



Dance and racism: Critical notes on the teaching of dance history

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ABSTRACT – Dance and racism: Critical notes on the teaching of dance history¹ – This article elaborates some brief considerations on the teachings of dance history in universities. The goal is to discuss institutionalized racism in higher education dance environments through critical notes on the contents of a hegemonic and colonial nature applied to the teaching-learning of dance history. In addition, it aims to draw attention to the urgency of creating another dimension of knowledge production, in order to ensure that broad visibility is given to marginal and peripheral histories in the context of dance education.

Keywords: **University. Teachings. Racism. History. Dance.**

RÉSUMÉ – Danse et racisme: Remarques critiques sur l'enseignement de l'histoire de la danse – Cet article élabore quelques brèves considérations sur l'enseignement de l'histoire de la danse dans les universités. L'objectif est de discuter le racisme institutionnalisé dans les milieux de l'enseignement supérieur en danse en formulant des remarques critiques au sujet des processus d'enseignement-apprentissage de l'histoire de la danse, qui font apparaître l'origine hégémonique et coloniale des contenus enseignés. Il s'agit en outre d'attirer l'attention sur l'urgence de créer une autre dimension de production de connaissances dans le but d'assurer une large visibilité aux histoires marginales et périphériques dans le cadre de l'enseignement de la danse.

Mots-clés: **Université. Enseignement. Racisme. Histoire. Danse.**

RESUMO – Dança e racismo: apontamentos críticos sobre o ensino de história da dança² – Este artigo elabora algumas breves considerações sobre o ensino de história da dança nas universidades. O objetivo é discutir o racismo institucionalizado nos ambientes de ensino superior em dança por meio de apontamentos críticos sobre os conteúdos, de natureza hegemônica e colonial, aplicados aos processos de ensino-aprendizagem da história da dança. Além disso, pretende-se chamar a atenção para a urgência da constituição de uma outra dimensão de produção de conhecimento, desejando garantir ampla visibilidade para histórias marginais e periféricas no contexto da educação em dança.

Palavras-chave: **Universidade. Ensino. Racismo. História. Dança.**

Introduction

This article presents some brief reflections on racism in the teaching of the history of dance. My interest is to specifically discuss how racism is institutionalized in educational processes related to the teaching of dance history in the higher education context. In addressing this issue, my hypothesis is that higher education courses in dance are environments structured and marked by normative and colonial logics and thinking, which seek to strengthen ethnic-racial domination projects.

On the other hand, all my actions in the struggle for education in ethnic-racial relations start from a dialogue with higher education institutions. I work in the Undergraduate Program in Dance at the Universidade Federal da Paraíba and realize that higher education spaces for dance teaching, although organized under racist pedagogical guidelines and educational regulations, have the potential to express critical territorialities of resistance to hegemonic positions. Therefore, my aim is not only to elaborate reflections on institutionalized racism in higher education environments for dance teaching, but also to share the efforts and pedagogical strategies I have been developing to ensure that broad visibility is given to African-descended marginal and peripheral histories in the dance scene.

According to Aquino (2001), the history of dance teaching in Brazilian universities was only identified as of the 1950s, with the creation of the first higher-education dance course in Brazil, at the Universidade Federal da Bahia (1956). Hence the understanding that critical efforts and stances, in contrast with the notion of dance training at universities as a project fully linked to the reproduction of epistemological hegemonies, are an even more recent phenomenon.

I consider that it was in the 1980s that dance teaching and practice at Brazilian public universities began to offer a representative context for conducting academic research aimed at restoring pluriversal perspectives in knowledge production that are critical of colonial impositions. I highlight the creation of the Odundê Dance Group, founded by black students from the Dance School of the Universidade Federal da Bahia in the 1980s, and the pioneering theoretical-practical propositions by Oliveira (1991), Santos

(2002), Lobato (2002) and Damasceno (2003), as instances of historical struggles that culminated in the strengthening of anti-racist proposals in dance training at universities³.

