COMBATING THE CULTURE OF HUNGER THROUGH ART: THE ROLE OF POLITICAL THEATRE IN UNDERGRADUATE COURSES

Combatendo a Cultura da Fome através da Arte: o papel do Teatro Político nos cursos de graduação

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ABSTRACT

How can we teach political sensitive issues meaningfully? This article aims to contribute to discussions about the impact of art, and specifically theater, on peacebuilding as a pedagogical and emancipatory tool. We present, as a case study, the work of the *Interna-só-na-mente* Theater Group, an extension project of Federal University of Paraíba in Brazil. Specifically, we describe and report the creation process and the presentation results of the play Hunger, produced by the group in 2021. The play addresses the phenomenon of hunger as a social economic problem, presented as a result of social-political choices. We start from the assumption that the group's methodology is capable of reaching symbols, emotions, and feelings achieving meaningful learning goals. As a result, we observed how the academic-artistic process changes the group members' understanding of the phenomenon, and brings it to the spectators, to deconstruct the structural and symbolic violence surrounding us.

Keywords: Theater of the oppressed. Emancipatory methodology. Hunger.

RESUMO

Como podemos ensinar questões políticas sensíveis de forma significativa? Este artigo tem como objetivo contribuir para as discussões sobre o impacto da arte, especificamente do teatro, na construção da paz como uma ferramenta pedagógica e emancipatória. Apresentamos, como estudo de caso, o trabalho do Grupo de Teatro Político Interna-só-na-mente, projeto de extensão da Universidade Federal da Paraíba, no Brasil. Especificamente, descrevemos e relatamos o processo de criação e os resultados da apresentação da peça Fome, produzida pelo grupo em 2021. A peça aborda o fenômeno da fome como problema econômico-social, resultado de escolhas político-sociais. Partimos do pressuposto de que a metodologia do grupo é capaz de atingir símbolos, emoções e sentimentos, alcançando objetivos de aprendizagem significativa. Como resultado, observamos como o processo acadêmico-artístico muda a compreensão dos membros do grupo sobre o fenômeno, e traz essa compreensão para os espectadores, para desconstruir a violência estrutural e simbólica que nos cerca.

Palavras-chave: Teatro do oprimido. Metodologia emancipatória. Fome.

INTRODUCTION

Armed conflicts, climate change, displaced people, unemployment, genocides, hunger, migrants, poverty. International relations and social sciences in general deal with social diseases that have to be covered from an analytical perspective but cannot be naturalized as simply distant social phenomena. Those problems are the result of social political decisions. How can we pedagogically approach such sensitive topics that are usually treated almost as natural phenomena by the media and, at the same time, achieve analytical learning goals leading students to deeply reflect on the proximity of these cruel social realities and eventually making them move towards solution thinking? Art might be a possible path.

[**2** de **26**]

Artigo: Combating the Culture of Hunger through Art: the role of political theatre in undergraduate courses.

Arts in international politics is not something new as Welch (2017) demonstrated in her book 'Theater of Diplomacy'. Ringmar (2018) dares to assert that "The world really is a stage, on which states are the players" (Ringmar, 2018, p.1). Even teaching political science and international relations (PS&IR) through art is not newer as well. UN simulations, for example, a pervasive teaching strategy in the field, can be thought of from a role-play performance. And even Ahmadov (2018) has already suggested that interactive theatre can be worthy to explore different topics in political science providing "fascinating, in-depth examinations of social and political topics" (Ahmadov, 2018, p.1) through student ownership and interaction with the audience.

Nevertheless, the type of experience and, consequently, learning goals students reach with this kind of activity might be different from the experience of building and performing a completely unedited play with no previously defined scenario, characters, or even script. Furthermore, bringing students to reflect and perform on complex sociopolitical problems that are close to, but far away from most of them, may result in an even more interesting experience. In the case of the theater of the oppressed every detail is built from the member's own experience. But how can this be done being constrained with short-term courses and fast learning charges professors face currently (Berg and Seeber, 2016)? Projects conducted in extension groups can be a possibility.

This article aims to present the process of building such an experience going from the first steps of researching and studying a social-political phenomenon, creating and writing a play until presenting and discussing the issue with the public. Here, we report the experience of a political theater group from an International Relations bachelor's course creating the play Hunger. In 2021, the topic was chosen democratically by the group justified by the need to study a well-known but invisible phenomenon in Brazilian society. Present in several works of Brazilian art, such as the classical books *Os Sertões* by Euclides da Cunha; *O Quarto de Despejo* by Carolina Maria de Jesus, the album *Planeta Fome* by Elza Soares, and the documentary *Garapa* directed by José Padilha, among others, hunger is dragged through time and remains a current problem.

In 2022, after a long process of studies, exercises, writing, and experimentation, the group finally presented the play Hunger, aiming to discuss the phenomenon as a socioeconomic issue, a consequence of political choices. We evidence how, even with the obstacles encountered, the method created by the group engenders a broadening in the understanding of political and social phenomena, overflowing to the spectators.

Domestically or internationally, the challenge of politicizing hunger - especially in democratic contexts - requires awareness-raising, political training, or at the very least drawing the attention of citizens - especially voters - to what can be changed to reduce, prevent, and reverse situations of malnutrition, malnourishment or non- nourishment. This awareness would lead voters to base their political choices on the candidates' proposals for mitigating hunger. It was in this spirit that the *Interna-só-na-mente* Theater Group created the play Hunger. After all, art has the role of touching people, driving them to reflection, empathy, and antipathy, to question

how we allow ourselves to naturalize Hunger to such an extent that it rivals Death itself as the cause of the end of life[6].

Studying the phenomenon of hunger aesthetically is necessary because, although millions of people in Brazil face some degree of food insecurity, many do not realize that it is not a natural (biological) process, but one based on political choices. In addition, most of those who hold political power, and could promote change, don't have to worry about the next meal. Therefore, accessing these individuals emotionally and symbolically is a fundamental part of the process of politicizing and raising awareness among individuals and, specifically, citizens.

Although Brazil left the FAO Hunger Map in 2014, in 2022 it came back again[7]. Mapping hunger, by the way, was a fundamental methodology for giving visibility to the work of Josué de Castro, reference of the fight against hunger in Brazil. In his book, *Geografia da Fome* (Castro, 1946), the author from Pernambuco state used images to illustrate the different facets of hunger and food issues, against the backdrop of the political decisions that led to food shortages. In addition to images, Castro also used art to discuss the issue, as in his novel *Homens e Caranguejos* originally published in 1967 (Castro, 2007).

