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Art and Trade in a Postcolonial Context: In Search of the Theatre Routes Linking Brazil and Portugal (1850 – 1930)

Abstract

Between 1850 and 1930, the transatlantic voyages between Portugal and Brazil made by Portuguese and Brazilian theatre companies reflected the post-colonial cultural relations between the two countries. The theatrical activity produced in Portugal provided parameters for the organization of companies and quite durable acting models in Brazil, where many theatres relied on foreign companies' repertoires. However, especially after the republic was proclaimed in 1889, such transatlantic theatre was perceived in Brazil as representing the old aesthetics questioned by the European avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century. Two case studies illustrate different artistic and economic dynamics of tours, seen as translocal exchanges leading either to tradition or modernization. The former looks at the Portuguese actress Adelina Abranches, who was concerned about the financial health of her touring company, whereas the latter focuses on the Brazilian actress Cinira Polônio, who wished to be in tune with the new times of theatrical activity in Europe.

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Introduction

Between 1850 and 1930, Portuguese and Brazilian theatre companies crossed the Atlantic to tour and perform in each other's territories. Their transatlantic voyages reflect the cultural relations between Europe and a Brazil seeking autonomy from the Portuguese metropolis. These migratory theatrical movements led not only to tensions and compromises but also to the emergence of translocal spaces of exchange and coexistence, such as for example the discursive public spheres in which plays were received. The idea of an intercultural community unified by the Portuguese language allows us to speak of an importing theatrical market as well as of its counterpart, an exporting market of primary products. This article presents groundwork undertaken in order to devise a larger research project that will ultimately result in the mapping of such transatlantic theatrical markets, routes, and networks. It takes into account the socio-economic contexts of the theatrical ventures under consideration, particularly the transition from a colonial to a postcolonial relationship between the two countries.

During the period in question, theatrical activities in Brazil took place within the organisational parameters of stable acting companies, which provided a durable model. Theatres were built in seaside towns with funding from Portuguese traders and relied heavily on foreign companies' repertoires. Towards the end of the nineteenth century however, and especially after the proclamation of the Brazilian republic in 1889, the plays which made up these repertoires were perceived in Brazil as representing traditions that had begun to be questioned by the European avant-garde movements of the turn of the century. The aim of this article is to clarify how the socio-political backdrop against which the transatlantic traffic of theatrical practice occurred shaped and influenced the theatre landscape in both countries.

To begin, we offer a short overview of the social, economic, and political conditions of cultural exchange between Portugal and Brazil in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This will be followed by an analysis of the routes and movements of theatrical enterprise from Portugal to Brazil, illustrated and exemplified by a case study of the Portuguese actress Adelina Abranches. Her documentation of extensive tours to several cities in Brazil allows us to recover the dynamics of such tours both from an artistic and a commercial point of view. As will become clear, the commercial aspect of touring in this direction (i.e. from Portugal to Brazil) cannot be underestimated, as tours were regarded as a key factor in maintaining the financial health of theatre companies in Portugal.

The touring routes in the opposite direction, from Brazil to Portugal, will be analysed in the final part of this article, exemplified by a second case study: The Brazilian actress Cinira Polonio, who, after a successful career in her home country and motivated by a desire to experience theatrical innovations in Europe, returned to where she had started her training as an actress and singer. During her time in Portugal she participated in the first film to be produced in Lisbon, and also achieved great success as a singer and dancer. Her story illustrates a reversal in the direction of theatrical touring, driven by an ambition to place the Brazilian arts in a new European context.

Social, Economic, and Political Background

The cultural manifestations of trade routes linking Brazil and Portugal have only very recently begun to be studied in any systematic fashion. So far the main focus has been on the search for source materials relating to the socio-political context in which theatrical enterprise took place in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first three decades of the twentieth century. The official treaties and documents produced during this time by diplomats and intellectuals – an ideologically motivated elite committed to developing strategies for gaining political influence on the world stage – are testament to the difficult effort of reconciling the political interests of both governments with the different socio-economic realities in their countries.

Thus, on one side of the Atlantic we find Brazil, a nation that has gained independence from Portugal in 1822 and becomes a republic in 1889. On the other side of the ocean is Portugal, which becomes a republic twenty-one years later, in 1910. Brazil's population grows with the rise of the coffee economy, the production and trade of coffee attracting more and more migrant workers. Among them are Portuguese emigrants, who seek to escape the frequent economic and financial crises in their own country and are driven to compete with other immigrant populations in search of a better life. Many of them will return to Portugal richer and socially promoted. Others choose to melt into the young nation, strengthening the Portuguese roots of Brazilian culture. They have generally arrived in Brazil under adverse conditions, often as illiterates and almost always in search of work less hard than in their native country. Exiled intellectuals, also among the new arrivals in Brazil, are even more likely to strive to keep their Portuguese culture alive, maintaining a historical connection to the former colonial power.

