

## Revising the Record in Lusophone Historical Drama

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**Abstract.** This article analyzes Lusophone historical drama written during the 1960s-1970s in Brazil and Portugal. After commenting on the contributions of Bertolt Brecht, Enrique Buenaventura and Antonin Artaud to the Lusophone stage, I demonstrate how playwrights such as Augusto Boal, Gianfrancesco Guarnieri, Bernardo Santareno, and Alfredo Dias Gomes adapted dramatic techniques to rewriting oppressive periods of history such as the Inquisition and slavery. I conclude that for the Lusophone playwrights, the events of the past were analogous to contemporary repression under the Salazar regime and the Brazilian military dictatorship.

Historical drama is a sub-genre of theatre that dates back millennia. The earliest plays with historical themes were written by Greek and Roman dramatists, including Aeschylus, Phrynichus, and Seneca. Over the centuries innumerable playwrights have tried their hand at the craft of recreating historical situations and personalities for the stage. Among the most notable are Shakespeare and Ben Jonson of Elizabethan England and Lope de Vega and Calderón of Golden Age Spain. Yet, no matter what time period or national theater involved, it can be said that there is usually a direct correlation between the history selected and the period in which the drama was written. As Herbert Lindenberger writes in *Historical Drama: The Relation of Literature and Reality*, "The continuity between past and present is a central assertion in history plays of all times and styles" (6). Though the historical drama may treat a period of

time long passed, there is some link with the current day. Audiences watching the drama are usually able to identify the similarities between the past and present through the portrayal of familiar situations and characters. Oftentimes, though not always as in the case of Shakespeare's Roman plays, playwrights draw from events that have occurred in their own countries. Episodes in national histories that have a connection to the current era thus tend to be the most commonly used material for historical dramas because the audience is more familiar with its own history than with that of other nations.

Many playwrights employ historical themes in their work as a way in which to comment on the socio-economic and political systems of their day. Rather than staging their political views outright and attracting the attention of censors, the composers of historical dramas use a more subtle and oftentimes cryptic approach of presenting analogous situations to make their point. This, however, does not always work, as witnessed by the numerous cases of censorship and even harsher forms of punishment for criticizing the establishment.

In the adaptation of history for the stage playwrights also imbue their own perspectives of the past. Any interpreter of history, whether he or she is a historian or playwright, infuses a personal viewpoint regardless of the rigor of his or her research methodology. In his work on the writing of history Hayden White affirms that ideology influences the recording of history, just as in any other narrative. He postulates that ideology cannot be removed from the interpretation of history, for "every representation of the past has specifiable ideological implications" (*Tropics of Discourse* 69). Furthermore, for White, facts or events do not in and of themselves make the story but rather how they are put together. It is the historian who "makes his story by including some events and excluding others, by stressing some and subordinating others" (*Metahistory* 6). Playwrights composing historical drama revise the historical record by emphasizing certain aspects and offering perspectives that are sometimes different from the official version of history. In *Theatre of Crisis: Drama and Politics in Latin America*, Diana Taylor explores how playwrights such as Enrique Buenaventura of Colombia questions the authorized rendition of the past by including a variety of events, outlooks, and versions that are usually not considered. By doing so he attempts to "inscribe and make audible the voices that have traditionally been kept out of Colombian History, voices of the victims, the victimizers, the participants or collaborators who make up the infernal world of his plays" (186).

In the case of two Lusophone countries a number of historical dramas

were written in the 1960s and 1970s. It was during this time that a military regime seized power in Brazil, and Portugal was under the decades-old control of the Salazar government. Opposition groups in both countries were severely repressed and the arts were harshly censored. Of the various art forms, the ruling powers were most concerned with theater. Because theater necessarily brings together groups of people, it was feared that the masses could easily be stirred towards revolt. Furthermore, there was the possibility that performers would improvise onstage and read lines not already approved by the censors in advance. After the 1964 *coup d'état* and following the implementation of Institutional Act Number Five (AI-5) of 1968, which increased the censorship of artistic activity, it became very difficult to write and produce Brazilian theater. Both text and performance were subject to censorship—the text could be prohibited either officially or unofficially by being *engavetado* (“put in the drawer”), and performances were subject to cancellation at the last minute (Damasceno 116). An example of the latter is the case of *Calabar: O elogio da traição*, by Chico Buarque and Ruy Guerra. Days before the opening night, the censorship bureau cancelled the production indefinitely, leading to the loss of money and time of those involved in its creation.