For Castro (1984) giving visibility to hunger is essential to confront the naturalization of such a perverse phenomenon. Perverse, we stress, because it has been known since the middle of the 20th century that humanity had the productive and logistical capacity to feed everyone in the World, dismantling Malthusian fears (Bastos, 2022). It was also in the 20th century that Amartya Sen, Utsa Patnaik, Stephen Devereux, and José Graziano da Silva, among other researchers debated the international and domestic political elements that could effectively eradicate hunger. In general, all of this involves denaturalizing hunger and placing it in the field of human action.

Therefore, this paper is organized as follows. In section 2, we present the theme of Hunger in its political and academic discussions. In section 3, we briefly discuss the possibilities of using art as a tool for promoting peace and as a pedagogical tool to approach sensitive issues in PS&IR courses. In section 4, we report the group's creative process for creating the play Hunger, the challenges encountered as a result of the pandemic, and the results of the experience of public presentations. Section 5 ends by bringing final considerations.

HUNGER IN BRAZIL AND ITS DENATURALIZATION

At the beginning of the 21st century, Brazil received relative global prominence as it became a model in the design of public policies and institutional structures aimed at promoting food and nutritional security, such as the creation of the National Council for Food and Nutritional Security (CONSEA) and Bolsa Família, which implemented a cash transfer

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[6] In the play "Hunger", discussed later in this article, Death and Hunger are characters who compete with each other as the ones most responsible for the end of life.

[7] Specific information can be found at: https://www.fao.org/interactive/hunger-map-2023-embed-dark/en/

[**4** de **26**]

Artigo: Combating the Culture of Hunger through Art: the role of political theatre in undergraduate courses.

policy, considered as one of the main factors responsible for Brazil leaving the Hunger Map in 2014. This is important because, in contemporary societies, the possibility of being able to eat increasingly depends on the ability to access food and not on its direct production for self-consumption. Therefore, having an income is fundamental. If the market is unable to provide the minimum income for food, the Brazilian government decided to improve the mechanisms to promote income transfers, leading to the creation of *Bolsa Família*. This political decision, accompanied by other public policies - especially that of increasing the value of the minimum wage above inflation - and a strong performance by the national economy, made up for Brazil's success (Do Couto Oliveira, 2022).

However, despite the right to food being guaranteed in Article 6 of the Federal Constitution, a long time passed by Brazil witnessed a dismantling of hunger fight policies: CONSEA was extinguished in 2019 and hunger no longer was a political priority for governments from 2016 to 2022. The political scene became aggravated by public budget crises and the COVID-19 pandemic (Do Couto Oliveira, 2022).

By then, researchers were already warning about the reemergence scenario of food insecurity that Brazil (Petropouleas, 2022). As a result, despite having left the FAO Hunger Map[8] in 2014, Brazil returned to it four years later and the estimate at the beginning of 2020, even disregarding the pandemic factor, predicted a worsening scenario of food insecurity for Brazilians. Throughout 2020, approximately 55.2% of Brazilians lived with some degree of food and nutritional insecurity and approximately 33 million people were suffering from severe food insecurity, *i.e.* hunger, according to data from the PENSSAN network (Penssan, 2021). The pandemic contributed to this worsening situation, but political decisions such as the dismantling of the social protection network through actions such as leaving the Zero Hunger Program were decisive for the complicated scenario that Brazil found itself in (Petropouleas, 2022).

Remarkably, the new government sworn in 2023 achieved resounding success in lifting 24.4 million people out of hunger (Secretaria de Comunicação Social, 2024), resulting from the resumption of good economic performance (in the wake of the end of the pandemic), combined with public policies to combat food insecurity (Rede Brasileira de Pesquisa e Cidadania, 2024). The path was already known. Bad weather aside, the political will was lacking. In 2024, however, there is still the unacceptable situation of more than 8 million hungry people in a country full of economic possibilities and social technologies to eradicate hunger.

Faced with this situation, it is inevitable that we ask ourselves: why does the Brazilian population accept political projects that leave the most vulnerable people to hunger? What are the symbolic, ideational, and institutional mechanisms that sustain and justify the cultural and structural violence of hunger? How does this process of justification take place, generating

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[8] A country enters at the Hunger Map when 2.5% of its population faces chronic food shortages.

inertia in the population to the point where the same political proposals almost won again in 2022?

These are profound questions that can be applied to different countries. As such, they demand specific answers for each society, taking into account the conjectural and structural aspects. In any case, the work of Galtung (1969; 1990) offers a fundamental key to interpreting the social acceptance of this violence through the concepts of direct, structural violence and cultural violence.

According to Galtung (1969), "direct violence where means of realization are not withheld, but directly destroyed" (Galting, 1969, p.169). On the other hand, while direct violence concerns physical and explicit violence, structural violence has as its central point "the archetype of exploitation and its impact on life expectancy", so that the social structure comprises dominating groups that benefit from it while "the underdogs may be so harmed that they die (of hunger, languish with disease) due to exploitation. Or they may be left in a state of permanent and unwanted misery, usually including malnutrition and disease" (Ferreira *et al*. 2019, 16).

In short, in a context of structural violence, even without intending to, individuals can cause enormous damage to others, with poverty and hunger being examples of these processes that ultimately kill human beings (Ferreira *et al.,* 2019). Finally, cultural violence would be those "aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence - exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics) - that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence" (Galtung, 1996).

Therefore, dichotomies are culturally established between Us/Them (and their subsequent transformation into it), Good/Bad, closer/less close to God, as well as linguistic subjugation, the positive/negative reinforcement of certain cultures through art, etc. These violent aspects of culture not only divide human beings but also justify atrocities committed in the name of We/Good/God/State, in a supposed superiority (Galtung 1996). Furthermore, it is worth emphasizing the visibility and invisibility of individuals in these cultural aspects. It is necessary to consider the aesthetic choices that enable the "social construction of the visual," as well as to recognize that partial images not only include people, places, events, and institutions but also exclude them (Calahan, 2020; Bleiker, 2018).

The application of these concepts to the Brazilian reality emerges in a heated political, social, and historical discussion. To understand Hunger as a political project and not a natural one, it is necessary to understand Brazilian state foundations.

