



Flamenco Negro: analysis of the spectacle by Companhia De Arte La Negra Ana Medeiros

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ABSTRACT – *Flamenco Negro: analysis of the spectacle by Companhia De Arte La Negra Ana Medeiros* – This paper proposes an analysis of the spectacle *Flamenco Negro*, based on the theoretical framework of the sociology of art and the sociology of ethnic-racial relations, combining the analysis of the social context of production of the work with the methodology of performance analysis. The study found that the process of creating such a work of art was part of a social network articulating a community of meaning that helped to form the dancers' own racial consciousness, enabling them to reaffirm their position and their way of dancing within the art scene and resize the black diaspora as a collective experience by highlighting the hybridity between Afro-diasporic dances and musicalities in Flamenco.

Keywords: **Flamenco. Racism. Blackness. Dance. Black Atlantic.**

RÉSUMÉ – *Flamenco Negro: analyse du spectacle par Companhia De Arte La Negra Ana Medeiros* – Cet article propose une analyse du spectacle *Flamenco Negro*, basée sur le cadre théorique de la sociologie de l'art et de la sociologie des relations ethniques-raciales, combinant l'analyse du contexte social de production de l'œuvre avec la méthodologie de l'analyse de la performance. L'étude a révélé que le processus de création d'une telle œuvre d'art faisait partie d'un réseau social articulant une communauté de sens qui a contribué à former la propre conscience raciale des danseuses, leur permettant de réaffirmer leur position et leur façon de danser au sein de la scène artistique et de redimensionner la diaspora noire comme une expérience collective en mettant en évidence l'hybridité entre danses et musicalités afro-diasporiques dans le flamenco.

Mots-clés: **Flamenco. Racisme. Négritude. Danser. Atlantique Noir.**

RESUMO – *Flamenco Negro: uma análise do espetáculo da Companhia De Arte La Negra Ana Medeiros* – Este artigo propõe uma análise do espetáculo *Flamenco Negro* a partir do referencial teórico da sociologia da arte e da sociologia das relações étnico-raciais, combinando a análise do contexto social de produção da obra com a metodologia de análise do espetáculo. O estudo constatou que o processo de criação foi parte de uma rede social articuladora de uma comunidade de sentido que ajudou a formar a própria consciência racial das bailarinas, possibilitando-lhes reafirmar sua posição e seu modo de dançar no cenário artístico e redimensionar a diáspora negra como experiência coletiva ao ressaltar o hibridismo entre danças e musicalidades afro-diaspóricas no flamenco.

Palavras-chave: **Flamenco. Racismo. Négritude. Dança. Atlântico Negro.**

Introduction

In recent years, due to recent changes in the global political agenda, there has been a renewed interest in discussing the issue of racism and black identity in various sectors of society, including the fields of arts of the scene. *Flamenco Negro*, the dance spectacle that this article examines, is part of this historical movement, presenting a pioneering and innovative character in a specific artistic area that, until then, had not produced more in-depth reflections on the matter.

The discussion in this article is justified within the broader debate on the poetics of blackness in the arts of the scene (Soares, 2020). This concept approaches and dialogues with the debate promoted by black feminism, since it reaffirms the importance of knowledge from the point of view of black people who perceive and suffer the phenomenon of racism (Collins, 2019). Thus, combined with the denunciation of racism, works of art that carry discourses crossed by the experience of the black artist in racially hierarchical societies, are works that produce poetics of blackness, because, according to Soares (2020, p. 11):

[...] we understand that these creations present themselves as testimonies of the witness-body, and therefore they are forms of knowledge and forms of empowerment of black artists, who commit and employ, from their own body, the collective impressions from a point of view of the experience lived by themselves.

Flamenco Negro is included in this category because it is a spectacle that expresses, through the pains of the characters, the weight of real situations of racial discrimination experienced by black women professionals of Brazilian flamenco. At the same time, it seeks to produce positive representations on black identity.

The analytical approach proposed here, however, sought to avoid the isolated analysis of the work of art, separated from the set of social relations that produced it. For this reason, a methodological proposal that has not yet been explored in reflections on the practices of this type in the arts of the scene in Brazil was adopted. It consists of analyzing the social context of production of the work of art from the reference of the sociology of art (Bourdieu, 1996; Bourdieu, 2008; Becker, 2010), combined with the

methodology of analysis of the spectacle (Pavis, 2008; 2010). With this, the article seeks to base, in the academic field, a theoretical-methodological perspective that considers the construction of the poetics of blackness in dance as part of a fundamentally social process that must be understood from a complex and relational approach.

The aim of the analysis proposed here was to reflect on how racism and, consequently, the forms of symbolic violence, hierarchies and discriminations through which it operates in the various worlds of the arts impact, nowadays, on Dance practices; and how they produce, as an artistic response, narratives of racism and black identity in the scene. Specifically, the article seeks to analyze how this occurs in flamenco, an artistic area that is a specific cultural and production field.

In the explanation of the field of research, this article seeks to relate the perspective of a collective of authors of the so-called new historiography of flamenco (Navarro García; Pablo, 2005; Núñez, 2017; Manuel, 2018; Gómez, 2019; Corrales, 2000; Millazo, 2013; Goldberg, 2014) with the historiographical perspective of the Black Atlantic by Paul Gilroy (2001).

In order to analyze the context of the social production of the work, a social research was carried out (Minayo, 2012), using as methodological tools the direct observations of the online meetings and the face-to-face rehearsals that structured the spectacle, with the aim of ascertaining social aspects of its assembly and preparation. Semi-structured interviews and informal conversations were also conducted with the group's artists, in addition to analyzing the debates and content produced by them on social networks.

