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# Madame Satã and the jails of Ilha Grande: an analysis of gender constructs and sexuality in the prison system

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## Abstract

The lawsuits described João Francisco dos Santos, or “Madame Satã”, as sexual pervert and a very dangerous person. The objective of this paper is to analyze Satã’s behavior in prison, where the treatment with prisoners was very violent, and, in Vila do Abraão, where he lived after being released. The research is based on testimonies left by him, documents, newspapers and interviews with guards and residents of Ilha Grande. Unlike his attitude in Lapa, his behavior in prisons and in Ilha Grande was completely different: his fame of brave scoundrel brought him respect and his homosexuality was well accepted. The identity shifts made by him challenged not only fixed constructions of gender and sexuality, but also those of justice and power.

**Keywords:** Madame Satã; Homosexuality; Ilha Grande’s prisons.

# Madame Satã e as prisões da Ilha Grande: uma análise das construções de gênero e sexualidade no interior do sistema carcerário

## Resumo

Os processos judiciais descreveram João Francisco dos Santos, ou “Madame Satã,” como pervertido sexual e pessoa perigosíssima. O objetivo deste artigo é analisar o comportamento de Satã nas prisões, onde o tratamento em relação aos presos era bem violento, e, na Vila do Abraão, onde ele morou depois de liberto. A pesquisa tem por base depoimentos deixados por ele, documentos de época, jornais e entrevistas com guardas e moradores da Ilha Grande. Ao contrário de sua atitude na Lapa, seu comportamento nas prisões e na Ilha Grande foi completamente diferente; sua fama de valente lhe trazia respeito e sua homossexualidade era bem aceita. Os deslocamentos identitários feitos por ele desafiaram não só construções fixas de gênero e sexualidade, como as de justiça e poder.

**Palavras-chave:** Madame Satã; Homossexualidade; Prisões da Ilha Grande.

# Madame Satã and the jails of Ilha Grande: an analysis of gender constructs and sexuality in the prison system

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In this article I look to analyze the gender constructs and sexuality of João Francisco dos Santos during the period when he was serving custodial sentences in the prisons of Ilha Grande. A well-known figure in the Lapa district of Rio de Janeiro<sup>1</sup> at the end of the 1920s, he was jailed innumerable times. He was prosecuted 13 times for assault, 4 times for resisting arrest, twice for receiving stolen goods, twice for theft, once for public indecency and once for carrying firearms.<sup>2</sup> Between 1928 and 1965, the year he completed his last sentence, he remained behind bars for 28 years. Over this period of his life, in other words, he enjoyed just 9 years of freedom. He spent almost the entire 1950s in Ilha Grande's prisons.

João Francisco's behaviour during the 1950s, by when he was already known as Madame Satã (Madam Satan), is described here based on documents and a series of interviews conducted with guards, inmates and local residents with whom he lived, initially at the Cândido Mendes Penal Colony and later, following completion of his sentence, in Vila do Abraão.<sup>3</sup> Additional key sources for the research were the memoirs and interviews left by Satã himself, along with other narratives already produced on his life trajectory.

Classifying João Francisco by gender is virtually impossible. He was a constant presence on Lapa's cabaret stages, dancing and singing dressed as a woman. He considered himself an artist and longed for success with his performances. Off the stage, he wore the same clothes as Lapa's petty criminals, known as *malandros* (scoundrels), renowned for their distinctive attire: wide trousers, usually white linen, and colourful shirts. The more elegant among them wore Panama hats and two-toned shoes (black and white). The *malandros* knew how to fight and were famed for being *valentes* (tough or brave). Many of them were skilled capoeira fighters.<sup>4</sup> In the 1930s, João Francisco was thus known for being both a transvestite and a tough guy (*valente*), symbols not mutually associated at the time.

At the age of 24, he killed a night security guard after being attacked by the latter. Thereafter, his life in Lapa turned into a series of fights and clashes with the police. He was continually arrested and, when attacked and humiliated by the police, responded in kind. Reading the criminal proceedings, we can note that the descriptions of the offences were always accompanied by the observation that the offender was a perverted homosexual, a pederast, and an extremely dangerous person.<sup>5</sup> The police would frequently beat up, humiliate and arrest individuals associated with Lapa's informal commerce, even when they had done

<sup>1</sup> The Lapa district is located in central Rio de Janeiro city, an area still known today for its nightlife. In the 1930s, the region, already occupied by nightclubs, also became home to the country's intellectual avantgarde, transforming Lapa into the hub of the city's bohemian life. At the end of the 1940s, the district fell into decline, becoming the target for urbanization projects and investments from the 1960s onward.

<sup>2</sup> On Satã's criminal record, see his obituary in Machado 1976.

<sup>3</sup> Interviews were conducted between 2010 and 2015 with former staff from the Federal District Agricultural Colony (CADF) and the Cândido Mendes Penal Colony (CPCM), both penal institutions installed on the island of Ilha Grande in the 1940s and 1950s. Also interviewed were residents from Vila do Abraão on the island, Ilha Grande, where the Penal Colony operated. These interviews form part of the archive of the research project *Memory and Violence on Ilha Grande*, UERJ, part of which is publicly available via the site [www.artecultpoder.uerj.br](http://www.artecultpoder.uerj.br).

<sup>4</sup> Capoeira is a martial art, initially practiced by Africans who arrived in Brazil as slaves. It involves dancing and playing musical instruments to African rhythms. Used as a form of fighting, it was suppressed by police authorities during the first decades of the Republican era. Today promoted as an expression of Brazilian culture, capoeira is practiced in gyms, schools and cultural centres.

<sup>5</sup> The proceedings relating to the criminal accusations against Satã have been analyzed in works by Green (2000) and Reduzino (2015).

nothing to break the law. According to the American historian James Green, despite the absence of any explicit penalties for homosexuals in the Penal Code, they were incarcerated for ‘public indecency’ and other supposed public order offences (Green 2000: 223).

In memoirs and interviews from the 1970s, Satã declared that he had been homosexual ever since his teens. Later he became a friend to women who worked as prostitutes, living with some of them and looking after various children whom he raised as his own. In the prisons and even in Vila do Abraão, the village on Ilha Grande where he lived after his release, he maintained his identities of homosexual and tough guy, earning the respect of the other prisoners. He worked as a cook in the guards’ houses and helped them to maintain order.

Satã had friendly relations with the other inmates, the prison guards, and even the prison directors in practically all the establishments where he was held. In 1962, Satã was released after serving his last sentence. He was older, tired and, as he himself lamented, Lapa was no longer the same. He chose Ilha Grande, where the old penitentiary was still in operation, as his place to live. In his testimony to Paezzo, Satã stated that he had many friends there, thanked various police officers and declared that the ‘prisoners’ of Ilha Grande were humanely treated (Paezzo 1972: 206). He died in 1975 of lung cancer. When he became sick, he was taken to Ipanema Hospital by journalists from the newspaper *O Pasquim* with whom he was close. He was buried on Ilha Grande.