In order to address these conditions and offer a critique of their governments, Lusophone playwrights looked to the past for similar periods of oppression and found them in the examples of slavery and the Inquisition. Portugal was very much involved in the slave trade from the time it first arrived in Sub-Saharan Africa and over the course of four centuries, transported millions of slaves to work in Brazil and the Caribbean. The second institution, the Inquisition, was created by the Roman Catholic Church to root out those who had lapsed in their Catholic faith or who belonged to other confessions. Though it had its origin in Rome, the Inquisition is particularly associated with Spain and Portugal, where it existed officially in the latter country until the nineteenth century. During the Inquisition, tens of thousands of people in Portugal and its colonies were brought before tribunals to defend themselves against charges of heretical acts such as spreading Judaism and witchcraft. Many were punished with sentences that ranged in severity from imprisonment to execution at the stake. Because of their brutality and overall significance in the history of Portugal and Brazil, these two events were used as metaphors for political repression in the modern era.

In their dramatization of slavery and the Inquisition, Lusophone playwrights drew from the work of others such as Bertolt Brecht, Enrique Buena-

ventura and Antonin Artaud. Of the three, Brecht had a tremendous impact. According to Lorena B. Ellis in her book *Brecht's Reception in Brazil* (1995), "Brecht's influence on Latin American theater not only brought a revolution in the aesthetic sense as it did in Europe, but also it caused sociopolitical awareness" (21). Portuguese-speaking playwrights identified themselves with Brecht's "Marxist-based analysis of social relations" (Counsell 80). The German playwright and theorist was committed to breaking down the existent bourgeois nature of theater, which did not reveal the underlying socioeconomic forces, and in transforming it to "show his audiences the true nature of society, thereby empowering them to change it" (Counsell 81). In order to do this he developed a new form of theater, which he labeled Epic theater. Epic theater was intended to elicit a critical rather than sympathetic response from the audience. John Willet explains that, "The essential point of [E]pic theater is perhaps that it appeals less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason" (23). Some of the various forms of Epic theater include the *Verfremdung*, or the alienation effect (A-effect), the use of film and music, and *Gestus*. The alienation affect sought to break the spectators' concentration on the "reality" onstage with distracting signs and labels, causing them to view the performance more objectively. Film projections were included in Brechtian theater to incorporate material that the playwright wanted the spectators to consider *while* viewing the stage performance. Indeed, according to Willet, Brecht viewed film as "a new, gigantic actor that helped to narrate events" (78). Music was also used in an entirely different fashion from earlier theater; instead of being added to merely entertain, the lyrics of songs brought up serious social and political issues. In *The Threepenny Opera* (1928), for example, the musical pieces "had the immediacy of a ballad, (and) were of a reflective and moralizing nature" (Willet 85). One of the most influential Brechtian techniques was that of *Gestus*, an encoding gesture that embodied social relations. Brecht believed that the gestures that actors made, both subtle, as in facial expressions, and more obvious, as in arm movements, represented social interactions and class distinctions (Counsell 86). With *Gestus*, movements onstage took on an entirely different meaning for they revealed socioeconomic and political attitudes. How an actor stood and what he or she did with his or her body divulged information regarding social class. Overall, Brecht placed great emphasis on the didactic possibilities of theater. He was convinced that audiences needed to be taught and that theater was "a means of teaching and transforming his society" (Willet 75). He devised

*Lehrstücke* or “instruction pieces” for audiences to learn from, for his ultimate goal was that they change society.

Another European playwright who greatly influenced the Lusophone stage was Antonin Artaud. Artaud was a theatrical director who developed the “Theatre of Cruelty.” As Bradby elucidates, the characteristics of this type of theater are “violence, sexuality, and the eruption of dramatic violence outside of the safe confines of the stage” (39). In *Theater and its Double*, a collection of essays published in 1938, Artaud postulates that

[t]he image of a crime presented in the requisite theatrical conditions is something infinitely more terrible for the spirit than the same crime when actually committed.  
(85)

Because theater is not “real,” the re-creation of violent scenes is disturbing in that they are performed specifically for a live audience. Each move and gesture is choreographed for the stage with a “visual language” of objects, gestures and movements (Artaud 90). In the historical dramas written in Brazil and Portugal during the 1960s and 1970s, there are many instances of violence—both physical and verbal. This reflected both the oppressive themes of history that were being represented onstage and convergently, the greater repression in society.

