

# **“Who Is the Macho Who Wants to Kill Me?” Male Homosexuality, Revolutionary Masculinity, and the Brazilian Armed Struggle of the 1960s and 1970s**

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In early 1972, Chaim and Mário, members of a small Brazilian revolutionary group, were sentenced to several years in prison for subversive activities.<sup>1</sup> Like many other radical left-wing organizations, the group collapsed in the early 1970s during the systematic government campaign to track down and eliminate armed resistance to the military regime. While serving time in Tiradentes Prison in São Paulo, Chaim and Mário shared the same cell. Rumors spread among the political prisoners of the different revolutionary organizations held in that prison that the pair was having sex together. “They were immediately isolated, as if they had behaved improperly,” recalled Ivan Seixas some 30 years later. At the time Seixas was also serving a sentence for his involvement in armed struggle. “They were treated as if they were sick,” added Antônio Roberto Espinosa, another political inmate and former revolutionary leader imprisoned in the same cellblock during the early 1970s.<sup>2</sup>

At first, Chaim and Mário denied the rumors of their ongoing affair, but they then decided to admit openly that they were having a relationship and let the other political prisoners confront the news. The unwillingness of the couple to hide their sexual relations provoked an intense discussion among the different groups, which maintained a semblance of discipline, organizational structure, and internal cohesion during their incarceration. To many of the imprisoned guerrilla fighters and other revolutionaries, Chaim and Mário’s bla-

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1. In accordance with Chaim’s request, this article uses the code names that Mário and Chaim used while operating underground. All translations from the original Portuguese are by the author.

2. Interview with Ivan Seixas and Antônio Roberto Espinosa by author, 1 Apr. 2004, São Paulo, Brazil.

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tant homosexual relationship represented “counterrevolutionary” behavior. The question was what the different revolutionary groups in prison should do about it. According to Seixas, a member of one of the political groups that remained organized within the prison proposed that the two men who engaged in sexual relations should be condemned to death.<sup>3</sup> A clandestine debate ensued among the prisoners. Should they be killed? Who should do it? How should it be done?<sup>4</sup>

The threat to carry out a *justiçamento* (summary trial and execution) was not an idle one. During this period, fellow comrades executed at least four members of armed struggle groups on accusations that they had been traitors to their organization, although none of these executions took place in prison.<sup>5</sup> José Carlos Gianni, who was a member first of Ação Libertadora Nacional (National Liberating Action), or ALN, and then the offshoot organization MOLIPO (Movimento de Libertação Popular, or Popular Liberation Movement), recalled the process that led to the summary execution of Márcio Leite de Toledo by members of his organization. According to Gianni,

One of the questions that hastened the split of MOLIPO from the ALN was the *justiçamento* of one of the militants of the organization who had even been a member of the national leadership. He began to question how we were conducting things, the [guerrilla] proposal, and at a given moment, he decided to leave the organization. The organization alleged that he was suffering a process of breaking down [*desestruturaração*], and, therefore, at any moment, he could give himself up and make a deal with the police, revealing a great amount of information. So, it wasn't seen as a process of political differences, but as the “*desbunde*” of this guy. No one accepted this in the group.<sup>6</sup>

At the time, the term *desbunde* signified that one had abandoned the fight and reverted to a lifestyle of sex, drugs, and perhaps even rock and roll.<sup>7</sup> The expression has an unusual semisexual connotation, as the root word *bunda*, or buttock,

3. Ivan Seixas did not wish to reveal the name of the organization whose member proposed the summary execution.

4. Ivan Seixas, interview with author, 13 Nov. 2002, São Paulo, Brazil.

5. Jacob Gorender, *Combate nas trevas* (São Paulo: Editora Ática, 1998), 278–83. Marcelo Ridenti, a historian of the Brazilian armed struggle, cites other examples of “revolutionary justice” [*justiçamentos*] carried out by this sector of the Left. Marcelo Ridenti, *O fantasma da revolução brasileira*, 2nd ed., revista e ampliada (São Paulo: Editora da UNESP, 2010), 270–73.

6. Quoted in Ridenti, *O fantasma da revolução brasileira*, 272.

7. Fernando Gabeira, *O crepúsculo do macho* (Rio de Janeiro: Codecri, 1980), 125.

invariably has an erotic undertone in popular parlance, even a possible association with homosexual relations.<sup>8</sup> Falling from a state of revolutionary grace, abandoning the struggle, or, in the case of Chaim and Mário, engaging in homosexual relations merited being cast out, and in the worst of circumstances even executed.

According to Seixas, Chaim and Mário eventually got word about the discussion of a possible *justiçamento*. Realizing that the situation was becoming critical, Chaim requested his files from the Military Court (*Auditoria Militar*) and gathered copies of all available paperwork. This included statements signed after torture sessions detailing the information that the prisoner had “confessed” to his interrogators. As Seixas retells the story, Chaim defiantly went to the section of the prison where the political prisoners who defended his execution were housed, ready for a fight. Going right up to the cell of the prisoners who had threatened “revolutionary justice” against him, Chaim pointed to each one and shouted: “Who is the macho who wants to kill me? I want to know.” He then challenged each one of his opponents: “I know all about your lives.” Turning to one, he charged: “You revealed such and such.” Moving to another he declared, “You talked. You turned someone in.” Throwing the written statements that he had signed after having been tortured into the faces of his potential executioners, he proclaimed: “See if you can find out if someone was arrested on my account. See if I betrayed anyone. See if I am a traitor. My sexual option didn’t prevent me from revolutionary behavior, and you machos turned people in.”<sup>9</sup>

As Seixas remembers the event, the vehemence with which Chaim cast doubts on the revolutionary virility of his would-be executioners silenced their threats.

It was a crazy situation. Everyone felt really bad and didn’t know what to do. This guy made political something that from [their] point of view was moral. . . . In reality they were the moralists, and he undid their business, saying “If you are going to kill me, do it now, and you are going to have to take on a faggot determined to defend himself. It’s not going to be so easy. I want to see if there is a macho [here] to face me. I confronted repression. I’ll deal with any macho here. . . . But I want to see which of you machos here who turned others in is going to kill a faggot who had the courage to confront the dictatorship. You didn’t, and I did.” And it was all over.<sup>10</sup>

8. James N. Green, “O desbunde e a política no Brasil nos anos 60 e 70,” paper presented at the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) meeting, Rio de Janeiro, 2009.

9. Seixas, interview, 13 Nov. 2002.

10. *Ibid.*

According to Seixas, after this confrontation, the idea of executing Chaim evaporated, and those who had discussed his possible justicamento simply left him alone.