One of the residents of Ilha Grande, Dona Nair Mattoso, mentioned by Satã in his acknowledgments, talked to us about her former friend in an interview. During our conversation, she remarked on a trait that was perhaps distinctive of Satã and provides an insight into his trajectory both inside and outside prison:

He was such a liar! He would visit my daughters where they lived, there in Rio, close to the Maracanã River. [...] And he’d say: “Do you know who died? Mr. Laerte.” And the girls would reply: Poor Mr Laerte! They asked how he had died. He replied: “— Ah, he tried to con someone there and he died!” So they would ask me later on the telephone (sometimes I managed to get to Angra, Mangaratiba, to phone from there) and I’d say no, he hadn’t died! I’d ask who had said such a thing and they would tell me it had been Satã. He killed off everyone! [Laughs.] He was a huge liar, many of the stories he told were lies. In that interview [by Pasquim], take it from me, it’s full of nonsense, but he talks about the things that happened to him, you know! If there’s one person here on the island, in these 76 years that I’ve been living here, who I miss, it’s Satã! Nobody else! My father died, my mother, my younger brother! But Satã I truly miss! Because he liked my daughters! Before he left for Rio, he would visit me and say: “*Godmother*”, I’m going to Rio!” So I’d ask: “When are you going?” I already knew he was after money. He’d then say: “Ah... I’m leaving on Tuesday!” This would be a Saturday. He would add: “Get me some sugar, cloves and cinnamon and I’ll make a dessert for you to take to the girls, because everyone there must be starving.” He said that they only had water in the fridge, he told everyone that and said that we let the girls go hungry. He was lying. We didn’t pay any attention to all the nonsense we heard from Satã. So he’d make papaya or coconut dessert, because there were lots of coconuts here. Now they’re destroying the remaining coconut trees. There was a lot of papaya too. So I’d give him the sugar, cinnamon and cloves, and he’d put them in a tin of powdered milk and take it to them [in Rio]. He’d make a scandal there [...]. Heavens... all the traders would go into the street to see Satã. He’d paint the town red. He’d go on a complete spree, he loved to show off. That was what he was like, a very simple person, nothing bothered him, there was nothing fancy about him.<sup>6</sup>

6 Nair Mattoso was born in 1924 in the Ricardo de Albuquerque district of Rio de Janeiro. In 1936, her father went to live in Praia do Abraão on Ilha Grande, where he found work servicing the machinery at the canned sardine factory. In 1946 she married Natalino Pereira dos Santos, born in Abraão, who worked as the pilot responsible for guiding the transport boats to the colonies. Nair was the owner of a store located at the ferry port, and her family still has guesthouse in Abraão. Interviews were conducted between 2012 and 2015.

It is this Satã, someone who thought of himself as a transvestite artist of Lapa, and who was seen by others as both a homosexual and a tough guy, but also as a liar, joker, exhibitionist, and, to our own surprise, a friend of the prison guards and keeper of order, who forms the epicentre of this article.

### Satã and his diverse personas

At the beginning of the 1970s, the newspaper *O Pasquim* published an interview with Satã that caused something of a sensation (Cabral et al. 1971). The main source of information on Satã's life, however, is a lengthy testimony given by himself to Sylvan Paezzo, writer and author of Brazilian soap operas, who published his own memoirs in 1972 (Paezzo 1972). In 1976, soon after Satã's death, a new interview was published by *O Pasquim* (Machado 1976). From the 1980s onwards, he would appear as a figure in books, films and academic studies.

Founded in 1969 and embodying the counter cultural spirit of the period, *O Pasquim* brought together a group of prominent intellectuals and became one of the main voices opposed to the military dictatorship. In 1971, the newspaper placed 'Madame Satã' at the centre of debate, described by one of its journalists as the 'most macho homosexual' in Rio's history. It is undeniable that while the journalists were aware of the movements related to gender and sexuality,<sup>7</sup> which became active in Brazil precisely during this period, they romanticized the image of the *malandro* and emphasized the 'masculinity' of the homosexual man being interviewed. There is no mention of his transvestite performances or his association with the so-called feminine universe.<sup>8</sup> Satã, since the 1930s, had performed on Lapa's stages as the transvestite Jamacy and Mulata Balacochê. He was an exhibitionist who loved lots of glitter on his clothes, and chose domestic professions considered to belong to the female universe.

The book *Memórias de Madame Satã: conforme narração a Sylvan Paezzo* by Sylvan Paezzo (1972) presents itself as a transcript of Satã's own account of his life, although the author clearly edited the text considerably. In the narrative, tales of the poverty and exploitation suffered during his childhood to the moment of Satã's arrival on the theatre stages of the city centre were intermingled with the interviewer's memory of being labelled *veado* (queer). The insult announced the moment of rupture from that continuous time represented by the saga of a poor boy who realized his dream of starring on Lapa's stages. His artistic career was interrupted after a brawl with a night security guard, which resulted in the man's death and Satã's imprisonment.

Satã distanced himself somewhat from his life trajectory: he was ironic, joked about the tragedies he had suffered, romanticized events that might otherwise have passed by unnoticed. "It was 1928. I was 28 years old because I was born in the same year that the century came into the world" (Paezzo 1972: 1). In the various trial proceedings studied, Satã's year of birth appears as 1904. But irrespective of any poetic license, he was born as the century begun. As a child he lived with his family in Tamboatá Farm in Glória do Goitá, a rural region of Pernambuco state. His grandfather was owner of the manor house<sup>9</sup> and his grandmother a slave. As a bastard child, his father was unable to leave the lands where his mother and her 18 children lived as an inheritance after his death. They were expelled from the farm. At the age of eight,

7 See Facchini 2011. According to the author, the movements related to gender and sexuality emerged in Brazil at the end of the 1970s, predominantly formed by gay men. In these early years of activity, lesbians were already beginning to affirm themselves as relatively autonomous political subjects. In the 1990s, transvestites and later transsexuals began to participate in a more organic fashion. At the start of the 2000s, it was the latter and bisexual women who began to become visible and demand recognition from the movement.

8 Green (2003) rightly points out that the interview reflects the heteronormative and hierarchized framework dominant in Brazilian society. For a more recent critique of the interviews, see Rodrigues 2013. On the classifications distinguishing the 'man' who is 'active' and penetrates his companion and the 'queer' (*bicha*) who is 'passive' and penetrated, see Fry 1982 and Parker 1992.

9 The sugar mills of Brazil's Northeast are composed of architectural clusters that include the manor house where the mill owners live, a chapel, and the various mill buildings.

his mother traded him for a mare and he began to work for a merchant who travelled through the region. The account indicates the miserable conditions in which his family lived. Exploited by the tradesman who had bought him, he fled until finally encountering the female owner of a guest house in Rio de Janeiro ironically called Felicidade (Joy). From the age of thirteen he lived on the streets, performing odd jobs that afforded him some degree of autonomy. In various passages of the book, wage labour is associated with slavery, a situation in which the miserable poor struggle to earn sufficient to eat. João Francisco sought a better life: he worked as a street vendor, a brothel assistant, a cook, a night club bouncer, a laundry owner, and an actor. The narrative of his personal life reflects broader economic and social dimensions, such as the poverty endemic to Northeastern rural life, child exploitation, the low wages paid to workers, and the economic effervescence of bohemian life in Rio de Janeiro, the country's economic and political centre at the time.

Writing about the biographic illusion, the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1998) emphasizes the proper name's capacity to designating the same object in different worlds. On the plus side of Paezzo's book, we could say that it depicts a figure who has no intention of maintaining a fictional unity: the persona transforms and acquires diverse names over his life time. João Francisco, Jamacy, Mulata Balacochê, Caranguejo da Praia das Virtudes, Madame Satã or simply Satã.

The name 'Madame Satã' was given by a police officer, associating the costume with which he had won a competition to the attire worn by an actress in a pre-code Hollywood movie from the period, 'Madam Satan.'<sup>10</sup> At first he shunned the nickname, but later accepted it, albeit with a touch of irony, remarking that the name by which he had become famous had been given by a stranger who associated his costume with one appearing in an American comedy that he had never seen (Paezzo 1972: 61-65). On Ilha Grande, he preferred to be called Satã.

In Lapa, Satã was frequently detained without charge and was well aware that he eschewed the prevailing norms and customs. In his own account:

They couldn't come to terms with my toughness because I was a known homosexual. They thought they couldn't lose to me and so they were always wanting to provoke and beat me. On the other hand, the newspapers gave much more prominence to whatever I did for just the same reason, being a homosexual. But what should I have done? Turned into a coward just to satisfy these people? (Paezzo 1972: 115).