Regarding the application of the techniques of analysis of the show, the themes addressed by the work were recognized through the division into narrative nuclei. These, in turn, were analyzed in articulation with social theory and, in this process, we sought to relate them to aspects of the artists' trajectory according to the problematizations brought by Sociology and Anthropology of ethnic-racial relations (Hall, 2002; Hall, 2003; Nagel, 2003; Munanga, 2017; 2020; Sodré, 2017) and also by black feminism (Souza, 1983; hooks, 1995; Carneiro, 2005; Carneiro, 2011; Kilomba, 2019; Greenshaw, 2002; Kerner, 2012; Collins, 2019).

Situating the social world of the black flamenco

The flamenco, an artistic expression recognized by UNESCO since 2010 as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, has long been considered a purely Spanish art. However, it has a very complex historical construction. Although the traditional historical narrative (Molina; Mairena, 1963; Machado y Álvarez, 1974; Washabaugh, 1996) considers it an art of only gypsy origin, which emerged in southern Spain, according to the most recent historiography (Navarro García; Pablo, 2005; Gómez, 2019; Steingress, 2007; Núñez, 2017; Manuel, 2018), flamenco has a multicultural historical construction, with European, gypsy, Arab, Jewish, African-American and African influence.

Although the spectacular scenic model that goes by this name was structured, in fact, only in the 19th century, in southern Spain, there are, in flamenco art, musical structures and body movement grammars that include older heritages. Thus, the so-called primitive or pre-flamenco stage¹, as several studies have corroborated (Corrales, 2000; Millazo, 2013; Goldberg, 2014; Manuel, 2018; Núñez, 2017), included an ethnic-racial mixture forged in the context of transatlantic relations of racial domination and the mixture of cultures of the African diaspora.

For a long time, for example, the false idea that the protagonists of the hybridism between flamenco and Latin American arts were the Spaniards who, in the 19th and 20th centuries, took their art to American lands and returned enriched by their influence, was held. Corrales (2000) points out that the expression *cantes de ida y vuelta*, used to describe these processes, ignored that, since the 16th century, African and African-American arts had already come to Spain. Therefore, blacks and mulattos, both enslaved and freed, had already played a central role in shaping the arts of southern Spain that constituted flamenco.

Among the African dances that influenced the formation of flamenco were the *paracumbé*, the *guineo*, the *zarabanda* and the *mangindoy*; and among the Afro-American dances, the *zarabengue*, the *retambo*, the *zamballo*, the *dengue*, the *guaracha*, the *caxumba*, the *guayumba* and the *fandango*. These styles were danced by freed blacks and gypsies who made up the popular classes of southern Spain and lived segregated from the hegemonic

cultural process. According to Gomes and Cruz (2022), some of these rhythms were also danced in Brazilian territory, having even influenced the formation of popular dances, such as the *lundu* (Gomes; Cruz, 2022). Therefore, the social actors who led the so-called pre-flamenco stage belonged to marginalized ethnic-racial groups that had to elaborate their artistic expressions in the environments of Atlantic Afro-diasporic cultural exchanges created by the slave trade.

Flamenco is thus a paradigmatic case to illustrate or think about the concept of the Black Atlantic, coined by historian Gilroy (2001) to describe the hybridity between the various black popular cultures in countries involved with slavery and post-slavery around the Atlantic Ocean. According to the author, at the same time that these cultures were disqualified by the racism of the dominant civilizing project, they created a network of exchanges and mutual influences of a transnational character. Later, they also became constitutive of the very Modernity that tried to deny them. Therefore, what we call Modernity was formed from a hybrid but asymmetrical relationship between the white colonizing civilizing project and the forms of resistance to it, which the author calls countercultures of Modernity.

In the history of flamenco, the transnational and intercultural character of the various elements that compose it is evident. Flamenco is a product of cultural hybridity, as defined by Canclini (2013), in which complex processes of interpenetration between popular and erudite art are evident. However, like so many cultures of the Black Atlantic, it was not the result of a harmonious or cordial mixture between artistic expressions of different ethnic groups. It starts from a process as hybrid as it is violent (Cevasco, 2006), a common characteristic of cultural hybridity phenomena involved in objective processes of domination.

The recognition of this racial dimension is a fairly recent discussion in the field of flamenco historiography. Consequently, it is still little known by most members of the international flamenco community. It was possible to verify this through the interviews conducted with the agents involved in a chain of events prior to the idealization of *Flamenco Negro*.

One of these events was the airing, in Spain, of the spectacle *Gurumbé: canciones de tu memoria negra* (2016), directed by anthropologist Miguel Angel Rosales, which caused great repercussions in the country's flamenco

community for having brought this issue to light for the first time. In Brazil, this documentary sparked a debate among professionals in the flamenco circuit in the city of São Paulo, the result of which was the production of an event, directed by Mariana Abreu, from the group Estúdio Soniquete, in 2020, and called *Flamenco Negro: histórias silenciadas*, in the context of the pandemic. This event was organized with the format of three live streams, containing speeches by black artists and researchers, including the director of the Spanish documentary, Miguel Rosales, who was invited to speak, as well as the black Spanish dancer Yinka Esi Graves.

From the point of view of the sociology of art, all these events prior to the events of the production context of the *Flamenco Negro* spectacle characterize an *art world* (Becker, 2010), a concept that refers to the set of social relations that constitute a work of art. These relations include not only the artists involved more directly in the artistic production, but also other social actors and even the wider social networks in which the artists are embedded.