The formation process of the Brazilian state was based on colonialism and slavery. Inheriting violence intrinsic to colonialism and the dynamics of the social structure that shape contemporary society (Ferreira and Maschietto, 2024; De Oliveira, 2018). At this point, violence is manifested mainly by racism, but also by the logic of income concentration and the

restricted conception of citizenship. This is because colonialism is not just a territorial conquest, but the imposition of a racial and social order (De Oliveira, 2018). The sovereignty of power is associated with "defining which lives matter and which don't, who is worthy and who isn't" (De Oliveira, 2018, p.49).

Violence, in its various forms, is much more than an indicator of deviant behavior but is a structuring element of social relations (De Oliveira, 2018). Expanding the idea of structural violence goes beyond the inadequate distribution of available resources. Violence is supported by legislation that embraces mechanisms for the social distribution of wealth and produces a coercive power that forces the majority to respect these mechanisms, which structures an oppressive and masked inequality (De Oliveira, 2018).

Thus, violence here is maintained by institutions and legalized by the normative order. Violence coexists with stable institutions (Ferreira and Maschietto, 2024). Here, we can also associate the idea of meritocracy, where social well-being is linked to supposed merit, legitimizing exclusionary mechanisms and validating what Bauman (2003) identifies as collective unaccountability and individual responsibility for problems.

So, Hunger is a physical phenomenon that implies direct violence towards those who suffer from it. In the short term, it can directly lead thousands to death. We can see Hunger directly when we walk the streets and deal with dozens of beggars who surround our cars begging for money. On the other hand, it is structural and political, as we ignore these direct pleas and incorporate them into our daily routine.

Therefore, the fact that Brazilian society has lived with hunger for so many centuries is the result of the state formation structured by a process of colonization under the bias of racism, concentration of income, and the limitation of social welfare, backed by institutional mechanisms that mask hunger as a political problem and also a state responsibility (Castro, 1984; Martins, 1981; Delgado and Theodoro, 2005; Ribeiro, 2017).

Although it's not our goal to review this debate in depth here, we argue that the weight of this social formation and the consequences of the violent structural and cultural processes of colonization, slavery, and even the end of slavery, may result in people perversely less sensitive to the structural and cultural violence of hunger.

In other words, the social structure that produces hunger is equivalent to a natural part of the landscape and therefore unintentional. Sad, ugly, but still landscape. And if it is a landscape, we contemplate it, pass through it, or adapt to it. However, it is also up to human beings to intentionally modify landscapes, but for this to happen, the existence of political will is essential (Lima, 2022). Art, therefore, becomes an indispensable instrument for building this will. Regarding this phenomenon, we can recover Chico Science, a Brazilian composer and singer, words:

> Joshua, I've never seen such disgrace
> The more misery there is,

the more vultures threaten
I took a bucket and went to the market to steal tomatoes and onions
An old woman was passing by and took my carrot
"My old lady, leave the carrot here
I can't sleep on an empty stomach
And with my belly fuller, I began to think
By organizing I can disorganize
That by disorganizing I can organize myself
That by organizing I can disorganize

Chico Science, From mud to chaos

ART AS A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL FOR BUILDING PEACE AND DEALING WITH SENSITIVE ISSUES IN PS&IR COURSES

Art is a social phenomenon able to engage individuals in dialogues by playing a role in the socialization process (Chęć-małyszek, 2018). It goes beyond the interactive function, placing itself as a political element, whose background is the problems faced by society, focusing on reaching its viewer and provoking a subconscious change in their ideas or attitudes (Chęć-małyszek, 2018). Art may facilitate deconstructing and resignify symbolic violence, while also acting directly or indirectly to reduce structural violence.

The process of building peace, through the connection with art or through the approach proposed by authors such as Augusto Boal and his theory on human emancipation, is perceived with relative indifference by many academics and international relations professionals. However, the power of art to question political and social repression and the mechanisms of the current order, as in authoritarian regimes, is undeniable. Actors, singers, and artists in general are always a voice that disturbs. From Gilberto Gil to Paulo Coelho, imprisoned and censored during the Brazilian military dictatorship; or from Mercedes Sosa to Norma Aleandro, exiled during the Argentine military dictatorship, there are always artistic voices challenging and denouncing the injustices and violence that affect a people. The reach caused by this type of mobilization poses risks to those in power, "due to the symbolic power mobilized and the great reach and impact they can have" (Kuhlmann *et al.,* 2019, 471).

Not surprisingly, new perspectives in the field of International Relations propose an aesthetic, interpretative turn, in which art becomes a tool for analysis, promoting new alternative representations to traditional models. In these, the authors sow the ground of the sensitive, which takes into account the varied human faculties, beyond rationality (Bleiker, 2001, 2018; Callahan, 2020).

Art's power to emancipate and transform comes from the fact that it is an instrument of social functions, a form of communication and expression for human beings, directly influencing people's way of acting and thinking, and is a vector for transforming conflicts. Art is also an instrument for building peace when it connects to the moral imagination - thinking and

understanding beyond what is seen, curiosity to understand the other, transcending and giving birth to something new - capable of generating constructive responses rooted in the day-to-day challenges of violence (Lederach, 2005).

The idea of peacebuilding worked on here is based on the principle that the transformation of society must involve local levels, beyond their representatives or leaders, but also civil society, as well as making use of the "non-neutrality of space, its movements, its living dynamics and its role of agency" (Kuhlmann *et al.,* 2019, 461). In this sense, it is possible to indicate that local actors have the capacity to be agents transforming reality and an emancipatory way of thinking since their actions aim to transform internal conflicts and build more peaceful social relations (Kuhlmann *et al.*, 2019).

According to Premaratna and Bleike (2016), the construction of sustainable peace cannot be imposed as a top-down enterprise but must be deeply embedded within the fabric of everyday life and local communities. Within this framework, the arts, with a particular emphasis on theatre, emerge as modalities that not only complement but also transcend the limitations inherent in conventional approaches—which are often excessively technical, externally imposed, and inattentive to affective dimensions and contextual specificities.

The arts possess a unique capacity to express and transform the emotional legacies of conflict, such as trauma, fear, and anger. Furthermore, they can generate solutions singularly adapted to specific contexts, thereby standing in contrast to universal "peace models," which frequently disregard local culture and ultimately fail to achieve legitimacy (Premaratna and Bleike, 2016).