In his confrontations with police authorities, Satã not only fought back when provoked. He retaliated against an army sergeant who tried to kill him by cutting his assailant's buttocks horizontally with his flick knife. In another episode, by now during the Novo Estado regime, an armed special police officer – who he named as Ferreirinha – tried to take him to the police station. While the officer was distracted, Satã took his revolver, left the bar, punctured the tire of his assailant's car and returned to exact revenge: "Start taking your clothes off Ferreirinha. I left him naked. And ashamed. And very annoyed" (Paezzo 1972: 56).

Without doubt he challenged established conventions, surviving the acts of repression and acquiring notoriety. In his memoirs, he declared that his sex life began at the age of thirteen, when the women of Lapa organized bacchanals: "He functioned as a man and as a *bicha* [queer], and preferred being a *bicha*" (Paezzo 1972: 115-6). Echoing Green's comment, it is also important to emphasize that the documenting of Satã's life story was an exception, since thousands of common men and women who lived more open lives with people of the same sex have been hidden from history. The historian also points out that Satã was an example of an 'infamous' homosexual who actively engaged in the construction of his own identity, becoming a widely known and emblematic figure (Green 2000: 203-4).

<sup>10</sup> The American movie 'Madam Satan,' a costume comedy directed and produced by Cecil B. DeMille, was released in Brazilian cinemas in May 1931. The nickname 'Madame Satã' may have been given to Satã soon after his release from the Correctional Colony, and not in 1938 as Paezzo narrates.

After Satã's death in 1975, interest in his life trajectory did not wane. Ten years later, the book *Madame Satã: com o diabo no corpo* by Rogério Durst (Durst 2005) was published. Although we can identify various passages in the book also present in Satã's testimony to Paezzo, there is a clear attempt on Durst's part to organize and add to the earlier account. As a result, Satã's life is turned into a predictable and well-constructed trajectory, losing the disruptive quality of Paezzo's text.

In 2002, the film *Madame Satã*, directed by Karim Aïnouz, with cinematography by Walter Carvalho and starring Lázaro Ramos, was a box office hit in Brazil.<sup>11</sup> The storyline made little endeavour to follow the existing narratives faithfully. It presented the public with a young man, João Francisco, living in bohemian Lapa before he became known as Madame Satã. Narrating João Francisco's life course, the film recounts the history of the police repression of the Lapa district during the first half of the twentieth century. In addition, diverging from the existing autobiographical accounts, the João who appears on the screen is an ambiguous figure: while oppressed and exploited, he is also shown oppressing those who depend on him. The film was renowned for its scenes of gay sex and for a more complex construction of his persona. This re-reading of João Francisco was undertaken when not only had the critique of the heteronormative framework already become part of the political agenda, but also various political subjects had become differentiated within the movement: lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transvestites and transsexuals, each with their specific demands. Reception of the film has been uneven. While some argue that the movie conveys the formation of multiple identities,<sup>12</sup> others suggest that the scenes showing Satã's performance on the improvised stage of the Danúbio Azul succeed in destabilizing the causal continuum between biological sexual identity, gender identity and performance, problematizing the man/woman distinction along much the same lines proposed by the writer Judith Butler. In her analysis of the exaggerated role-playing of the drag queen, Butler argues that this performance implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself.<sup>13</sup>

Although readings of Satã's life are legion, the existing narratives run out of steam when the persona depicted is the one entering and leaving prison. And they practically vanish when the Satã in question is the resident of a small and peaceful village on Ilha Grande. Below we follow the course Satã's life, based on his own testimonies, while also turning to existing records on the prisons where he was held, newspaper reports from the period and a number of interviews.

### **Working for the tindá team**

In Durst's book (2005), chapter three is entirely dedicated to Satã's spells in prison. More descriptive than analytic in approach, Durst points out that the shorter sentences were served either in the capital or in the prison or central penitentiary of the Federal District, while the longer sentences were served on Ilha Grande. The 'prisons of Ilha Grande' appear in the text as though they were one and the same institution over time, so too Satã's relationship with them. However, as this article shows, Ilha Grande's prisons varied considerably and that the treatment received and survival strategies adopted by Satã, principally with respect to the construction of his homosexuality, altered according to circumstances.

There is considerable difficulty in locating the prisons where Satã was held because precise information on dates and places is often lacking. The existing legal proceedings are incomplete and fail to provide a complete picture of Satã's course through the penal institutions. The memoirs left behind follow no

11 The film 'Madame Satã' received various awards: best direction at the Biarritz Film Festival (2002); the Gold Hugo at the Chicago International Film Festival (2002); nomination for the official selection *Un Certain Regard* at the Cannes Film Festival (2002); 4 awards at the 28<sup>th</sup> Huelva Ibero-American Film Festival (Spain).

12 See Lima 2011.

13 On this point, see Alós 2014.

particular chronological order. When Satã mentions the names of guards and directors, like Júlio Cesar and Ivo Moura, the director of the Dois Rios Correctional Colony (CCDR) and the head of security of the Federal District Agricultural Colony (CADF), respectively, we can locate him in time and prison space. But not all the names, events and dates match. Names are written incorrectly, like that of the police chief Demócrito de Almeida, cited as Demóclites de Almeida. As usual in oral testimonies, the author does not recall the sequence of events with any precision and many of them appear in newspapers or official documents in other versions.

Satã's first period of prison was certainly spent at the Dois Rios Correctional Colony (CCDR), located in the Dois Rios village, in 1928. João Francisco was known in Lapa by the nickname Caranguejo. Following his fight with Alberto, a night security guard, and the consequent death of the latter, he was condemned to 16 years of prison. The law decree that created the Colony established that small offenders would be sent there – that is, prisoners serving one to three months of jail time for minor offences. Satã's detention in the establishment already shows that the law was not being followed. The ease with which criminals could be isolated, combined with the overcrowding of the central jails, meant that men, women and adolescents serving a variety of sentences were all sent to the Colony.<sup>14</sup>

Although not recounted by Satã, the conditions of the CCDR as a whole were terrible. To gain some idea, we can turn to a description of the establishment made by a police supervisor at the time:

The use of these individuals[for labour] could not be expected after observing the impossibility of gaining a restful night's sleep, with a platform of dirty planks as a bed, lined with rotten mats and an infected blanket, which doubles as a cloak to shelter from the rain, not forgetting the brick-like pillow. I was unable to sample the meals, which the inmates say are awful and inadequate, but by the look of the kitchen and canteen, the kind of food on offer is all too easy to imagine... The women, living in complete indolence, are housed in a vast cement shed with broken tiles, dark, and just a single doorway providing ventilation. The light that could enter via some slots located in the upper part of the walls is sealed by hemp cloths that also block the entry of fresh air. The dirty beds –without white patches visible anywhere to indicate cleanliness at some point in time, however remote – and the few mattresses are filthy. [...]The cells are infected and inhumane, damp and dark with a gloom that, even with the door wide open, makes is impossible to discern anything, and filled with a foetid stench.<sup>15</sup>

The Colony was a place for dumping men and women accused of vagrancy, prostitution, capoeira and other offences, removed from the city's street by the police and kept in isolation for a period not meant to exceed six months. They were quite literally forgotten there. Sporadically the press would denounce the miserable life of the prisoners inhabiting that 'distant hell.'

Satã escaped the miserable conditions of the Colony and having to live with the other inmates. He sought to get on well with everyone, prisoners and guards alike, and during this first time in prison was chosen to be the cook for the Colony's director. He formed a friendship with the latter's wife, who, according to Satã, seemed to be aged between 15 and 16 years old, and lacked experience in the kitchen (Paezzo 1972: 33).

