

## **If There Were a Single Bahian (Brazilian) Dance Culture...**

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### Abstract

How might culture be embedded in artworks? As a Brazilian artist performing abroad, I often receive feedback suggesting that my solos are deeply related to my “roots”. Such experience led me to three reflections: 1. It is tempting to reduce a dance experience by seeing only; 2. It is ambitious to pinpoint someone’s culture through a dance; 3. Stereotypes prevent the exchange and flourishing of innovative ideas. In this paper, I will refer to my performance *Sombreiro* (2018) to explore how shadows can be used to connect people to culture. By sharing dance, psychology, history, and anthropology references, I will discuss how shadow aspects of Bahia served as choreographic strategies to suggest a sense of unknowing and otherness in the audience.

*Keywords:* Brazil, Bahia, culture, dance, shadow

Brazil is a nation of 27 states with different cultural backgrounds and practices. Five regions compose the country which serves as a parameter to draw some similarities and differences between the states. Even with globalization, some foreigners find it difficult to understand Brazil's diversity and multiculturalism. This paper discusses how some characteristics of Bahia, a north-eastern state, can be culturally integrated into a dance piece. Rather than suggesting an immutable way of doing so, the effort is to draw a discussion on the strategies developed by a Bahian dancer to signify its culture artistically.

The northeast of Brazil is formed out of nine states: Bahia, Pernambuco, Sergipe, Maranhão, Rio Grande do Norte, Alagoas, Paraíba, Recife e Piauí. All of them face the Atlantic Sea and have beautiful beaches, which contributes to the population's way of living and attracts national and international tourists. However, the Brazilian northeastern states also suffer from dry seasons in the countryside.

Bahia is a state that attracts people for its natural beauty, culture, and history. It was at Cabralia, Bahia, where in 1500 the Portuguese arrived in Brazil. There they encountered native people and soon started to exploit the goods of the region. They brought also brought in African slaves from Angola, Benin, and Mozambique. Daniel Shafto states that:

Salvador was the center of the slave trade during Brazil's slavery era, which lasted from the mid-16th to the end of the 19th century. As a result, the city's culture reflects African traditions much more than other Brazilian cities (Shafto, 2009, p. 56).

When in 1888 slavery was abolished, the slaves were set free without any opportunity to ascend in society. This unfairness has been present in Bahian society ever since, especially visible in Salvador, its capital, where there is a concentration of white wealth, whereas the majority of dark-skinned people, have little. This despite the fact that Salvador is the city with the highest concentration of black inhabitants outside Africa. The influence of Africa in Bahia is ever present in the colourful way people dress, their cuisine, music, dance and more.

In the following, a focus on dance is apt because of the scope of the article and the background of its author. Bahian Afro Dance is popular in dance centres in Salvador. It mixes elements of Orishas, goodness and entities full of symbolism and movement emphasis. This paper has not been written by a Bahian Afro Dance specialist, but by a Bahian dancer and researcher who has extreme respect for that dance and believe in the power and value of cultural exchange and dissemination. It is split into three sections. In 'Culture and dance' I explore choreographic ideas in the analysis of *Ondine* (1843) by Jules Perrot. In particular, I draw connections to my production *Sombreiro* (2018) which refers to cultural shadows. This solo is approached in "a dance, many shadows". Lastly, in "the unsettled", I present the findings of a study and discuss possible ramifications following from them.

### **Culture and Dance**

The frictions of a society can differ depending on the transient characteristics of the culture shared. To support this idea, a text by anthropologist Christoph Brumann is helpful. As he notes:

Cultures can have no "natural" boundaries but only those that people (anthropologists as well as others) give them, and delimiting a certain set of elements as a culture can

therefore be only more or less persuasive, never ultimately “true” (Brumann, 2005, p. 55).

The concept of culture in the plural form, as “cultures”, works to highlight its characteristic of flow and movement. A consideration of West is also valuable for the analysis of the possible cultural dimensions of dance performances. As she notes:

Parts of what Jung calls the cultural shadow - qualities a culture suppresses, denies, or ignores - are clear to those outside the culture (West, 2007, p. 35).

Following West, shadows in dance performances can be analysed as a process of representing qualities suppressed within a culture. In the analysis of *Ondine* (1843) by Jules Perrot,<sup>1</sup> the use of shadow serves as a form of fascination and distraction. In considering culture to be mobile, I refer to its aspect of moving forward that, at times, does not invite people to reflect on themselves as special individuals, but rather as collective actors in a performance.