The research found that some of the artists involved in the production of the *Flamenco Negro* spectacle in 2021 had participated in the event *Flamenco Negro: histórias silenciadas* in 2020. Not all of those involved in the live streams were black people. However, the event sparked subsequent conversations on the topic among some black Brazilian flamenco artists who had participated or attended. This led, over a period of one year, to the formation of the artistic concepts that would culminate in the construction of the dance spectacle *Flamenco Negro* in 2021.

Not all the artists who built the *Flamenco Negro* spectacle had participated in the live streams in 2020. This event, therefore, was also composed of other social agents, but it was a constitutive part of the social process that led to the production of the *Flamenco Negro* spectacle in 2021. It consolidated the social relations and exchanges of affections that influenced the perception of the artists who later engaged in the collective action of the production of *Flamenco Negro* on the theme of racism, blackness and the black identity of women in flamenco.

Flamenco Negro was marked, therefore, by the black origin of all the dancers involved in its conception and who appear centrally in the scenes. The dancers Ana Medeiros, Patrícia Correa, Bianca Benevenuto, Rose Correa and the violinist Gabriela Vilanova were black women living in the city

of Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul; and dancer Jemima Ruedas and the singer Isadora Arruda were black women from São Paulo. The artistic director, Sílvia Canarim, the announcers Thaís Virgínia and Luciana Meira, as well as the musicians who composed the soundtrack, were white².

Initially, the choreographer and creator of the show, Ana Medeiros, had been selected in a notice from the company Marco Polo for the presentation of another flamenco spectacle, entitled *Mujeres de Água*, from 2020. The notice required a counterpart from the artist. Initially, the choreographer proposed a video lesson in which she would talk about the black influence on the history of flamenco, to be presented on July, 25, 2021 the date of Black Latin American and Caribbean Women's Day. However, as the artist narrated, an episode she experienced in the flamenco artistic environment involving the issue of structural racism led her to change her mind.

According to Ana Medeiros' account, when she approached a Brazilian flamenco musician about the indirectly racist content contained in a canonical lyric from the traditional flamenco repertoire, she received an evasive answer. The musician claimed not to recognize any trace of racism in the lyrics. Immediately the scene of the fourth dramaturgical nucleus of the spectacle, which will be described later, was idealized by the director and choreographer. From it, the spectacle *Flamenco Negro* took shape, adding other scenes that also narrated episodes of the daily life of the flamenco universe involving racial issues, based on the reports of the other dancers.

Ana's attempt to respond to the aforementioned episode by constructing a spectacle on the theme of racism is what Bourdieu (1996) calls a stance taking, which represents a dimension of the agency of this black artist within the field of flamenco. Thus, from a sociological point of view, even this and other conflicting social relations that these artists established with other agents of the flamenco world were constitutive of this work of art.

Also according to Becker (2010), the worlds of art are the artists and their networks of cooperation and social interactions. In the speeches of some dancers, it was evidenced that the personal and political positioning, referring to racial issues, was still "relatively recent" in their lives; that they had never before talked about the theme of racism in the artistic scene, and referred to the last year of conversations since the live stream on 2020. Therefore, the debate about racism that had already been established in the

social network in which Ana Medeiros lived had an impact on the way these social actors began to see themselves in flamenco, constituting their positions as agents of this field of art in the face of racial issues and their own identities as black women.

In this sense, the chain of events that led to the construction of the spectacle functioned as a formative experience of the black consciousness of these artists and evidenced the path of *becoming black*, by Neusa Santos Souza (1983). This concept refers to the knowledge of being black in a racist society. It is about confronting with the existence of racial stereotypes and the self-deprecating psychological states created by them in order to build a positive and self-affirming black identity. It is the acquisition of *black consciousness* (Munanga, 2017).

In addition, all the agents involved in the production of the Spanish documentary and the Brazilian livestreams stated that they had never seen this theme addressed or debated in flamenco. Considering that, in the field of flamenco, all professional artists always seek to learn about each other's works of art in search of references of this specific artistic culture, it is possible to consider *Flamenco Negro* the first professional flamenco spectacle to address the theme of racism in its dramaturgy and to put on stage only black dancers.

With general direction, conception, scenery, costumes and choreography by Ana Medeiros and with artistic direction by Sílvia Canarim, the show was presented for the first time on July, 25, 2021 in virtual format, due to the covid-19 pandemic, originally consisting of a 20-minute duration video. In the same year, the work received the Açorianos Award for Best Dance Spectacle in Rio Grande do Sul.

On November 20 of the same year, the show was adapted to the face-to-face format, with an additional time of 40 minutes, totalizing 1 hour in duration, being presented at the Teatro de Arena, in the city of Porto Alegre. On November 16, 2022, this version was presented again at the opening of the *VIII International Symposium Desigualdades, Direitos e Políticas Públicas: novos ativismos e protagonistas na reinvenção da solidariedade social*, held by the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciências Sociais of Unisinos, in the same city.

As the dramaturgy of *Flamenco Negro* was inspired by the individual experiences with situations of racial discrimination lived by the artists throughout their life trajectories, several dancers stated that they had to deal with certain painful memories throughout the process of artistic creation. Thus, the whole process implied dealing with what Sueli Carneiro (2011) calls “the pain of the color”. Many scenes that will be described in the following section sought to represent these traumatic experiences in a poetic way. However, despite this painful dimension, all the artists stated that the process was also accompanied by positive feelings, by a “relief for not having to keep it anymore”, by a satisfaction for “being able to talk about it” or for “being able to take it to other people”.