The third playwright and theorist who greatly influenced Lusophone historical drama was the already mentioned Enrique Buenaventura of Colombia. Born in 1925 Buenaventura founded the Teatro Escuela de Cali and wrote dozens of dramas. In many of his plays Buenaventura used a collage effect of unifying various pieces of information to offer a more inclusive perspective on history. Like Brecht, Buenaventura was committed to consciousness-raising and social change through the use of theater.

One of the first Brazilian theater groups that began experimenting with these forms of theater was the Teatro de Arena. Founded in São Paulo in 1953, the innovative theater in the round company was committed to encouraging popular participation in the theater and broadening its audiences to the lower and middle classes. Teatro de Arena first began staging works of foreign playwrights such as Tennessee Williams but later focused exclusively on original dramas by Brazilian playwrights such as Gianfrancesco Guarnieri. Augusto Boal explains that “This phase coincided with political nationalism, with the flourishing of industry in São Paulo, with the foundation of prizing everything that is national. At this time the Bossa Nova and the New Cinema were also born” (*Theatre of*

*the Oppressed* 162). Guarnieri's *Eles não usam black-tie* (1958) was one of the first successful plays produced by the group. It examined class differences in Brazilian society and the struggle of *favela* or shantytown dwellers in Rio. By the early 1960s Teatro de Arena became more active in making theater a locus for "political expression and mobilization for political action" (Damasceno 66). Because of their political involvement, a number of Arena participants such as Oduvaldo Vianna Filho and Augusto Boal were imprisoned and tortured.

After the 1964 *coup d'état* that brought a military regime to power, Teatro de Arena began staging plays that would challenge the military regime and its concept of Brazil. These plays drew from stories of Brazil's past that would provide a corollary to the current repressive situation. History was re-written and retold with an emphasis on giving voice to the vanquished. Rather than privileging the conquerors, thereby reinforcing the state-sponsored version of history, Arena sought to portray in a new light those who had been defeated. The intention was to encourage those outside the power structure, such as the Brazilian Left and working class, to continue their struggle.

*Arena conta Zumbi* was the first of a series of plays by the Teatro de Arena that was both historical and revolutionary. In it, playwrights Augusto Boal and Gianfrancesco Guarnieri adapted the story of Palmares from a book called *Ganga Zumba* (1962) by João Felício dos Santos (Campos 71). Palmares was the maroon community that existed in the hinterland of Pernambuco; During the seventeenth century runaway slaves under the leadership of Zumbi formed the agricultural-based community. Palmares was so successful that it numbered nearly 20,000 inhabitants and had extensive trading networks with neighboring non-slave villages. Fearing widespread slave revolt and departure as well as a powerful autonomous nation, the governor of Pernambuco demanded its destruction. In the end it took nearly five decades and thousands of men to defeat Palmares. Since its demise, Palmares remains in the national consciousness as a symbol of resistance to domination.

Arena tells its version of Palmares in a two-act musical, which features a "cantador" or narrator that is played by different actors. According to Boal in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, "All the actors were grouped into a single category of narrators; the spectacle ceased to be realized from the point of view of each character and came to be narrated by a team" (170). In Act I, slaves are treated brutally and encourage each other to run away to Palmares. There, under the leadership of Zumbi, they work hard to become a productive agricultural community. The Palmarinos, or inhabitants of Palmares, sell their

products to neighboring white villages. The peaceful relations between the two communities do not last, as the former landowners begin to complain about their loss of goods (i.e. the slaves) and encourage the once friendly neighboring whites to cut off relations with the former slaves. Before long the governor orders Palmares destroyed and in Act II, after a series of unsuccessful assaults, the whites ultimately annihilate Palmares. Before its destruction, though, Ganga Zumba, the grandson of Zambi, is born and becomes leader of Palmares. Zambi responds to the impending end of Palmares in a statement reminiscent of Bertolt Brecht's poem, "To Those Born Later" (ca. 1930).