Before delving into the use of shadows in *Ondine* (1843) by Jules Perrot, it is relevant to give an overview of this piece. *Ondine* is part of an oeuvre of ballets choreographed by Perrot which historically belongs to the romantic era from 1830-1840s. Dance historian Susan Au argues that Perrot took inspiration from a fantasy book to create *Ondine*. In her words:

Since early times man has populated the waters with imaginary half- human creatures. The ancient Greeks had their naiads and nereids, the Hindus their apsaras, and the Germans their nixies. Although belief in these fantastic folk waned with the centuries, people in the early nineteenth century still found the notion of water sprites charming and appealing, and thus a popular literary heroine, *Undine*, was born. Her tragic story, told by the German author Baron Friedrich Heinrich Karl de la Motte Fouqué in the novel *Undine*, in turn inspired one of the most famous Romantic ballets, Jules Perrot’s *Ondine, ou la Naiade*, first produced in London in 1843 (Au, 1978, p. 159 – original emphasis).

Amongst many similarities with the book, the ballet *Ondine* also takes place outdoors, in nature, telling stories of villagers. Two skilled ballet dancers play the parts of the protagonists: Fanny Cerrito<sup>2</sup>, as Ondine, and Perrot, the director himself, as Matteo, Ondine’s lover. Au summarises the development of the piece:

The ballet consists of six scenes that are confined to two locales: a Sicilian fishing village and the naiads’ undersea realm. The action is continuous and takes place within two days. The ballet opens with the villagers’ preparations for the Festival of the Madonna. After several dances they depart, leaving Matteo alone on the shore. As he casts his nets into the water, a large shell rises bearing the alluring form of Ondine. She entices him to a precipice and beckons him to leap after her into the water, but he is saved by the timely arrival of friends (Au, 1978, p. 161).

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<sup>1</sup> Jules Perrot (1810-1892) was a French ballet dancer and choreographer. His pieces include *Die neapolitanischen fischer* (1838), *Alma* (1842), *Ondine* (1843), *La Esmeralda* (1844), *Eoline* (1845), *Kaya* (1845), *Catarina* (1846), *Lallah Rookh* (1846), and *Faust* (1848). See: Garafola, L. (1997) *Rethinking the Sylph: New Perspectives on the Romantic Ballet Studies in Dance History*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Fanny Cerrito (1817-1909) was an Italian ballet dancer and choreographer. She became popular in England in ballets she performed with Perrot. See: Lee, C. (2002) *Ballet in Western Culture: A History of its Origins and Evolution*. New York: Routledge.

Out of the six scenes mentioned by Au, one is remarkable in *Ondine* because of the use of shadows. As is common in other romantic ballets such as *La Sylphide*<sup>3</sup> and *Esmeralda*<sup>4</sup>, a triangle of lovers is evidenced here. Matteo loved Ondine, but he was engaged to Giannina, another villager. In an attempt to attract Matteo, Ondine takes shape of Giannina with a shadow:

Ondine then assumes Giannina's form and leaps ashore to dance the famous Pas de l'Ombre, or Shadow Dance, in which she revels in the novel sensation of having substance and a shadow (Au, 1978, p. 164).

### Figure 1

*Ondine* (1843) by Jules Perrot – Fanny Cerrito in the Pas de l'Ombre (Au, 1978, 163- Photo by Ivor Guest)



The image above (Fig. 1) shows the Pas de l'Ombre scene in which Ondine dances with her own shadows on the floor. Ondine was fascinated with her double figure, and was curious about her newfound, shadow-producing materiality. A similar sense of curiosity was sought in the process of developing *Sombreiro* which is described in the further session of this article.