Portuguese emigrants who have come to wealth in Brazil and subsequently return to their native country, mainly its northern parts, are referred to as *brasileiros de torna-viagem* ('Brazilians who have come back'). They become stock characters in literature and the theatre. During the nineteenth century, these 'Brazilians' effect a surge in economic progress in the north of Portugal, filling lost villages with new and comfortable art nouveau palaces and spending their accumulated riches on the land. More than just displaying their wealth, their aim is to be respected and admired, to engage in cultural activities, but also to hold titles and powerful positions. It is worth at this point to highlight the contradiction at the heart of this discourse: Portuguese emigrants who have become 'Brazilian' in the eyes of their countrymen, shape an image of Brazil as an Eldorado, but simultaneously cultivate an idealized and nostalgic view of the *portugalidade*, Portuguese essence, or Luso-Brazilian essence, of their motherland. It is a contradiction rooted in postcolonial sentiment.

Similarly, the way in which Portuguese colonial power is viewed and theorised by Brazilians at the time is striking in its ambivalence. In an attempt to define Brazilian identity during the nineteenth century, positive and productive views of the monarchic regime are combined with a keen appreciation of liberal ideas. This results in mixed reactions towards land owners and businessmen of Portuguese descent. In the eyes of Brazilian intellectuals and artists, Portugal remains, at the transition between the nineteenth and twentieth century, part of the motherland. Within the context of the modernist artistic movements of the 1920s, Europe and in particular Paris are seen by

these Brazilians as an important factor in shaping the ideal of a Latin-American cosmopolite. In tense rivalry to this idea, the Brazilian national imagery also becomes infused with the ideal of primitivism so valued by the European programmes of avant-garde art, who see it as a marker of modernity. This appreciation of primitivism inaugurates a new artistic path, drawing inspiration from what is left of the culture of the indigenous peoples who inhabited Brazil before its colonisation, as well as of the Africans who were brought into the country by the slave trade.

While this new emphasis on primitivist art does not eradicate the essentially European character of cultural enterprise in Brazil, it does recalibrate the balance of influence between the two Portuguese-speaking countries.¹ In the field of the scenic arts, admiration and reverence, rivalry and dispute, a vision of financial opportunity and the defence of an aesthetic matrix form the basis of a complex relationship and an intricate network of cross-cultural influences. This relationship, and particularly the routes along which such influences travel, are the focus of this article.

Theatre Routes from Portugal to Brazil

Let us begin with an overview of the relations between Portuguese and Brazilian theatre, based on an analysis of the transatlantic routes along which theatre companies and actors travel from Portugal to Brazil. The first half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century are two periods of great change, with major consequences for both countries. Mainly these are caused by political regime changes, but also by various other factors including changes in trade agreements and Brazil's developing agricultural export economy. The effect is that over one century, Portugal's maritime commercial routes and the developing theatrical market in Brazil enable a network of theatre routes to grow along the extensive Brazilian coastline, offering new opportunities also for Portuguese theatre companies. This new market is created by economic and political conditions intimately linked to the creation of both nations.

Brazil's theatre industry begins to develop out of private enterprise in the nineteenth century. Initially still aligned with Portuguese monarchic power, it will later associate itself with the Brazilian imperial court. Attracting a varied audience, it does however mirror different dynamics of entertainment consumption and reflect social tensions in the cities. From the second half of the nineteenth century until the 1930s there is a definite commitment and drive to establish a European-style theatre industry in the tropics, resulting in Portuguese theatre companies making good business in Brazil and creating a thriving overseas theatrical market. Using the commercial shipping routes along which industrialized goods are imported from Europe and raw materials such as sugar, cotton, rubber and coffee are exported to Portugal, these companies mainly visit Brazilian coastal towns.² Rio de Janeiro, one of the harbours in these transatlantic routes, develops into an attractive place for Portuguese theatrical managers to settle. They seek to draw both the literate elites and a more eclectic audience, mainly composed of Brazilian and Portuguese traders, to their theatres.