State from the prisons and residents of Ilha Grande said that prisoners considered well-behaved were employed to provide domestic services in their houses and were called, in the local slang, prisoners from the *tindá* team. Satã could not be considered well-behaved since he had just arrived on the island with

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed description of the operation of the Dois Rios Correctional Colony (CCDR) during this period, see Santos 2009: 141-181.

<sup>15</sup> The official visit and the report were both published in the newspaper *Correio da Manhã*. See: 'Uma visita oficial à Colônia Correcional de Dois Rios.' *Correio da Manhã*, 3 December 1930, p. 3; and 'A visita do 4º. Delegado auxiliar à Colônia de Dois Rios. O Sr. Salgado Filho enviou ontem seu relatório ao chefe de polícia.' *Correio da Manhã*, 5 December 1930, p. 3.



a 16-year sentence to complete. As well as being a cook, what helped him evade the worst of the Colony were his relationships inside the prison (since he was nominated for the job in the director's house by another inmate) and his fame as a tough guy (*valente*). Those selected for domestic work in the guard house or the homes of local residents acquired certain privileges: they escaped confinement in the cells, and were able to enjoy much better food. But undoubtedly a trade-off was involved: they became henchmen, conflict mediators, bodyguards, and even informants to the guards.

As we have seen, Satã's brawls with guards and police officers were a constant in Lapa. In the Colony, though, Satã obtained the director's protection and, as a consequence, nobody stood in his way, neither guards, nor other inmates. In turn, he voiced supporter for the director. Rather than holding him responsible for what happened there, he would sometimes praise him, mentioning that, on his release from prison, his bosses went to the port to bid him farewell and paid him a generous amount for his dedicated work.

### **A tranquil jail term in the laundry team**

Paezzo's book contains a description of an episode in which Satã, retaliating after an attack on himself, had knifed an army sergeant across the buttocks. The consequence was a four-year prison sentence. In the interview given to *O Pasquim*, Satã claimed that the sergeant had actually cut himself on barbed wire. Irrespective of what happened, Satã returned to Ilha Grande, probably in 1939, a period when the Federal District Agricultural Penitentiary was operating on the island (1938-1941), a penal institution created to rehabilitate well-behaved criminals. The old Dois Rios Correctional Colony was placed under the authority of this new institution.

Satã commented that he arrived on the island after the death of a guard called Vasconcelos, reputed to have been highly sadistic and cruel with the inmates. As well as the guard Vasconcelos, Satã cited the director Fabio Sena. We found no record of these names. However, in 1939, numerous accusations were made against a guard called Sanhaço, always defended by the director José Jannini. While the names do not match, the descriptions of the guard's brutality, as well as the lack of food, are reiterated in the documents from the period. In a letter sent to the Federal District magistrate, Sebastião Silva denounced the barbaric regime to which 500 prisoners were being subjected with the sanction of the Chief of Police:

(...) After diligently finding the fugitives and brutally beating them, the said Sanhaço, taking out a revolver, shot the prisoners, injuring Jair Alves Braga, who ended up with two bullets lodged in his right arm and forearm. [...] The witness Sebastião da Silva, unable to stand any longer the forced labour to which he was subjected, or the beatings, and who like the other inmates was forced to carry beams to the prison, fled with two companions, who after several days were re-captured. [...] "Wake up to die, you won't give anyone more work ever again." And just after he heard this sinister phrase, he was shot and at the same time thrashed with a length of vine, beaten with rifles, and kicked.<sup>16</sup>

On June the 14<sup>th</sup> 1939, the director José Jannini wrote to the head of cabinet of the Ministry of Justice and Internal Affairs, asserting that the mistreatments cited by the accusers were merely the "fantasies of sick minds." He attached records describing the accusers as unruly and argued that they had been armed with knives, scissors and scythes when they escaped. On July the 8<sup>th</sup>, the case was shelved. Official documents provide us with more precise information on dates, names and regulations, but a complete lack of transparency exists when it comes to the events described: indeed a careful operation had clearly been

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Sebastião Silva to the Federal District police magistrate, 6 March 1939. Case 2.757/39. National Archive.

mounted, from the choice of who would investigate the accusation to those who would rule on it, entirely to the benefit of the state personnel involved.

On his return to Ilha Grande, Satã tried to work in the *tindá* but was unsuccessful. He was assigned to the laundry, a job that ensured his time in jail was spent tranquilly. During this period, he had enough freedom to be able to raise a pig called Rosita as a pet (Paezzo 1972: 99). Once again, Satã had managed to obtain a secure place where he had no problems with other inmates or even the guards. This time, though, he lacked the director's protection and needed to earn a place among the other prisoners. Not only small offenders were sent to Ilha Grande at this time, but also criminals serving all kinds of sentences. Although he always claimed to have experienced no problems with the other *malandros*, because he was the toughest and most famous of them, it is interesting to note that Satã contented himself with a task considered feminine within the prison, the laundry.

Júlio de Almeida, a prisoner who arrived on Ilha Grande in 1958, had contact with Satã when both of them went to Rio de Janeiro to present a witness statement in court. Júlio referred to Satã both in the masculine (*ele*, him) and in the feminine (*ela*, she). He explained that *she* was proficient in performing light tasks, such as washing, ironing and providing domestic services in the houses of the guards and local residents. He was never responsible for running the prison kitchen, for example, a disputed and dangerous place, since it functioned as the entry point for drugs and guns. In his words:

He had a similar body to mine, a little bit taller, a bit lighter skinned [...] She... she... I say 'she' because he was effeminate, right? I'd say that she was a tranquil girl, calm, she wasn't aggressive, you know? I mean she was like... very skilled in her work [...] she washed clothes, all the business with the director's clothes... she bred pigs, you know?<sup>17</sup>

In Green's view, Satã transgressed standardized gendered ways of acting, confusing the prevailing social stereotypes (Green 2000: 204). His analysis is confirmed by the gender switching made by Júlio when referring to Satã.

Satã's success in obtaining a calm situation on Ilha Grande needs to be highlighted, since the island's prisons continued to be much feared. Satã's comment on the lack of food and the difficulties encountered there raises the question of prostitution within the institution, a problem absent from the official documents:

And the hunger was such that I saw a prisoner with half a kilo of flour and a bunch of bananas have 4 or 5 lads offering themselves as women to him. In exchange for a meal (Paezzo 1972: 86-7).

## The mediatic escape of Carmem Miranda

In the Paezzo narrative, Satã's third imprisonment on Ilha Grande was to serve a ten-year sentence. The reason is unclear. Satã had been advised to talk to the head of security, Ivo Moura, but did not do so due to his attempt to escape. He also recalled that he set off aboard the tugboat Laurindo Pita, which carried more than 150 people linked to the *jogo do bicho* gambling game<sup>18</sup> (Paezzo 1972:120-131).

The events recounted in this narrative, the result of Satã's recollection and Paezzo's writing, probably took place, but not exactly in the form recorded. The past always arrives in the present filled with lacunas.

<sup>17</sup> Testimony of Júlio de Almeida, referred to by the press 'The last prisoner of Ilha Grande' because he arrived at the Federal District Agricultural Colony, in 1958, to serve a sentence of more than fifty years, and settled there with his family, where he has lived to the present day. Interviews conducted between 2012 and 2015.

<sup>18</sup> *Jogo do bicho* is an illegal game, banned since 1946. Extremely popular, it involves betting on numbers that represent animals.

Anyone seeking to reconstruct it fills such lacunas with their own imagination. For this reason, memory cannot be assumed to be a faithful copy of the past. The sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1994 [1925]) explained this process rigorously in his theory of social frameworks of memory. When individuals remember the past, they also place themselves as the main protagonist of whatever event is being narrated. Depending on the personality and on the convictions of the person who remembers, the experienced event assumes different dimensions. The importance of individual strategies in the process of remembering the past was emphasized by social psychologists, like Bartlett (1961 [1932]). By considering both these theoretical approaches to memory, we can conclude that memories are thus neither pure imagination nor faithful portraits of the past: they form elements of plots woven from lived experiences and narrative strategies. Someone who narrates the past is a storyteller and, in common with all such narrators, the stories are produced in response to those listening to the narrative.