In *Arena conta Zumbi* the playwrights creatively rewrite history, using myth and other less-than-exact documentation. The opening lines of the drama explain how the play was constructed.

Estudamos documentos  
 coisa escrita, assinada,  
 mas deixamos o coração  
 fazer a peça animada. [...]  
 Há lenda e há mais lenda  
 Há verdade e há mentira,  
 de tudo pegamos um pouco  
 mas de forma que servira. (12)

In this segment the playwrights describe how they researched written documents but let their hearts write down the story. They question the truthfulness of recorded history and challenge the information given by those in authority. Instead of privileging those who destroyed Palmares, the playwrights provide a different perspective—that of the former slaves. In this way *Arena conta Zumbi* sends the message that those outside the power structure, such as the Brazilian Left and the working class, should be heard.

Throughout *Arena conta Zumbi* there is a strong critique of capitalism in twentieth-century Brazil. This is made in several ways. First, slavery in the historical drama is depicted as inhumane and brutal. In Act I slaves are bought and sold at markets just like other salable goods. There is a market scene in which a merchant tries to sell his chattel:

MERCADOR. Olha o negro recém-chegado. Magote novo,  
 macho e fêmea em perfeito estado de conservação.

Só vendo moço e com forças. Pra serviço de menos empenho tem os mais fracos e combalidos, pela metade do cobrado. Quinze mil réis o são, sete mil e quinhentos os tropiados. Escravo angolano purinho. Olha o escravo recém-chegado, magote novo, macho e fêmea. (19-20)

Like livestock, the slaves are described in terms of their physical prowess and the work they can perform. They are seen not as human beings but rather as commercial items that can be used and abused.

As property the slave is treated cruelly. In *Arena conta Zumbi* there are several episodes in which the heartless treatment of slaves is graphically described. In one scene actors recite a list of the types of instruments used to punish slaves while in Brechtian fashion a screen above them shows slides of the torture instruments. This depiction of torture is effective in making the audience visualize the multiple ways in which the slave was coerced into working. By portraying how the slaves were sold like livestock and mistreated with instruments of torture, the playwrights are also making a commentary about the contemporary period. Working conditions in the factories and farms of 1960s Brazil were poor and the worker had little recourse of appeal due to the tight restrictions on unions and other organizations. The business elite held the working class in “economic bondage” regarding them as replaceable and forcing them to work long hours for little pay.

In *Arena conta Zumbi*, the playwrights provide a solution for their politically and economically torn nation in the form of a utopia. The definition of a utopia is “a place, state, or condition ideally perfect in respect of politics, laws, customs and conditions” (“Utopia” 485). Since a utopia necessarily implies an “ideally perfect” place, it cannot exist in reality. Yet the hope for a better situation or future is one that the playwrights wish to impart upon the audience. The dramatized Palmares is featured as a workers’ utopia—a classless society where freed slaves relish their freedom and work hard. This is a vision for a Brazil of the future in which—after the equal distribution of wealth and land—people could live side by side in freedom and peace. Palmares is thus featured as productive because the former slaves are happy to work for themselves instead of a slaveowner. This contentment with their new socio-economic status is reinforced with music and song.



Trabalha, trabalha irmão.  
 Trabalha, trabalha, de coração.  
 Palmares tá grande, Palmares cresceu,  
 com a força do braço do negro  
 que sabe o que é seu. (40)

The lyrics of this song reinforce the cry for equal distribution of land and wealth in Brazil. Before the 1964 coup, attempts were made on the part of the left-wing political parties to address the issue of land reform. Once the military came to power, all inroads were brushed aside and most of the land in Brazil—especially in the Northeast—continued to remain in the hands of a few powerful families.

Like all utopias, however, Palmares cannot last and in the end the Donos das Sesmarias or white landowners and others team up to destroy it. Nevertheless, the hope brought about by its very existence and lasting power—well over a century—is an example for those who struggle against oppression in the present day. When Zambi hands the kingdom of Palmares over to his grandson Ganga Zumba at the end of Act II, he recites lines that are a loose translation of Bertolt Brecht's poem, "To Those Born Later:

Eu vivi nas cidades no tempo das desordem. Eu vivi no meio da minha gente no tempo da revolta. [...] Assim passei os tempo que me deram pra viver. A voz da minha gente se levantou e minha voz junto com a dela. Minha voz não pode muito mas gritá eu bem gritei. Tenho certeza que os dono dessas terra e sesmaria ficaria mais contente se não ouvisse a minha voz [...]. (75-76)