Analysis of the spectacle

Flamenco Negro is a contemporary spectacle that breaks with traditionalist thoughts and closed conceptions about this art, because, although it has flamenco culture as its centrality, it also uses references from other dances and music, related to the Atlantic Afro-diasporic culture. Among the elements that constitute it, the following stand out: body movement (dance) and the signs of the lyrics of the songs as constituents of the dramaturgy of the work; the alternation between scenes in a process that does not necessarily result in a linear narrative; and the use of text and verbal expression, which places the spectacle in an aesthetic close to theater. Most of the dramaturgical components (music, texts, costumes, choreography and the corporeality of the dancers) aim to narrate blackness in the universe of flamenco dance.

In order to analyze the meanings of the dramaturgy of the work, the spectacle was divided into five narrative nuclei. For this purpose, a table was built and used to group the themes that were identified. They were not necessarily divided according to the changes of scene, music or costumes, but according to their thematic focus: 1) the black contribution to the history of flamenco art; 2) the discrimination of the black subject in flamenco; 3) the black body and the aesthetics of flamenco dance; 4) the condition of black women in flamenco; and 5) ancestry.

In the first narrative nucleus, named as *A Contribuição Negra na História da Arte Flamenca*, the stage is slowly illuminated and an image emerges

from the darkness: six black women, who are the five dancers and the violinist, are arranged as in the composition of a painting, all standing facing the audience.

In the background, the sound of an African drum is heard, and the voice of the announcer speaks:

The *cante* is *gitano*³, the music is Moorish and the dance is Black. I do not lie in any of the three statements, but in none do I tell the whole truth. Because recognizing that there is only one dogma in flamenco and it is the mixture, in each of its expressions a dominant gene is manifested. The gypsy ended up racializing the *cante jondo*⁴, however much it hides recitations of the same Corán. The guitar speaks Arabic, even if it is made, as Lorca said, with Greek barge wood and African mule's mane. And the Black people birthed the three strains of flamenco dance that they took to America, and later Andalusians and Castilians danced with the same tapdances: the *zarambata*, the *fandango* and the *tango* (Medeiros, 2021b).



Figure 1 – Spectacle *Flamenco Negro*, by Companhia de Arte La Negra Ana Medeiros. Artists: Ana Medeiros, Gabriela Vilanova, Patrícia Correa, Rose Correa, Bianca Benevenuto and Jemima Ruedas. November 20, 2021, Porto Alegre, Brazil. Source: Photo by Fábio Zambom.

With these words, extracted from the book *Flamenco: arqueología de lo jondo*, by Antonio Manuel (2018, p. 141), the debate of the new historiography of flamenco about flamenco art also being, in part, of African and African-American origin is summarized. Thus, the initial narrative nucleus of *Flamenco Negro* highlights the multiracial character of this art, emphasizing

the transatlantic black diaspora as a constituent of some body grammars and musical structures present in flamenco culture.

In the development of the scene, precisely one of the flamenco musical styles that has an African matrix, the *fandango*, appears soon after. Slowly, the artists begin to undo the initial pose and start dancing the *fandango* in a scenic action in which each dancer performs a dance solo in the center, one at a time. This scenic action refers to the organizational logic of a flamenco *juerga*⁵, in which the *performers* are arranged in a circle and one dancer at a time goes to the center to perform a dance improvisation to the sound of collective clapping.

According to Sodr  (2017), the circle or wheel is the most frequent formation of group rhythmic movement in the symbolic configuration of Africans, structuring most of their dances. The author also states that, in African cultures, the dance danced in a circle symbolically reworks space and momentarily modifies symbolic and social hierarchies through the integration between individual bodies and a kind of collective body, a kind of social philosophy put into action (Sodr , 2017). In the scene, the dynamic that is established is that of a *juerga*, denoting this collective bond that is created in dance circles in which everyone participates in the performative event, both those in the center and those who are supporting the musical percussion by clapping.

The *juerga* through *fandango* is executed all the time under the watchful eye of the older dancer, who is sitting on a chair in the background. This refers to the African notion of ancestry, which will be discussed later.

In the second scene, still from the first narrative nucleus, a voice declaims, partly in Portuguese and partly in Yoruba, a poem written by the general director Ana Medeiros:

Neither so white nor so black. The bottom of my well is shallower than yours.
But the path I walk is the same cutting noon. Neither so white nor so black. I
climb an immense mountain, with dignity and refinement. I am a seamstress.
And my blood is black. At the tip of the needle I embroider the same royalty
that allowed my ancestors to shine and re-exist. Neither so white nor so black.
But underneath the epidermis, the same exposed wound. Prejudice. Rejection.
Acceptance. Forced to tolerate it. Neither so white nor so black. I am, I
follow and I embrace myself. I embrace you (Medeiros, 2021b).

Thus, the text refers to the type of social subject common to the context of 19th century Spanish society, in which flamenco art was configured: the mestizo individual. Like flamenco itself, whose cultural hybridity did not occur through a smooth and harmonious process, free of conflicts, here, the black flamenco woman, descendant of enslaved people and situated at the bottom of the economic hierarchy of the world of work and therefore having as an option only to work as a seamstress, exposes the tension of her between-places identity. The identity narrated here is the product of the disjunction between the binary racializing discourses, which propose only one type of black identity. The account therefore disrupts identity binarisms in line with the overall concept of the spectacle itself, whose cast is composed of dancers with a very wide range of black skin tones. It also shows a narrative of a black flamenco woman who does not surrender to assimilationism⁶, reaffirming her blackness.