In the early nineteenth century three large theatres are built in Brazil, one in Rio de Janeiro, one in Salvador in the state of Bahia, and another in the town of S. Luiz in Maranhão, in the North of Brazil. Two of them are the result of an initiative of

Portuguese entrepreneurs. They are the first professional theatres in Brazil, as hitherto only opera houses of modest proportions have been built, with amateur casts organising themselves in Rio de Janeiro as well as towns in Minas Gerais. The third theatre, the 'Teatro de São João' (St. John's Theatre) in Rio de Janeiro, is built by decree of the Prince Regent, Dom João, in order to meet the aristocracy's demands of a city that has become the seat of the Portuguese Empire.³

The Portuguese Court Theatre, as it comes to be known, is in essence a model of concessions to private theatre enterprises, which becomes the main form of organisation of theatre companies in Brazil. This is quite different from the way other institutions are created in the period immediately after the arrival of the Royal Court in Brazil. There are, for example, no intermediaries in the negotiations for the transformation of the Real Biblioteca (Royal Library) into the Biblioteca Nacional (National Library), whose collection is the subject of compensation for property left by the King in Brazil. Similarly, the Escola de Belas Artes (School of Fine Arts) and Jardim Botânico (Botanical Gardens) are both direct results of the Crown's investments on Brazilian soil.

The Prince's decree recommending the construction of a 'decent theatre' is received favourably, as the country finds itself in a period of apparent prosperity at the time. In this colony (which will soon become a kingdom and, in the following decade, a nation independent from Portugal and headed by a Portuguese emperor) the origins of economic success lie in the growing world markets for tropical products, as well as the international political set-up of the last decades of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth century, which enables such global markets to develop.

The hypothesis put forward here, which we propose to test further, is that Dom João's gesture of granting a Portuguese citizen the concession for the Court Theatre is thus already an economic decision, signalling commercial opportunity to urban Portuguese merchants. When agricultural trade begins to falter soon after independence, the Brazilian government has no financial backing and is forced to issue currency and raise the price of imported goods, creating inflation and leading to the impoverishment of the urban population. Theatre business, even though only in its infancy at the beginning of the century, is seen not only an opportunity for diversification and expansion of the trade managed by the Portuguese, but also as an important strategy for brokering peace between Portuguese and Brazilian public officials, merchant employees, and soldiers, who blame the Portuguese for their impoverishment at that time⁴.

It is true that theatre as an art form and a business model can promote social and cultural standards over and above the mere advancement of business itself. In this case it is particularly interesting to observe how the theatre helps to control and mitigate outbreaks of nativist sentiment, since its impact on the formation of a new generation of Brazilian actors has been well researched. Our first hypothesis (stated above, relating to the business models of successive generations of theatrical entrepreneurs and foreign actors exploring new theatre markets) points to a new, previously unexplored, area of research⁵. Our second hypothesis concerns the relationship between Portuguese theatrical touring in Brazil and a developing Brazilian style of acting and theatrical aesthetic. It is an aspect that has been extensively analysed throughout the twentieth

century, in a range of scholarly works that deserve to be remembered in theatre historiography.

Coexistence and Negotiations between Portuguese and Brazilian Theatre Companies

Two Portuguese companies operate in the Teatro São João in its early years. In 1813, the tragic actress Mariana Torres brings seven actors with her from Portugal and incorporates five more Brazilian amateur actors into the company, who are trained by António José Pedro, also a tragic actor from Portugal. The company returns to São João in 1819, before finally departing to Lisbon in 1822. Due to the departure of his main star, the businessman Fernando José de Almeida hires another company, recruited around leading lady Ludovina Soares da Costa, who is then only 27 years old. It is a big company setting sail on two different ships in June and July 1829; historians count fourteen to twenty members. Following Brazil's declaration of independence it will become the Teatro S. Pedro de Alcântara, borrowing its name from the emperor. When Dom Pedro I abdicates the throne, its name changes again and it becomes the Teatro Constitucional Fluminense. Ludovina, the second great tragic actress to travel from Portugal, will perform on Brazilian stages for thirty years, often with João Caetano as her partner, the first great actor born in Brazil.

The transatlantic journeys of Portuguese theatre companies in this period are defined by two characteristics: Firstly, companies and artists often remain in Brazil or, if they do leave, usually return with new and longer permanent contracts. This type of touring is therefore quite different from the short and repeated tours of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Secondly, the controversial arrangement which allows Brazilian actors to join incoming Portuguese companies leads to these home-grown actors being given new contracts, particularly in the period after the departure of the first emperor. In the years after his 1831 abdication, strong nativist feelings in Brazil give rise not only to a growing rivalry between Brazilian and Portuguese actors, but also to an expansion of the native theatrical market.