In this statement Zambi describes how he lived in a time of turmoil and raised his voice along with that of his people. He knows that his actions did not please the rich landowners and the former slaveowners but that did not stop him. Regardless of the outcome, it is worthwhile and necessary to stand up to oppression. The inclusion of this poem in *Arena conta Zumbi* reflects how important the German writer's influence was both on the play and the Brazilian Arena theater group in general. It also expresses how the playwrights viewed themselves—as part of the opposition movement that rebelled against the status quo.

The end of the play illustrates that fighting oppression is not in vain. According to Robert Anderson: "Significantly, Zumbi is not killed in the final

battle of the play. His final self-sacrifice is implied in the hopeless battle at the end. Zumbi never dies, just like the legend that he spawned" (21). Zumbi transcends Death and is raised to divine status. His *apotheosis* and legacy continued as a lesson and inspiration for subsequent generations of slaves until abolition in 1888. For Brazil, the political repression at the hands of the military would last until 1985, when democracy was restored. In the case of economic oppression, though, the disparity between rich and poor continues to grow.

Whereas *Arena conta Zumbi* focuses its critique on the socio-economic system of Brazil through its portrayal of slavery, the historical dramas about the Inquisition attract attention to other aspects of life under dictatorship such as the limitations placed upon freedom of expression and the imprisonment and torture of those in the opposition. In *O Santo Inquérito* and *O Judeu*, playwrights Dias Gomes and Bernardo Santareno draw an analogy between the political dissident of modern day Lusophone countries and the Jew or *cristão novo* or New Christian. Over the centuries Jews were viewed as the "Other" within society and discriminated against because they held a different belief system. The playwrights associated this oppression with that of the political dissident who was considered a menace to society, imprisoned, and "disappeared" for his or her political convictions. The playwrights were also personally familiar with repression in their respective countries. Bernardo Santareno was jailed by the PIDE, the Portuguese secret police on more than one occasion. Alfredo Dias Gomes (b. 1922), knew many people who were imprisoned by the military regime and spent some time in exile for his own safety.

The two dramas about the Inquisition vary greatly in content and style. *O Santo Inquérito* focuses on the life of Branca Dias and some of her family members. As Dias Gomes affirms in the preface entitled "O que sabemos e o que pensamos das personagens": "Parece fora de qualquer dúvida que Branca Dias, realmente, existiu e foi vítima da Inquisição" (16). That is not entirely the case. There are scholars such as Anita Novinsky, an expert on the Inquisition in Brazil, who question the existence of Branca Dias.<sup>1</sup> Whether she actually lived or not is not an issue for the play because of the fact that her story is famous. This demonstrates the importance of an incident or personality in a historical drama being well-known. Indeed, Lindenberger extrapolates that "What matters to a modern audience [...] is not the historical accuracy of the fable, but the fact that, whether historical or mythical, the matter is 'publicly known'" (2). Since the story of Branca Dias is recognized throughout Brazil, especially in the Northeast, the audience can relate to her as a historical figure.

Dias Gomes dramatizes Branca's life in a two-act play set in 1750 in the state of Paraíba, Brazil. The characters include Branca's father (Simão Dias), her fiancé Augusto Coutinho, Padre Bernardo, and various members of the Inquisition. Act I begins with the Inquisitional trial of Branca Dias in which Padre Bernardo describes Branca's heretic crimes to the Visitador and the Notário. Next, there is a flashback scene to the first meeting of Branca and Padre Bernardo when the young woman saved the Padre from drowning. It is then that Padre Bernardo becomes fascinated with Branca's opinions about God and religion, leading him to conclude that Branca needs his help to rid her of heretic beliefs and practices. Soon, Branca's entire family comes under suspicion and her father Simão is interrogated about the family's New Christian ancestry. Act II begins with Branca in prison, wondering what is happening to her. She is repeatedly interrogated by the Visitador and Padre Bernardo. Her fiancé Augusto is also imprisoned and tortured in an attempt to make him testify against Branca. He dies during a torture session and Branca accuses her father of not trying to save him. At the end of the drama Branca refuses to renounce her beliefs and is sentenced to death. The final scene depicts Branca's execution in an *auto-da-fé*.