That said, it is worth emphasizing that, although Brazilian universities' dance schools have a whole history of fight against racism led by professionals attentive to the urgency of strengthening knowledge production alternatives, we can observe the persistence of racist paradigms in processes of teaching-learning the history of dance. In this article, therefore, my initial concern is to problematize racism as the underpinnings of Eurocentric referentialities instituted by vigorous historical narratives aimed at maintaining power and colonizing imaginaries; next, I seek to share practices for implementing anti-racist perspectives in the teaching of dance history.

I believe that the educational approach to the teaching of dance history has been used primarily to reproduce hegemonic practices and, therefore, to establish ethnic-cultural and epistemic domination territorialities that consolidate the understanding of history on the basis of a white and dominant narrative intrinsically related to racial power and authority. My starting point is the understanding that dance history teaching at universities is not based on neutral and impartial content, especially when one realizes that academia itself is not a neutral environment (Kilomba, 2019), but a space for predominantly white aesthetic and cultural discourses: a space of violence, which reflects continued abuses and distortions arising from colonial exploitation, with curricula and pedagogical projects impregnated with racism.

Thus, considering that dance history teaching is constituted in an environment of hegemonic narratives, agents and artistic movements, I argue, in this article, for the need to review its pedagogical practices and contents based on the notions of decoloniality (Mota Neto, 2016; Bernardino-Costa et. al., 2020; Maldonado-Torres, 2020) and afrocentricity (Asante, 2009) as perspectives that strengthen resistance to the colonization of being, knowledge and power. I also argue for recentering historically and culturally people of African descent that are on a peripheral situation in the dance educational context due to the impositions of coloniality.

Coloniality and Racism



Coloniality has been a key concept for thinking power relations established by colonialism, capitalism and modernity. Introduced into Social Sciences in the late 1980s by Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano, the notion of coloniality refers to a set of processes transcending the particularities of historical colonialism and which does not disappear along with the procedures that formalized the independence of colonized nations.

In this sense, Coloniality is considered a constitutive element of a Eurocentric world norm that structures conceptions of humanity according to which societies are either irrational or rational, inferior or superior, primitive or civilized, traditional or modern (Quijano, 2010). It is, in short, the colonization of ways of being, knowing and acting expressed in the invisibility of the traditional peoples' knowledge, in denying the ethnic minorities' right to exist, in the continuous production of racial stereotypes that generate disactivism and disarticulation and, therefore, in the institutionalization of racism as a social structure.

According to Quijano (2010), a mode of knowledge production has been formalized, since the 17th century, which is based on Eurocentric logics resting on the notion of rationality. This mode of knowledge production seeks to legitimize a monocentric world organization based on valorizing certain expressions of knowledge to the detriment of others and on the formation of an ethnically and racially oriented geopolitics of knowledge. The Eurocentric lineage of knowledge production is based on principles related to historically homogeneous forms and elements, which give modern science the monopoly of establishing the universal distinction between true and false to the detriment of other alternative forms of knowledge made invisible.

Bernardino-Costa et al. (2020) and Grosfoguel (2006), in turn, argue that racism is an organizing principle of this geopolitics of knowledge production, whose strongest historical basis is found in the philosophical statement Descartes formulated in 1637: I think, therefore I am. For these authors, the expression is at the basis of a tradition of thought that imagines itself producing universal knowledge through the idea of an equally universal and deracialized man.

The logic of I think, therefore I am rests on the viewpoint that others do not think and therefore do not exist, instituting a radical division between those capable and those incapable of producing universal knowledge, those who exist and those who do not exist. This turns the erasure of non-hegemonic worldviews into a tool of a policy aimed at eliminating and inflicting violence and death on racial minorities (Bernardino-Costa et al., 2020).

This allows me to perceive that the concept of coloniality emerges to represent the continuity of colonial exploitation, by invading the imaginary of the other, that is, by its westernization. In other words, coloniality is like a device that remains active, even after the political and legal emancipation of colonized territories, constituting itself not as a cognitive arrangement exclusive to Europeans, but one also shared by subjectivities historically colonized and educated under European hegemony.