In the next narrative nucleus, the *Discriminação do Sujeito Negro no Flamenco*, the theme of individual racial discrimination is addressed. In the second scene, a dancer and a violinist are on stage. A voice of some character located outside the scene, but which, in the context of the scene, implies that it is a choreographer or artistic director, corrects the positioning of the dancer on stage with racist comments: “how difficult it is to position you”, “your color doesn’t fit”, the “costume doesn’t fit with your color” (Medeiros, 2021a). With the successive corrections, the dancer is placed further and further down the stage, becoming less and less visible.



Figure 2 – Spectacle *Flamenco Negro*, by Companhia de Arte La Negra Ana Medeiros. Dancer: Patrícia Correa; musician: Gabriela Vilanova. November 20, 2021, Porto Alegre, Brazil. Source: Photo by Fábio Zambom.

The text used in this scene refers to speeches that the dancer heard on some occasions throughout her life trajectory. Some of them, at certain times, discouraged her to continue dancing flamenco, to the point of leading her to abandon her practice for some time. In terms of dance dramaturgy, this demotivating effect is represented through her body movement. At first, the dancer dances with more stage presence. However, with the successive corrections of her position on stage and discriminatory speeches, her bodily expressiveness becomes more restrained and her stage presence diminishes.

Here, one of the ways in which racism can operate in practice is depicted. Racism can be defined as the systematic domination of one ethnic group by another, accompanied by representations and ideologies that essentialize and belittle the subordinated group (Monsma, 2017). It has two dimensions: a practical one – the institutions, social networks and individual actions that systematically reproduce it – and a symbolic one – that of classification systems, ideologies or categories of perception of the world through which physical differences or other symbolic markers are negatively valued. At the practical (action) level, racism can also be divided into three dimensions: structural, institutional and individual (Almeida, 2018).

This scene demonstrates how individual racism operates in everyday life through a mechanism of reproducing the hierarchies of structural racism in face-to-face interactions. According to Fanon (2008), the systematic and structural discrimination of Africans and people of African descent created a symbolic structure within which *blackness* was marked by depersonalization, that is, as something outside the very idea of human nature. The black body was thus signified as without humanity. The author points out that racism against black people has a fundamentally ontological dimension, which organized the entire perception of the so-called *Western* world in which the black body was fated to remain in the zone of non-being, of non-humanity.

In the words of Neusa Santos Souza (1983, p. 7):

The discrimination of which his body is the object, does not give truce to the humiliation suffered by the black subject who does not give up of his human rights, resigning himself to the passive condition of 'inferior'. A curious and tragic condition. It is at the very moment that the black person

claims his condition of equality before society that the image of his body appears as an intruder, as an evil to be remedied.

In the scene, a black dancer claims her equality condition by trying to assert her place within the flamenco art scene. However, her body is soon signified as an evil to be remedied, as her color is not considered adequate to match any other element of the scene. It is, then, inferiorized and hidden due to the mark of its color, being pushed further and further to the back of the stage.

Towards the end of the scene, the voice of the announcer says: “[...] this rhythm, by *alegrías*⁷, will not be enough for you to dance, because only the white of your teeth will appear” (Medeiros, 2021a), making, once again, a derogatory reference to the black phenotype in the scene. Here we have, therefore, a denunciation of racial discrimination or racism that acts at the individual level through the imposition of a hegemonic somatic norm. This kind of event can unfortunately be quite common nowadays in various contexts in the worlds of the performing arts. It can result in low visibility or the lack of it, as well as low protagonism of black people in the art scene, which can lead these subjects to stop wanting to dance smiling expressively and positioning themselves in front. Or it may even lead them to abandon the practice of flamenco.

Finally, the announcer asks the ultimate question: “Are you sure you want to dance?” (Medeiros, 2021a). In short, as if it were not enough to say that this body is an intruding body, accompanied by attempts to invisibilize it, by taking it further and further to the back of the stage, the voice that represents racial discrimination asks if this body is sure that it should be there, claiming its existence in art.

Throughout the scene, however, the character shows non-acceptance or agreement with the event portrayed. The costume is black, which may also refer to the idea of non-acceptance or mourning when remembering that event. Right after the announcer’s last speech, the dancer walks to the center of the stage and begins to perform a dance solo. The music is a *farruca*, a flamenco musical style, whose lyrics tell of a dove that had its wings cut off so that it would not fly away. But the dancer dances with virtuosity and expressiveness.

In the continuation, comes the nucleus *O Corpo Negro na Dança Flamenca*. In the first scene of this narrative nucleus, a dancer begins her choreography with both arms bound by restraints, which limit her movements. The dancer starts tap dancing, performing music with her feet, but she cannot move her arms. Her body movement expresses a tension, a will to free herself.

In one of her speeches at the meetings for the construction of the spectacle, the same dancer who solos in this scene said that, in her dance, within the flamenco artistic milieu, she had always felt “very contained”.



Figure 3 – Spectacle *Flamenco Negro*, by Companhia de Arte La Negra Ana Medeiros. Dancer: Bianca Benevenuto. November 20, 2021, Porto Alegre, Brazil. Source: Photo by Fábio Zambom.

This scene results, therefore, from the dancer’s personal experiences in making her life trajectory within a predominantly white flamenco world. Here, the notion of institutional racism allows us to elaborate the claim that the flamenco milieu, in some contexts in Brazil, functions as a racist institution. That is, it reproduces structural racism through the aesthetic dispositions learned by its agents in positions of power, such as teachers and others, to whom the field gives authority to define the rules of aesthetic value judgment. In the accounts of this and other dancers, it was evident that many masters of flamenco art with whom they lived reproduced the disqualification of their black corporeality.