This article examines the tensions between the nonnormative sexual desires of members of the Brazilian revolutionary Left and the organizations to which they belonged. It considers the internal dynamics of radical Marxist organizations of the late 1960s and early 1970s to understand how young Brazilian revolutionaries who were caught up in the passion for politics of the time, as well as desires for their fellow comrades or other people of the same sex, managed to negotiate the thicket of self-doubt and hatred, confusion, overt hostility, rejection, and even possibly a summary execution. It is a complex story in which some members of revolutionary groups received support from their comrades in arms when they discreetly discussed their sexual desires, while others meticulously hid their sexual orientation for fear of ostracism. The anecdote told by Seixas about the possible implementation of “revolutionary justice” based on vague moralistic precepts of “counterrevolutionary” comportment is the most dramatic example in the constellation of reactions to male homosexuality. Attitudes ranged from benign toleration or even empathy by some to marginalization by most. As a whole, the revolutionary Left considered homosexuality inappropriate and unacceptable sexual behavior.

The relationship between the Latin American Left and sexual politics in the late twentieth century remains a relatively unexplored topic. The literature for the United States is more extensive. Scholars who have studied the origins of the gay and lesbian movement in the United States have pointed out the close connection between the Left and key founding militants.<sup>11</sup> Harry Hay and other charter members of the Mattachine Society, the first gay rights organization in the United States (established in 1949), had previously been in the Communist Party. Hay’s and other radicals’ analysis that homosexuals were an oppressed minority, an analogy drawn from left-wing and progressive forces’ involvement in the civil rights movement, shaped early homophile organizations in the United States. Two decades later, innumerable members of the early gay and lesbian liberation movements participated in the New Left—the civil rights, antiwar, women’s, and other social movements of the 1960s—which served as political and organizational training grounds for their later involvement as queer activists.<sup>12</sup>

11. See, especially, John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940–1970* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983).

12. See, for example, Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Dutton, 1993); and Ian Lekus, “Queer and Present Dangers: Homosexuality and American Antiwar Activism, 1964–1973” (PhD diss., Duke Univ., 2003).

Authors have suggested a similar connection between gay and lesbian activists in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Puerto Rico and their previous experiences in the Latin American Left during the 1960s and the 1970s.<sup>13</sup> Most of these studies, however, have taken the perspective of leftists who had been expelled from Marxist, socialist, or other revolutionary groups, or who had left them to build gay liberation or gay activist organizations. Apart from works that have analyzed the ways in which the Cuban Revolution has dealt with homosexuality over the last 50 years, few studies explore the internal life of Latin American revolutionary organizations in relationship to sexual comportment.<sup>14</sup> This article is an effort to advance research on an understudied aspect of gender and sexuality studies in Brazil and in Latin America more generally. To do so, this analysis considers how radical militants in the Brazilian Left understood homosexuality and dealt with members of their organizations who engaged in same-sex romantic and sexual relationships. In addition, it examines how rev-

13. For Brazil, see James N. Green, "More Love and More Desire: The Building of the Brazilian Movement," in *The Global Emergence of Gay and Lesbian Politics: National Imprints of a Worldwide Movement*, ed. Barry Adam, Jan Willem Duyvendak, and André Krouwel (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1999), 91–109; "Desire and Militancy: Lesbians, Gays, and the Brazilian Workers' Party," in *Different Rainbow: Same-Sex Sexuality and Popular Struggles in the Third World*, ed. Peter Drucker (London: Gay Men's Press, 2000), 57–70; and Aguinaldo Silva, "Compromissos, queridinhas? Nem mortal!" *Lampião da Esquina* (Rio de Janeiro) 3, no. 26 (July 1980): 10–11. For Argentina, see Néstor Perlongher, "Historia del Frente de Liberación Homosexual de la Argentina," in *Homosexualidad: Hacia la Destrucción de los Mitos*, ed. Zelmar Acevedo (Buenos Aires: Del Ser, 1985), 272–78; and Juan José Sebreli, "Historia secreta de los homosexuales em Buenos Áries," in *Escritos sobre escritos, ciudades bajo ciudades, 1950–1997* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1997), 275–370. For Mexico, see Max Mejía, "Mexican Pink," in Drucker, *Different Rainbow*, 43–57. For Puerto Rico, see Frances Negrón-Munaner, "Echoing Stonewall and Other Dilemmas: The Organizational Beginnings of a Gay and Lesbian Agenda in Puerto Rico, 1972–1977 (Parts I and II)," *Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños Bulletin* 4, no. 1 (1992): 76–95; no. 2: 98–115.

14. For works on Cuba see Allen Young, *Gays under the Cuban Revolution* (San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 1981); Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich, "Homosexuality, Homophobia and Revolution: Notes toward an Understanding of the Cuban Lesbian and Gay Male Experience," in *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey Jr. (New York: Meridian, 1989), 441–55; Marvin Leiner, *Sexual Politics in Cuba: Machismo, Homosexuality and AIDS* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1992); Brad Epps, "Proper Conduct: Reinaldo Arenas, Fidel Castro, and the Politics of Homosexuality," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 6, no. 2 (1995): 237–41; Ian Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays: Cuba and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1996); José Quiroga, *Tropics of Desire: Interventions from Queer Latino America* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1999); Emilio Bejel, *Gay Cuban Nation* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2001); Lillian Guerra, "Gender Policing, Homosexuality and the New Patriarchy of the Cuban Revolution, 1965–70," *Social History* 35, no. 3 (2010): 268–89.

olutionaries who had same-sex desires coped with left-wing attitudes toward homosexuality. It is a complex story that defies neat categories of “good guys” and “bad guys.” Although reactions to and life options regarding homosexuality are personal and individual and reflect a wide range of choices and possibilities, those within the revolutionary Left who recognized their own homosexual desires or others who reacted to the homosexuality of fellow leftists operated within the context of a rigid political and ideological framework that ultimately disdained homosexuality.

One obvious starting point for examining the relationship between the Latin American revolutionary Left and homosexuality of the 1960s might be Manuel Puig’s novel *Kiss of the Spider Woman*.<sup>15</sup> The novel portrays the clash between a hardened macho revolutionary who is softened by the kindness of a self-avowed queen, but it does not explore the internal contradictions within the revolutionary Left, a movement that proclaimed a dedication to freedom, liberation, and a radical transformation of society yet consistently marginalized men or women who did not confirm to normative gender roles and sexual behavior. Nor is Silviano Santiago’s marvelously written and imaginative tale *Stella Manhattan* a helpful source.<sup>16</sup> The work offers little insight into the dilemmas and dramas faced by Brazilian men who sexually desired other men while participating actively in the armed struggle against the military regime.