The memories left by Satã are important not because of the sequence or order of events, but because they help us comprehend both his actions and reactions to the prisons that he passed through, and the networks of relations mobilized by himself to deal with established norms and institutions. In the Correctional Colony, Satã encountered inmates who enabled him to become a trusted employee of the director and evade the misery and mistreatment typical of the locale. In the Agrarian Penitentiary, he worked in the laundry, which he considered a safe place. Although black and homosexual, he managed to gain the respect of the inmates and guards inside Ilha Grande's prisons.

The police records contain a case against Satã for bodily harm and resisting arrest in February 1942, with a report from a police chief. Satã, dressed as a *baiana*,<sup>19</sup> had attracted a lawyer to his house. A tenant in the building had called a police officer to take him to the station and Satã resisted arrest, injuring both his neighbour and the officer in the process. According to the police chief, João Francisco dos Santos, "despite being a passive pederast, was a tough man who resisted arrest", contradicting the more usual dictates of the police. For the police chief, he was simply an addict who commercialized his addiction, since he was a widow and acted in a virile manner. The advice passed on to the authorities was for Satã to be studied by men of science.<sup>20</sup>

This official document makes explicit the view of a contemporary senior police chief concerning homosexuality, associated by the police authorities with perversion, criminality and deviance. In the laboratories of criminal anthropology, physicians and criminologists sought the origin of criminality through studies of biotypes and social environments. The Satã case merited study because by combining 'pederasty' and 'virility,' he threw into question the principal theories formulated in hospitals, prisons and other public institutions. Police chiefs and jurists associated the crimes committed by Satã with sexual 'inversion' and an 'infirmity of the will.'

In the newspaper *A Luta Democrática*, owned by Tenório Cavalcante, a controversial politician highly popular in Baixada Fluminense, a region with major social problems and urban violence, we find many news reports on the crime world. The report on Satã's imprisonment in 1955 also contains a description of his past deeds, highlighting his performance as Carmem Miranda on the journey to Dois Rios:

His police record at the Department of Customs<sup>21</sup> is far from minor. On 9<sup>th</sup> November 1942, following an order issued by the cabinet of the Chief of Police, the invert was taken to the Ilha Grande Correctional Colony, to where he returned on 9 July 1944. During the journey 'Madame Satã' demonstrated his art by imitating Carmem Miranda, managing to capture the attention of the guards with the swaying of his hips, and thereby help the

19 A woman native to Bahia, or someone dressed in the large white skirts traditionally worn by black women from the region.

20 Case 481/42. National Archive. Inventory: RJ Criminal Court. Notation: João Francisco dos Santos.

21 In Portuguese, *Delegacia de Costumes*, a police department for investigating and preventing minor crimes or 'misdemeanours.'

other prisoners to escape... In addition, 'Madame Satã' has to his credit various entries in the police records concerning inquiries. Whenever arrested, he would confront the officers of the law and several men would always needed to secure him.<sup>22</sup>

The newspaper, which sensationalized crimes and demonized criminals, called Satã an 'invert,' highlighted his skill in imitating Carmem Miranda, and emphasized his fights whenever arrested and taken to the police stations. The newspaper mentioned two transfers of Satã to Ilha Grande, one in 1942 and the other in 1944, and claimed that his performance had helped other prisoners to escape, though not himself. Like police chiefs and officers, the journalists also considered Satã to be a dangerous 'invert.' In his interview with *O Pasquim*, Satã described his own escape, as well as the headline in the papers: "Another spectacular plan by Madame Satã: an Oriental ballet and a dive into the dark waters of Copacabana" (Cabral et al. 1971). According to Satã, after attracting everyone's attention, he jumped into the sea and swam to Copacabana. He was caught and once again sent to Ilha Grande.

Ivo Moura, cited by Satã, arrived on Ilha Grande in 1942 as head guard at the newly created penitentiary and remained in office there until 1958. He was part of a cohort of *gaúchos* personally trusted by the director of the Fernando de Noronha Agricultural Colony (CAFN), a prison holding the leaders of political parties opposed to the authoritarian regime installed by Getúlio Vargas in 1937. After Brazil joined the Second World War, Fernando de Noronha island became a strategic military location and CAFN's staff and prisoners were transferred to Ilha Grande, occupying the installations of the recently built Agricultural Penitentiary mentioned earlier. It was renamed the Federal District Agricultural Colony (CADF). The prisoners and employees who had been located were, in turn, transferred to the Cândido Mendes Penal Colony (CPCM), an institution set up in 1941 for the correction of small offenders, situated at another site on Ilha Grande called Vila do Abraão. In 1945, as democracy became restored, the political prisoners held at CADF were awarded amnesty and the prison itself operated throughout the rest of the 1940s with a much smaller contingent of prisoners than expected.

Maintaining discipline at the Agricultural Colony did not require the level of violence used in earlier periods. Between 1942 and 1945, the institution received special funding to keep the political prisoners under guard. For the criminal authorities responsible for the system, the political prisoners were not deviants to be rehabilitated through 'scientific treatment.' and nor did they need to engage in agricultural labour for their recuperation. Some prisoners were able to live in houses built close to the main building. Although the Colony had its share of escape attempts, beatings and other problems encountered in the other prisons, during this period the institution provided those being held there with an amenable place to serve their sentence.

A criminal case from 1947<sup>23</sup> tells us that Satã had tried to enter Cabaré Brasil, a nightclub located on Lapa's main street, and was barred by the civil guard for being disorderly and unkempt. According to the document, he had fought back, first with a flick knife, quickly knocked away by the guard, and subsequently with punches and kicks. Satã was accused of causing injury, resisting arrest and disrespecting a public employee in the exercise of his duty. In the investigation into the defendant's previous life, the commissioner Ilo Salgado Bastos made a similar appraisal to Frota Aguiar, claiming that although Satã was a passive pederast, shaved his eyebrows and adopted a feminine demeanour, he was a highly dangerous individual who refused to respect police authorities. At the time, following the 1940 Penal Code, security measures could be applied according to either the seriousness of the crime or the level of danger posed by the criminal. In the latter case, applied to Satã, imprisonment punished the individual not for what he had

<sup>22</sup> Madame Satã. *A Luta Democrática*, 6 September 1955, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Case 6262/47. National Archive. Inventory: RJ Criminal Court. Notation: João Francisco dos Santos.

done, but for what he was. The final sentence was 3 years and 8 months in prison. He was sent to the Federal District Prison and subsequently to the Central Penitentiary. On 27<sup>th</sup> March 1947, the director of the latter institution, Antonio Pereira de Castro Pinto Junior, sent an official letter to the Judge of the 14<sup>th</sup> Criminal Court asking for João Francisco do Santos to be sent to the Judicial Mental Hospital for submission to an examination of his nervous system.<sup>24</sup> Satã was sent to the Federal District Agricultural Colony (CADF) on Ilha Grande, since the same case is cited in the letter issued on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1948 and signed by Colonel José Rodrigues Pessoa – director of CCDR, also responsible for the Agricultural Colony – requesting a copy of Satã's sentence. With support from the lawyer Orlando Torres Correa, the case went to the Appeal Court and Satã was released in October 1948, having completed just 2 years of prison.