Lynn Garafola, a dance historian, provides an alternative view to consider the use of shadows in *Ondine*. Garafola outlines that Perrot took inspiration from the visual arts for the creation of *Ondine*. As she argues, Perrot's production aligned with other choreographers of his time:

<sup>3</sup> *La Sylphide* was a ballet created in Paris in 1832 by Filippo Taglioni. Garafola. It is considered the main representation of the dance romantic era. Garafola lists *La Sylphide*'s characteristics: "Its themes of the supernatural, exotic folklore, and the quest for the ideal were skillfully realized in the union of scenic effects, diaphanous costumes, shadowy gas lighting, and above all, the expressive use of dance technique, in particular the pointework and lightness of the female dancer." See: Garafola, L. (1997) *Rethinking the Sylph: New Perspectives on the Romantic Ballet Studies in Dance History*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

<sup>4</sup> *La Esmeralda* was a ballet created in London in 1844 by Jules Perrot. See: Garafola, L. (1997) *Rethinking the Sylph: New Perspectives on the Romantic Ballet Studies in Dance History*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Some choreographers went so far as to imitate specific paintings, in the manner of tableaux vivants, such as Perrot’s representation of Léopold Robert’s celebrated “La Fête de la Madonne” in his ballet *Ondine* (Garafola, 1997, p. 23).

The connection between a scene of *Ondine* and painting is interesting for making a link with the use of shadow in this ballet. Art-history literature relates the studies on shadows in the visual arts to the origins of painting itself. Already Pliny the Elder suggests that the first practices of painting used shadow as both inspiration and representation. As Romanian art historian Victor Stoichita cites Pliny:

[The origin of the art of painting] began with tracing an outline around a man’s shadow and consequently that pictures were originally done in this way (Pliny XXXV, in Stoichita, 1997, p. 11).

Reflecting on Pliny’s considerations, I read the Pas de l’Ombre scene in *Ondine* as representing Perrot’s interest in pictorial design. Taking into consideration that *Ondine* is a piece related to romantic ballets, which are known by their characteristic theme of divertissements, the use of shadows amongst other fully lit scenes was useful to create contrast.

As an emblematic ballet, especially because of the use of the shadows, *Ondine* inspired cartoonists to produce graphic pieces from it. The editors of *The Punch*<sup>5</sup>, a British magazine, took the Pas de l’Ombre scene as a motivation to criticize an influential politician.

### Figure 2

*Daniel O’Connell in Punch, v. (1843), 69. Image from the book: Williams and Williams (2005, p. 61)*



<sup>5</sup> *Punch Magazine* was a British caricature magazine founded by journalists Henry Mayhew, Mark Lemon, and Stirling Coynem engraver Ebenezer Landells and printer Joseph Last in 1841. It had a liberal bent and criticised royal habits. The publication of *Punch Magazine* ran for 141 years. Petersen points out that, “The primary title, *Punch*, was based on the name of the offbeat lead character in the Punch and Judy puppet theater that entertained middle-class audiences along seaside resorts” (p. 79 – original emphasis). See: Petersen, R. S. (2011) *Comics, Manga, and Graphic Novels: A History of Graphic Narratives*. Santa Barbara: Praeger.

The image above (Fig. 2) depicts Daniel O’Connell,<sup>6</sup> a determined Irish politician who established the Repeal Association to abolish the union with Britain in 1839. The cartoon in *Punch* illustrates a bouncing male figure dressed as a female. In the background, on the right, a blurring figure resembles the face of a bold male. I interpret the satirical drawing as revealing O’Connell’s feeling as a tangled politician who suffers due to separatist thoughts – the shadows on the tree’s roots also facilitated my reading.

My interpretation of the drawing found support in a reading by Lawrence J. McCaffrey, a political science specialist. McCaffrey explains that O’Connell invested in the Repeal for believing that Ireland was being treated as inferior in the Union. McCaffrey affirms that in time the Westminster Review contacted O’Connell to say that his ideas were not good. As he mentions,

the *Westminster Review* told O’Connell that he was wrong in his claim that the English people hated the Irish people. Apathy, not hate, best described the British attitude toward Ireland and the Irish (McCaffrey: 1966, p. 111).

In combining McCaffrey’s consideration with my interpretation of shadows in the satirical drawing (Figure 2), I picture O’Connell as lonely and unsupported. The details of the hand-shadows, which do not match with O’Connell’s right hand, suggest horror, as if the shadow revealed the dangers of chasing Repeal.

Leslie Williams and William Williams, an art historian and a historian respectively, compare the similarities between a poster of *Ondine* and the cartoon in *Punch*:

The main difference is that while the dancer is posed *en point* with her right hand over her head to balance herself while her left gestures towards her shadow, O’Connell reaches madly for his shadow with both hands, threatening to throw himself off balance. The uncooperative shadow, labeled ‘Repeal,’ thumbs its nose at the over-eager Liberator. O’Connell is depicted as victim of his own delusions (Williams and Williams, 2005, p. 61 – original emphasis).