Dozens of former Brazilian revolutionaries who joined the armed struggle in the 1960s and early 1970s have written accounts of this period, but most authors maintain silence about sexuality, and especially homosexuality.<sup>17</sup> The noted exception is Herbert Daniel, whose memoir, *Passagem para o próximo sonho* (Ticket to the Next Dream), deals extensively with his experiences as an urban guerrilla and his repressed homosexuality and is an important source for this article.<sup>18</sup> Volumes by scholars and journalists that have specifically focused on women and the armed struggle only peripherally mention sexuality, and they

15. Manuel Puig, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (New York: Random House, 1978). The book was originally published in Spanish as *El beso de la mujer araña* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1976).

16. Silviano Santiago, *Stella Manhattan* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1985), English edition translated by George Yudice (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1994).

17. For bibliographic references of other memoirs and historical accounts, see Marcelo Ridenti, “As esquerdas em armas contra a ditadura (1964–1974): Uma bibliografia,” *Caderno Arquivo Edgard Leuenroth* 8, no. 14/15 (2001): 259–95; and Carlos Fico, *Além do Golpe: Versões e controvérsias sobre 1964 e a Ditadura Militar* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2004), 139–206.

18. Herbert Daniel, *Passagem para o próximo sonho: Um possível romance autocrítico* (Rio de Janeiro: Codecri, 1982).

do not develop a sophisticated analysis of the relationship between gender relations, sexuality, and the revolutionary Left.<sup>19</sup> Given the limitations of these literary sources, the scant number of memoirs available that address this topic, and the paucity of written records that the Left (or even representatives of the military regime) has produced on this subject, oral histories remain the most accessible source for uncovering the questions at the core of this piece. Yet even this source must be interrogated for slippages in memory and the possibility that the interviewee has reframed the past to reflect changes that have taken place in their own or Brazilian society’s attitudes toward homosexuality in recent years.

Although several Brazilian women involved in the revolutionary underground movement had sexual and romantic relations with other women during their years of militancy or thereafter, they are very reluctant to tell their stories and have refused to let their names or any other identifying information be published. On several occasions while interviewing people who had participated in the events of those years, I was told to turn off my tape recorder and agree not to publish anecdotes, rumors, or gossip about *companheiros*, and especially about *companheiras*.<sup>20</sup> There are many possible explanations for former militants’ reluctance to document aspects of the sexual and social history of radical oppositional forces during the dictatorship, or for lesbians and gay men to talk about their revolutionary past. For some, the pain or trauma related to the hostility or rejection that they experienced in the 1960s and 1970s from their comrades in

19. For works on women in the revolutionary movement, see, among others, Albertina Oliveira Costa, Maria Teresa Porciuncula Moraes, Norma Marzola, and Valentina da Rocha Lima, eds., *Memórias das mulheres no exílio* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1980); Luiz Manfredini, *As moças de Minas: Uma história dos anos 60* (São Paulo: Editora Alfa e Omega, 1989); Judith L. Patarra, *Iara, reportagem biográfica* (Rio de Janeiro: Rosa dos Tempos, 1992); Elizabeth F. Xavier Ferreira, *Mulheres, militância e memória: Histórias de vida, histórias de sobrevivência* (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1996); Mauricio Paiva, *Companheira Carmela: A história da luta de Carmela Pezzuti e seus dois filhos na resistência ao regime militar e no exílio* (Rio de Janeiro: Mauad, 1996); Ana Maria Colling, *A resistência da mulher à ditadura militar no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Record / Rosa dos Tempos, 1997); Luiz Maklouf Carvalho, *Mulheres que foram à luta armada* (São Paulo: Globo, 1998); Martha Vianna, *Uma tempestade como a sua memória: A história de Lia, Maria do Carmo Brito* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2003); Ridenti, *O fantasma da revolução brasileira, 195–202*.

20. Although more than a half dozen former revolutionaries discussed or speculated about the same-sex eroticism of women involved in the armed struggle in conversations related to research for this article, none of them authorized me to use any of the information or anecdotes that they relayed to me. The only published record that I have identified that features a lesbian is an oral history of Madalena, who was a militant of the pro-Soviet Brazilian Communist Party in the 1970s. Daphne Patai, *Brazilian Women Speak: Contemporary Life Stories* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1988), 248–69.



arms seems to remain palpable today. One well-known leader of the left-wing student movement in the late 1960s, whom I interviewed in 2010, was still concerned about the possibility that former comrades would make pejorative comments about sexual practices that took place 40 years ago. Two militants who had homoerotic affairs while underground, and later developed heterosexual relationships, expressed their concern that publicly revealing information about their personal and sexual experiences in the revolutionary Left would complicate their current lives. After one long interview, two very prominent activists offered an off-the-record account of the sexual history (including the alleged homosexuality) of an important member of their organization who had been disappeared by the repressive apparatus. However, they did not authorize my use of the information about this leader, arguing that since he had not chosen to publicly reveal his sexual desires while alive, they felt they had no right to do so for the historical record. It is my hope that the visibility of this research project may attract other individuals willing to grant interviews and reflect on this subject, in order to make a comprehensive study of this topic as part of a more complex and complete social and culture history of the opposition to the military regime that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985.

### **Different Paths among Rebellious Youth**

The Brazilian Left slowly reorganized in the aftermath of the March 31, 1964, military takeover. The Brazilian Communist Party's feeble response to the coup d'état accelerated the spin-off of dissident groups. Pro-Chinese Maoists had already broken with the pro-Soviet organization in 1962 to form the Partido Comunista do Brasil (Communist Party of Brazil). But hemorrhaging of these two organizations intensified in 1966 and 1967 as militants left both communist parties and their areas of influence to support what they considered the Cuban and Chinese paths of revolutionary armed struggle to overthrow the military regime.<sup>21</sup>

In late 1967 and throughout 1968, a confluence of different oppositional forces created a sense that the military dictatorship was coming under check and might actually be overthrown. Student mobilizations, wildcat strikes, and ever-bolder pronouncements from the legal opposition challenged the government of President Costa e Silva.<sup>22</sup> By the end of the year, however, the military outlawed

21. Daniel Aarão Reis Filho, *A revolução faltou ao encontro: Os comunistas no Brasil* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1989), 45–76.