A further distinctive attribute of the arts resides in their inherent ambiguity and their openness to multiple interpretations. This semiotic plasticity renders them ideal vehicles for vocalizing marginalized and minority perspectives, voices that are commonly silenced within traditional peace processes (Premaratna and Bleike, 2016).

With this, there is a strong idea that the local population and its culture are key and indispensable factors for building sustainable and lasting peace (Toledo and Facchini, 2017). On the other hand, as Augusto Boal (2009) points out, to think about a society without oppressed and oppressors, it is necessary to think about culture, because it is culture that determines the truth of each society. The idea of a culture that is superior or accepted as the best leads to an oppression that is exercised, albeit subtly, without challenge, or even in a predominant aesthetic that is linked to what is accepted as beautiful (Boal, 2009).

Since culture is "a set of values, attitudes, and behaviors that predominate and characterize the functioning of a particular group" (Harada *et al.*, 2010, p430), the theater is a mechanism that can lead to a more critical awareness of each individual's or collective role in society. In this way, it is possible to create or transform a culture that is detached from the one imposed on you, since "creating our own culture [...] is a political act and not just an aesthetic one; an aesthetic act, not just a political one" (Boal, 2009, p.36).

Theater as an emancipatory tool

As a manifestation of art, theater is of essential importance in building dialogue and effectively promoting social transformation. The inspiration for the birth and flourishing of *Interna-só-na-mente* Theater Group*,* as the group is known among its members, comes mainly from the methodology developed by Augusto Boal and his idea of political emancipation, the Theater of the Oppressed (TO). In the Brazilian playwright's conception, the TO methodology aims, through art, to represent social phenomena from the perspective of a relationship of oppression, since the main purpose is to present theater as a tool for social transformation.

For Augusto Boal, the ability to make art and turn his experiences into theater was intrinsic to the human being. The development of the TO methodology, in turn, made it easier to awaken the dormant side of the human artistic essence. In the search for peace-building, the difference between conflict resolution techniques and theatrical techniques is the role played by the participants. If people are to become aware of their role as a social group, it is of the utmost importance that they are given the tools to take on the art and give it new meaning. For this reason, gaining a mastery of theater and art as a whole, so that they can then produce it, is of essential importance, because in this way they act on it, recognize it as a subject of transformation, and can take it on as truly their own (Boal, 2009).

Thus, theater is a weapon and the ruling classes use it as a means of domination. On the other hand, theater can also be a weapon of liberation used for the benefit of the oppressed (Boal 1991). In this sense, in the essence of TO, human beings are actors - because they act - and spectators - because they observe (Boal, 2009), providing the experience of the feeling of oppression from the perspective of the oppressed so that a collective consciousness can be established that allows the cycle of oppression to be broken.

Thus, the spectator - or SpectActor, as Boal envisioned - plays an active role in the play, with texts constructed collectively, based on real stories and typical experiences of the daily lives of those who were present, typical problems that are still very current in our society, such as discrimination, prejudice, work, violence, among others (Boal, 1991).

The political persecution endured by Augusto Boal, manifesting as state censorship and subsequent exile, proved instrumental in the formative development and methodological evolution of the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO). As argued by Andrade (2018), Boal's preliminary work in Brazil, subsequently refined and expanded during his periods of exile in Argentina, Peru, and later in Europe, was a critical driver of the methodology's diversification. This transnational dissemination introduced TO to a global context, where its core tenets, as outlined by Barbosa and Ferreira (2017), are founded upon three fundamental principles: 1) the dissolution of the hierarchical distinction between artists and non-artists, asserting theatre as a universal language; 2) the establishment of a dialogical relationship between stage and audience, transforming passive spectators into active "spect-actors"; and 3) the conceptualization of theatre as a "rehearsal for

revolution," positioning it as a laboratory for devising and practicing resistance against real-world oppression.

Notwithstanding its global reach, the methodology has been subject to appropriations that risk diluting its foundational emancipatory project. Scholars identify several key deviations, including: Commodification, whereby TO is transformed into a marketable service; Technicization, which reduces its praxis to a depoliticized set of games and exercises; Instrumentalization, evident in its co-optation by institutional projects and NGOs that position participants as objects of intervention rather than subjects of their own liberation; Individualization, a shift in forum theatre that favors individual coping strategies over analyses of collective struggle; and Fetishization, which treats TO as a panacea, obscuring its role as one strategic tool among many within broader political organizing (Ferreira, 2017).

So, Boal's ideas are connected and are part of peace-building at the local level, with civil society as the main agent of transformation. Theater would then be a way of making the community realize its power to change and emancipate itself.

Theater as a pedagogical tool

Although simulations and role play are massively diffused pedagogical tools among international relations courses, in a quick literature review[9] we find that theater is much less employed. We suggest that this is due to the complexity inherent in the activities related to creating a play from the conception, until the presentations, on the one hand, and the constraints courses face to deliver a great amount of content in a short time, on the other hand.

For Ramel (2018), teaching through the arts helps explore sensitive dimensions and international changes, challenge myths, and promote students' intellectual emancipation through concepts such as emotions, communities, and identities. Specifically in the field of Political Science and International Relations, Ventura and DRI (2014) report their successful experiences in using theater in the classroom to teach issues related to Human Rights.

Garcia *et al.* (2019) report positive results in employing Theatre of the Oppressed to approach sensitive topics in criminology, sociology, and social work courses. Reverberating our goals, they write that "A major issue for students is to understand the role of social power in the formation of social identity, interpersonal interactions, effects on their own lived experience, and the role of systemic, institutional factors in sustaining oppression" (Garcia *et al.* 2019).

Ahmadov (2018) reinforces that simulations and role-plays have been adopted to increase the effectiveness of teaching PS topics through creative, engaging, and structured interaction. Besides that, those experiences also cultivate critical skills that are hardly developed in regular lectures such as body and language expression and communication, improvisation, interaction,

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[9] We conducted this search in Scopus and Web of Science (Clarivate) in 1st September, 2024 employing the keywords: "play" or "theater" and "political science" or "international relations". From more than 80 papers and books in our review, only two were directly related to theater as a pedagogical tool in PSIR courses.

listening, reading, speaking in public, and working in teams. If we also understand that vulnerability is an act of courage (Brown, 2012) probably there is no place for vulnerability and exposure at the stage so that students may also be empowered when being at the center of attention presenting such complex issues as the topic of hunger.