Following Williams and Williams, the representation of O’Connell’s shadow is associated with an error, a mistake that he could have prevented by controlling his own shadows as a person with a side that is not appropriate to share with the rest of the society. For example, O’Connell could have given up of the Repeal if he had heard the suggestions of the Westminster Review, as described earlier in this section in the text by McCaffrey. In 1844, three years after establishing the Repeal Association, O’Connell was imprisoned. This consequence reinforces a reading of shadows as repulsive, which relates to Jung’s the primal concept shadow as something a person does not wish to be.

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel O’Connell (1775-1847) was an Irish nationalist leader who managed to change the British government to guarantee a seat in the House of Commons in 1828. At that time, Roman Catholics, such as O’Connell, were ineligible as candidates to the House. Available at: World Dictionary: <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100244944?rskey=w9tMSG&result=2>.

More recently, in 1958, Ecuadorian-born British choreographer Frederick Ashton<sup>7</sup> directed a new version of *Ondine*. Music scholars William E. Studwell and Bruce R. Schueneman link the German composer Hans Werner Henze (1926-2002) with Ashton in the creation of *Ondine*:

The Henze/Ashton work was based loosely on the novel by Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué. *Ondine* had been staged several times in the 19th century, and while Ashton went back to the novel for inspiration, he did retain Jules Perrot's earlier staging idea: the *pas de l'ombre*, in which Ondine, catching sight of her shadow for the first time, dances with it (Studwell & Schueneman, 2012, pp. 48-49 – original emphasis).

The fact that Ashton chose to invest in the *pas de l'ombre* demonstrates how shadows continue to be a rich stimulus for choreography. In this regard, Perrot's piece has contributed to dance pieces across different centuries. In trying to continue the studies of shadows in dance practices, I developed practice-led research through experiments in the studio with light, shadow and darkness (chapter four) valuing not only a scene, but looking for strategies of producing an entire performance with shadows, *Sombreiro* being the result of the investigation (chapter five).

The analysis of *Ondine* was relevant for the development of *Sombreiro* because I could thereby connect it to the studies on cultural/political shadows. The reach of *Ondine* as influencing cartoonists of the nineteenth-century and a choreographer of the twentieth-century, contributed to my desire to pick up ideas from Bahian society to frame *Sombreiro*, a dance piece created in the twentieth-first century. Whereas *Ondine* featured the Festival of the Madonna, I drew inspiration from two Brazilian festivals, one of which was held in honour of Yemanjá, a feminine, Afro-Brazilian mythological figure. Furthermore, the interplay of light, shadow and darkness in *Ondine*, inspired my series of experiments in the studio, before the conception of *Sombreiro*.

### A Dance, Many Shadows

*Sombreiro* was presented in different venues in the UK and in Prague, Czech Republic. One motivation I had to create the piece was connections from home while living in a post-colonialist country (UK). An author who is important for me in these analyses is Rinda West (2007), a Jungian specialist, through her book *Out of the Shadow*. West takes into consideration novels by American Indian writers to discuss shadow linked to the negative effects of colonialism. A text by West on cultural shadow is useful to picture my experience of producing *Sombreiro*:

Like the construction of ego, the construction of culture engenders shadow: some beliefs and behaviors must be suppressed, and these make up the unconscious, repressed, and denied shadow of the culture. Early in evolutionary history people must have understood that survival required suppressing impulses to kill members of the clan. As cultures developed, taboos became more elaborate, requiring individuals to conform to complicated codes of desire and behaviour. These moral codes carry emotional charges, have the force of divine sanction, and are enforced by collective power (West, 2007, p. 14).

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<sup>7</sup> Frederick William Mallandaine Ashton (1904-1988) was the principal choreographer and director of the Royal Ballet in England. He had a prestigious career directing around thirty ballets. See: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Frederick-Ashton> Accessed: 29 October 2019.



By “collective power”, West refers to cultural shadows as shaping the moral codes of cultures. An example she gives is that for Christians, the collective shadow is the devil. For the creation of *Sombreiro* I took a field study in Brazil attending the 2017 Maragojipe Carnival and the Yemanjá festivity in Salvador looking for shadows. In both events, I noticed few protesters carrying signs. They went to the streets to denounce corrupted politicians and highlight the presence of the shadow of moral bankruptcy in Brazilian society.