To give an example of this complicated process: In 1833, a Brazilian group of actors fails to integrate with the Portuguese cast of actors at the Teatro São Pedro and moves to the small, newly built Teatro Valongo in an old inlet near the town harbour.⁶ One month after their premiere, however, they are displaced to make room for a group of Portuguese actors who have left S. Pedro in order to form their own company (Prado, 1972, p. 15). The hostilities between the Portuguese company responsible for the Teatro S. Pedro and the actor João Caetano, leader of the group of Brazilian actors, are resolved in 1839, when Caetano signs his first contract with the imperial government. He also commits himself to founding a national company, which nevertheless relies on Portuguese actors to maintain its repertoire (Souza, 2004, p. 44). On the one hand, these skirmishes between Portuguese and Brazilian actors and impresarios indicate an expansion of the labour market into new ventures, such as for example the Teatro da Vila Real da Praia in Niterói, and the São Januário near the Palácio Imperial, home of the royal family in Quinta da Boa Vista (Rio de Janeiro). On the other hand, the Portuguese presence in daily theatrical life remains overwhelming: As well as the Portuguese repertoire of plays

and the Portuguese actors performing on stage, Portuguese professionals dominate fields such as translation, adaptation and playwriting, as well as administrative activities.⁷

The ambivalent relationship between Portuguese and Brazilian theatre makers indicates how closely the commercial and artistic aspects of Brazilian theatre are linked in its formation period in the nineteenth century. If there are “outbursts of rebellion and submission,” as Prado asserts, it is through Portuguese artists that the “the influx, albeit late, of European culture” takes place (Prado, 1972, pp. 10-11). Popular genres such as historical spectacles and freely adapted and translated melodramas make up the majority of the repertoire at the beginning of the century. They are texts whose authorship is often neither clear nor highly valued. As Prado writes, “most of the plays had to be handed over, handwritten, from company to company, forming a common heritage, often anonymous, from which everyone borrowed” (Ibid., p. 19). When Furtado Coelho takes on the direction of the *Ginásio Dramático*, a pioneering theatre group dedicated to the staging of realist French dramas, there is a period when both traditional and modern forms of theatre gain popularity. However from 1855 onwards, with the nativist enthusiasm so dominant in previous decades gradually subsiding, Brazilian theatre’s journey towards popular genres becomes irreversible. It adopts the hybrid genre of Portuguese drama of the time, combining drama and melodrama, and later develops its own popular genres including the comedies of the actor Vasques and Arthur Azevedo’s ‘*Revistas*’ (shows with music, dance and humour), created as an alternative to Alcazar Lirique’s operettas. In all these genres, the theatrical manager outweighs, and is little concerned with, the literary reviewer. In this sense, there is a confluence between the shows coming from Portugal and those produced in Brazil: Both seek to conform to the expectations of audiences and to become part of everyday life in the city. The theatre industry is thus already disconnected from the civilizing ideal of high art and instead finds itself in line with the commercial ideas of multiplicity, commodification, and mobility. It is a theatre geared towards attracting a large audience, committed to treading the path of consumption, feeding on urban life and satisfying itself with the present.⁸

The productions staged by the companies contracted to work in the main theatre of the Royal Court follow old theatrical practices of recycling stock texts and costumes. It can be said, therefore, that the distant South Atlantic market reproduces traditional models of performance which are already considered outdated and being replaced in other European countries. Cultural objects are consumed as belated novelties or, from a different perspective, as a revisiting of the past. The result of this is a market that yields profit, and also appears to bridge geographic and cultural distances.

Due to the availability of a number of large theatres in major coastal towns and several smaller ones in the capital, the presence of foreign, mainly Portuguese, companies in Brazil increases during the last decades of the nineteenth century and again in the twentieth century. The social and economic context in Brazil favours transatlantic tours, especially as the volume of exported goods grows and a market economy slowly begins to develop. The theatrical market is structured around commercial bases and centres on the work forces of European immigrants.

When the national theatre is founded, the ideal model of employing a permanent cast for long periods of time is soon replaced by a model of temporary occupation (for a

maximum of one year) by foreign companies.⁹ The civilizing goals which prompted the construction of theatres in the first place and dictated the terms of the contracts for the first companies give way to demands of an industry focused on entertainment. Presented with a veneer of intellectual refinement, it gives the city of Rio de Janeiro the appearance of a metropolis worthy of becoming the capital of the republic from 1889 onwards.