Here it is worth emphasizing that there is no black body in an essentialist and universal sense, since the learning of body techniques (Mauss, 1974) in dance is shared and embodied socially and culturally. Thus, different black individuals, subjected to different types of social experiences and body training schools, embody a great diversity of black corporealities in dance.

However, as dance is an art that has the body as the center of its representations, one of the ways structural racism operates within the field of dance is through the disqualification of some characteristics of the black body. Both in flamenco and in other arts permeated by representations, symbolic imaginaries and racial stereotypes, “the body is the first place of attack of racism” (Rufino, 2016). The phenomenon of racism has historically always operated, among other mechanisms, through attempts to integrate the black body within the aesthetic references of a white hegemonic culture (Hall, 2003).

In the development of the scene, gradually, the dancer begins to free herself from her bonds, releasing first one arm, then the other, until she finally frees herself completely and begins to dance free in the center of the stage, a *siguiriya*, a flamenco musical style that represents anger or rage. In her reports, this same dancer stated that, although the themes proposed by the *Flamenco Negro* spectacle touched on very sensitive emotional points for her, referring to racism, the process of artistic creation was also, at the same time, something *liberating*.

In the next scene, the same theme is represented in another way. A dancer enters the scene and performs a solo. After some time, the voice of the announcer says: “Hey! What are you thinking, dancing like that? Hey, do you think you’re at Sapucaí, twerking around like that?” (Medeiros, 2021a). Here, the spectacle shows one of the many ways in which racism imposes an aesthetic regulation on the black body. Even though flamenco originated from Afro-diasporic rhythms and today’s flamenco is diverse, even adopting elements of contemporary art and dance in terms of diversity of body movements (Navarro García, 2006; Canarim, 2017), we have this kind of regulation that disqualifies the ways in which black flamenco artists have found to express themselves in dance.

It is worth noting here that, in the colonial period, Africa was considered a world of *peoples without history*, and the term *primitive art* was used

to create a negative conception of the art of peoples subjected to colonial domination. The field of dance, as the construction of a specific aesthetic regime, was constituted simultaneously with the diffusion of such racial stereotypes, whose distinctions allowed the recognition of only certain expressive forms of body movement. We can understand this disqualification of the bodily sign evoked by hip movement in flamenco as the reproduction of an aesthetic norm in the body that dances.

The movement with the hips, present in many African and Afro-diasporic dances, has historically been linked to derogatory value judgments about the movement of the black body. In the colonial period, the dances of enslaved populations (including *jongo* and other dances generically called *batuques*) in which hip movement was emphasized were called “lascivious” (Freycinet, 1825). It was said that they revealed shamelessness and indecency, which were morally harmful. Even after the end of the colonial period, Afro-diasporic popular dances, such as *candombe* or *maxixe*, were disqualified (Velloso, 2007).

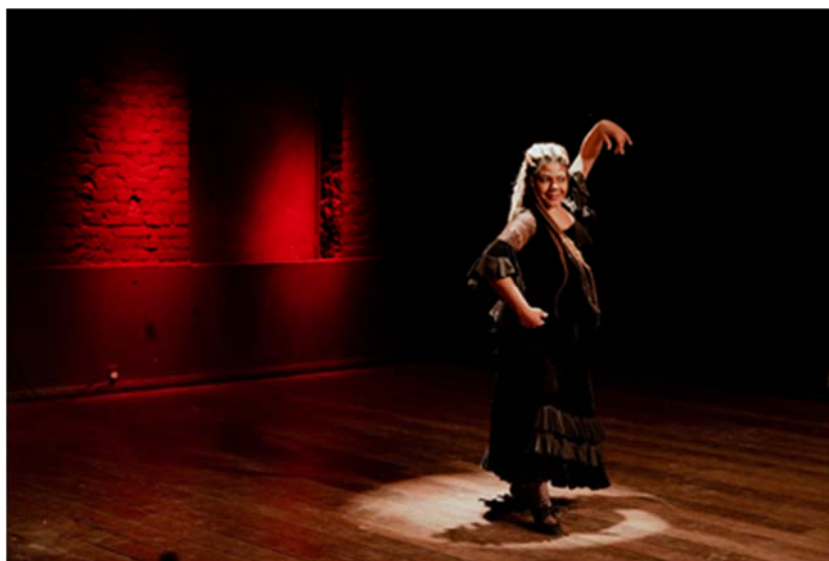


Figure 4 – Spectacle *Flamenco Negro*, by Companhia de Arte La Negra Ana Medeiros. Dancer: Jemima Ruedas. November 20, 2021, Porto Alegre, Brazil. Source: Photo by Fábio Zambom.

According to Munanga (2020, p. 16), racial discrimination against the black subject has been fundamentally carried out “[...] by the inferiorization of their body before reaching their mind, spirit, history and culture”. However, the inferiorization of the body is often combined with the disqualification of black culture, the so-called epistemic racism or epistemicide (Carneiro, 2005). In the scene, this double mechanism of discrimination is demonstrated: at the same time that the body movement of the black body

is disqualified, a reference is made to the samba (through the question “Do you think you are at Sapucaí?”), another Afro-diasporic dance, to demarcate a border of distinction and reinforce aesthetic norms.

As Hall (2002; 2003) notes, it is on the socially signified body that racism operates, and it is in the body that identities and social performances resistant to racism are sustained, in a conflictive field marked by a struggle for the control of signification and the imposition of hegemonic cultural representations. In this sense, the vigilance and control over the expression of black bodies in flamenco dance is not dissociated from the broader control over the very definition of what is the field of flamenco art. As can be perceived from the phrase enunciated in the scene, right after the lines that disqualify the body movement: “This is not flamenco!” (Medeiros, 2021a).