My reading of the protesters in street festivities of Bahia as shadows mobilized more studies on the colonization processes. In analysing *Heart of Darkness*<sup>8</sup> by Joseph Conrad (1899) and *The Oregon Trail*<sup>9</sup> by Francis Parkman (1872), both describing the process of colonization in the USA, West reflects on shadows. She states:

[The two books] expose the psychological dynamics of conquest. In both cases the invaders believed themselves possessed of higher culture, intelligence, and virtue. Conflating native people and the land they inhabited, they split from consciousness their own viciousness, greed, power lust, and cruelty, projecting these qualities onto the people and places they overran and thereby rationalizing their conquest (West, 2007: 36).

The racist idea of hierarchy, i.e. that colonialists were more valuable and intelligent than natives, can also be described as a way of projecting shadows. In Brazil, for example, the Portuguese’s conquest was mobilised by the idea that the Indians’ customs were inferior. The result of this thinking was the massacre and exploitation of native people.

### Figure 3

*Sombreiro* (2018), Flavianna Sampaio. Photo by Solomiya Lekhiv



In reflecting on possibilities to link cultural shadows into *Sombreiro*, I planned the solo aiming to offer to the audience a remarkable experience though connections between my body and my shadows (figure 3). Following Grobras, Reason, Tan, Kay and Pollick dictum that “The

<sup>8</sup> *Heart of Darkness* (1899) describes Conrad’s work on a steam-boat in the Congo in 1890. This trip was planned by the King Leopold II of Belgium that aimed “to conquer the native population, harness them for labor, and strip the continent of its ivory and rubber” (West, 2007: 33). See: West, R. (2007) *Out of the Shadow: Ecopsychology, Story, and Encounters with the Land*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia.

<sup>9</sup> *The Oregon Trail* (1872) describes Parkman’s observations on a trip by land in wide parts of the United States. He often refers to Indians as savages while making racist comments on them: “Parkman fantasizes about shooting the man ‘to see how ugly he would look’. He sees these people as images, the focus of his aesthetic gaze, objects rather than subjects” (West, 2007: 48). See: West, R. (2007) *Out of the Shadow: Ecopsychology, Story, and Encounters with the Land*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia.

appreciation of art is a subjective process often linked to motional/hedonic experiences (2017: 57), I intended to reach my audience emotionally. I wanted the public to engage with my piece in a deep and unique way. This aim can be connected to a statement by American choreographer Sean Dorsey:

As a dance maker, it's my job to create work that people can be impacted by (Dorsey in Smith, 2016: 31).

In looking at strategies to make *Sombreiro* impactful, I considered the location of the audience as a relevant area for investigation. Through video recording, placing the camera at different levels of the raked seating, I noticed that a standing position was best for my performance because it would make it easy for the audience to see my shadows on the floor. This strategy challenges the traditional seating arrangement in theatres, which tends to make the audience comfortable and passive for a receptive response guided mainly by the motion of the dancer. This idea is also engaged by dance scholar Susan Foster, who stated that,

I argue that any notion of choreography contains, embodied within it, a kinesthesia, a designated way of experiencing physicality and movement, that, in turn, summons other bodies into a specific way of feeling towards (Foster, 2011, p. 2)

By “other bodies” Foster means the audience, which I took as a stimulus to define the exact location of my audience. In general, I have recorded myself during rehearsals mostly from the raked seating, and the existence of a small balcony in the studio raised my interest to test how a person would engage with my performance from there. The balcony was around six meters wide, three meters high, and located on one side of the studio. If the audience were to look directly down on my performance from this asymmetric position, I would need to define my performance space on one side of the stage. I restricted my performance space to an area of approximately five by five meters. By placing the audience on the balcony overlooking the performance area, they were positioned in a high position but close to me, something not possible in the standard seating and stage plan. In fact, a standing position in the raked seating would have appeared “fake” as the seats were still present and the highest possible location was further back the room, with empty seats between the audience and the performing area. In the chosen arrangement, all the seats were removed, enabling me to configure parts of the piece very close to the audience, which I perceived as positive to motivate the audience’s attention.

The diverse locations of the choreographic units across the stage invited the audience standing on a balcony, to engage with *Sombreiro* using their entire bodies. The necessity of keeping body balance and at the same time moving one’s head to follow my movement in space throughout the twenty-minute performance, engaged the viewers’ whole bodies in the act of paying attention to the performance. In particular, the standing position *per se* required some energy of the public, a condition that challenged their usual spectatorial practice when seated.