We know from the Portuguese actors who visited Brazil and left records of their tours that their transatlantic trips were primarily motivated by economic considerations. As we have seen, the touring routes from Portugal to Brazil benefited these actors and theatre companies, but they also proved lucrative for the new Brazilian theatres striving to build audiences. Covering Brazil's extensive coastline and port cities Belém, Recife, Salvador, Rio de Janeiro, Santos and Porto Alegre, and branching out to the state capitals of São Paulo and Minas Gerais, tours often lasted months. They were opportunities to pay off debts incurred in the production of the last European season, or to obtain cash for the production of new shows on returning to Portugal. Exceptional cases, such as reports about some contracts not providing round-trip tickets and actors having to beg for funds in order to be able to return home (Tristão, 1919, p. 5), do not invalidate this general principle.¹⁰ As Adelina Abranches puts it: "Good times in which, in order to straighten out the finances, we resorted to Brazil..." (Abranches, 1947, p. 282)

A Portuguese Actress in Brazil: Adelina Abranches

The actress Adelina Abranches (1866-1954) crosses the Atlantic for the first time in 1885 and continues her tours to Brazil until 1934, when she joins a revue company. In her memoirs she describes the dazzling beauty of cities such as Salvador and Rio de Janeiro, the social life on tour, the gifts of jewellery she receives from members of the audience, but also her fear of the black *capoeira* fighters and the risks of catching yellow fever (Abranches, 1947, p. 96).

Her commentary on the beauty and dangers of Brazil is particularly interesting because it contains various references to the ways in which theatrical productions are organised in order to be taken on tour to the provinces and abroad. In Adelina's reports the economic aspects of the trip are not explicitly stated, but form a constant background, such as for example when she mentions the various strategies used to reduce costs. It becomes clear that tours were not primarily a means to extend the runs of successful show at a company's own theatre, as more often than not the shows that were taken on tour were specifically designed for this purpose. Thus, the preparations for a new touring show, commissioned by an impresario or entrepreneur, often occurred on a ship: 'we rehearsed and marked the play on board with furniture drawn in chalk on the floor!' (Abranches, 1947, p. 281)

She describes how these shows, put together by theatrical entrepreneurs according to a formula that pits well-known actors and a good quality repertoire against extremely cheap scenery, fail to fully satisfy public demand.¹¹ Negative reactions to such poorly produced shows reveal, on the one hand, a certain refinement of taste on the part of audiences, and on the other hand, that the logistics of these tours are thought out with the sole purpose of bringing profit. Recalling an early tour of the Azores, Adelina sums up the formula of modern theatrical entrepreneurs, which her own company has not yet

fully grasped: 'For travelling purposes they organise *reduced* companies. It never crossed our minds to fire one of our artists or assistants of the theatre...so we travelled to the islands with as many figures as a revue theatre company – the first mistake... - And we took our entire repertoire as well as complicated scenery – our second mistake...' (Abranches, 1947, p. 145)

We can see that in the case of tours to Brazil, production values were compromised as shows travelled. With every journey, the commodification process of the theatre was consolidated. A similar process can be observed in other contexts, such as for example the touring practices of British theatre companies. As Tracy Davis writes, "during the first tour the trademark was the nationality and the name of the company. In subsequent tours, the most important trademark was the stars' names." (Davis, 2000, p. 348)

The case of Adelina Abranches is an interesting one. Not the main star of the company, she plays a variety of roles (including some male characters) across a range of theatrical genres. She also seems to have a rare ability to win over the public, to create a sense of closeness and to overcome resistance about her work. Moreover, she uses her authority within the company's artistic leadership to stop the practice of incorporating local actors into tour productions, especially in cases when it appears to be important to preserve a sense of hierarchy and specialisation in the cast. From this actresses' point of view, there are areas of artistic value that cannot be compromised by commercial considerations.

What Adelina's memoirs tell us, however, is that tour logistics effect a hierarchy that ranks the actor's work higher than the material objects of the production (i.e. set and costumes), and also higher than the authorship of the theatrical text. The idea of a particular actor performing in a particular town on a specific day creates a special, spatialised sense of temporality, where the passage of time can be measured by following a theatre company's journey on a map.

Theatre Routes from Brazil to Portugal

As social and economic developments continue to drive the two nations further apart, their 'natural' relationship begins to change in the 1930s. While language has always seemed to be the strongest linking factor in this relationship, it becomes clear that it is not necessarily only a unifying force. Language evolves differently and is also used very differently in each country: On the Portuguese side the language is seen as a kind of genetic marker that has the potential to erase cultural differences, while on the Brazilian side it is seen as a distinctive sign of regional and social identity.