APPROACHING HUNGER THROUGH THEATER: THE PROCESS, RESULTS AND CHALLENGES

The *Interna-só-na-mente* Theater Group [10] is an extension project linked to Federal University of Paraíba at Brazil. The group has been coordinated by Professor Dr. Mariana Baccarini[11] since its creation in 2016, and by Professor Juliana Moreira[12], who joined the project as assistant coordinator in 2022. Throughout its history, the group has been discussing controversial political and social issues through theater, such as depression, religious intolerance, and violence against women, among others (Baccarini *et al.,* 2020; Baccarini *et al*., 2022).

Drawing on the methodologies of several playwrights, the group's work is primarily rooted in the Brechtian tradition of theater as a means of political awakening. Lately, this foundation has been supplemented by the principles of Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed, which aims to foster popular empowerment and freedom from oppression through artistic practice (Boal, 1991).

Specifically, the *Interna-só-na-mente* Theater Group seeks to deal with themes that converge with the ills of Brazilian social reality caused by the perpetuation of structural inequality camouflaged by a dominant elite that fosters oppressor/oppressed relations. According to Boal, the ideas of the ruling classes echo in the aesthetic channels of Word, Image, and Sound, through which we must also wage social and political struggles (Boal, 2009). In this sense, the themes chosen to be studied, developed, and transformed into sketches deal with sensitive political and social problems that need to be discussed with society.

The group's methodology operates on two parallel tracks. The first is a democratic selection of themes, followed by in-depth academic research involving scientific literature, seminars, and debates with specialists. Concurrently, the second track employs theatrical exercises to craft an aesthetic proposal. These tracks converge in the production of a play, which is then presented and opened for discussion with the public (Baccarini *et al.,* 2020)

The members of the group are students and professors at Federal University of Paraíba and one of the main difficulties faced is precisely the turnover among members, as a result of the completion of undergraduate courses by students. Between 2020 and 2022, 36 students passed through the group, from six different courses. However, in recurrence of turnover, the group was made up of 14 to 22 students per year, plus one or two teachers.

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Table 1 summarizes the number of students per year and the variation in the undergraduate courses taken.

Table 1: Students and variety of undergraduate courses per year

Year	Number of students	Undergraduate Courses	Academic Semesters
2020	19	International Relations; Social Sciences; Pedagogy; Physics	Varied (Second to Seventh Semester)
2021	14	International Relations; Social Sciences; Pedagogy	Varied (Second to Seventh Semester)
2022	22	International Relations; Social Sciences; Journalism; Dance	Varied (Second to Seventh Semester)

Source: Elaborated by the authors

In 2020, the topic was chosen because of the political negligence with which the issue, as well as the fact of Brazil returning to the Hunger Map. On the other hand, scenes in the news about disputes over bones and remains by a hungry horde, including children, women, and the elderly, impacted the population's imagination, touching on its symbolic aspects.

For the group to delve deeper into the subject, a partnership was established between *Interna-só-na-mente* Theater Group and another research group Research Group on Hunger and International Relations (FOMERI). Professor Thiago Lima [13] coordinates FOMERI by integrating researchers from several academic backgrounds, from undergraduates to PhD researchers. The group has been active since 2012, studying and researching issues related to hunger and food and nutrition security (FNS) in International Relations.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic declared in March 2020 not only deteriorated food security and contributed to the increase of the problem to be studied, but also put an end to the targets drawn up by the group until then. Therefore, the group decided to consolidate the Theatre of the Oppressed methodologies and employ Forum Theatre in the group's plays.

Forum Theater is a theatrical technique created by Boal that puts the spectator in the actor's shoes to experiment with the possibilities of acting and resolving the oppressions they observe in the social context, enabling more active participation in the shows (Canda, 2012; Minillo and Baccarini, 2021). In this learning process, using Forum Theater exercises, a skit with the theme "violence against women" was produced for a performance with audience intervention at a

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[13] Professor at the Department of International Relations at Federal University of Paraíba.

university in João Pessoa on March 20. However, the pandemic made the performance impossible and forced the group to review its performance and look for ways to adapt the TO methodology to a social distancing scenario.

In this context, when the ban on classes and face-to-face activities at Federal University of Paraíba was decreed, the group started meeting remotely and tried to continue the research calendar on Hunger. This research effort was aimed at inserting the project's members into academic, literary, and audiovisual discussions on the subject, enabling a better understanding of the subject dimensions, its social and political causes and consequences, and how these could be addressed through theater to sensitize audiences who have never experienced food insecurity. In addition, to apply the discussions on Hunger to the Theater of the Oppressed, the group dedicated itself to reading and discussing the book "The Aesthetics of the Oppressed" by Augusto Boal.

The group organized five online lectures open to the public to discuss Hunger in Brazil based on texts, documentaries, and books. Chronologically, the lectures with experts were organized as follows: (omissions occurred to preserve blind review) Nutrition: Superfoods and Industrialization, with Prof. Ana Cláudia de Vasconcelos [14] (UFPB); Hunger in Brazil with Atos Dias[15]; Current Hunger Programs with Dr. Jannifer Santana[16]; Monitoring and Evaluation of Hunger and Food Security: experiences beyond academia, with João Antônio Lima (Federal University of Pernambuco)[17]; and Intestine Connections: we want Food, Fun and Art, with Prof. Dr. Thiago Lima (UFPB/FOMERI)

In the first lecture, Ana Vasconcelos brought up a pertinent debate on the relationship between hunger and the way the food industry induces poor nutritional eating habits, bringing new perspectives to the group's sketches. In the second lecture, Atos Dias contributed by bringing literary and audiovisual works about hunger to the table. These works were later studied by the group and helped them put together the sketches, especially in aesthetic terms.

The third speaker, Jenifer Santana, then collaborated with a discussion on Brazilian FNS programs and policies that were being implemented - or discontinued - at the time of the discussion. In his talk on monitoring and evaluating hunger, João Antônio Lima spoke about hunger in the world and the role of FNS policies in combating this problem. Finally, the last speaker, Thiago Lima, gave an enriching talk about hunger beyond its biological and political aspects, addressing the cultural side of the issue.

The lectures and public discussions gave a better understanding of Hunger as an economic, social, and political problem of capitalist societies (Ribeiro Junior, 2021) and instilled a fundamental notion that the group tried to adopt as a guide for the sketches: the maintenance of

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[14] Ana Claudia Calcanhoto Vasconcelos is an adjunct professor in the Department of Nutrition at UFPB

[15] Atos Dias is a researcher at FOMERI and a Phd candidate in the Graduate Program in Political Science (PPGCP) at UFPE.

