

“Boring,Crazy and Ill-Tempered”: Theater Artists, Power and Gender

Helena Gonalo Ferreira¹

This study takes a provocative look at power relations in portuguese theater, questioning why women artists do not occupy positions of power (Table 1).

INSTITUTION	DIRECTOR	TENURE
Teatro Nacional D. Maria II	Agustina Bessa-Luís	1991-1993
Teatro Municipal São Luiz	Aida Tavares	2015-2022
Rivoli Teatro Municipal	Isabel Alves Costa	1993-2007
Teatro Municipal de Viseu – Teatro Viriato	Paula Garcia	2016-2020
Teatro Municipal de Viseu – Teatro Viriato	Patrícia Portela	Mar 2020 – Jan 2022
Teatro Municipal de Matosinhos	Luísa Pinto	2007-2015
Teatro Municipal do Porto	Cristina Palas Leitão and Drew Klein	2023 – July 2024
Teatro Municipal de Guimarães – Teatro Oficina	Sara Barros Leitão	2022
Teatro Municipa de Bragança	Helena Genésio	2003-2019
Teatro Municipal de Castelo Branco – Teatro Viriato	Maria da Luz Lopes	2013 – present
Fórum Municipal Luisa Todi	Patrícia Mauti	2020 – present
A Oficina	Fátima Alçada	2020-2022
Comédias do Minho	Fátima Alçada	2024

The research explores the trajectories of these women, the challenges they face, and the ways they create networks of resistance and alternative power. Grounded in Cultural Studies and poststructuralist feminism, the investigation proposes a reconceptualization of power in theater, not merely as something to be claimed but as a space to be reinvented. Through archival analysis of the Experimental Theater of Porto (TEP) and interviews with eleven portuguese women artists, this research unveils persistent mechanisms of exclusion within theatrical institutions.

The archival examination reveals historical patterns in employment contracts, correspondence, and programming decisions that systematically marginalize women from decision-making roles. The conversational interviews allow participants to articulate their experiences of navigating and challenging rhizomatic patriarchal structures (Fig. 1). The findings demonstrate that while institutional barriers continue to confine women to subordinate positions, these artists actively construct alternative frameworks of power and agency. Rather than seeking inclusion within existing hierarchies, they develop innovative collaborative practices that challenge traditional theatrical authority. These women create horizontal networks of support, establish independent creative spaces, and employ artistic practices that resist conventional power dynamics. The study concludes by advocating for a fundamental restructuring of theatrical power relations, moving beyond tokenistic representation toward transformative change. It highlights how these women resist traditional hierarchies by forging new artistic and political paths that reimagine theater as a space of collective creativity and shared authority, ultimately proposing a more inclusive and democratized vision of cultural production.



¹ – CLLC & Department of Languages and Cultures, University of Aveiro.

TABLE 1
Women with directorship positions in Public Theaters in Portugal.

FIGURE 1
Patriarchal rhizome (Banana tree) according to the author [Drawing by Rosalina Silva at the author's request].