22. João Roberto Martins Filho, *Movimento estudantil e ditadura militar, 1964–1968* (Campinas: Editora Papirus, 1987); Maria Ribeiro do Valle, *1968: O diálogo é a violência: Movimento estudantil e ditadura militar no Brasil* (Campinas: Editora da UNICAMP, 1999).



all civilian protest by decreeing Institutional Act No. 5, which closed Congress, increased censorship, suspended habeas corpus, and expanded the power of the military and the police. Torture became increasingly widespread as a tool to terrorize opponents of the regime and a means to dismantle systematically the revolutionary groups that took up arms against the military.<sup>23</sup>

Frustrated by the clampdown on legal forms of protest, several thousand students as well as some workers, former members of the armed forces, peasants, and liberal professionals joined or became supporters of the myriad of armed struggle organizations that had sprouted up after 1964 to challenge the military regime.<sup>24</sup> Between 1968 and 1971, an increase in bank robberies, assaults on army barracks to appropriate arms, kidnappings of foreign ambassadors to force the release of political prisoners, and attempts to establish rural guerrilla bases led to a spiral of arrests and torture until almost all remnants of armed resistance were crushed by 1973.<sup>25</sup>

It is important to remember that a minority of youth rebelled against the authoritarian regime through armed struggle. Entering a revolutionary organization implied life-threatening risks, and many who sympathized with the radical Left were hesitant to commit themselves to such a dangerous project. The government's determination to repress any radical opposition usually forced militants of proscribed organizations to abandon their family and friends and operate underground. Police pursuit, detection, and arrest inevitably led to torture. Authorities used brutal interrogation methods not only to dismantle revolutionary organizations but also to strike fear among those sympathizing with their actions as a means of reducing recruitment to their ranks. The nature of clandestine activities and severe repression also isolated most revolutionary organizations from a much larger segment of the student movement and others that had mobilized against the military regime between 1966 and 1968.

At the same time that radical oppositionists turned to urban and rural guerrilla activities in an attempt to overthrow the dictatorship, new cultural expressions and social practices took hold among significant sectors of Brazil-

23. Lina Penna Sattamini, *A Mother's Cry: A Memoir of Politics, Prison, and Torture under the Brazilian Military Dictatorship*, translated by Rex P. Nielson and James N. Green, with introduction by James N. Green (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2010).

24. It should be emphasized that several organizations were already involved in militant armed struggle activities prior to the declaration of Institutional Act No. 5 on 5 December 1968, but the hardening of the government's policies contributed to more people joining the different revolutionary organizations that were already active.

25. See, among many books on the topic, Gorender, *Combate nas trevas*; Antonio Caso, *A esquerda armada no Brasil, 1967-81* (Lisbon: Editora Moraes, 1976); and Ridenti, *O fantasma da revolução brasileira*.

ian youth. To a large degree this was due to the intensification of urbanization and an expansion of the middle classes in the 1960s, the increasing entrance of middle-class women into higher education and the workforce, and the appropriation and transformation of international trends regarding comportment and culture.<sup>26</sup> The dramatic growth in the Brazilian economy between 1969 and 1974, dubbed the “Brazilian economic miracle” by the military regime, significantly benefitted the urban middle classes and fueled consumer culture. Greater availability of the Pill and other contraceptives, combined with changing sexual norms and influenced in part by transnational notions favoring sexual liberalization, resulted in increased premarital sex among youth. The *tropicália* movement, led by singers and composers such as Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil, united innovative, Brazilian-inflected rock music with notions of personal and sexual liberation and burst onto the cultural scene in 1967. Brazilian youth also borrowed US countercultural ideas disseminated in the Brazilian press. European concepts, such as the French student slogan of 1968, “Il est interdit d’interdire,” appropriated as “É proibido proibir” (It’s forbidden to forbid), circulated on campuses, in the media, and in song.<sup>27</sup>

During the tumultuous years of 1967 and 1968, for example, students and intellectuals fiercely debated the relative merits of politically engaged music in comparison to songs that focused on personal or existential questions. At times those involved in political activities dismissed others less interested in mobilizing against the dictatorship, calling them *alienados* (alienated). Those youth who focused on personal or cultural questions rebutted by charging that leftists involved in politics were intolerant and even authoritarian. Conflicts about music and culture reflected a larger dispute about the best means to end dictatorial rule and an even larger, less explicit debate about the affinities and tensions between politics and personal liberation.<sup>28</sup>

Being committed to the armed struggle did not automatically mean that a young revolutionary might disdain rock music, countercultural ideas, or the latest cultural trends from abroad. Aretuza Garibaldi remembers that when the

26. “As submissas prisioneiras do lar,” *Veja* (Rio de Janeiro), no. 137, 21 Apr. 1971, pp. 44–49. Sonia E. Alvarez, *Engendering Democracy in Brazil: Women’s Movements in Transition Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990).

27. For the best overview of this period, see Maria Herminia Tavares de Almeida and Luiz Weis, “Carro-Zero e pau-de-arara: O cotidiano da oposição de classe média ao regime militar,” in *História da vida privada no Brasil*, vol. 4, ed. Lilia Moritz Schwarcz (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1998), 319–409.

28. Christopher Dunn, *Brutality Garden: Tropicália and the Emergence of a Brazilian Counterculture* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2001).

Beatles’ *Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* album hit the stores in Belo Horizonte in late 1967 or early 1968, her boyfriend Angelo Pezzuti, who was in the third year of medical school, bought a copy and then met Aretuza at the door of her high school.<sup>29</sup> “He said, ‘Forget work, we’re going to listen to this album.’ Then we bought some cheese and other food, went to his apartment (he didn’t have much furniture) and made a picnic on the floor. We spent the day listening to the album. Angelo said that it would revolutionize pop music.” At the time, Pezzuti was a member of the leadership of COLINA (Comando Nacional de Libertação, National Liberation Command). In 1968, he and others in his organization robbed a series of banks in order to raise funds in preparation for a rural guerrilla movement. He was totally committed to a socialist revolution in Brazil, yet he could enjoy the music of the Beatles. Pezzuti was not the exception. In spite of the intense politicization among students and middle-class youth in 1967 and 1968, there was no simple divide between politically involved and alienated youth. Consumer tastes and cultural appropriations among rebellious youth were much messier and more complex than it might seem at first glance.

However, all of these shifting values and behaviors ran into conflict with the conservative social and moral attitudes of the generals in power. Press and cultural censorship and other draconian measures implemented by the military regime were not only directed against cultural production with overtly oppositional political content. Government censors also prohibited songs, plays, books, films, and other creative works that allegedly offended “morals and public decency” (*moral e bons costumes*). Nudity in the printed media, excessive “manifestations of homosexuality” during official Carnival celebrations, and “obscene” literary production received the red ink of the guardians of public morality.<sup>30</sup>

Among other measures, the repressive government decrees at the end of 1968 increased censorship and forced into exile famous promoters of libertarian ideas such as songwriters and performers Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil. Yet experimentation with drugs, an emergent hippie culture, and greater sexual freedom continued throughout the early 1970s. Alfredo Syrkis, who participated in the kidnapping of the German and Swiss ambassadors in 1970 to demand their exchange for the release of 110 political prisoners, summed up divisions among Brazilian middle-class youth during this period:

29. Aretusa Garibaldi, interview with author, 9 June 2009, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, digital recording.