[16] Dr. Jennifer Queila de Santana is a researcher at FOMERI.

[17] João Antônio dos Santos Lima holds a master's degree in development management and evaluation from the University of Antwerp (Belgium).

[**14** de 26]

Artigo: Combating the Culture of Hunger through Art: the role of political theatre in undergraduate courses.

Hunger in Brazil as a result of political choices. After this round of talks, the group got together to organize the ideas discussed during the five meetings and started building the play. Unlike the topics from previous years, such as "Depression" and "Religious Intolerance", plays that had their point of connection to the theme and not a common story, the idea was to have a play made up of three complementary sketches, in a single story.

The play was a collaborative effort, shaped by the exchange of impressions and emotions that emerged from the group's lectures and discussions. By the second half of 2020, after completing the other activities, the three drafts had already been written. However, with no estimate of the return of face-to-face activities that would make it possible to present the play, the group decided to present partial results of their work to the public. Thus, one of the sketches - "Tell the truth, or die lying" - was chosen to be presented online as the closing of the extension project's activities in 2020. The initiative was challenging but very important, with interesting feedback from the audience present and, above all, raising the public's critical view of Hunger.

This second skit from the play Hunger features a character created by the students denominated "Dono do Brasil" (Brazil´s owner, in English) who would be participating in an auditorium program in which questions are asked and lies are paid for with Death. In this scene, *Dono do Brasil* vehemently denies the existence of hunger in Brazil when asked by the narrator or the audience and, in the end, he is taken away by Death.

Throughout 2020, the group intensified its use of social media, making *Instagram* its main way of promoting the project. The group set up a strategic plan to disseminate content in the form of posts related not only to Hunger but to the Arts Performing in general, spreading classical and modern dramaturgy and especially TO to a wide audience. In addition, in the context of social distancing, several attempts have been made to adapt the TO exercises and the body and vocal warm-up dynamics to the remote meetings, but few have been successful.

Seeking to broaden contact with the public, another activity proposed for the project's social networks was "Casa (En)Cena", in which the members staged classic works of drama and recorded them via *Zoom* making them available on *Instagram.* The goal was to show that theater, albeit in a restricted form, could be adapted to a remote reality of performance. When the semester started in 2021, the group got back to organizing and planning activities, but unfortunately still in the restricted scenario. The group continued producing content on Instagram about theater and movies, documentaries, and book recommendations. In addition, the members split up to rehearse two sketches from two other plays written and performed before the pandemic.

One of the sketches chosen for adaptation and remote presentation, entitled "Disguises"[18], is part of the play "Depression", produced in 2018. The scene, starring the character "Letícia", was constructed to show the audience the daily experiences depressed people face.

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[18] https://www.instagram.com/p/CPQ3tiEnKDi/

The other skit adapted and recorded by the group, entitled "Elevator of Faith", was taken from the play "Religious Intolerance". The comic scene takes place in a setting that depicts individuals of different religious orientations, who find themselves trapped inside an elevator and gradually begin to argue. In the end, amid the crush of the elevator and the confrontations related to their beliefs, the characters realize that they have many points in common.

The group also organized two lectures to discuss the Theatre of the Oppressed. The first entitled "The Theatre of the Oppressed as an Emancipatory Methodology", featured speakers Prof. Dr. Márcia Chiamulera[19], Prof. Dr. Flávio da Conceição [20] and Flávio José Rocha[21], who brought to the debate issues related to art and education, as well as explored the application of the methodologies created by Augusto Boal in educational environments. The second was organized to debate the intersectionality between art and education with professors Paulo Kuhlmann [22] , Yasmin Rodrigues[23] and Fabíola de Sousa [24] who made up the panel for the lecture "The Role of Art in Public Education".

After two years of trying to maintain a theater group in a scenario of social distancing, the group returned to face-to-face activities on March 24, 2022. Before that, some virtual meetings were held to plan and discuss the works of Augusto Boal with the members who had just joined the group.

Although continuous research efforts were undertaken, the pandemic hindered the integration of games derived from the TO into the development process of the play in a more direct and substantial manner. In the face-to-face meetings, the focus of the activities was on performing TO exercises and other body activation exercises to consolidate the group by increasing integration between the members. In addition, image theatre exercises were aesthetically tested, particularly in relation to scenes that held significant narrative importance.

Also, in the first half of the year, the group organized a bazaar to raise funds to train members and produce the plays. Meanwhile, the group started to plan a performance in the second semester, doing collective readings of the play "Hunger", dividing up the roles and rehearsing the scenes[25].

On September 2, the group did the first presentation of the play Hunger in two sessions. After these presentations, the group collected opinions and instigated debate among the public, as they had set out to do since the genesis of the project, also collecting fresh food to donate to

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[19] Márcia Chiamulera is an adjunct professor in the Department of Performing Arts at UFPB.

[20] Flávio Santos da Conceição is a professor at the Federal University of Acre (UFAC).

[21] Flávio José Rocha has a PhD in Social Sciences and works in the field of education with TO.

[22] Paulo Roberto Loyolla Kuhlmann is an associate professor of International Relations at UEPB.

[23] Yasmin Rodrigues is a teacher in the municipal school system of João Pessoa - PB.

[24] Fabíola de Sousa Braz Aquino is a professor in the Psychology Department at UFPB.

[25] For details on all the group's meetings, average number of people and theme addressed, see Appendix 1

SACIAR[26] , a project that aims to bring quality food to families in situations of social vulnerability in the metropolitan region of João Pessoa.

After this first performance, another professor, Juliana Moreira, who is also an actress joined the group as assistant coordinator and helped to restructure the play, adding sound and lighting, as well as improving the actors' performances. As a result of their work, on December 2, the group did its first performance in a professional theater, presenting the play "Hunger". In the occasion, the debate was led by Professor Thiago Lima.

Table 2 summarizes all the presentations, virtual and face-to-face, carried out by the group between 2020 and 2022.