Coloniality naturalizes the experience of individuals with this pattern of domination, making it seem natural and not likely to be questioned (Quijano, 2010), operating the seduction by colonialist culture, the epistemic subordination of the non-European other and the erasure of non-white historical processes. Coloniality's effects are evidenced not only in the establishment of Eurocentrism as a universal, normative and deracialized reference in the epistemic, aesthetic, artistic, philosophical, religious, political, economic, historical, existential and social contexts, but also in the strengthening of control strategies that attribute, to people of other ethnic groups, a condition of subordination, inferiority and invisibility.

In his book *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (2008) reflects on the effects of modern colonialism, examining the living conditions of black people in society and the ways in which colonial invasions gave rise to number of complexes and forms of alienation, whereby dominant cultures imposed on minority ethnic groups the insignia of abnormality and spread the idea that white Western cultural categories and values were the only true ones. Fanon's (2008) studies point out that the racism spread along with modern European colonialism operated by making use of racial origin for the construction of differences in a social context in which whiteness⁴ was defined as the norm and other racially identified groups were understood as a deviation. These

constructed differences, according to Kilomba (2019), are still currently linked to hierarchical values that determine socially shared meanings and can generate marginality, stigma, racial dishonor and inferiority, or centrality, racial honor and superiority, depending on the ethnic group to which individuals belong. This leads me to identify racism as a form of cultural engineering fundamentally political, which does not dispense with power to generate and establish differences, prejudice and discrimination.

I notice, however, that critical discussions on dance in Brazil have been increasingly occurring in dialogue with radical perspectives or paradigms that explore pluriversalism in the formulation of categories, concepts, experiences, which are then applied to develop strategies for fighting racism in knowledge production. Recently, these studies began to focus on the effects of colonization in the production of thought about dance (Oliveira; Laurentino, 2020; Silva, 2018), on the valorization of processes of African origin in the history of Brazilian dance (Ferraz, 2017; Santos, 2018; Silva, 2020), on discussions about dance pedagogical aspects from Black perspectives (Machado, 2017, Silva; Lima, 2021, Tavares; Dias, 2020), on the effort to define and map choreographic practices of African origin (Oliveira, 2017), among many other relevant topics.

This heterogeneity of research topics in racism in the context of dance emerges as a response to colonial oppression, the marginalization of black presence in the white racial domination system, the broad debate on ethnic-racial education in Brazilian society and the implementation of public policies for fighting racism. Furthermore, it is worth noting the growth in Núcleos de Estudos Afro-Brasileiros e Indígenas (NEABIs) in universities, the founding of the Associação Brasileira de Pesquisadores Negros (ABPN), the holding of Congressos Brasileiros e Regionais de Pesquisadores Negros, as well as the many advances in Black presence in higher education environments, as illustrated by policies to combat social inequalities and promote historic reparations, which range from the establishment of national curriculum guidelines for education in ethnic-racial relations and teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African history and culture in higher education courses (Conselho, 2004) to affirmative action initiatives, through quotas.

Furthermore, as pointed out by Oliveira & Laurentino (2020), I emphasize the importance of the Associação Nacional de Pesquisadores em Dança (ANDA) and of the Associação Brasileira de Pesquisa e Pós-Graduação em Artes Cênicas (ABRACE), which have made efforts to promote an institutionalized discussion about the theme. In 2019, ANDA created a Thematic Committee on Dance and Black Diaspora: political poetics, modes of knowledge and other epistemes, coordinated by Fernando Marques Camargo Ferraz and Amélia Vitória de Souza Conrado, both PhD professors at the Universidade Federal da Bahia. ABRACE, in turn, has a Working Group called The Afro in Performing Arts: Afro-diasporic performances from a decolonization perspective, which is undergoing changes in its coordination, but has been coordinated, since 2017, by PhD professors Julio Moracen Naranjo (UNIFESP) and Marianna Francisca Martins Monteiro (UNESP).

In general, the objective of these discussion meetings is to collect research and reflections on dance production in diaspora territories and create an environment conducive to the production of critical knowledge around the histories and aesthetics engendered by black cultures and their political and poetic frameworks. Legal provisions, public policies and academia can thus contribute to the elaboration of new epistemic paradigms, giving visibility to the urgent need for the valorization of black presence in the historical panorama of Brazilian dance.