At the end of the 1940s, Satã found himself in a recently built penitentiary with a small number of inmates and well-trained administrative staff. Probably for this reason, he provides us with little information on the prison. The memories that return to our thoughts are those that are out of the ordinary or that leave a strong impression on us. In his interview with the newspaper *O Pasquim*, he said that he became a close friend to the Mostardeiro family from Rio Grande do Sul (a state in the south of Brazil). The lawyer Manoel Mostardeiro was the right arm of CADF's director, Nestor Veríssimo, and took over interim control of the Colony in 1944 after Veríssimo's death, and during various other periods. According to a former resident of Dois Rios, Satã's adopted daughter spent some time with Dona Sila, Mostardeiro's wife.<sup>25</sup> This time too, Satã developed a close relationship with directors, obtained the support of lawyers to review his sentence, and avoided any clashes with the guards and other inmates.

## Conflict mediation amid chaos

According to Durst, Satã spent virtually the entire decade of the 1950s in prison (Durst 2005: 45). In June 1949, Satã was convicted for wearing a dagger on his belt. The Commissioner Carlos Santos, discussing the information available on the defendant, claimed that despite describing himself as a cook, Satã engaged in the vice of pederasty, using unoccupied houses in Lapa. He added that Satã was feared among *malandro* circles and had committed a series of crimes, including assault, disobedience and resisting arrest. In October, Satã received a sentence of 2 years and 6 months confinement and a fine of two thousand cruzeiros for the more serious accusation of attempting to sell on stolen jewels the year before. For this crime he was arrested on the 13<sup>th</sup> March 1953. Transfer of the sentence to probation was requested and he was released two years later. Part of this term was spent at the Cândido Mendes Penal Colony.

On 8<sup>th</sup> May 1955, the date on which Geraldo Pereira, a famous *sambista* and composer, died, Satã was evidently out of prison, in Lapa, since we know that he had brawled with the *sambista* shortly before the latter died. Two months later he was convicted again. The newspaper *A Luta Democrática*, on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1955, described Satã's imprisonment for a *suadouro* scam in collusion with Elza Gomes de Matos, 19 years old. The report mentioned that Satã has been arrested a short time after receiving conditional release, this time receiving a sentence of 6 years and 4 months for pimping and assault.<sup>26</sup> The cases show the overlapping of sentences of 1947, resulting from resisting arrest at the door of the Cabaré Brasil; 1950, for receiving

24 Antonio Pereira de Castro Pinto was director of the Federal District Central Penitentiary between 1946 and 1951, when he was accused of administrative irregularities. See: 'Escrivão é o responsável pelas irregularidades no cartório da 25ª. V.C.' *Correio da Manhã*, 3 December 1958. p. 5.

25 Testimony of Olí Demutti Moura, son of the employee Ivo Moura, who, along with other children of guards who spent their childhood in Dois Rios, between 1942 and 1960, remember the past fondly. Interviews held between 2012 and 2015.

26 Pimping here includes the crime of facilitating, profiting from, exploiting or promoting the prostitution of others; while *suadouro* refers to the crime usually perpetrated by a prostitute of attracting the victim to a particular location to be robbed by others.

stolen jewellery; and 1952, for theft. There is no formal accusation of either pimping or theft, even though the reports always mentioned that Satã, an individual with a terrible criminal record, a passive pederast, worked in disreputable houses.

Also according to *A Luta Democrática*, Satã had told the commissioner Palhares from the Department of Customs that the scam had been perpetrated because he had been left penniless after being run over and suffering a fractured leg. In his testimony to Paezzo, Satã claimed that the accusation of being involved in the *suadouro* scam was unfair because he had been practicing *candomblé* that day, meaning it was impossible for him to have taken part in the alleged robbery. Whatever the case, Durst is correct to assert that Satã remained in prison for virtually all the 1950s. These periods of imprisonment were mostly served at the Cândido Mendes Penal Colony (CPCM).

Although two agricultural colonies were established on the island, receiving individuals serving all kinds of sentences, they maintain important differences. The Federal District Agricultural Colony (CADF), located in Vila Dois Rios, had relatively new living quarters, it was run by a group of employees who demonstrated greater administrative skills, and, due to its greater isolation, were able to keep the inmates under greater control. After 1945, when political prisoners were granted amnesty, prisoners with longer sentences to complete were sent there. Located in Vila do Abraão, the Penal Colony had fewer funds and more operational problems. As well as prisoners serving out their sentences, other individuals were sent to the colony, including beggars, vagrants and even the disabled, who were unable to work. The installations, buildings repurposed from the old Lazareto site, a quarantine hospital that was built in 1884, were rundown and the cells used for confinement, located close to the shore, were humid, dark and foetid. Since Vila do Abraão is the port for boats arriving from Angra dos Reis or Mangaratiba, and situated closer to the mainland, controlling escape attempts proved difficult.

Satã cited, albeit out of sequence, three directors of CPCM – Otávio Pinto, Francisco Monteiro and Carneiro de Mendonça – who, he said, treated the inmates very well. These directors occupied the post during the second half of the 1950s when the colony was experiencing a period of rapid decline, facing overcrowding, a lack of funds, corruption among employees and installations in an advanced state of deterioration. Official records and newspaper reports on corruption, escapes and the entry of marijuana into the prison were frequent. Given the lacking of sufficient public funding to feed the inmates even, the directors granted permission for more of the convicts, those they could trust, to live outside the prison.<sup>27</sup> These prisoners were able to plant their own fields and the institution was no longer obliged to feed them or provide clothes and medicine. Satã emphasized the difficulty faced by the directors in maintaining control of the institution:

They tried everything to keep everything under check, but the manufacture of knives increased daily. Likewise the sale of alcohol. And also the marijuana dealing, they had no idea how to put an end to it, they didn't even know that many prisoners had marijuana plantations on the actual island, even within the prison's walls (Paezzo 1972: 171-2).

In the Penal Colony, Satã not only managed to return to his work in the laundry, he became the head of the team. He recalled that during this period he encountered a 'nervous' jail in which nobody slept from fear of being murdered. People were killed over very little: a dispute over small change, jealousy or a simple misunderstanding. He probably worked in the guards' houses too and was even allowed to have

<sup>27</sup> See the following newspaper articles: 'Ilha Grande: terror dos presos de todo o Brasil. 900 presos em toda a Ilha – Duas colônias penais, em uma ilha de 180 milhas de perímetro – Muitos presos vivem em liberdade completa – Maior problema da administração.' *Tribuna da Imprensa*, 30 January 1952. p. 7; and 'Estabelecimentos penais sem recursos para dar alimentação aos detentos.' *Jornal do Brasil*, 26 June 1960. Supplement, p. 4.

his own house. According to Júlio de Almeida's testimony, Satã lived outside the cells and looked after the house of one of the staff.<sup>28</sup>

As for his sexual orientation, Satã encountered no problems among the guards and inmates. In the Penal Colony's service orders we find penalties for pederasty listed. However, while an inmate who had hidden a bag of maize received punishment of ten days in a dark cell, an inmate who had forced another "to engage in acts of pederasty and immoral acts" was punished for just three days.<sup>29</sup> In this case, pederasty did not imply sexual contact between an older man and a youth, but homosexuality as an immoral act. In the poorly supervised system in which the inmates were held at the Cândido Mendes Penal Colony, the sexual orientation of the prisoners was not a problem for its directors. Control of the sexuality of 600 men, working outside their cells and without intimate visits, was practically non-existent.