30. James N. Green, *Beyond Carnival: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1999), 242–66.

In reality it was a generation that I like to say trifurcated in Brazil. One part, after Institutional Act No. 5, when the dictatorship turned into a total dictatorship, joined the armed struggle and went underground; another part decided to go all the way with the counterculture, trying to create a separate universe in which it was possible to live: there were the rural communes, the use of drugs, above all hallucinogens such as LSD. People went to live in communities, in [alternative] families, trying not to read the newspapers, escaping reality, avoiding “downers” [*bode*], as they said at the time. They were the people who became hippies. And there was a third segment of that generation that quickly joined what the system had to offer them.<sup>31</sup>

News of the international counterculture reached Brazilian youth through diverse sources, but one of the most popular venues was a column entitled “Underground” that was written by Luiz Carlos Maciel and published in the alternative weekly *O Pasquim* in the early 1970s.<sup>32</sup> *O Pasquim*, a Rio de Janeiro-based, youth-oriented tabloid that featured humorous jabs at the military and Brazilian society, first appeared on newsstands in 1969. It almost immediately achieved a nationwide mass circulation that at times was greater than *Veja*, the most important mainstream weekly magazine in the country. Throughout the 1970s, the editors of *O Pasquim* waged an ongoing battle with the censors in their efforts to talk about politics, culture, sex, drugs, and rock and roll.<sup>33</sup>

Although *O Pasquim* offered an unconventional and critical reading of Brazilian society, this did not mean that the publication’s editors and contributors embraced the emergent ideas of the gay and lesbian liberation movements that burst onto the international scene after the Stonewall riots of 1969 in New York City. Scant information about this new social movement filtered into Brazil, largely due to government censorship of the Brazilian media. These restrictions notwithstanding, the editors of *O Pasquim*, along with most intellectuals who positioned themselves on the Left, initially viewed feminism and gay rights with disdain.<sup>34</sup> Whether it was because feminist and gay liberation ideas

31. Alfredo Syrkis, “Os paradoxos de 1968,” in *Rebeldes e contestadores: Brasil, França e Alemanha*, ed. Marco Aurélio Garcia and Maria Alice Vieira (São Paulo: Fundação Perseu Abramo, 1999), 112.

32. Marcos Alexandre Capellari, “O discurso da contracultura no Brasil: O *underground* através de Luiz Carlos Maciel, c. 1970” (PhD diss., Univ. of São Paulo, 2007).

33. José Luiz Braga, *O Pasquim e os anos 70: Mais para epa que para oba . . .* (Brasília: Editora Universidade de Brasília, 1991).

34. When US feminists and gay liberationists came to Brazil in the late 1970s, for example, *O Pasquim* editors treated them with sarcastic disdain. See James N. Green,

threatened traditional patriarchal practices embedded in male-dominated intellectual circles or because of long-standing skepticism among most leftists about certain aspects of US culture that seemed to conflict with Brazilian values, the promoters of *O Pasquim's* free-wheeling insubordination to the generals' moral and cultural codes did not endorse these ideas.<sup>35</sup>

If iconoclastic rebels against the dictatorship's policies were reluctant to look favorably on new ideas about feminism and gay liberation in the early 1970s, the isolation of the revolutionary Left, caught up in a whirlwind dynamic of survival, created a mind-set in which most militants were even less susceptible to innovative ways of thinking about nonnormative social and sexual comportment. Encircled by the ever-tightening grip of the state's repressive apparatus, proponents of the revolutionary Left generally saw those who did not join them in armed actions as alienated youth, and those who decided to leave their organizations as traitors to the cause. As mentioned previously, the fear among his fellow revolutionaries that Márcio Leite de Toledo might abandon his organization (*desbundar*) and reveal information to the police led to his summary execution in 1972. When Alfredo Sirkis decided to leave the Vanguarda Popular Revolucionária (Popular Revolutionary Vanguard, VPR) and go into exile in May 1971, the members of his group also criticized him for having *desbundado*.<sup>36</sup> For those revolutionary organizations that were isolated and on the defensive, the decision for a member to end political involvement became synonymous with joining the counterculture, getting high, and even possibly engaging in nonnormative sex. Daniel Aarão Reis, a student leader and member of one of the revolutionary organizations that kidnapped the US ambassador in 1969, recalled: "*desbundando* was a word invented by the hardliners in the vanguard for all those who didn't support the armed struggle. Then it came to refer to those who had revealed information under torture. . . . At one point the torturers even used the term."<sup>37</sup> According to Reis, a term that had once merely meant that a member of an organization had abandoned the cause came to signify that one had actually become a traitor and gone over to the other side.

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"Madame Satan, the Black 'Queen' of Brazilian Bohemia," in *The Human Tradition in Modern Brazil*, ed. Peter M. Beattie (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Publications, 2004), 267–86.

35. Braga, *O Pasquim e os anos 70*, 193–97; Bernardo Kucinski, *Jornalistas e revolucionários: Nos tempos da imprensa alternativa* (São Paulo: Página Aberta, 1991), 159.

36. Tereza Angelo and Adair Gonçalves dos Reis, interview with author, 7 Aug. 2010, Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

37. Quoted in Beatriz Kushnir, "Desbundar na TV: Militantes da VPR e seu arrependimentos públicos," Paper presented at the XXIV Simpósio Nacional de História, 2007.

### Homophobia and the Brazilian Left

How did the revolutionary Left understand homosexuality? The discourse about “revolutionary morality” articulated by the political prisoners who allegedly sought to condemn Chaim and Mário was deeply rooted in at least five parallel and complementary ideological frameworks largely shared by the Brazilian Left in the 1960s. The first linked homosexuality to bourgeois behavior, and hence to the counterrevolution. A second notion concurred with the medical and psychiatric ideas that homosexuality was a type of physical and emotional degeneration. Another attitude, albeit probably unconscious, relied on the traditional Catholic teachings that considered homosexuality to be a moral abomination. Anti-imperialist sentiment associated homosexual behavior and criticisms of homophobia with foreign (US) influences. Finally, leftists echoed popular notions that rejected male homosexuality because it implied the feminization of masculinity and disrupted a pervasive construction of revolutionary masculinity that was at the core of militants’ self-images.