In this way, the idea that the dance production contexts that we know of are not universal, but particular, local and ethnic begins to be duly taken into account. Therefore, it becomes clear the need to displace hegemonic, white and Western knowledge from its place of sole reference, as a response to the power and authority dynamics that assign legitimate protagonists to the history of dance based on racist and colonial principles.

History of dance: anti-racist perspectives

In July 2009, Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie gave a talk called The Danger of a Single Story at a Technology, Entertainment and Design (TED) conference. In her lecture, the writer addressed the dangerous articulations established around stories told and shared from a single frame of

reference, as well as the implications of these narratives regarding the construction of the stereotype of subjectivities and territorialities.

Initially, the writer spoke about her childhood readings and how the children's books she read made her start writing stories about realities that were foreign to her life in Nigeria, where blue-eyed white characters, who ate apples, played in the snow and talked about how lovely it was that the sun had come out, contrasted with the social reality of black people who ate mangoes, had not seen snow and had no need to talk about the weather in their country. Next, Adichie reported, based on lived events, episodes that explain the single story idea in terms of aspects such as class prejudice, xenophobia, racism and exploitation of unilateral information, and then shared her views on the tradition of storytelling in the West, pointing out our vulnerability in the face of the stories that are told to us (O Perigo, 2009).

This talk is important in allowing us to understand the dangers of a single story and analyze the historical processes that established mechanisms of social control and regulation. But, at the same time, this talk allows us to realize how the teaching of dance history has been guiding the reproduction of hegemonic theoretical-practical perspectives and keeping the teaching and creation in dance within the limits of a dangerous arena: a single story based on racism and coloniality.

The effects of a dance history based solely on European and North American thinking are diverse. First, it is possible to identify processes of erasure or persecution of non-hegemonic histories and poetics that are associated with the continuous circulation of stereotypes about the choreographic productions of racial minorities. Next, there is the panorama of violence observed in the artistic experience in dance of black students, teachers and researchers, as racism is performed by the exaltation of Europeanized principles and notions of beauty, harmony and order, as well as through the reproduction of pedagogical strategies without a reflection on racial myths, the production of racist artistic practices and the continued violence institutionalized in higher education contexts. In addition, it should be noted what Veiga (2019) identifies as diaspora effect: the feeling of exclusion from the modes of knowledge production, the perception of not belonging to the

environment in which one lives and of not being included in the social dynamics in equal terms with the other members of society.

These single story effects in educational processes applied to the construction of narratives about dance indicate the erasure or lack of visibility given to the knowledge of African origin and have taken on different names, perspectives or analytical categories in theories critical to colonization, namely: genocide (Birth, 2016; 2019); alienation (Fanon, 2008); coloniality (Quijano, 2010) or epistemicide (Santos, 2006). It is noteworthy, however, that despite the differences, these categories are the expression of racist strategies for denying and destroying the capacity of non-white peoples to produce historical knowledge.

I see that, in contrast to the monoculture of knowledge production, many authors have called our attention to the need for epistemic disobedience in the field of Social Sciences, as in the case of Hartmann et al. (2019), Hooks (2017), Nascimento (2016), Maldonado-Torres (2020), Mignolo (2008), Rufino (2019), Santos (2010; 2006) and Tavares (2020), who point to possibilities of reflecting on life, the relationship between diverse forms of knowledge and, consequently, the development of a historical reflection beyond the canons of colonialism.

It is in this context of academic debate, therefore, that the perspective of anti-racist practices emerges to meet the transgressive demands of black researchers around the world who are fighting against coloniality and racism. I am thus focusing here on the formulation of pedagogical proposals opposed to racism in order to reflect on the teaching of dance history in higher education contexts based on a theoretical dialogue with decolonial theory and the Afrocentricity approach.

Decolonial perspective is the expression of a movement aimed at overcoming the archaisms of modernity, a kind of turn that breaks the logics of rationality, an engaged critical attitude. According to Maldonado-Torres (2020), the decolonial attitude refers to the orientation of individuals in relation to being, knowledge and power and means a critical commitment against coloniality.

This attitude is fundamental to the accomplishment of the decolonial turn and is incorporated as knowledge into the body. Therefore, we observe an ontological, epistemological and ethical relationship established between the idea of decolonial turn and corporeality in the emergence of subjectivities as agents of radical transformation.