Even the Lisbon accent, described by Décio de Almeida Prado (1988) as being the only remainder of Portuguese imperialism by the time of the 1930s, begins to lose its globalising character – a function that has defined it throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. The regular Brazilian tours of Portuguese theatre companies had contributed to its dominance, as had the longer stays or permanent relocations of Portuguese actors, businessmen and authors to Brazil. Written language, too, had been dominated by the Portuguese, rather than Brazilian, style, as the prevalence of imported Portuguese play texts shows.

It shall be argued here, however, that contrary to the view of Duarte Ivo Cruz, Brazilian theatre after the modernist movement of 1922 is not solely defined by a “lasting frame of a common language and culture”¹² (Cruz, 2004, p. 89). Instead of being bound by Portuguese culture, it cultivates and at the same time transcends the boundaries of the colonial language. This is true not only of dramatic texts themselves, but also true in relation to dramaturgy, to stage practices, and to models of theatrical enterprise. The Brazilian theatrical market of the time has its own distinguishing features, while retaining some of the social and economic models of the European commercial theatre (such as for example its box-office business structure, genres of shows, and audience composition). The 1922 Modern Art Week sees the birth of Brazilian Modernism and the Anthropophagic movement, both of which have as their stated intention ideas of ‘swallowing’ European and North American influences, digesting them and then creating something new and culturally very Brazilian. The result of these ideals is a new relationship with culture and with language. Influences and impulses from native languages (such as Tupi), as well as from European culture, are seen as raw material from which to shape a national identity for literature and the arts. Throughout the decade, amateurs and university students create spaces for artistic experimentation, and many of the modern forms of theatre developing in France and Italy arrive in Brazil directly, not second-hand via Portugal.

A Brazilian Actress in Portugal: Cinira Polonio

Just as Portuguese theatre companies had travelled to Brazil in the early days primarily to present their repertoire, what brings Brazilian actors and theatre companies to Portugal, more than commercial reasons, is the prestige of coming to Europe.

This is certainly the case for the ‘divette’ Cinira Polonio, who, already famous in Rio de Janeiro for her versatility as a performer in the ‘teatro de revista’ – she is an actress, songwriter, and author of operettas – comes to Portugal in 1888. She continues to work there until 1900, both as a manager and as a successful actress, hired by manager Francisco Palha to perform at the Teatro da Trindade in the operettas *Noite e Dia*, *O Burro do Senhor Alcaide*, as well as in the revue *Retalhos de Lisboa*. She is particularly admired as an interpreter of French songs, but her performances with Salvador Marques’ company at the Teatro Avenida, in *A Grã-Duquesa de Gerolstein*, and at the Teatro da Rua dos Condes, are also mentioned. Her ‘unusual performance’ in the role of André (a male part) in *O Burro do Senhor Alcaide* attracts attention, as does her impersonation of Sarah Bernhardt in a sketch in the revue *Retalhos de Lisboa*.

The image she projects is that of a sophisticated modern woman: She is independent, remaining single and dedicating her life to her career. Born in 1861, she travels to France and Italy when she is still very young, in order to study music and singing. She makes her debut at the Teatro Lírico in Rio aged seventeen, in the role of *Fausto*’s Margareta. Her travels between Brazil and Europe continue until the moment she chooses to move to Portugal in 1888.

While in Portugal, this time in Oporto, she becomes involved with the beginnings of filmmaking, as we know from her participation in the films *Cinira Polônio dizendo uma cançoneta* (‘Cinira Polonio singing a chansonnette’) and *Dança Serpentina* (Serpentine

dance) in 1896. The latter is directed by the pioneering Portuguese filmmaker Aurélio Paz dos Reis, who films Cinira dancing Loïe Fuller's famous choreography. In Lisbon in 1902 the famous American dancer had performed this same dance, which she had created in 1892 while on tour with the company of the Tokyo Imperial Theatre (SadaYacco's company). Curiously, Cinira's Serpentine Dance is included in the first public exhibition of motion pictures in Lisbon. Presented by Mr. Erwin Rousby in June of 1896 at the Real Colyseu, in the middle of the operetta *O comendador Ventoinha*, it becomes a huge success.

Cinira's participation in the beginnings of filmmaking in Portugal may be understood as a consequence of her openness to exploring new media. She is, for example, also known as composer of two operettas, *O relógio do Cardeal* and *O Traço de União*, and as a conductor. Although no film industry to speak of exists in Portugal at the time, Aurélio Paz dos Reis's filmmaking activities make an impact and reach a cultural elite that has a strong appetite for other forms of entertainment. He even sets out to explore the Brazilian market by showing his films (the Kinetographo Português) at Rio de Janeiro's Teatro Lucinda on 15th January 1897, in anticipation of a much more valuable trade route for actors than their work in the theatre.