The pro-Soviet Brazilian Communist Party, as well as the myriad of offshoots from the 1960s, ranging from the Maoist Communist Party of Brazil to the pro-Cuban guerrilla groups, all followed the traditional perspective regarding homosexuality shared by the international communist movement. According to this vision, homosexuality was a product of bourgeois decadence and would disappear when capitalism was overthrown and a communist society established.<sup>38</sup> Giving homosexuality a class content and linking same-sex sexuality to the bourgeoisie placed those who engaged in such behavior in the enemy camp. In the 1930s, sodomy laws that had been taken off the books in the first years of the Soviet Revolution were reintroduced into the criminal code, and homosexuality was considered incompatible with revolutionary behavior.<sup>39</sup> The Cuban Revolution continued this tradition. In the early 1960s, many homosexual men and women were forced into militarized work camps to “reform” their “anti-social behavior.” Cuba’s First Congress on Education and Culture in 1971 declared that homosexuality was “a social pathology.” Homosexual men and women were barred from cultural or educational activities.<sup>40</sup> Brazilian rev-

38. James N. Green, “(Homo)sexuality, Human Rights, and Revolution in Latin America,” in *Human Rights and Revolutions*, ed. Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, Lynn Hunt, Marilyn B. Young and Gregory Grandin (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 139–54.

39. Laura Engelstein, “Soviet Policy toward Homosexuality: Its Origins and Historical Roots,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 29, no. 2 (1995): 155–78.

40. Guerra, “Gender Policing, Homosexuality and the New Patriarchy of the Cuban Revolution, 1965–70,” 269.

olutionary militants and leaders from an array of organizations who received training in Cuba no doubt absorbed or perhaps even endorsed this perspective, which paralleled notions of homosexuality prevalent in Brazil at the time. Similarly, pro-Chinese Maoist ideology, which had won the support of the Communist Party of Brazil, Ação Popular, and other smaller revolutionary organizations, held that homosexuality was a product of bourgeois decadence and would disappear with a socialist revolution.<sup>41</sup>

Almost all of the guerrilla organizations considered themselves Marxist, and that ideology held that the working class would lead the revolution. Nonetheless, the armed struggle groups, composed largely of middle-class youth, remained isolated from any concrete contact with the working class.<sup>42</sup> Among the middle-class students who joined the ranks of the revolutionary armed struggle, “petit bourgeois deviation” became code words for distinguishing who was purer or more revolutionary from those who didn’t quite meet the mark. Challenging the defective class origins and orientations of other comrades was among the easier ways to dismiss a political opponent or to win an ideological battle. Engaging in self-criticism was also a preferred way to combat one’s own petit bourgeois background and comportment.

In the midst of the shift toward more permissive sexual relations among Brazilian middle-class youth in the 1960s, many revolutionary organizations, still wed to orthodox Marxist language and ideology and involved in internal personal struggles to overcome their members’ own social backgrounds, considered a preoccupation with sex to be petit bourgeois self-indulgence. Herbert Daniel recalls that after he had joined a revolutionary organization, he dealt with his sexuality by simply repressing it:

My *petit bourgeois* problems worried me as obstacles that prevented me from becoming a good revolutionary. Among them sexuality, and more explicitly, homosexuality. Ever since I began to engage in political activities, I felt as if I had to make a choice: either I would lead a regular sexual life—disturbed, secret and absurd, that is, purely petit bourgeois,

41. The Brazilian Left did not publish documents stating these positions, but they were reflected in internal discussions and in generalized notions about homosexuality pervasive in the different organizations. During the political liberalization of the late 1970s and early 1980s, representatives of the different leftist currents articulated their views on homosexuality that retained the core idea that homosexuality was a product of bourgeois decadence. See interviews in Hiro Okita, *Da opressão à libertação* (São Paulo: Proposta, 1981), 63–73.

42. The noted exception was the Vanguarda Popular Revolucionária’s links to the 1968 Osasco strike. Ridenti, *O fantasma da revolução brasileira*, 177–94.



if not reactionary—or I would make the revolution. I wanted to make the revolution. Conclusion: I had to “forget” my sexuality.<sup>43</sup>

The attempt to purify himself by purging allegedly deviant class-based behavior through self-sacrifice led Daniel to suppress his personal and sexual desires in order to adapt to a group norm. This was a common strategy for coping with homophobia within the Left.

Medico-legal discourses about the degenerate nature of homosexuality largely remained unquestioned during this period. Doctors, psychologists, sex educators, and journalists continued to propagate concepts that had been borrowed from Europe and the United States in the early twentieth century and adapted to Brazilian conditions in medical schools, university courses on psychology, popular literature about sex, and the mass media. Experts attributed homosexuality to hormonal imbalance that could even lead to criminality. The biologically degenerate nature of the condition resulted in people with unstable personalities who neurotically desired to possess the bodies of those of the opposite sex. Some physicians promoted hospitalization as a means of curing the ailment, while others insisted that the state should simply police the behavior. In short, homosexuals were biologically and psychologically sick and needed medical treatment to be cured.<sup>44</sup>

Catholic conceptions of the immorality and the sinful nature of same-sex sexuality were also hegemonic in Brazil well into the 1960s.<sup>45</sup> Although church attendance slowly declined in the 1960s, Catholicism remained the country's predominant religion. Most leftists grew up in this tradition. For many Brazilian revolutionaries, the path to politicization was by means of the left wing of the Catholic Church. Ação Popular (Popular Action), the leading political force within the student movement in the 1960s, emerged out of progressive Catholicism. Some priests, brothers, nuns, and active lay members of the Catholic Church joined or actively supported armed struggle organizations.<sup>46</sup> However, liberation theology, as it came to be known, did not develop a critical assessment of traditional Catholic teachings about homosexuality, with one lone exception.<sup>47</sup> Although all of the armed struggle organizations adhered to a variation

43. Daniel, *Passagem para o próximo sonho*, 96. Emphasis in original.

44. See Green, *Beyond Carnival*, especially chapters 3 and 6.

45. *Ibid.*

46. Kenneth P. Serbin, *Needs of the Heart: A Social and Cultural History of Brazil's Clergy and Seminaries* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

47. This dissenting voice in the Brazilian Catholic Church was Jaime Snoek, a priest and trained Catholic theologian born in Holland but residing in Brazil since 1951,

of Marxist ideology, which implied some kind of break with conventional religious theology, an alternative approach to that of the traditional teachings of the church about same-sex sexuality did not emerge within the ranks of the Left.