There is no doubt regarding the existence of the main character of *O Judeu*—Antônio José da Silva. Da Silva, or "The Jew" as he was known, was born in 1705 in Rio de Janeiro and brought to Portugal at an early age when his mother was summoned before the Inquisition under charges of practicing Judaism. He studied Law at the Universidade de Coimbra before moving to Lisbon to become a playwright. The playwright's life ended tragically in 1739 when he was executed by the Inquisition. Even after his death, da Silva's plays were presented in Portuguese theaters. Among his more famous plays are *Vida do Grande D. Quixote de La Mancha e do Gordo Sancho Pança* (1733), *Anfitrião ou Júpiter e Alceme* (1736), and *Guerras do Alecrim e da Manjerona* (1737). In these and other satirical dramas Antônio José da Silva was known for his use of puppets and his critique of the excesses of the upper classes.

In his portrayal of Antônio José da Silva's life Bernardo Santareno weaves together in collage format numerous excerpts from various texts, including letters from figures of the time, Inquisitional testimony and selections from Antônio José da Silva's plays. The drama is divided into three acts and the action takes place in a number of locations including Lisbon and Coimbra, where Antônio José da Silva is a law student. Act I begins with an *auto-da-fé* in which a Padre Pregador, or preacher, attacks the Jews. The audience is at first addressed

as if it were part of the masses watching the event before several actors come onstage to take the role of spectators. Next, the Cavaleiro de Oliveira appears as a narrator and comments on the *auto-da-fé* and the Inquisitional process. Throughout the drama this historical figure who lived in London as an exile explains the similarities between the period being performed and the twentieth century. He describes how difficult it is for António José da Silva to study law at Coimbra. Because of the garment that he is ordered to wear by the Inquisition he is tormented by students, especially the fearsome Estudante Pálido. In Act II António José da Silva meets and marries his cousin Leonor in the home of his mother Lourença Coutinho. At the end of the act there is a segment from António José da Silva's *Vida do Grande Dom Quixote de La Mancha e do Gordo Sancho Pança*. Act III begins with Lourença Coutinho's nightmare of the destruction of the Jewish people. There are projected images of the gas chambers of the Holocaust as a voice reads the names of concentration camps. Near the end of Act III António José is taken away after having been denounced by the Escrava Negra. He is interrogated, tortured, and eventually confesses. In the last scene there is an *auto-da-fé* in which António José da Silva is led to the pyre as people scream and the Padre Secular describes his sentence.

In each drama the playwrights try to emphasize the reasons why the protagonists attract the unwanted attention of the Inquisitional authorities and relate it to the present day. In *O Santo Inquérito* it is Branca's worldview that puts her at odds with the Inquisition. Branca naively discusses her ideas about God and religion with Padre Bernardo after she saves him from drowning in Act I:

BRANCA. O mais importante é que eu sinto a presença de Deus em todas as coisas que me dão prazer. No vento que me fustiga os cabelos, quando ando a cavalo. Na água do rio, que me acarícia o corpo, quando vou me banhar. No corpo de Augusto, quando roça no meu, como sem querer. Ou num bom prato de carne-seca, bem apimentado, com muita farofa [...]. (30)

Branca's view of God is not punitive nor coercive but rather simplistic and sensual. Branca feels God's love all around her—in the wind, the water, her fiancé's body, etc. It is precisely Branca's sensuality and her open feelings of love that most disturb Padre Bernardo. When Branca later describes how she once swam in the nude on a hot summer's night, the Padre is even more disquieted.

Throughout *O Santo Inquérito* there are frequent references to Branca's nudity and nocturnal river bathing. These begin in Act I, Scene 1, when Padre Bernardo declares, "Ela está nua" at the end of his opening statement to the tribunal (30). Though she has clothing on, the priest cannot or will not see it. During one of her interrogations she describes bathing in the river one night when she couldn't sleep. The Padre presses her to admit that her fiancé, Augusto, watched her bathing, yet it is the Padre who becomes the voyeur. He cannot keep the thought of the young woman swimming from his mind. The repeated references to Branca's nudity in the *O Santo Inquérito* and the Padre's reaction to it symbolize how disruptive sexuality can be to societies rigorously attached to conservative values. Indeed the military regime conceived of Brazil as a conservative, traditional, Roman Catholic country. Open sexuality was contrary to this ideal because in essence it involves the most basic freedom—freedom over one's mind and body. Under dictatorship the body and the mind are governed by an outside power that puts constraints on thoughts and actions. Arthur Miller, the author of a historical drama about the Salem witch trials theorizes that there is a link between sexuality and politics. "[B]elow its concern with justice the play evokes a lethal brew of illicit sexuality, fear of the supernatural, and political manipulation, a combination not unfamiliar these days" (164). For this reason, Branca's symbolic nudity is emblematic of personal autonomy—a concept that is problematic to traditional authority.