In my view, decoloniality is like a moving force, a kind of turn of the moving body on itself whose effort consists in opposing the disembodiment of the transformative-ethical consciousness, realizing the implications of coloniality in processes of social, political, environmental, educational, artistic, historical-philosophical construction and creating strategies for raising awareness, confronting and disarticulating colonial paradigms. An expression of transgression, the decolonial turn does not accept epistemic disqualification, nor ontological or ethical denial (Bernardino-Costa et al, 2019), consolidating instead a form of thought-creation-activism that seeks the valorization of the experiences of non-hegemonic subjectivities in contrast to the structuring oppressions that constitute societies.

Decoloniality reveals ways in which the very world we live in, and its inherent epistemes, is the means for understanding existence, while it seeks to foster practices, strategies and ways of thinking-doing built on the affirmation of humanization and existence itself based on counter-hegemonic civilizing systems, that is, which organize processes that bring an awareness of the world through forms of knowledge and experiences that give rise to new paradigms for strategies to combat oppression and inequalities.

According to Mota Neto (2016), decoloniality is anti-colonial, non-Eurocentric, anti-racist, anti-patriarchal and anti-capitalist in the effects it generates, and it assumes a critical attitude against any and all forms of exclusion that originate in colonial exploitation. In this context, decolonial theory is in itself an action of resistance, an activist practice, a creative mode of taking a critical standpoint that problematizes and produces radical changes seeking to dissolve the diverse forms of oppression perpetrated by coloniality.

Afrocentricity, in turn, is an approach that has been presented as a break with the dominant identity's hegemony, thus representing a possibility of transforming central referentialities and discussing new orientations from the



epistemological perspective of place. The idea of place is used as a means of approaching social and ethnic contexts as specific and particular, postulating, in an Afro-centered approach, the need to clearly identify the individual's location in order to develop a theoretical framework specific to their social group and based on their historical and cultural experience (Nascimento, 2009).

This approach is thus characterized as a mode of thinking that engages in critical arguments about modern rationality, hegemonic ethnocentrism and colonial exploitation. It is noteworthy, however, that the Afro-centered approach does not seek to establish itself as an ethnocentric hegemonic model, but rather to recentralize African peoples and the forms of knowledge that have been kept marginal to education, art, economy, communication and technology, sustaining African worldviews within and at the center of their own history.

Afrocentricity's perspective derives from a political, pedagogical, artistic and historical standpoint and represents a paradigmatic locus in the construction of a knowledge that, according to Mazama (2009), emerged in the 1980s with the publication of *Afrocentricity* (1980), a book by Molefi K. Asante, followed by *The Afrocentric Idea* (1987) and *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge* (1990). The Afrocentric paradigm is a response to white supremacy and is based on affirming that racism is a social and epistemic problem, on the non-acceptance of Eurocentrism as universal norm and on affirming that racial issues are relevant to debates on the consolidation of hegemonic references and of knowledge itself (Oliveira, 2021a).

The Afrocentric approach allows me to consider that ethnic-racial asymmetries express many ways of denying rights to the Brazilian Black population, since, as Asante (2009) states, Black people have been negated in the white racial domination system. And, this denial does not only mean marginalization, but obliteration of presence, aesthetic meanings and activities, which produces dis-agency, that is, an inability to use the psychological and cultural resources necessary for the advancement of freedom, thus producing a subaltern and displaced attitude (Asante, 2009).

In the author's words, an oppressed person is dis-located when she operates from a location centered in the experiences of the oppressor. On the other hand, Blacks as subjects can occupy a central place when they go through a process of raising political, educational, artistic, aesthetic awareness; discover the possibility of building and re-signifying their own presences; commit themselves to their own psychological location and to discovering themselves as agents; elaborate the defense of African cultural elements; articulate a commitment to lexical refinement, considering the meanings related to the African becoming, and a commitment to a narrative of history. In short, the Afrocentricity's perspective proposes a re-centering of black people based on the realization of the existence of diverse centralities and referentialities.