Politicians and parliamentary members occasionally manifested concern about Ilha Grande's prisons. In May 1952, Mr. Breno da Silveira, a Rio deputy, was a member of a parliamentary commission that visited the two colonies on Ilha Grande. As well as denouncing the lack of resources, he was struck by the "drama of homosexuality," which was discovered not only on Ilha Grande, but even on the boats that took to the inmates to the prison. According to the deputy, there prevailed "neglect, negligence, complete laxity on the part of the government," which did not give the 'unfortunate' any kind of help to overcome the degradation observed there.<sup>30</sup>

Ten years later, the homosexuality of the inmates still bothered the authorities. A commission elected to present solutions to the prison problem advocated the deactivation of the Cândido Mendes Penal Colony. Mr. Levi Ibsen de Moura, head of the commission, citing the rebellion that had taken place at another prison establishment, asserted that the CPCM's conditions were even worse. He also expressed concern over the issue of sexuality, claiming that there were insufficient guards to watch over the prisoners and that physically weaker inmates faced the dilemma of having to kill or "be corrupted." He added:

As soon as one arrives at the Colony, one notes the peculiar attitude of some of the prisoners, with their long nails, weird hair and languid looks. However, there exist cases like that of the prisoner 'Ramirinho' who killed five colleagues in six months and was finally transferred to Lemos Brito [...].<sup>31</sup>

Satã, in his interview with *O Pasquim*, denied the existence of forced sexual relations in the prisons. An assertion that contradicts others he made, including in the same interview. In Paezzo's book, we find Satã's explanation that every jail had sheriffs or owners of mattresses who would choose "pretty lads, sons of a rich daddy" to be their women. If the youth resisted the sheriff, other veterans would come to help him and beat the victim until he ceased resisting. The young prisoners were seldom able to obtain support from the prison directors and when they did receive any, it came too late. Some lads obtained guns and killed in order to be respected, others went mad, and others still accepted the situation and remained silent (Paezzo 1972: 51-2). In another passage he claimed that once while he was working in the laundry, he witnessed a murder after a new inmate refused to become a *malandro's* woman (Paezzo 1972: 199). In the same book, homosexuality among *malandros* (scoundrels) is described in a much more generalized form:

Meia Noite Segundo was called Meia Noite Segundo [*Second Midnight*] because when he spent his first time in jail, the actual Meia Noite [*Midnight*] made him his woman. In fact the famous and original Meia Noite from the samba world had also spent his time as a *malandro's* woman, since he frequently gave his ass to Tinguá when he

28 Testimony of Júlio de Almeida. Interviews held between 2012 and 2015.

29 Cases 3.416/56 and 17.377/56. National Archive. MJNI Inventory. Organization and Administration of Penitentiary Institutions Series. CADF. Boxes 2.523 and 5.949.

30 'Câmara dos Deputados. Regime Penitenciário.' *Jornal do Brasil*, 31 May 1952. p. 6.

31 'Ilha Grande em Péssimas Condições.' *Tribuna da Imprensa*, 2-3 December 1961, p. 7.

was a young vagrant and spent his first spell in jail [...] Few young *malandros* did not become the wives of older men in their first prison terms (Paezzo 1972: 164).

In the Penal Colony, despite the administration's difficulty in keeping 'order,' Satã, as in his earlier periods in prison, gained the respect of the inmates and guards. It is important to emphasize that he did not hold any position of power within the jail, such as those of the 'sheriffs.' The latter collected money and distributed ordered contraband, which varied from toothpaste to every kind of drug. Those who had no money became hostages to others. Satã won over the trust of the guards and assisted them. As head of the laundry team, for example, he once spotted an escape attempt by two inmates who he saw as his subordinates and immediately alerted the guards (Paezzo 1972: 165). Whenever he could, he would try to avert fights between prisoners. Few in number, the guards used trusted 'prisoners' in exchange for small perks. For them, it was important to prevent escapes and violent – and potentially lethal – fights among the convicts.

### Among guards and residents

The historian Claudia Mattos, describing the Rio criminal ethos of *malandragem* through song lyrics, pointed to the existence of various codes of conduct among the *malandros* (Matos 1982). Satã followed some of these to the letter. He never ran from a fight, he was skilled in the use of a flick knife, and he resolved his own problems. He clashed with *malandros* like Sete Coroas and Geraldo Pereira. The latter was almost two meters in height, a well-known *sambista*, and highly respected in Lapa. However, Satã's fights with the police did not match what would be expected from a *malandro*, who survived on the streets by adhering to the popular saying: *manda quem pode e obedece quem tem juízo*: those who can give the orders; those who are wise will obey. Instead, Satã reacted with anger and indignation to police brutality, even inside police stations, and, though he struck back, he would be beaten until left unconscious.

Satã's indignation had grounds. In the 1930s, with Getúlio Vargas's seizure of power,<sup>32</sup> there was a resurgence in the repression of gambling houses, the activities of guest houses and cabarets, along with all those who the regime classed as undesirables. The police authorities arrested hundreds of people, closed hotels deemed suspicious and imposed their own laws. Following the installation of the Estado Novo national regime,<sup>33</sup> the repression of the city's bohemian life intensified further. Furthermore, the judicial-penal authorities were strongly influenced by positivist, scientificist and biological theses disseminated by journals specializing in legislation, legal doctrine and jurisprudence.<sup>34</sup> Criminologists not only attributed a natural criminal tendency to those individuals identified as black and mixed race, they also associated homosexuality with deviant and sick practices. In the 1950s, the attempts to cure people diagnosed as sexual degenerates continued. In 1953, a Biotypological Commission for Investigation and Readjustment (CBIR) was created at the Cândido Mendes Penal Colony, formed by a physician, a professor, a professional supervisor and various employees, appointed by the director.

These scientific theories and their differentiation and ranking of human beings undoubtedly had a strong impact in the administrative sphere, legitimizing beatings and even the murder of individuals classified as inferior and degenerate. However, these beliefs were always subject to local interpretations and, in the case of Ilha Grande, what mattered most for the guards was the assistance of tough guys (*valentes*) in maintaining order. Violence might be employed when an inmate failed to work as demanded by the guards,

32 In 1930, an armed movement supported by three Brazilian states – Minas Gerais, Paraíba and Rio Grande do Sul – placed Getúlio Vargas in power, preventing the elected president, Júlio Prestes, from assuming office, a politician considered the representative of the economic elite centred on agricultural exports.

33 In 1937, Getúlio Vargas decreed the Estado Novo (New State), closing down Congress and assuming dictatorial powers. He governed until 1945.

34 On this subject, see Alvarez 1996; 2002.



but mainly in response to escape attempts, thefts, assaults and homicides – or, in other words, in situations that undermined the institution's everyday running and the reputation of its staff. The colony guards were extremely violent, a situation made critical by the lack of supervision by the central administration over the penal colonies, the small number of employees, and the precarious conditions to which the prisoners were subjected.

In the Ilha Grande colonies, Satã was not persecuted for being openly homosexual by either the inmates or the guards. Among the former, moral condemnation of homosexuality appears not to have been widespread. Foucault observed the irony of attempting to treat homosexuality through imprisonment, where those found guilty are placed in close contact with other men (Foucault 1994: 673). Satã left prison in 1962 and opted to remain on Ilha Grande, declaring himself a friend of the guards who lived there and praising the prison system.

The place where Satã chose to reside, Vila do Abraão, was isolated and provincial. Its few residents lived from small-scale farming or from fishing, scraping a living from archaic and mostly unlucrative practices.

Satã's relationship with Vila do Abraão's residents was not simple. As occurs in other small towns and villages, he was known by everyone, which does not mean that he was accepted. But Satã had prestige, he came from a larger world. For Satã, as for other prisoners, the residents were *caipiras*, that is, residents of the interior, small town folk. In the village, there was no piped fresh water supply, waste collection or sewage system, and the primary schools struggled to keep open. As its commerce was linked to government investment in the prisons, the decline in funding for the latter left the village languishing.<sup>35</sup>

In the 1960s, the village was a border area between the outside world and the world inside the prisons. Many inmates lived outside the prisons and many guards located their families there. Satã worked in Janete's bar and many people recall that whenever there was an audience, he would climb onto the bar top and perform his own show. In some festivals, Satã injected life into the small village: he would get hold of some coloured cabaret lights and appear singing as Carmem Miranda. During carnival, he assumed a prominent role, organizing the village's dances. He would dress as a pink ballerina, or in a wedding dress, with hemmed skirts and high heels improvised from stacked clogs.

