among the arts, dance is certainly one of the most unstable and precarious areas in terms of labor rights and funding opportunities. At a time when we do not have a Ministry of Culture in Brazil, Rui Moreira continues to dance in the resistance, facing the lack of policies for the arts;

continues to parade and move in multiple roles in the arts, from dancer to choreographer, from curator to producer. In 2021, Moreira received the *Açorianos de Dança* Award, promoted by the Municipal Department of Culture of Porto Alegre, in the Outstanding Performer category with the show *Co cês*. Currently, at 59 years of age, in a political attitude, he is engaged in the propagation of black knowledge, now completing his Degree in Dance at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. He was the subject of a doctoral thesis study (Gavioli, 2019), and there are still many monographs, dissertations, and thesis to cover his multifaceted performance in dance. All hail the artistic longevity of Rui Moreira, a great Brazilian dancer and choreographer, with more than four decades of professionalism in dance, showing, through his art, his Afrocentric framework bringing African and Afro-Brazilian archetypes to contemporary times.

Afro dance with a gaúcho accent, with the word: Mestra Iara! Afro-Sul speaks!

For the research of the black dancer and researcher Manoel Alves Neto, talking about Mestra Iara is to bring forward one of the main references of dance in Rio Grande do Sul. Iara Deodoro dos Santos has been an artist since the age of eight and has been at the head of the Instituto Sociocultural Afro-Sul Odomodê for over four decades. At 66 years old, she is a dancer, choreographer, producer, director, and teacher, among many other roles she accumulates as the head of the Afro-Sul Group of Music and Dance (ALVES NETO, 2017). As a choreographer, she has directed more than 30 shows. With a degree in Social Assistance and a post-graduate degree in Popular Education, she always had an attentive eye on inequalities and made her artistic career a struggle for the visibility and resistance of black culture.

She has been working since the 1980s at the Carnival of Porto Alegre, where she has been the flag bearer and choreographer of wings and front commissions, having worked in 18 different schools in the same year. In the show directed by Iara, *Reminiscências – Memórias do Nosso Carnaval*¹⁵, which premiered in 2019, she performed a reinterpretation of Afro-Sul's participation in the popular carnival party in the city of Porto Alegre. In recent years, she has received numerous awards¹⁶, including the recognition from the Rio Grande do Sul Department of Culture in 2016 for her work.

Intersectionality as an analytical sensitivity is a fundamental theoretical assumption to understand the countercolonial¹⁷ political dimension of the Gesture of Resistance produced by

¹⁵ The show was nominated for six categories and won one at the *Açorianos de Dança* Award in 2017, the greatest acknowledgement in arts in the city of Porto Alegre.

¹⁶ Honored by the Porto Alegre City Council in 2013, awarded the 2012 Woman Citizen Trophy by the OAB-RS and honored by the Rio Grande do Sul Legislative Assembly in 2012. See ALVES NETO (2017).

¹⁷ The countercolonial approach is a political, organic stance, articulated outside the academy, by the *quilombola* intellectual Antônio Bispo dos Santos, known as Nego Bispo, an activist who debates *quilombola* strategies in the process of resistance against colonial violence, which are expressed through the maintenance of a triad understood as the Monotheistic Euro-Christian cosmology, imposed by the colonization processes on African, Afro-Diasporic and Amerindian populations.

Mestra lara in the teaching and creation processes in Black Dances. In lara's artistic-pedagogical practice, the Gestures of Resistance are anchored in the experiments carried out from the drum beats characteristic of southern Brazil. Many of them named in the context of the Batuque do Sul¹⁸, others marked by the strong sound of the *Tambor de Sopapo*, also known as the *Grande Tambor*, an instrument of great dimensions and strong bass sound, registered as intangible heritage of the city of Pelotas¹⁹, where there are historical records of its presence since the colonial period.

For the researcher (ALVES NETO, 2017), the gesture of resistance happens as a metaphor in the body in the process of decolonization, they are disruptive spaces, listening to the ancestral balance found in the vibration of touches, in the orality that tells and performs the myths of the Orixás, forces of nature. Master lara's artistic-pedagogical practice considers not only the technical aspects of black dances, but also the poetic aspects that lead the dancers and the public to an awareness of the beauty and potency of African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture, based on the movement of the body.