Given these conceptual dimensions, it is worth emphasizing that, while decoloniality expresses a radical criticism of the colonization of imaginaries and subjectivities, as well as of mechanisms of modern colonial exploitation, and Afrocentricity indicates the realm of African culture as the specific territory of resistance and knowledge production, both perspectives point to racism experienced in the body and structured in histories as organizer of colonial oppression and domination. In this sense, they both strengthen the development of anti-racist proposals applied to the teaching-learning processes in dance history: sometimes deconstructing the conceptual and artistic dependence that disregards the uniqueness of historical processes in Brazilian dance, sometimes creating conditions that allow us to value the histories of oppressed and silenced populations in our country.

Experiences in teaching dance history

Anti-racist teaching practices based on decolonial and Afro-centered approaches express theoretical-practical attitudes aimed at breaking with colonial experiences, therefore representing an act of confronting a hegemonic system of thought and, consequently, an act of historical and cultural liberation from coloniality and Eurocentrism. This mode of epistemic disobedience, however, needs to be increasingly associated with our actions, so as to be transposed from the theoretical realm to the practical domain in order to

combat cognitive injustices, organizing a confrontation with indolent reason (Santos, 2006) or with intransigent reason (Rufino, 2020), but simultaneously aiming to confront social injustices by fostering practiced knowledge, that is, a process involving performative knowledge.

Therefore, at this point, I want to share brief observations about Black Poetics in Dance, a course offered in a partnership between the Cena Preta - Quilombo Research Group and the UFPB ComuniDança Extension Project, which are two projects I coordinate within the scope of the Undergraduate Program in Dance from the Universidade Federal da Paraíba, located in João Pessoa (PB), in order to explore teaching-learning curricular alternatives. I will also briefly comment on the performance of anti-racist pedagogical alternatives.

Discussions about the whitening of the curriculum of the Universidade Federal da Paraíba's Undergraduate Program in Dance were provoked by Black students who did not recognize themselves in most of the program's regular curriculum components. Thus, in order to meet an immediate demand, while the program's Teaching Structuring Center works on curriculum components on the thinking about dance complying with racial minority policies, I developed the course Black Poetics in Dance⁵.

The course emerged, therefore, as an alternative aimed at discussing contents that had not been covered by the pedagogical project of the Undergraduate Program in Dance, and it sought to provide an in-depth historical overview of Brazilian dance from the perspective of Black presence. The course was held between October 8th and December 10th, 2020, had a total of 30 class hours and, throughout its duration, we sought to establish a close relationship between artists and researchers who adopted artistic-pedagogical approaches based on decolonial and/or Afro-centered perspectives.

There were twenty-three students regularly enrolled at the Universidade Federal da Paraíba in the course, in addition to forty-one others who were not part of the university's community and who signed up for the activity, thus totaling sixty-four people interested in discussing dance history based on Black perspectives. The course brought together people from all over Brazil, which generated dynamism and enabled multiple perspectives in the

discussions carried out. Among the cities represented, the highlights were: Araraquara (SP), Bayeux (PB), Belo Horizonte (MG), Candeias (BA), Contagem (MG), Guarapari (ES), Ilhéus (BA), Juazeiro (BA), Macéio (AL), Natal (RN), Niterói (RJ), Petrolina (PE), Planaltina (DF), Pombal (PB), Porto Alegre (RS), Rio de Janeiro (RJ), Salvador (BA), São José do Egito (PE), Senhor do Bonfim (BA), Viçosa (MG) and Vitória (ES).

Among the students enrolled at the Universidade Federal da Paraíba, eleven were Black, seven were brown and six were white. Among those enrolled in the course but not at the university, the number of Black participants was even higher, totaling twenty-nine, followed by seven people identified as white and five who declared themselves brown.

In all course's classes, we sought to conduct an in-depth theoretical reading of studies on structural racism concepts; on the scenic construction of stereotypes and recreational racism technologies; on the impacts of coloniality on dance training; on definitions of Black dance; on the historical dimension of Black presence in Brazilian dance; and on Black artist collectives active in the contemporary scene. Our activities, which took place weekly, included reading and discussing texts; the critical analysis of dance pieces known to be created by Black people; and talks with directors, choreographers and researchers associated with the aesthetic and poetic conception of the choreographic productions discussed in the course.