According to residents, Satã was always easy-going.<sup>36</sup> Renato Buys, a maths teacher and one of the guardians of local memory,<sup>37</sup> recalled that one time he had been in Janete's bar, where Satã worked, when an outsider began to make jokes and provoke him. Renato offered to help Satã to pay back the insult, but Satã replied that he knew how to defend himself and showed him the long, thin knife worn on his belt. Even provoked, Satã refrained from striking back. Another resident, Renato Mattos, a trail guide, told a story well-known on the island. On one of Satã's trips to Angra dos Reis, a group of youths began to make fun of him, ridiculing everything he did. Satã said nothing while he was on the boat, but on arriving at the mainland, he called them all over to fight and, despite his age, sent the youths packing. His fame as a tough guy remained intact, but on the island he avoided trouble.

Renato Buys, confirming remarks made by the other residents, recalled that Satã could be seductive and even bothersome, but never violent. He also recounts how Satã, while still an inmate, would stand next to the dock observing the arriving prisoners and selecting those who would be 'his.' A joke or not, nobody knows. After completing his sentence and living in Vila do Abraão, Satã had for company, Maria, a short-statured homosexual from the Brazilian Northeast. Also according to Renato Buys, one day Maria

35 On the precarious situation of Vila do Abraão in the 1960s, see 'Ilha Grande: sobreviver é uma questão de tato.' *Jornal do Brasil*, 22 May 1968. Main section, p. 15.

36 For their recollections of Satã's period in Vila do Abraão, I would like to thank the following residents: Júlio de Almeida, Antonio Simplício, Constantino Cokotós (deceased), Alexandre Guilherme de Oliveira e Silva, Graciela Cuellar, Renato Motta, Maria Rachel Sousa, Nair Matoso, and Renato Buys. Former residents who contributed to the research include Olí Demutti Moura, Sergio Esteves Demutti and Maria das Graças Ramuz.

37 See, for example, Buys 2010.

robbed some things from him and fled. Satã was distraught. He put on a black cape, took a boat and sailed out theatrically to the beaches in search of Maria, who was eventually found. She ended up staying a while longer with Satã before leaving.

In various criminal proceedings, Satã was cited as a 'widow' and 'father.' We have little information, though, on his family relationships. The declarations to *O Pasquim* reveal various contradictions. Satã claimed that he had never been in love, and thought the idea of having an *amiguinho* ('little friend') and marriage between homosexuals ugly and ridiculous, adding that he was married to a woman and had six children who he raised as his own. In Paezzo's book, Satã declared himself distressed with the company of Maria Faissal, even saying that prison had freed him from the situation. But Satã undoubtedly devoted care to Maria Faissal's daughter. In two of the court cases studied, dating from 1947 and 1954, Satã asked for authorization to pay for the girl's boarding school and a medical visit. Despite the shaved eyebrows and melodious voice, Satã never walked in the street dressed as a woman, which he found absurd. For his adopted children, he was João Francisco. In the period when he lived in Vila do Abraão, Ilha Grande, he was able to bring his mother to visit him and, on this occasion too, he was João Francisco. Satã thus identified himself as a homosexual, transvestite and tough guy, but also as a husband, father and son, depending on the context in which he found himself. He also sometimes claimed to be a member of *candomblé*, a fact little explored.

In a case from the 1970s, the suspect, a head of security from the Cândido Mendes Penal Institute (IPCM), cites Satã as his partner in running a brothel.<sup>38</sup> The accusation was judged groundless and the case closed. However the accusation shows the existence of different codes and ways of life among the residents. The guards of the former prison had much more financial power than the other residents. Some had been accused of corruption and the residents looked on them with suspicion. The friendship between Satã and the guards was nuanced. In a newspaper interview from the 1970s, Satã claimed that the guards, very often illiterate, joined the Colony's administration as residents of the island, without any other qualifications for the job. He went on to denounce the local violence:

This island is a land where if the child cries, the mother doesn't hear: if the child dies, the mother doesn't see. And those of us here see little, because if we look too closely, they order our eyes to be gauged out: if we say too much, they order our tongue to be torn out: and if we hear too much, they order our ears to be bunged up.<sup>39</sup>

Satã continued to earn money from the same activities he performed while in prison, washing clothes and cooking. According to Dona Nair, Satã sometimes had no money at all, but people would ask him to make snacks for marriages, cook fish stews and perform other jobs. He knew many people off the island who could help him.

In sum, on his successive returns to prison, Satã found various ways of finding a niche for himself and gaining perks. He was skilled in the construction of his *personas*, as though he were on stage. This Italian word, derived from the Latin, *per sonare*, or 'sounding through', commonly used in the artistic field, helps us comprehend behaviours and identity constructs. The Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman is famed for his dramaturgical approach in which social interactions are analyzed as theatrical performances. Goffman analyzes diverse representational strategies, arguing that these constructs vary from situation to situation, group to group, and cannot be comprehended either in terms of a strictly individual motivation or as the imposition of collective representations. The multiple roles performed by individuals over the course of life

<sup>38</sup> Trial dated 23 January 1970 against the former councillor of Angra dos Reis, and the head of service of the Cândido Mendes Penal Institute, for marijuana trafficking, larceny and theft of a cafeteria. On the 5<sup>th</sup> October, the Military Police of Guanabara State rejected the accusations, including the existence of a brothel on Ilha Grande. Rio de Janeiro State Public Archive. Political Police Inventory. Secret Sector. Notation 66. Pages 139-148.

<sup>39</sup> 'Ilha Grande: sobreviver é uma questão de tato.' *Jornal do Brasil*, 22 May 1968. Main section, p. 15.

are seen as an open game in which individuals can either conform to the set of existing norms and values, or resist the imposed disciplines (Goffman 1983).

Michel Foucault placed less trust in individual strategies and denounced the conformity of subjects to powers exerted on their habits and bodies. For him, the power inherent to the various networks and entanglements that constitute us, or 'biopower,' is rarely negotiable (Foucault 1987). However, Foucault also believed that it is individuals, not in going about their everyday life, as Goffman argued, but in the defence of their pleasures, who react to control mechanisms and mount forms of resistance, effecting operations on their bodies, thoughts and behaviours. Foucault turned to Greek Antiquity to comprehend those who would say the truth despite the consequences, those who are insolent and scandalous, since their ethics and courage are not the result of social norms, but what their spirit and body say. Resistance emerges as a way of obtaining a degree of satisfaction and power in the "care of self" (Foucault 2011).

Recently, Satã's life trajectory has been re-explored by authors studying sexuality and gender since it allows a reading of a fluid identity that shifts position – that is, a non-identity – as it encounters and opposes prejudices and hostilities.<sup>40</sup> As we have seen, Satã did not always break from established norms and many of his self-constructions were ambiguous. Satã's life in the prisons of Ilha Grande and later in Vila do Abraão shows us that once respected, he would follow the norms. Despite living out his life in a small settlement, his horizon of expectations remained closely linked to the life of Lapa. Over his life time, he defended his right to be homosexual and to perform the roles on the stage that he so loved. Satã maintained friendships with journalists, musicians and artists from the period. He was jovial and enjoyed life. Despite being buried in the local cemetery, Dona Nair told us, his wish was to have a tomb in one of Rio's cemeteries. One of his phrases, the assertion that life is a joke, would appear to encapsulate his view of the world.

Translation: David Rodgers

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<sup>40</sup> The assertion of queerness, arguing for sex as discourse in an era when transgender performances and the limits of the anatomical body have become public issues, goes beyond the demand for legal equality, a result of Foucault's reflections, arguing for the multiplicity of experiences that mark the body in its clash with norms, humiliations and forms of suffering. On this topic, see Miskolci 2011.

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