Tables 2: Presentations 2020-2022

DATE	PLAY	FORMAT	AUDIENCE
12/03/2020	"Tell the truth, or die lying"(HUNGER)	Virtual (Google Meets)	190
09/02/2022 11h00	HUNGER	In person - Auditorium 211, CCSA/UFPB	About 100
09/02/2022 18h00	HUNGER	In person - Auditorium 211, CCSA/UFPB	About 100
12/02/2022	HUNGER	Ednaldo do Egyto Theater	About 100

Source: Elaborated by the authors

The return to the "stage", which is not always a theater stage but a school court or makeshift auditorium, was a moment of fulfillment for the group. In addition to the structural process of constructing the play, we should also analyze its construction and symbolic consequences. Throughout the process, discussions about hunger changed the group's perspective on the phenomenon. Discussions and lectures presenting data, figures and theoretical and political constructions on Hunger provided the students with technical knowledge for writing the play. However, even more importantly, in order to access the emotional, cultural and, why not, religious universe of both the group and the spectators, we tried to imbue the play with symbols, identities and characters with which we could identify.

The play begins with two of the main characters on stage, Hunger and Death, who are in a dispute as to which of the two is capable of taking more souls to "the other side". There is an assumption that Death should be the main character responsible for the "passage". However, Hunger has acquired such strength as a result of choices, supported by the economic and political

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[26] Social project in the town - to find out more about the https://www.instagram.com/_saciar/#

elite, that it has been balancing the game. These characters have a strong presence and are symbols that represent society's religious, moral and ethical imagery.

The economic and political elite is personified in the character "Owner of the Supermarket", who is later transmuted into "Owner of Brazil" in the second part of the play. This character plays a fundamental role in the plot because he represents all the naturalization and cultural indifference about hunger. He exudes contempt for the poor, while praising his clothes and acquisitions. He receives applause from an audience that elected him and whom he despises, and he blatantly lies in defiance of the game of Life. He utters words and phrases said on the news by the real people who inspired his creation. As a result, the "Owner of the Supermarket"/"Owner of Brazil" is (co)responsible for the deaths of the extra characters ("Famished", "Boy" and "Woman").

In turn, the presenter of the television program represents the sensationalist media's exploitation of issues that cause so much pain. The presenter doesn't hide his glorification of the powerful character and his silencing of questions that could hinder the progress of the program. He hides his laughter while signaling security to control the audience. He eases up on the questions and only becomes incisive when it's the ideal media moment.

Finally, exploited supermarket workers and the program's audience complete the extras, responsible for questioning some of the actions of the "Owner of the Supermarket / Owner of Brazil" and trying to help the characters who are hungry. They are victims of the system, but they represent compassion and questioning of the present reality.

As the play progresses, the "Owner of Brazil" support of the lie that "There is no hunger in Brazil!" during the television program leads him to Death, as a consequence of the game. However, by taking the main ally of his opponent, Death itself doubles the bet and gives him the chance to live again, as long as he takes his share of the blame for collecting the Famished. In this scene, even under the scrutiny of Hunger and the threat of Death, guilt does not permeate the minds of the ruling elite, who absolve themselves of responsibility. He continues to reaffirm his innocence and fails to recognize his role in the structural machinery that turns him into the oppressor and grinds down the oppressed.

Finally, the play ends with the family of "Famished", "Woman" and "Boy" hugging, already "on the other side", while "Famished" blames himself for "not being able to protect our son". This shows the victim blaming as if the "inability" to keep the family alive was the result of a demerit on the part of the "Famished" character, and not the result of the political choices of a dominant elite. The image is frozen, forming a Theater-Image (Boal, 1991), a theatrical technique developed by Augusto Boal, in which the use of words is dispensed with in order to develop other forms of perception. At this point, real photos depicting famine can be transmitted as a backdrop.

The image aesthetically aims to highlight the love among the members of this family, who, with care and affection, bravely faced the invisibility, apathy, and indifference of an entire society. Furthermore, the text also implies the victim-blaming, including by the victims themselves, in view

of the constant referencing of meritocracy in opposition to individual capability. The scene represents the oppression in our country, whose direct, structural, and cultural violence led to the death of a family that was only seeking to survive.

And so the curtain closes.

CONCLUSION

Dealing with hunger means, among other things, understanding a common need for all the world's inhabitants: the right to food access, which is why it is so important. In this sense, with the dynamics of interaction between actors in the international system intensified by globalization, natural resources and food have become a strategic source of power (Haro, 2020). Hunger is a global problem, the cause of which for some analysts may be a lack of income or the agri-food production and distribution model itself. Thus, the causes can be discussed and thought about at the level of interaction between states and international institutions (Lima, 2014).

In this way, it is understood that historically established economic and political structures shape the model of the world's agri-food systems, resulting in nutritional and food shortages. For Josué de Castro, the relationship between the structure of societies and hunger leads us to believe "that hunger and underdevelopment are one and the same, and that there is no other way to fight hunger than through economic emancipation and raising the productivity levels of the starving masses" (Castro, 1946, p.1).

Hunger, understood as a consequence of political choices, is sustained by mechanisms of structural and cultural violence that work towards its reproduction. Historical processes such as colonization, slavery and the development of capitalism permeate the creation of dichotomies such as us/them, which justifies misery and hunger in Brazil, as well as justifying racism, machismo and other everyday expressions of violence.

Only by confronting these structures, symbols and culture will it be possible to build peace in Brazil. The Political Theater Group has sought to use emancipatory methodologies, especially the Theater of the Oppressed, to begin a journey towards becoming an agent that seeks to work for the emancipation of the local communities and places where it operates.

After choosing Hunger as the theme to be developed by the group, the project formed partnerships with groups that study Hunger, understood as a political phenomenon, and groups that help people in vulnerable situations. The coincidence of choosing to study the subject and then being caught up in a pandemic that has worsened food security in our country has been remarkable for the members of the project over the years that have followed it.

The group's meetings, even virtual ones, were powerful moments, because the issue, which was never really far away, but rather invisible and neglected, gained prominence every week and came closer and closer to the reality of many. The whole process marked the trajectory of those who had the opportunity to be part of the group during this period.

In this article, we briefly present how the group understands the theme of Hunger, based on our studies, and discuss the process of developing and writing the play, which culminated in the first face-to-face performances at UFPB and later at a theater in the city. Finally, we present the symbolic content of the play in general terms. Although we understand that the emotional impact of the play is individual, based on its social constructs, values, identity and symbols, we believe that the sharing of several of these by society encourages joint discussion. Thus, at the end of each performance, we held debates aimed at exchanging impressions, emotions and feelings, in addition to academic discussions on the subject.