Another passage from Foster is also pertinent to reflect further on the standing position of the audience in *Sombreiro*. She points out, from a mental perspective, how audiences engage with dance pieces:

Functioning at an unconscious level, proprioceptors participate in spinal-level reflexes that primarily assist in maintaining posture and balance, and they also contribute to the learning and remembering of physical activities such as sports (Foster, 2008, p. 48).

Following Foster’s considerations, I propose that in *Sombreiro* the audience’s location contributes to activate proprioceptors that assist posture. The inclination of the head that the audience must achieve in order to view the performance involves body balance as well as physical remembering of previous instances of elevated spectatorship. One image I have of the motion of the audience watching my solo was that they were looking down as if from a precipice.

#### Figure 4

*Sombreiro (2018), Flaviana Sampaio. Photo by Solomiya Lakhiv*



In an expansion of Foster’s belief that proprioceptors facilitate physical learning, I suggest that they also contribute to artistic learning. The main choreographic key theme of *Sombreiro* is the shadow and the audience’s raised location was designed to emphasise this occurrence on the flooring (Figure 4). The audience’s position enabled them to look straight down onto the stage, valuing the perception of shadows on the floor as a horizontal plane, rather than my frontal shape, viewed vertically. This arrangement was intended to work as an invitation for the public to engage deeply with my shadows.

A text by psychologists Corinne Jola and Shantel Ehrenberg, and dance specialist Dee Reynolds considers how dance audiences are immersed in choreographies during spectatorship. They explain:

Rather than purely personal and private, experience is treated as socially mediated. Audiences are considered as active agents in constituting the meaning of the performance through articulating their experiences. In describing and discussing their responses to dance performances, the spectators we dialogue with have the opportunity to tease out what they themselves consider to be important about what they have seen (Jola, Ehrenberg and Reynolds, 2011, p. 28).

The notion that audience members can individually consider what is important in a dance performance is the basis for the interpretation of shadows in *Sombreiro*. I believe that the arrangement of the solo allows audience members to individually interpret shadows as symbols. Similarly, McKinney concludes in her study of the nature of communication between scenography and its audiences that “[s]cenography can easily manipulate the viewer’s attention but audience members are also capable of making their own choices about what to focus on” (McKinney, 2008, p. 84). In the personal journey of watching *Sombreiro*, each person reads the piece according to his/her embodied experiences which frame the ways of identifying themselves within the piece.

As explained by Jola, Ehrenberg and Reynolds, the process for a dance audience to engage with a piece is connected to “what they have seen” on stage. In the case of *Sombreiro*, ideas of colonialism and protest, can be noticed in the performance. Taking into consideration that my solo was observed mostly by British people, I propose that my Brazilian background was something that could be noticeable and significant. A text by Foster facilitated reflection on this point:

The dancer’s performance draws upon and engages with prevailing senses of the body and of subjectivity in a given historical moment. Likewise, the viewer’s rapport is shaped by common and prevailing senses of the body and of subjectivity in a given social moment as well as by the unique circumstances of watching articular dance (Foster, 2011, p. 2)

Following Foster’s comments, I present the idea that in *Sombreiro* my Brazilian background is noticeable not only because it exists, but also because I chose to highlight it as a choreographic theme. In this sense, one interpretation of my shadows could be to place the audience in a (post)colonial context, as it is a subject that sometimes is avoided and the interplay of dark and light in my piece can be seen as a symbol of it.

Colonialism is an important, though conflicted, part of British cultural memory. Although Brazil was colonized by the Portuguese, colonial history might be a way for British audiences to engage with *Sombreiro*. The elevated position of the spectator, which often is related to power, might also be a key factor to link the performance with colonialism. Theatre scholar Christopher Balme reflects on *The Road* (1965), an African play written by Wole Soyinka,<sup>10</sup> which deals with colonial domination and how the audience access it:

They are outside the house, looking through the windows into the interior space, observing the officer and wife at their recreation. In a sense, Soyinka establishes a fifth wall between the audience and the action, instead of creating a conventional living room scene. This scenographic device places the audience in the position of the Yoruba subjects of colonial domination (Balme, 1999, p. 261).