During the course, we established partnerships with some guests whose works, based on a phrodiasporic perspectives, gave rise to the choreographic productions and to a novel approach to making-thinking histories, such as Bruno de Jesus (Salvador), Tiago Oliveira (Rio de Janeiro), Flávia Souza (Rio de Janeiro), Tieta Macau (São Luís – Fortaleza), Fábio Batista (Rio de Janeiro), Dende Ma'at (João Pessoa), Mirela Ferreira (Salvador – João Pessoa) and Fernando Ferraz (Salvador)⁶.

In all these meetings, we sought to debate racially structured power relations in the dance scene and evaluate alternative approaches to the history of dance based on strategies for combating racism. This means that our pedagogical process involved elaborating some fundamental considerations for

structuring institutional actions and pedagogical proposals related to dance training and the teaching of dance history based on anti-racist logics.

We immediately understood that teaching the history of anti-racist dance cannot be a process based solely on hegemonic referentialities, since hegemonic representations, as a colonial heritage, is structured by racism. Thus, like Souza (2020), we realized that selecting historical content based on colonizing and Eurocentric perspectives makes Black groups and artists invisible and precludes the construction of a dance history in which these artists are seen as agents who create art and culture.

In this context, we identified that, in our discussions about dance history, one of the most challenging tasks in the development of anti-racist proposals concerns the need to denounce the idea that particularistic standpoints are not universal, that is, our teaching-learning perspective seeks to discuss European and North American hegemony as historically situated, but not as a universalist phenomenon. In this sense, the history of American modern dance and of German expressionism, for example – including names such as Doris Humphrey, Isadora Duncan, Kurt Jooss, Martha Graham, Mary Wigman, Merce Cunningham and Rudolf Laban – are to be understood as particular references on dance. And, even while recognizing their impact on the dance education of the artist-teacher-researcher in Brazil, due to the effects of colonization processes, they represent particular perceptions of history and choreographic work (Oliveira, 2021b).

We came to understand that if the curriculum is structuring the production of knowledge solely on the basis of Eurocentric parameters, it is necessary to discuss this curriculum and find strategies for developing new curriculum components and syllabuses. If the bibliographic references used to establish a dialogue with knowledge are related to white logics, it is essential to bring together those responsible for developing the political and pedagogical projects for a discussion and improve representativeness by involving teaching structuring centers or Black organizations outside universities (Oliveira, 2020).

In addition, another relevant point we identified for consolidating the teaching processes of dance histories from pluriversal and anti-racist

perspectives is the observation and valorization of marginal and peripheral choreographic proposals, in order to counteract the erasure and invisibility of Black choreographic productions. This argument concerns the entire production chain of dance, which, in turn, gives dance histories, to a certain extent, their configuration. Thus, it is extremely important to consume Black art and promote spaces of racial equity in dance curatorial processes.

It is worth emphasizing, however, that the importance of examining Afro-diasporic choreographic modes does not rest on an essentialist view, that is, on the belief that they are worth of notice for being Black. But rather because it is unreasonable in a society like ours, with a Black majority, for only one ethnic group to have its choreographic knowledge seen, valued and informing what meanings dance will have.

Furthermore, it is imperative to hire professors based on racial criteria, ensuring representativeness and proportionality in universities and, therefore, favoring a broad dissemination of multiple and diverse epistemic and historical perspectives. Hiring non-white education professionals and, especially, who are critics of racism can have a significant impact on the teaching-learning process of dance history in higher education contexts. I believe that the absence of Black and minority teachers is a sign that leads us not only to recognize the racist composition of the body of professionals involved with teaching-research-extension activities, but also to organize and make efforts to pressure higher education institutions to implement entrance examinations that consider and stipulate the hiring of Black professionals (Oliveira, 2020).

The commitment to integrate, into our academic practices, a criticism of the status quo in universities and, therefore, in the teaching-learning of dance history – namely racism, coloniality and Eurocentrism in the production of knowledge – leads us to understand the urgency of valuing the diversity of historical perspectives, so that names like Dona Mercedes Baptista and Master King are presented as an expression of genealogies, narratives and protagonism in the history of Brazilian dance. By introducing an anti-racist gaze at the teaching of dance history, we are thus producing a politically conscious and engaged dance context and, therefore, creating yet another non-

hegemonic space of theoretical and practical resistance that allows us to radically transform higher education institutions.