The explicit narratives in the dramaturgy of her works consider epistemologies of the black body and, therefore, of the black culture, especially of black women, who in turn, are pregnant with poetics and "give birth" to dance. The term "give birth", synonymous with "give light", has been used by black Brazilian artists to reinforce the role of women in the production of Black Dances in Brazil. This can be verified by the number of works and choreographies destined to narrate the black feminine in Brazil and Africa. Narratives that approach ancestry, as an African civilizational value, therefore the importance of what came before, reinforcing the principle of care for the elderly and for the children. The productions of these women, as well as those of Master lara, are directly connected to the social demands of their time and, consequently, aligned with this analytical sensitivity called intersectionality.

In the corporeality produced in the Afro-Gaúcha Dance of Mestra lara, we can find syntaxes operating that break with colonial stigmas such as the verticality and the slender figure of the body. By producing spirals in a curvilinear sense, guided by a polyrhythmic experience, the movements of the body segments, guided by the dynamics of the drums, but with different rhythmic and gestural dynamics, engender polycentrism in the dancing body. Subverting the typical masculine image of the proud white gaucho, the gestures of Mestra lara's Afro-Gaúcho dance are anchored in the ancestral memory of the African woman. Their feet take root, sometimes they slide, sometimes they transfer their weight to the sound of the drum, the body vibrates in contraction and expansion, in line with the anteroposterior pendulum

¹⁸ Religious expression of African origin emerging from the process of black diaspora in southern Brazil.

¹⁹ Recognized the importance and uniqueness of the *Tambor do Sopapo* in the gaucho territory, specifically in the city of Pelotas-RS, the *Tambor de Sopapo* was recognized by the City Council of Pelotas-RS as Intangible Heritage of Pelotas Culture, through Municipal Law 6.915/21.

of the pelvis. This gesture reverberates in the column in an undulating movement, in a “light-strong” serpentine, echoing the experience of strengthening the presence, ethnic-racial consciousness and that of a black woman on gaucho soil. With Mestra Iara a whole collective of black women vibrates from Rio Grande do Sul.

***Where do we go from here?*²⁰**

Brazil is an invention, founded initially by a myth of discovery of a territory largely populated and cultivated by native communities. This myth has long been reinforced by formal education systems. Although Brazil is an invention, it is, also, not a lie. It is a country where important decolonial disputes flourished. In the heat of the action, movements such as *capoeira*, *candomblé* and *samba* are proof of this, dancing black bodies on stage and in the streets show that these are important practices and bodily discourses in the process of counter-narratives of bodies, even before the invention of the decolonial concept.

[...] Crenshaw's proposal instrumentalizes us in this field of mediated justice. In the African diaspora, we, *Iyalodés*, develop wet conducts and faced the colonial standard, giving movement to the force of the tide, just like Marielle Franco, who died on a Wednesday, the day of *Sangò*... the ancestral presence of Marielle Franco circumvents laws to face the legal regimes of Brazilian colonialism. (Akotirene, 2019, p. 108).

The three studies by black researchers and artists presented in this article are examples that draw on Lélia Gonzalez's sources to promote intersectional analysis regarding social class, race, and gender markers in different sub-fields of dance. Lélia Gonzalez's ideas are being resized by new generations of feminist authors such as Luiza Bairros, Flávio Rios, Djamila Ribeiro, Cidinha da Silva, Carla Akotirene, among others. We hope to join this new generation of black Brazilian intellectual women by fostering the thought of Lélia Gonzalez in dance studies, echoing her ideas in search of the national and international repercussion she deserves. Lélia's criticism, irony and interdisciplinarity purposefully produce a destabilization in language, resulting in a decolonization of language and an appropriation of the place of speech of blacks and, in particular, of the Black Woman.