In *O Judeu* António José da Silva also has different ideas about life. He is interested in practicing his art as a playwright and does not understand nor appreciate the limitations being placed on him because he is of New Christian heritage. The New Christians were Jews and descendants of Jews who were forced to convert to Christianity. Because da Silva himself does not practice Judaism, he does not want to be labeled as one. In an exchange with his wife Leonor he describes how he sees himself:

ANTÓNIO JOSÉ. Eu sou tão-só um homem. Nem mais, nem menos. Nem raro de espírito, nem singular de corpo. Um homem; um qualquer. Tu, uma mulher sem marcas; uma no meio das gentes. Esta é a verdade. A verdade! (132-133)

António José da Silva cannot escape being called a Jew and feels that the label "Jew" personifies hatred. It is Leonor who reminds him that regardless

of how he sees himself, the outside society and the powerful Inquisition in particular view him as a Jew. Santareno is well aware that racial and religious labels such as “Jew” or “heretic” are a social construct and create a societal expectation for that person to become what he or she is considered to be by others. In Portugal under Salazar, those who differed in opinion with official government policies were considered subversives. This included all those who protested the restrictions placed upon freedom of expression. In addition to the extreme censorship of the arts, public gatherings were not allowed and the open discussion of politics was strongly prohibited.

For those who did not abide by the strict policies of the dictatorships there was the possibility of imprisonment and even harsher punishment. This is analogized in the plays about the Inquisition. In *O Santo Inquérito* there are several scenes in which Branca is in a jail cell, lamenting her predicament. There are also several references to torture. In Act II the Visitador demands that Augusto Coutinho be brought out before Branca. The audience is not shown what happened to Augusto, but from his wounds it is apparent that he has been tortured. Even though the actual torture session is not depicted, portraying the end result of it is effective in making the audience feel uncomfortable. According to John Fraser in *Violence in the Arts*:

If one is made to feel uncomfortable, it is because one is confronted with facts that one hadn't known, or hadn't thought carefully enough about, or is still reluctant to feel intensely about. (47)

Being visually confronted with evidence that young people like Augusto are being harmed is shocking and disturbing. The inclusion of such a scene is there to make audience members realize that a gross abuse of power is taking place around them and that they should do something about it. To reinforce the institutionalization of torture there is the dialogue between the Visitador and the Guarda. When the Visitador finds out that Augusto fainted after only fifteen minutes of torture even though the maximum allowed is an hour he declares that the guards should not have been so rough for:

VISITADOR. A finalidade da tortura é apenas obter a verdade [...]. (Dias Gomes 98)

The Visitador's strict tone reveals a certain “by-the-book” enforcement of the rules regarding eliciting confessions. It also signifies a larger organization

that is behind the use of torture. The allusion to clear guidelines in the torture of prisoners during the Inquisition to elicit information is also found in the twentieth century. According to Joan Dassin in *Torture in Brazil*: “The official proceedings of political trials held in military courts indicate that the authorities were fully aware of the routine use of torture during preliminary inquests, and that evidence produced under torture was considered valid in the courtroom” (x). During the military regime the authorities not only knew about the employment of torture methods to elicit information, but approved of it by using such methods in cases against the accused in courts.

In *O Judeu*, there are even more explicit scenes of torture. For example, in Act III the “*tratos de pole*” or pulley are re-enacted. The stage directions indicate how Antônio José is hung by his arms, then dropped violently toward the ground only to be jerked upward again, straining his limbs and muscles. Watching this scene of torture is not only revolting to the audience but also to those who participate in the torture. After watching the scene and hearing Antônio José confess, the stage directions call for the 1<sup>o</sup> Inquisidor to angrily stare at his superior, the Inquisidor Mor, turn his back and leave the room. In so doing he refuses to collaborate in a cruel and unjust institution. This reaction sets an example for the audience to follow in not supporting nor participating in present-day political repression.