The experience lived by the actors of the political theater group reveals that art, represented here by theater, has the power to provoke sensations in its spectators, sensations that are able to shape or build relationships that motivate social change. We hope that the experiences lived and publicized by the group will motivate members of academia to break through the fourth university wall and discuss, together with the communities, the mechanisms of transformation for building positive peace, anchored in equality.

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Appendix 1- Group Meetings

DATE	EVENT	PERSON IN CHARGE/ SPEAKER	PARTICIPANTS/ AUDIENCE	TOPIC/ SUPPORT MATERIAL
02/12/2020; 03/11/2020	Text discussion	Prof. Mariana Baccarini	20 (group members)	Augusto Boal (2009): "Aesthetics of the Oppressed"
02/12/2020	Research on Hunger	Prof. Thiago Lima	20 (group members)	
03/04/2020	Theater exercises	Prof. Mariana Baccarini	20 (group members)	
05/20/2020	Research on Hunger (via Google Meets)	Prof. Mariana Baccarini	20 (group members)	"Hunger" by Martín Caparrós (pp. 01 to 08) and "Geography of Hunger" by Josué de Castro (pp. 134 to 147)
05/27/2020	Research on Hunger via Google Meets	Prof. Mariana Baccarini	20 (group members)	"Food Aid: Pros and Cons"
06/03/2020	Writing	*Interna-só-na-mente*	20 (group members)	Writing the first draft of the play "Hunger"
06/10/2020	Public lecture via Google Meets	Prof. Ana Cláudia Vasconcelos (UFPB)	About 40 participants (open to the public)	"Nutrition: Industrialization and Superfoods"
06/23/2020	Public lecture via Google Meets	Prof. Atos Dias, (FOMERI)	About 40 participants (open to the public)	"Hunger in Brazil and the Northeast"
06/30/2020	Writing	*Interna-só-na-meente*	20 (group members)	Rewriting the draft of the play "Hunger"
07/07/2020	Public lecture via Google Meets	Profa. Jenifer Santana	About 40 participants (open to the public)	"Current Hunger Combat Programs"
07/14/2020	Writing	*Interna-só-na-meente*	20 (group members)	Rewriting the draft of the play "Hunger"

Artigo: Combating the Culture of Hunger through Art: the role of political theatre in undergraduate courses.

07/21/2020	Public lecture via Google Meets	Me. João Antônio Lima	About 40 participants (open to the public)	"Monitoring and Evaluation of Hunger and Food Security: Experiences beyond academia"
07/28/2020	Writing	*Interna-só-na-mente*	20 (group members)	Discussion about the skits and a first reading of the scripted characters
08/06/2020	Public lecture via Google Meets	Prof. Thiago Lima	About 40 participants (open to the public)	"Intestinal Connections: We Want Food, Fun, and Art"
09/08/2020	Writing	*Interna-só-na-mente*	20 (group members)	Finalizing the writing of the play "Hunger"
09/15/2020; 09/22/2020; 09/29/2020; 10/2020	Theater exercises	Profa. Mariana Baccarini	20 (group members)	
10/27/2020	Research on theater	Profa. Mariana Baccarini	20 (group members)	Kabengele Munanga (2016): "Pan-Africanism, Negritude, and Black Experimental Theater"
11/11/2020	Rehearsal	*Interna-só-na-mente*	20 (group members)	Rehearsals for the skit presentation of "Hunger"
11/26/2020	Lecture "Black Perspectives: Culture and Art in Debate" - Google Meets	Profe.Clarice Ferreira Menezes (UFMG); Prof. Carla Pereira Silva (IFNMG/ UFMG); Prof. Ivonildes Fonseca (UEPB); Fernanda Ferreira	About 200 (online)	

Artigo: Combating the Culture of Hunger through Art: the role of political theatre in undergraduate courses.

04/30/2021	Meeting to organize activities	Prof. Mariana Baccarini	15 (group members)	
05/07/2021; 05/14/2021; 05/21/2021; 05/28/2021	Rehearsal and recording	Prof. Mariana Baccarini	15 (group members)	Rehearsal skits "Disguises" (play DEPRESSION) and "Faith Elevator" (play RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE)
06/11/2021; 06/18/2021; 06/25/2021; 08/10/2021; 08/17/2021; 08/24/2021; 08/31/2021	Theater exercises	Prof. Mariana Baccarini e *Interna-só-na-mente*	15 (group members)	
09/14/2021; 09/21/2021	Organization of activities	Prof. Mariana Baccarini	15 (group members)	
09/27/2021	Lecture "The Theater of the Oppressed as an Emancipatory Methodology"	Profa. Márcia Chiamulera; Prof. Flávio da Conceição; Prof. Flávio José Rocha.	About 40 students (open to the public)	
11/09/2021	Lecture "The Role of Art in Public Education"	Prof. Paulo Kuhlmann; Profa. Yasmim Rodrigues; Profa. Fabiola Sousa.	About 40 students (open to the public)	
03/24/2022	Meeting to organize activities	Prof.Mariana Baccarini	15 (group members)	Return to in-person meetings
03/28/2022; 04/01/2022; 04/08/2022	Theater exercises	Prof.Mariana Baccarini	15 (group members)	

04/29/2022	Group presentation for new members	Prof. Mariana Baccarini	24 (group members)	
05/06/2022; 05/12/2022	Theater exercises and bazaar organization	Prof.Mariana Baccarini	24 (group members)	
05/17/2022; 05/18/2022; 05/19/2022	Fundraising bazaar	*Interna-só-na-mente*	24 (group members)	
05/26/2022; 06/02/2022; 06/09/2022; 06/16/2022; 06/23/2022	Theater exercises	*Interna-só-na-mente*	24 (group members)	
08/08/2022 to 09/09/2022	Rehearsals	*Interna-só-na-mente*	24 (group members)	Rehearsals for the play "Hunger"
09/12/2022	Meeting	*Interna-só-na-mente*	24 (group members)	Presenting Prof. Juliana Moreira
09/19/2022; 10/03/2022; 10/10/2022; 10/17/2022	Theater exercises	Prof. Mariana Baccarini	24 (group members)	
10/24/2022; 10/31/2022; 11/07/2022; 11/14/2022	Rehearsals	*Interna-só-na-mente*	25 (group members)	Rehearsals for the play "Hunger"