Testimonies of Cinira Polonio's integration in Lisbon's theatrical and intellectual milieu confirm some of her qualities which were already evident in Brazil. Having spent formative years in France, she is more than just a skilled singer and performer in a specific repertoire: She is seen as having a certain cosmopolitan touch, or flair, that gives her an air of distinction both in Brazil and in Portugal.

Sousa Bastos, a manager for whom she has worked and who conducts business on both sides of the Atlantic, refers to her in his book *Carteira do Artista* (1898) in a not very pleasant way, noting that she pleases mainly country people as a French 'chansonette' singer, and that her success is due to advertising and not to her merit, as she lacks a good voice. His view, however, is contradicted by one of Cinira's colleagues, an actress equal to her in beauty and intelligence, who also knows about building a public image. It is worth quoting her description of Cinira at length:

It happened in April 1893, and I was present at a recital of *The Secret of a Lady*. During an intermission, I watched Cirina sing *La lanterne, Les trois petites filles et Le petit cochon*. His Majesty the King attended the performance [...] Cinira was a star by this time, in a different genre, more exciting and gay, but undeniably less artistic, although it pleased the masses in the stalls, maybe because the exuberance of the gesticulation clarifies the meaning of the text for those who are not very much familiar with the boulevard expressions so abundant in this genre of literature. Her 'chansonettes', *La demoiselle de Commerc*y and *La petite Baronne*, disturbed the peaceful people of the capital city, who were amazed and stared at her décolleté costume, wide open, in the form of a heart, to her waist. She was the one who revealed to us the elegant and ultra-wordly style of the Parisian people, this same Cinira that now hangs around Brasil, like Pepa, meditating perhaps on the injustice of this country that leaves her there wallowing in nostalgia after having overpraised her like a pagan idol, while, for lack of voice, in our theatres she would be of good use. I was a colleague at the Trindade venue of the tawny Circe for a short time, because she left that theatre after a quarrel with the impresario who had fined her for not having attended a

performance. This was due to her tiffs with E. C., who was actually the one who installed Cinira as a princess, well-supplied of good teeth to bite the cheese of her fortune. [...]. It was by looking at Cinira that I learned the first notions of good taste in dressing, which makes a person look always well, although wearing clothes of modest price. The cut is everything, the value of the costume, irrelevant. (Blasco, 1908, pp. 102-3)¹³

Beyond making evident the jealousy that Cinira Polonio's success and freedom evokes among the other Portuguese actresses, this quotation is important because it shows that the reasons for the Brazilian actress's distinctive aura (she is by this time 31 years old), can be attributed to a combination of several factors: how she cares about her physical appearance and about current fashions, the singularity and modernity of her behaviour inspired by a free French style, and, besides that, her beauty and the sensuality she radiates on stage as well as off. They all contribute to her successful career as an actress, while at the same time highlighting the fundamental uncertainty that characterises the life of an artist – famous one day, forgotten the next.

Cinira Polonio returns to Portugal one more time, in 1906. She goes back to Brazil for good in 1909, evidently without having made her fortune, since she dies, poor, in 1948. Borrowing the words of Mercedes Blasco, she spends her final years living off the 'nostalgia of glorious times'. If we view her life in the larger context of cultural relations between Brazil and Portugal, we may say that her coming to Europe signifies a growing interest on the part of Brazilian actors and artist to develop a career on European stages.

Compared with actresses who came to Brazil from Portugal (such as Ester Leão) or from Italy (such as Itália Fausta), she took the inverse route. For them, the common language and the similarity of theatrical models and its genres (including operetta and revue, which had been exported to Brazil by managers such as Sousa Bastos) made it easy to establish contact with Brazilian audiences. In addition, they gained the eminence and lustre of foreign stars, invited in order to add glamour to national productions. Whatever their direction of travel, however, the goals of these actresses were the same: to increase their value in the theatrical market and to reflect that value in their pay and working opportunities.

In research terms, what remains to be done in relation to Cinira Polonio's artistic activity in Portugal is to measure the public impact of her presence and to evaluate the role she played in inspiring, or modelling, new feminine pathways in Lisbon's theatrical environment. What kinds of relationships did she establish with the actresses with whom she shared the stage, and up to what point did her long stay in Portugal soften her status as a foreign actress? What kinds of working conditions, in terms of wages and of the choice of what parts to play, were granted to her? What did she do as a manager both in Portugal and in Brazil, where we know that she introduced the commercial strategy of putting on several performances in a single day? Did she take care of the way her image was produced and received by the public sphere?