The theoretical choice is always political and to think about Latin America is to consider the complexity and density of the colonial historical landscape in which we live. Regarding the spaces of international knowledge, it is necessary to emphasize that post-colonial studies²¹ were developed in the hegemonic languages of power, namely English and French, currencies

²⁰ Adapted from the subtitle of the article *Racism and sexism in Brazilian culture* (GONZALEZ, 2020, p. 75)

²¹ Postcolonial thinking emerged in the 1980s from the work of diaspora intellectuals from the Middle East and South Asia, notably Edward Saïd, Gayatri C. Spivak and Homi Bahba. It has produced strong criticisms of the close relationship between the modes of knowledge production based on Western conceptual, epistemological, and methodological perspectives and the colonial projects of European and American expansion. See Dantas, 2020.

of academic capital dominated by a group of knowledge-bearers who benefit from their credits to build careers of intellectual prestige (SEGATO, 2021). In this sense, promoting the name of Lélia Gonzalez in Brazil and in an international context presents itself as an asset for the valorization of black and Latin women and of black culture. To reveal her thoughts in the sphere of dance thinking is to present her as an “*abre-alas*”, an opener of spaces to intersectional thinking, an invitation into the Latin American universe.

We hope that the term intersectionality, which has been gaining popularity in Brazil in debates about gender and race, may have repercussions on theoretical productions in dance, as well as on its practices. Thus, for black women and black men to be inserted, in greater numbers, in important spaces of power in the field of dance, it is necessary that all people, white and black, be responsible for using intersectional analysis and that this notion permeates different research, even those that do not address these issues directly. It remains a great challenge to find efficient ways to blacken the studies, practices, thoughts and corporealities produced in dance institutions.

We return to one of the questions we posed at the beginning of the article: how to put into practice what we name? Brazil can be seen as a postcard, a country in harmony, a cordial nation; or it can be shown from the perspective of the non-white and peripheral population in relation to the centers of power.

Regarding our area of expertise – the production of academic knowledge at the intersection with artistic practices – we envision some possibilities of answering this question, which arises mainly from the implementation of quotas and affirmative actions for black and indigenous people in universities. Affirmative actions have provoked a relative “blackening of the academy”, allowing the debate on the notion of “race” and “racism”, words that, for a long time, were silenced in our society, “forcluded”. By assuming quotas for black and indigenous people, we recognize a phenomenon “which is none other than Eurocentrism, both socio-racial and epistemic in academia, manifested in its aversion to the presence of Amerindian and Afro-descendant signs among its boards” (SEGATO, 2021, p 322). We agree with the author, when she explains that, in Brazil, if on the one hand there is a certain “general jelly” of sociability and democracy in culture, the same is not true of the distribution of economic resources and access to health, housing and education, and, in this last aspect, coexistence breaks down and creates a separate society. The whitened elites are in the majority or in their entirety in university spaces, and it is in this corridor that those who will be resourceful to make decisions and having power in society are walking. We consider it urgent that the “blackening” of knowledge production and the debate around race be disseminated not only in the academic field, but also in different sectors of cultural and artistic production. Thus, it is necessary to review parameters of selections and university curricula, but also to rethink criteria for

programming and curation of festivals, selection of public notices, auditions for companies and the elaboration of public policies, considering aspects of intersectionality.

It is urgent and it is the responsibility of all of us, who work in different sub-fields of dance, to work for affirmative action policies aimed at guaranteeing the right to inclusion, access, and permanence of populations historically subordinated and made invisible in spaces and means of producing artistic and academic knowledge. It is urgent to understand that the fact that there are practically no black people, especially women, LGBTQIA+, people with disabilities and other historically oppressed groups, symmetrically occupying spaces in the different sub-fields of dance, is an evident expression of colonial violence that needs to be ended. It is necessary to assume that the fallacious process of “Racial Democracy” denounced by Lélia is also spread in a forceful way in the field of dance, subalternizing and making the production of black artists unfeasible.

Lélia Gonzalez, philosopher, teacher, writer, intellectual and Brazilian black feminist activist, played a decisive role in the fight against structural racism and in the articulation between gender and race in our society. According to her friends, she was a warrior, owner of an extraordinary political force, she produced daily and actively, a woman who communicated to everyone, a loving woman of *Oxum*. In short, a woman ahead of her time. Throughout her life, theory and practice have always been connected. She dedicated her life to explaining the impact of racism and sexism on black women and was a woman with a wide smile, a great fan of *samba* and the dance of the Afro blocks of Salvador, as she recognized the power of the Black Body in movement in Art a privileged *locus*, where the gesture manifests itself as an important language in the elaboration of black-referenced political speeches, which dialogued directly with the peripheral black population, extremely marginalized. In her analysis, the black body in movement in social contexts is potency! We praise the contributions of Lélia Gonzalez and hope that they serve as a basis for the elaboration of countercolonial resistance policies in dance studies! Axé!

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