As Bourdieu (1996; 2008) observes, the symbolic differentiation between what is or is not art depends on processes of aesthetic distinction that, in turn, depend on the instances of legitimization of the status of artist, which reflect the broader power relations of society. According to the author, there is always some “dependence of the field of art on the field of power” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 77). Thus, the normative definitions that constitute styles, aesthetics and the fields of dance and music themselves correspond to the social hierarchies existing in other social fields.

The theme of the sexualization of the black woman’s body appears in both the second and fourth narrative nuclei, with more centrality in the fourth. In the second narrative nucleus, this already appeared in the content of the lyrics of the song played on the violin. The fourth narrative nucleus also has the representation of the text contained in the lyrics of the songs, plus the symbolism contained in the gestures and dance movements, which is why I named the second nucleus as *A Condição da Mulher Negra no Flamenco*.

According to González (2020), racism causes black women to be seen from two stereotypes: the domestic and the *mulata*. The word *mulata* is symbolically related to racist images that associate the black woman’s body to a body automatically available for sex. In the first narrative nucleus, the song played is *É Luxo Só*, by Ary Barroso and Luiz Peixoto, which uses precisely the term *mulata*, which refers to the reflection on the high exploitation of the image of the black body in the imaginary that permeates Brazilian popular music.

This theme returns in the fourth narrative nucleus, in which the song *La Morenita*, a popular flamenco song, and the Brazilian song *O Teu Cabelo Não Nega Mulata*, both songs that reproduce racial stereotypes about the black woman's body, are mixed with the Brazilian song *A Carne*, by Elza Soares, which is just the opposite, that is, a denunciation of the structural racism that affects the black body. The difference is that, in the fourth nucleus, the soundscape oscillates between two cultural universes, the Brazilian and the Spanish, referring to the fact that racism operates in both cultures.

The scene features a black dancer with a single spotlight on her body and the rest of the stage in darkness. She tries to dance, but at every moment she is interrupted by hands that emerge from the shadows, touching her body. She needs to repel these hands in order to continue dancing. This nucleus brings a narrative of the black woman's body deprived of its dignity or the recognition of its humanity and, simultaneously, constituted as an object of desire, of erotic and sexual pleasure, when it acts within the artistic scene of flamenco dance. In other words, it refers to the specific way in which the black woman's body is racialized from the interaction between two different vectors of oppression: racial violence and gender violence.

Here I highlight the notion of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2002; Kerner, 2012; Collins, 2019), which refers to how different systems of hierarchization and domination, such as racism and sexism, articulate or combine. Another equivalent notion is that of generified racism, by Kilomba (2019), which names the inseparability between gender and race in the oppression suffered by black women, since the very construction of black women's gender is already gestated within racism.

According to Nagel (2003), in the history of colonization, symbolic representations of exotic and hypersexualized peoples were configured, with erotic accounts of young native women abounding in the imagination of European men. From the 20th century onwards, this was reinforced by the global tourism industry. According to the author, there is today a very close relationship between conventional tourism and so-called sexual tourism. Even when conventional tourism is not directly linked to the commercialization of sex, its advertising often reinforces sexual stereotypes about the racialized body of native populations, considered exotic. Thus, the scale of the commercialization of sex

has increased with the rise of travel and globalization. Many of the world's tourist destinations are now also places of intense sex trade.

In this line of analysis, when a black Brazilian woman dances flamenco, perhaps old fantasies of dances from exotic places and the sexuality of their inhabitants intersect with stereotypes about the black woman's body, based on racial and gender hierarchies, identified by authors such as González (2020). This articulation between stereotypes on black women and the global erotic imaginary about cultures considered exotic demands further research in dance.

The dramaturgical narrative of the fourth narrative nucleus proposes to the spectator the reflection on this theme, which causes many black dancers of various dances to be reduced to the imaginary of sexually available bodies. It can also lead the audience to question the common practices related to generifed racism within flamenco dance. Furthermore, it touches on important issues also for flamenco music professionals regarding the relationship between certain contents of traditional flamenco *cante* lyrics and the Brazilian social world of flamenco dance, which is predominantly composed of women, including black women.

As the scene unfolds, the dancer frees herself from the hands touching her body and walks away to other parts of the stage. Then she starts dancing a *petenera*, a flamenco musical style that represents pain and redemption.



Figure 5 – Spectacle *Flamenco Negro*, by Companhia de Arte La Negra Ana Medeiros. Dancer: Ana Medeiros. November 20, 2021, Porto Alegre, Brazil. Source: Photo by Fábio Zambom.

At the end of the fourth narrative nucleus, the same older dancer who appeared in the first nucleus returns to the stage. She places a *mantón*⁸ over the body of the dancer who is in the scene and then embraces her. There is a dance sequence with the *mantón*, as if the dancer is now equipped with renewed energy. The *mantón*, as well as the hug, seems to represent something that is passed on, from one generation to another.

In the fifth and last narrative nucleus, the same older dancer who observed everything from the background in the initial scene returns to the scene and collects the *mantón* that was left on stage. According to Fu-kiau and Lukondo Wamba (2000), Sodr  (2017) and Oy w m  (2021), the valorization of the wisdom of the elders as guardians of the community's collective wisdom and memory is a cultural characteristic present in African cultures. It is associated with civilizational values, such as the transmission of knowledge through orality and the notion of a non-cyclical time, which links the present to the past. This cultural trait, which is called ancestrality, survives in the African Atlantic diaspora (Sodr , 2017). As, for example, Gilroy (2001) notes, it creates a notion of emotional time, unrelated to the chronological, which leads to the survival of Africanisms in Black Atlantic cultures in parallel to innovations.