Future research

Apart from her memoirs, her private correspondence and newspaper reviews, we lack information about administrative details and the general conditions of her journeys between Brazil and Portugal. There is much information about this and other similar routes to be recovered: How much profit did the theatre managers who let their venues to visiting companies make? What were the politics of the box office? What were the cost implications of productions – did they include official licences authorizing public performances, payment of royalties, contracts in Portugal and Brazil with stage staff for example? Is it possible to know, from the Archive of the DGE (General Direction of Theatre Performances in Portugal) how many tickets were sold for the different performances, and will this allow us to extrapolate the real impact and reach of Brazilian actors and theatre companies? Were tours in Portugal and Brazil really good business, and what did touring budgets look like? How did individual actresses and actors prepare for their trips and how did they conquer unknown markets? What were the consequences of success achieved abroad – did it impact on subsequent working conditions in terms of pay or choice of repertoire? What other commercial activities were developed during tours in both countries (such as for example actor training, advertising, programmes on the radio or later on television)?

The history of theatrical touring routes between Brazil and Portugal remains to be written, and it calls for research that can bring to light the motivations for and impact of such tours by theatre companies and artists. They deserve recognition for at least two reasons: They have an undeniable impact on local artists and theatre managers, and the experiences artists have while they are abroad changes their lives as well as the cultural landscape of their homelands.

Endnotes

¹ A broader analysis of that change in perspectives can be found in Silviano Santiago's text (2004, pp.11-44).

² In different cities of the Brazilian coast, 15 theatres built in the nineteenth century preserve their original architecture (Serroni, 2002).

³ The Teatro São João was rebuilt four times, three times due to fires (1824, 1851, 1856). In 1930 the building, reconstructed according to the original design, fell 'victim of brutal and disastrous momentum of modernization' (Prado, 1993).

⁴ Since Brazil's independence, the relationship between Brazilian and Portuguese people has been characterised by admiration and tension, both in theatre and in the wider socio-political field.. Tension grows, and the turn of the 1910s to the following decade is a critical point, with clear manifestations of lusophobia. A Brazilian writer and journalist, João do Rio, however, believes in the possibility of a lusophone theatrical and cultural territory. Campaigning for bringing Brazil and Portugal together, he writes many reviews of 'transatlantic theatre' and creates a magazine called *Revista Atlântida*. In the newspapers he becomes a militant against the Brazilian government's anti-Portuguese actions, among them the ban on the work of Portuguese fishermen.

- ⁵ According to Werneck and Reis (2012), scholars have begun to study cases of mediation and tension between artists and the public, between entrepreneurs and artists, and between critics and directors from both nationalities.
- ⁶ The theatre was situated in the neighbourhood of the slave market.
- ⁷ In the Brazilian actor João Caetano's formative years, the influence and proximity of several Portuguese theatre professionals is notable: they are in particular Victor Porfírio de Borja (who was already in Brazil before the inauguration of Teatro São João), Gertrudes Angélica da Cunha (second lady of the company), and Ludovina Soares da Costa, with whom Camilo José Guedes de Rosário performed numerous times.
- ⁸ While the Ginásio Dramático searched in the Portuguese repertoire for ways to increase its ticket revenue, the Teatro de São Januário, under the direction of the actor and manager Florindo, became the theatre of choice for the working classes, its audience primarily made of 'boys who worked in the city's commerce; many of them having come from Portugal and living at their employers' house'. Despite complaints regarding their abusive behaviour in the audience, this demographic became, the theatre's main source of economic sustenance. When the São Januário closed its doors, its audience followed their favourite actor, the comedian Vasquez, who had joined the Fênix Dramática. (Souza, 2004, p. 281)
- ⁹ Records of the São João and Politeama Theatres in Salvador show that from 1884 to 1912, eighteen Portuguese companies performed there, presenting a dramatic and musical repertoire, especially operettas. (Boccanera Junior, 1999, pp. 173-199)
- ¹⁰ The situation would be remedied with the formation of a trade union, The Associação de Classe dos Trabalhadores de Teatro (Theatre Workers Association) (Tristão, 1919, p. 5), which imposed standards that made it impossible to organise tours in the old ways.
- ¹¹ "We took paper scenery, already quite old, and few props. Doors were also made out of paper. And we didn't even have drapes to cover them up. José Louseiro, who was used to making big money with our company, did not remember that Brazil progressed day by day. The plays, there, were put on stage with luxury and elegance." (Abranches, 1947, p. 398)
- ¹² Our translation.
- ¹³ Our translation.

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