Nationalist and long-standing anti-imperialist sentiments that criticized the economic, political, and cultural influences of the United States in Latin America and its support for the dictatorship were deeply embedded in the Brazilian Left. These radicals tended to reject the innovative ideas of feminism and "gay power" as they developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s and were portrayed in the Brazilian media. Brazilians largely received a caricatured portrayal of the US women's and gay and lesbian movements. Journalists described feminists as hostile to men and demands for homosexual rights as silly if not absurd.<sup>48</sup> The US (and European) feminist and the gay and lesbian movements were seen as petit bourgeois phenomena concerned with personal issues that were at variance with revolutionary politics. Some leftists argued that such "foreign" movements diverted attention away from the pressing social, economic, and political problems of countries such as Brazil that were living under military regimes.<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, although Wilhelm Reich's writings on sex and revolution and Herbert Marcuse's works, such as *Eros and Civilization*, had been translated, published, and circulated in Brazil in the late 1960s, they seemed to have had little impact on Brazilian middle-class youth in general, to say nothing of those who decided to join the armed struggle. These European-American thinkers with Marxists backgrounds had elaborated theories that discussed sexual repression in the context of class analysis. Although some journalists, such as *O Pasquim* columnist Luiz Carlos Maciel, ruminated on Reich's theories, the Austrian-American psychiatrist and psychoanalyst received little attention in

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who wrote an article articulating a positive view of homosexuality in a "Catholic culture magazine." Jaime Snoek, "Eles também são dea nossa estripte: Considerações sobre a homofilia," *Revista Vozes*, no. 9 (September 1967): 792–802.

48. Braga, *O Pasquim e os anos 70*, 26; José Castello Branco, "A homossexualidade do Paquim," *O Beijo* (Rio de Janeiro) no. 2, Dec. 1977, pp. 3–4. "Os alegres revoltosos," *Veja*, no. 158, 15 Sept. 1971, pp. 61–62; "O quarto sexo," *Veja*, no. 295, 1 May 1974, pp. 76–77.

49. Later in the 1970s, when the armed struggle had been defeated and legal opposition to the regime took front stage, a common assertion among Marxists of most tendencies was the idea that the Left should build a "united opposition" against the military regime without letting other issues divide that unity. This argument that the main struggle [*luta maior*] was against the military regime and its loyal US backer was reflected, for example, in the debate on homosexuality held at the University of São Paulo in February 1979. See Eduardo Dantas, "Negros, mulheres, homossexuais e índios nos debates da USP," *Lampião da Esquina* 2, no. 10, Mar. 1979, pp. 9–10.

the academic and intellectual world or beyond a small circle of people interested in alternative psychology.<sup>50</sup> Marcuse, who was an intellectual inspiration for the European student rebellions of 1968 and whose work bridged the gap separating class politics and sexual politics, was inextricably associated with the international counterculture. The Brazilian Left as a whole cast aside his ideas as too far removed from the country's political reality.<sup>51</sup>

Prevailing gender norms further contributed to an anti-homosexual bias within the Brazilian Left. Approximately 20 percent of the militants of Brazil's guerrilla organizations were women. Several dozen played leadership roles in the different groups, and many engaged in armed actions. These women broke many traditional roles while living in the precarious and dangerous world of the underground. The ideology of the movement drew on Soviet, Cuban, and Chinese communist notions about the equality of the sexes. Achieving that parity was not very easy. Vera Sílvia Magalhães, who helped plan and execute the kidnapping of the US ambassador in September 1969 to obtain the release of 15 imprisoned revolutionary leaders, remembered how difficult it was for her to participate in the leadership of one of the two organizations that carried out the armed action. "I was the only woman among seven men. I had to exert a tremendous effort to reach [the leadership]. My political activity was a battle because in addition to everything, there was *machista* prejudice."<sup>52</sup> Magalhães and former guerrilla Yeda Botelho Salles reflected on those years in a document entitled "Balance Sheet without a Perspective—1968: Those Who Didn't Forget; Those Who Didn't Regret"; they wrote:

For us women, our political activity was a double-edged sword: it was a type of social affirmation, and it was a confused lived experience between a rejection of domination and the recognition of differences. The attempt at [achieving] an equal exchange almost always ended up in unequal exchanges. We called our boyfriends *companheiros* and that word meant everything we desired. Neither the women nor the men were able to achieve this comradeship, and many frustrations accumulated.<sup>53</sup>

50. Capellari, "O discurso da contracultura no Brasil," 110–30.

51. Isabel Loureiro, "Herbert Marcuse: Anti-capitalismo e emancipação," *Trans/Form/Ação* (São Paulo) 28, no. 2 (2005): 7–20.

52. Carvalho, *Mulheres que foram à luta armada*, 172. Vera Sílvia Magalhães repeated a very similar comment to me in an interview conducted in 2003, indicating that this was a significant point in her reflections about the role of women in the student movement and revolutionary organizations. Vera Sílvia Magalhães, interview with author, 17 July 2003, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, tape recording.

53. Carvalho, *Mulheres que foram à luta armada*, 173.

The efforts to achieve some kind of gender equality within revolutionary relations and organizations left women who aspired to leadership in an ambiguous position. Members of the “generation of 1968,” who were swept up in an optimism that promised an end to the dictatorship through armed struggle, were influenced by the array of cultural and social changes taking place among youth worldwide in the late 1960s. However, the countervailing revolutionary imperative to the libertarian impulses of the period demanded discipline, order, and cohesion. The attempted readjustment of gender roles described by Magalhães and Salles remained a precarious advance within the tight confines of small organizations under attack.

The notion of the revolutionary equality of the sexes was predicated on modifying long-standing patterns of gendered relations between men and women. This was no easy task among middle-class revolutionaries, many of who had grown up in traditional families where their mothers usually assumed conventional female roles and likely had maids to do the menial household chores. Within underground organizations the battles by women to change unequal gendered behavior of the male comrades were fraught with resistance. Inevitably, members of armed struggle groups fell back on traditional masculine and patriarchal norms.

Some women might have achieved leadership roles, but to the extent that this was possible it was due to their masculinization. They had to fight hard, be aggressive in debates, and, as Magalhães remembered, be able to put their “dick on the table [*colocar o pau na mesa*]” like the guys.<sup>54</sup> In a male-dominated milieu, nurturing a hardened and determined persona garnered respect and political capital for Magalhães within her organization. Similarly, the stern public persona and the iron discipline of Inês Etienne Romeu, a leader of the Vanguarda Popular Revolucionária from June 1970 until her arrest in May 1971, won her esteem among her fellow comrades living in the underground.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, an undercurrent of suspicion and subtle rejection of those women circulated among the militants, who speculated that their overly masculine demeanor might also mean that they were possibly closeted lesbians.<sup>56</sup>

54. Magalhães, interview, 17 July 2003.

55. This assessment of Inês Etienne Romeu was repeated by members of her organization whom I interviewed who had worked with her in the underground, as well as by women who were her cellmates.