A similar message of non-compliance with the system is offered in *Santo Inquérito*. Simão has just told his daughter that Augusto has died during a torture session rather than implicate her. He describes how Augusto finally succumbed while hanging from his ankles. After hearing that her fiancé has perished, Branca asks her father why he did not do anything to help Augusto. He responds that although he thought about lowering the rope he didn't.

SIMÃO. Eles têm leis muito severas para aqueles que ajudam os hereges. Eu já estava com a minha situação resolvida, ia ser posto em liberdade...

BRANCA. Bastava um gesto...

SIMÃO. E o que me custaria esse gesto? Um homem deve pesar bem suas atitudes, e não agir ao primeiro impulso. Eu podia ter tido o mesmo destino que ele. Era ou não era muito pior? (115)

After hearing from her father that Augusto is dead, Branca reacts with shock and at first blames “eles,” or the Inquisition, for Augusto’s death. Then she questions her father’s actions and learns that he could have done something to save Augusto’s life, but did not so as not to compromise his own. Branca wants to know why Simão did not offer a *gesto*, or gesture to help save Augusto. In a Brechtian sense the *gesto* or *gestus* as implied by Branca is symbolic of involvement. Simão, like many people of Dias Gomes’s day, did not want to become involved in the stand against the dictatorship for fear of risking his own life. Branca in turn blames her father for being an accomplice to the death of Augusto and, symbolically, for the continuance of the military regime in Brazil. She says:

BRANCA. O senhor é tão culpado quanto eles.

SIMÃO. Não, ninguém pode ser culpado de um ato para o qual não contribuiu de forma alguma.

BRANCA. O senhor contribuiu.

SIMÃO. Não matei, não executei, não participei de nada!

BRANCA. Silenciou. (117)

Though Simão tries to distance himself from Augusto’s death, Branca finds him responsible for not saying anything. Even his denial that he did not kill, order or participate is rebuked with his daughter’s statement that he was silent. For Branca, silence means complicity. She continues with, “Quem cala, colabora” meaning, literally, that whoever fails to speak, collaborates. With these three words Dias Gomes points an accusatory finger at those in the audience and in Brazilian society at large who do not rise up and protest what is happening in their country. The playwright is making a plea for action against the regime of his day on the part of the erstwhile “silent majority.”

For playwrights writing under dictatorship, the historical drama proved to be an effective tool in which to address issues such as socio-economic inequality, the repression of civil rights and the imprisonment and torture of political dissidents. By going back to the past, Brazilian and Portuguese playwrights found their inspiration in actual episodes of history. Because their intent was to critique the regimes in power, Augusto Boal, Alfredo Dias Gomes, Gianfrancesco Guarnieri, and Bernardo Santareno put their own take on the past—privileging some material and perspectives over others.



They employed techniques derived from the theater of others, namely, Brecht, Artaud, and Buenaventura and adapted them to their own stage. The playwrights were extremely committed to educating the public as to what was happening around them with the hope that they would do something to change the political system. In terms of avoiding the censors, the two Brazilian plays studied suffered only minor cuts and were produced shortly after being written. It was not until 1968 when the A-I 5 Institutional Act No. 5 was in place that censorship laws became more stringent and similar productions were forbidden. *O Judeu* did not fare as well. Banned from the stage, the play was first performed in 1981—fifteen years after it was written, and sadly, a year after Santareno's untimely death. In a most ironic and perhaps fitting turn of events, the performance took place in the Teatro D. Maria/Casa de Garrett, located atop the ruins of Palácio Estaus, the headquarters of the Inquisition. In a symbolic way, the verdict against Antônio José da Silva and the thousands who were persecuted during the Inquisition was overturned. Since the return to democracy in Portugal in 1974 and in Brazil in 1985, there have been fewer historical dramas produced. Especially in Brazil, the relative lack of political constraints on artistic expression has made the covert use of history as seen in the dramas analyzed in this talk less necessary.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In an interview Anita Novinsky stated that there is no reliable proof that Branca Dias actually existed.

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