Whilst Balme refers to the creation of a “fifth wall” as a symbol to approach colonial domination, in *Sombreiro* the positioning of the audience on the balcony raised their spatial position (and, symbolically, their social position) while simultaneously requiring them to stand and observe the performance from behind a balcony rail, which might have the effect of a “fifth wall”. If colonialism is connected to exploration of “unknown” terrains, in an authoritarian and manipulative way, in *Sombreiro* the capacity to influence the action is denied to the audience by their containment on the balcony. An ambivalent sense of disempowered colonial power might be read in the hierarchy of the audience being on a higher level than the dancer while not exercising any power over her, as the performance evolves with me not making any eye contact or engagement with the audience. During the whole performance, I, as a dancer, look straight ahead or down at my shadows. It is only at the end of the piece that I look up, to the ceiling, but the lighting does not value this positioning, leaving room for the audience to play multiple roles based on embodied experiences and their engagement and identification with the piece.

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<sup>10</sup> Wole Soyinka (1936 -) is a Nigerian playwright, poet, novelist and political activist. His influences include Yoruba culture, Shakespeare and the Greeks. More information can be found at: <https://www.oxfordreference.com/search?q=Wole+Soyinka&searchBtn=Search&isQuickSearch=true> Accessed: 01 February 2020.

The audience of *Sombreiro* might alternatively relate the piece to a form of protest. Their standing position and/or my movement onstage may be reminiscent of riots in the past and recent times. In my movement vocabulary, I often dance abruptly, moving my arms and torso violently, which can be linked with anger, a kind of emotion that motivates people to fight for changes by mobilizing protests in the streets.

Through the standing position, the audience may have perceived themselves to be mirroring the Bahian protesters I observed in the street festivities. This link serves to expand the readings of the piece: As a protester, what kind of connection would the audience draw with me? Would they see me as a protester myself or as playing the role of a suffocating form of power? With me being a protester, would the audience feel sympathy, as if fighting for the same cause, or would they demonstrate a lack of empathy? Instead of considering the answers to these questions, I believe that it is most relevant to acknowledge that they exist and other interpretations can also be inferred.

An important approach to the symbolism of shadows for theatre spectators is found in already mentioned research by McKinney's scenographic. Interested in the communication between scenography and audiences, she analyses the allusive effect of shadows. By reflecting on her piece *The General's Daughters* (2003), McKinney argues:

The performers appeared first outside the room as large shadows, surrounding and disorientating the audience making them conscious of their own physical presence in the scenography (McKinney, 2008, 21-22).

As described by McKinney the role of the shadow in the piece facilitated the audience's disorientation. This reinforces the symbolic meaning of shadows also present in *Sombreiro*, in which the stated questions above might serve to inspire the process of the audience disorientation. Another important reflection on audience interpretations of shadows is documented in McKinney's thesis via a comment by a spectator herself:

[a female spectator] writes of the same performance that the woman in black standing in the shadows holding the boots made her feel sick although she did not know why (McKinney, 2008, p. 51).

Although audience response was not a research theme per se in *Sombreiro*, McKinney's thesis serves to defend the idea that shadows can greatly affect an audience's interpretation of a performance. Reason and Reynolds also reinforces this thought by acknowledging how people are selective in the act of watching choreographies:

Audiences' emotional responses to dance movement, therefore, are produced by the *process* of engaging with the work rather than elements found within the work alone. In other words, spectators' responses to movement are not produced in a singular manner by the movement alone—a particular quality of movement always producing a particular kind of response—but also by the interpretative strategies with which individual spectators engage with that movement (Reason and Reynolds: 2010, p. 68).

Whilst in Reason and Reynolds "movement" seems to strictly refer to dancers' movement, in *Sombreiro* I attribute it to the movement of lighting and shadow in relation to sounds and

silence. For this, I mixed silence, live sound and recorded music,<sup>11</sup> to emphasise the interplay of shadows, lights, blackouts and the surrounding darkness of *Sombreiro*.

### **The Unsettled**

The cultural and political aspects connected with the implicit aesthetic of the solo contributed as a driving force to shape the piece symbolically. The studies on colonialism informed my reading of the street festivities of Bahia as events allowing the performance of collective shadows. As a result, I reflected on the protesters in the streets as a shadow, a feeling that affected my body movement, and facilitated the creation of the lighting and the atmosphere of the solo. The reflection on cultural shadows can be used by other artists not only to signify culture but also to feed new strategies to create art.

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<sup>11</sup> Part of *Sombreiro* (2018) is available on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/274889126> Password: IJCS.V7

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