Final considerations

Of all forms of domination, I believe that those that justify themselves through ideological biases and mask the historical processes that generate social inequalities can be considered the most powerful. This is because the colonization of imagination and knowledge is a phenomenon that produces consensus and justifies inequality, oppression and exploitation through social institutions. Oppression, then, takes root in the social structure through a set of ideas systematically organized and shared; ideas that come to be recognized as norms, standards and models that are intended, in many cases, to be indisputable.

It is clear that in Western societies, and in those westernized by a broad colonization process, these univocal and indisputable models correspond to Eurocentric and North-centered perspectives. And it is this referentiality, which refuses to recognize the other as a subject and operates their conversion into an object, that informs our notions of harmony and beliefs about artistic supremacy, which are grounded in an extremely violent context based on privilege and oppression.

The maintenance of this violence in our educational practices creates spaces for the reproduction of racist social structures which, in the context of dance history teaching, are manifested in the categorical absence of Black teachers and artists, as well as in the erasure of the histories of dances of African origin in the regular curriculum components. These dances, usually referred to as Afro-Brazilian dances, are qualified as ethnic, anonymous, artisanal, anachronistic, ritualistic and ahistorical.

The consolidation of the history of dance as a singular history based on ethnocentric logics was built upon the principle of producing incessant narratives about European and North American choreographies. Ultimately, this turned these narratives into a dominant, credible and, supposedly, universal historical reality.

Today, however, it is clear for me that the teaching of dance history as it has been established does not represent universal history, but rather an ethno-history based on white perspectives. I therefore propose, like Mignolo (2017), that we should engage in a process of epistemic decoloniality, which allows the opportunity to unlearn what was learned through a pedagogical practice based on recognizing the colonization of historical knowledge in dance and breaking with colonial thinking and the narrative of modernity.

Examining the effects of coloniality, racism and European ethnocentrism on dance curriculum development, specifically with regard to dance history teaching at universities, allowed me to understand the absence of the diverse dance histories (in the plural) and the need to radically transform teaching contents and approaches, in order to break with the reproduction of colonial logics and establish new centralities in dance learning.

That said, I realize that, as forceful as the process of confronting the established historical knowledge about dance seems to be, this action is equally, as Rufino (2019) points out, an act of tenderness, love and responsibility for life, for all lives. After all, if Black lives matter, we must consider that Black histories of the Brazilian dance scene should also matter to us.

Notes

- ¹ This study had financial support from Research Productivity PROPESQ/PRPG/UFPB Public Call nº 03/2020 under SIGAA research project code PVJ13529-2020.
- ² Este trabalho contou com apoio financeiro da Chamada nº 03/2020 Produtividade em Pesquisa PROPESQ/PRPG/UFPB código do projeto de pesquisa no SIGAA PVJ13529-2020.
- ³ In view of this historical context, I clarify that, by situating my pedagogical practices as alternatives to the Eurocentric hegemony in the dance education panorama, my interest is not to erase previous efforts to fight racism in dance education at Brazilian universities, but rather to contribute to new perspectives in the struggle against institutionalized racism in higher education environments.

- ⁴ The term as used here refers to the range of privileges and structural advantages of white people in societies marked by racism.
- ⁵ It is important to note that the UFPB Undergraduate Program in Dance has several research and extension projects that combat monoculture in knowledge production processes, in addition to curriculum components on the relations between dances of African and indigenous origin and author-oriented processes of choreographic composition and research.
- ⁶ These artists have been long associated with historical processes related to Black dances, whether due to their professional experiences, choreographic perspectives or artistic genealogies.

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This original paper, translated by Edson Seda (Tikinet Edição Ltda.), is also published in Portuguese in this issue of the journal

Received on April 29, 2021

Approved on August 11, 2021

Editors-in-charge: Arnaldo de Siqueira Junior

Cassia Navas

Henrique Rochelle

Celina Nunes de Alcântara

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