In this narrative nucleus, wisdom and ancestrality return to the scene. It is the turn of the dancer to dance to the song *Cordeiro de Nan * a song to orix s of Brazilian popular music. All the other dancers enter and dance in a circle around her. Here, the costumes undergo a change: the outfits are more colorful, with vibrant colors.



Figure 6 – Spectacle *Flamenco Negro*, by Companhia de Arte La Negra Ana Medeiros. Dancers: Ana Medeiros, Bianca Benevenuto, Rose Correa, Patricia Correa and Jemima Ruedas. November 20, 2021, Porto Alegre, Brazil. Source: Photo by: Foto de Fábio Zambom.

Then, the dancer representing the ancestry takes the *mantón* to the chair, which appears once again in the background. All the dancers go there and position themselves, as if they were composing again the same picture as at the beginning of the spectacle. In a kind of network of diverse meanings, the cultural resistance of the African-American black man within the African diaspora is portrayed as a process rooted in an ancestral past, but simultaneously inserted in contemporaneity.

In the end, the show directs the audience to a more positive outcome, in which we see the same black dancers all dancing together in situations contrary to the situations of oppression narrated in the previous sections. They dance and exercise all their artistic power in flamenco dance with joy and great expression.

As bell hooks (1995) states, many of the narratives of black struggle and resistance that continue to this day concern the politics of spaces. In this final scene, we see a group of black women asserting their position and protagonism within the flamenco art scene.



Figure 7 – Spectacle *Flamenco Negro*, by Companhia de Arte La Negra Ana Medeiros. Dancers: Ana Medeiros, Bianca Benevenuto, Rose Correa and Patricia Correa; musician: Gabriela Vilanova. November 20, 2021, Porto Alegre, Brazil. Source: Photo by Fábio Zambom.

Final considerations

The study showed that there is a relationship between structural racism, the different scales of oppression it produces and the positions and dispositions allowed to social actors within the field of art; and that, nowadays, despite advances in the face of racism, the black body, in many contexts of the artistic scene, is still seen as an intrusive element, as an impossibility for the gaze of those who reproduce racism. Specifically in the universe of flamenco, where black representation is still scarce, the black body is still almost invisible and, when it becomes visible, its expressiveness, its speech, its creative act and its artistic agency are curtailed.

It was found, therefore, that the spectacle brought to reflection issues that are still difficult to understand for a significant portion of Brazilian society. The discussions and representations about blackness and black identity, as well as the true episodes of racism, experienced by the performers and portrayed in their dramaturgy, show the need for a permanent and deep reflection on the theme.

The research also found that the narrative mobilized for the constitution of the dramaturgy was the result of a social network that articulates the construction of a community of meaning related to the theme. Previous

events, such as the Spanish documentary and the theoretical instrumentalization process obtained in the 2020 live stream, as well as the process of creating the spectacle itself, consolidated social relations, generating exchanges of affections. These, in turn, altered the racial perceptions of the individuals involved with the production of the work, consequently producing an intersubjective and collective construction of a black identity in the Brazilian flamenco scene.

The debate on historical reviews that emphasize that flamenco art has an African and Afro-diasporic cultural heritage was one of the constitutive elements of the network of meanings that guided this whole process. Thus, it was found that the past of colonial traumas (Kilomba, 2019) can lead black individuals to find meaning in the study of Afrodiasporic musicalities and dances as part of the very process of acquiring a racial consciousness. Therefore, the research demonstrated that the black Atlantic diaspora, as a collective experience, still influences the black experience in dance art today and can enhance the construction of black artistic identities.

Another constitutive element of the network that emerged from the production of the show was the experience of sharing situations of micro-violences of everyday racism. This led the black artists involved in the production of this work to resignify their traumatic experiences, situating them within a collective dimension. As such affections and perceptions became material for the dramaturgy of the show itself, artistic identity and personal identity were revealed as constructed within a single process, in which art was not separated from everyday life and the poetics of blackness were revealed as constituted from social relations.

Finally, by using only black artists in the scene, the work legitimized the presence of a black flamenco body in the artistic scene, positively affirming its existence in the face of a racist society. In this sense, *Flamenco Negro* is an invitation for us to reflect on how this is still an important strategy of resistance in a society still marked by the weight of structural racism.

Notes

- ¹ I use here the division of the history of flamenco by Hernandez (2002): 1) Primitive or Pre-Flamenco stage (1800- 1860); 2) Flamenco Golden Age

(1860-1920); 3) Flamenco Opera (1920-1950); 4) Neoclassicism or Renaissance stage (1950-1985) and, then, contemporary flamenco.

- 2 Jef Lima, Helena de los Andes, Alexandre Palma, Sônia Bentto, Diego Zarcon and Tuti Rodrigues.
- 3 Gypsy.
- 4 *Deep chanting*, related to loneliness or sadness, in Flamenco culture.
- 5 A meeting or gathering in which flamenco dancers, singers and musicians, arranged in a circle, put their artistic skills into practice in a collective improvisational dynamic.
- 6 Perspective of thought that advocates the assimilation of peripheral cultures or identities by dominant cultures or identities.
- 7 The *por alegrías* dance, one of the oldest flamenco musical styles, is characterized precisely by the way the dancers dance, *por fiesta*, that is, with a happy, festive or smiling expression.
- 8 Silk shawl with bangs, typical of southern Spain and incorporated into the costume of Flamenco culture.

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