

New Professor Studies Soap Operas for an Unusual View of Latino Society

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During a gathering to mark her promotion to full professor, Cacilda Règo poses with (from left) Brad Hall, head of the Department of Languages, Philosophy and Communication Study; Matt Sanders, associate dean in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences; and Larry Smith, USU interim provost.

As a child in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Cacilda Règo lived across the street from the Cinema Paissandu — “a sort of Cinema Paradiso for me,” she says now.

It was only later that she learned the movie theater was the hangout for activist filmmakers who were organizing against Brazil’s series of military-backed dictators in the 1960s.

And, as a Ph.D. candidate, it inspired her dissertation on “the struggle on the part of Brazilian filmmakers to use films to transform Brazil into a more just society.”

Règo, a USU professor of Portuguese, has long peered out from the movie and television screen to gauge Brazilian and Latino society. A country’s film and television culture, she said, “reflects the society in which they are made.” And yes, she adds, that includes the many sappy Brazilian telenovelas she loves.

She now shares that research, as well as her expertise in Portuguese, with students in the Department of Language, Philosophy and Communication Studies.

Her research overlays her longtime efforts to define the concept of home from an immigrant’s view, Règo told a crowd of well-wishers who gathered recently to celebrate her promotion to full professor.

Règo explored the concept of home during a speech in Utah State University's Inaugural Lecture Series. The lectures take place at the home of USU President Noelle Cockett. As the evening's host, Cockett explained that the "well-loved" event "honors faculty members who've reach the pinnacle of their careers."

Règo's academic route began when she earned a bachelor's in tourism and administration in Rio de Janeiro. Her journey as an immigrant began with a visit to the United States to explore her fascination for American popular culture.

"I was motivated by a stubborn spirit of adventure and an immense intellectual curiosity about American popular culture, which I only knew from films and television," she said.

Her goal, she admits, was to visit Disneyland.

Once here, she found that her years of studying English in Brazil did not translate well.

"I couldn't understand anyone during the first months," she said. "I was encouraged to take English classes and watch television. Or, better, watch soaps."

Soon, she had swapped her tourist visa for a student visa and began graduate work at the University of Texas at Austin, earning her master's in Latin American studies and international communication.

As she continued at the University of Texas, she steered her research toward the history and development of Latin American soap operas.

"My circumstances of work and soap watching have led me to think and write about how telenovelas (or soaps) are made, how what they say reflects the society in which they are make and how they are received and used by viewers," she said.

Looking back now, she laughs, "I had never dreamed of being a scholar with an expertise in soap operas."

Since then she has continued to publish research on Brazilian popular media. In 2011 she released her first book on contemporary Latino movie culture, *"New Trends in Brazilian and Argentine Cinema"* (University of Chicago Press). More recently, she worked with Marcus Brasileiro, an associate professor of Brazilian literature and culture, on *"Migration in Lusophone Cinema"* (2014, Palgrave MacMillan). The term Lusophone refers to those who speak the Portuguese language.

Règo reflected on the journey that brought her to this Northern Utah city that has become her 'home.' She's also converted, somewhat, from a University of Texas Longhorn to "a proud Aggie."

Her journey is yet to be completed, she added. "I am currently working on three book projects and hope to continue to do what I love the most for many more years: to teach my USU students."

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