56. For another example of the tendency of young female revolutionaries to assume a masculine persona in order to acquire political legitimacy within the revolutionary wing of the student movement in the later 1970s, see the oral history of Célia in Patai, *Brazilian Women Speak*, 237. Madalena, who was a member of a student cell of the Brazilian

### Revolutionary Masculinity

If the masculinization of some female militants allowed them to assume leadership roles in armed struggle organization, the feminization of male revolutionaries was out of the question. Pervasive Brazilian cultural notions labeled male homosexuals as effeminate, passive, vacillating, and unreliable, while Marxists viewed them as inherently petit bourgeois and potentially traitorous. These two traditions combined excluded the possibility of homosexual men becoming revolutionaries. Nothing symbolized the idea that a male revolutionary needed to possess a particular form of masculinity more than the prevalent images and notions of Che Guevara, the iconic figure of the Latin American guerrilla movement in the 1960s and 1970s. “El hombre nuevo” (the new man) promoted by Che and imitated by his followers was virile, bearded, aggressive, and single-minded in his sacrifice for the cause, postponing worldly pleasures of the moment for a glorious socialist future.

The 1959 Cuban Revolution had a profound impact on the Latin American Left. The overthrow of the Batista dictatorship and establishment of a socialist state made the island a beacon of hope throughout the continent. The writings of French journalist and revolutionary Régis Debray, who had been imprisoned in Bolivia after interviewing Che Guevara in 1967, offered a theoretical justification for carrying out an armed struggle against the Brazilian military regime. Pointing to the success of Fidel and his band of revolutionaries fighting in the Sierra Maestra in the late 1950s, Debray’s *Revolution in the Revolution* systematized the *foco* theory, which argued that a small dedicated group of revolutionaries could establish a rural base, demoralize a dictatorial regime, inspire the rural and peasant masses to rise up, and ultimately overthrow a reactionary government. For those who had broken with what they considered to be the moderate and reformist program of the Brazilian Communist Party, as well as for the new generation of youth who joined the student movement after 1964, the Cuban Revolution—and especially Che Guevara—embodied the revolutionary path for Brazil and the rest of Latin America.

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Communist Party in the 1970s, states that fellow comrades knew that she was a lesbian and did not discriminate against her, but she also considered her sexual identity to be a secondary struggle that did not justify being discussed in party circles. Patai, *Brazilian Women Speak*, 260–62. Without further research it is hard to know whether this apparent toleration of female homosexuality by student members of the Brazilian Communist Party was an anomaly, a different understanding of male and female homosexualities within the Brazilian Left, or a product of the social and cultural liberalization of the mid- and late 1970s.

In 1965 Che Guevara left his post as the minister of industry in Cuba to support the revolutionary movement in the Congo.<sup>57</sup> When that endeavor failed, he relocated to Bolivia, where he was killed on October 8, 1967, while attempting to build a revolutionary base in the backlands, an area strategically located near Argentina and Brazil but totally inhospitable to guerrilla warfare. The impact of his demise on Brazilian revolutionaries was profound. Herbert Daniel recalled in his memoir: “The death of Che was an illumination [and] tragically happy evidence that it didn’t matter where we were; we were not alone; we were the other hands of Che; afterward, if we were to suffer the same infinitely pure death, [it was] nothing less than the immeasurable pleasure of sharing the legend. Because Che died in his legend, as part of his myth; [it was] inevitable and comprehensible.” Rather than being demoralized by the demise of Che’s rural guerrilla campaign at the hands of US-trained counterinsurgency forces, Daniel recalled that his “death and defeat in Bolivia was lived as a victory and its justification, as the certainty of the inevitability of a victorious future. It was a death filled with hope.”<sup>58</sup>

In a collection of essays published in Brazil on the twentieth anniversary of the death of Che Guevara, Daniel Aarão Reis, who had participated in the armed struggle two decades previously, commented on the symbolic importance of the Argentine revolutionary who had adopted the Cuban Revolution as his own: “Some communists were notorious for preparing to suffer, to die. Our option was different: instead of suffering, becoming prisoners, dying, we would prepare to kill. Our choice was the struggle.” To those who made this choice, Che personified that militant posture. Reis remembered that during the student demonstrations of 1966, ’67, and ’68, while different tendencies criticized Fidel, Mao, Lenin, and Stalin, admiration of Che was unanimous, and his death didn’t shake the myth.<sup>59</sup>

Throughout the world, the popularized image of Che Guevara with his long, flowing hair, unkempt beard, and red-starred black beret became an iconic symbol of rebellious youth. Long-haired students who were challenging traditional gender markers with their disheveled locks could imitate his image. Che’s beard could be just as much a sign of rejecting bourgeois respectability as it could be a symbol representing the sacrifice of the comfort of domesticity for

57. See, for example, Jorge G. Castañeda, *Compañero: The Life and Death of Che Guevara*, trans. Marina Castañeda (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997).

58. Daniel, *Passagem para o próximo sonho*, 94.

59. Flávio Loutzii and José Corrêa Leite, *Che: 20 anos depois; ensaios e testemunhos* (São Paulo: Busca Vida, 1987), 213.

the harsh life of the guerrilla fighting in the jungle. He was a rebel with a cause who was willing to abandon country and friends, pick up a rifle, and offer his life for the revolution.

Che's stylized portrait that became so ubiquitous by the end of the 1960s also melded with the oldest, most powerful, and most pervasive symbol in Western civilization, namely Christ's sacrifice, suffering, and ultimate martyrdom. The seminaked body of the assassinated revolutionary sprawled out on a rustic stretcher in rural Bolivia offered additional symbolic and potent meanings. This Christian imagery, layered on top of the figure of a Marxist revolutionary, also had a strong appeal to the hundreds, if not thousands, of young Brazilians who had joined the Left through their experiences in Juventude Universitária Católica (Catholic University Youth) and later Ação Popular. The view of Christ's teachings as a message to the poor and oppressed motivated youth raised in the Catholic Church, as well as friars, nuns, and priests who lent support to the armed struggle. Just as Columbian revolutionary priest Camilo Torres had taken up arms to fight for a better world, so too Dominican friars in Brazil would offer aid and assistance to revolutionary organizations. Like the worker-priests living among the poor, Che Guevara became an ecumenical symbol of the revolutionary figure dedicated to the people of Latin America in revolt.<sup>60</sup>

Historian Florencia Mallon has documented the impact of Che's image among the supporters, militants, and leadership of the MIR (Movement of the Revolutionary Left) that engaged in armed struggle in Chile in the late 1960s and 1970s. According to Mallon, "The imagery of this young generation, which given the strong 'agit-prop' emphasis of the party's early years was an extremely important political tool, drew directly on the combination of the Cuban *barbudo*—the bearded and long-haired young romantic best symbolized by Ernesto 'Che' Guevara—and the emerging hippie rebels who preached free love, danced to rock music, and stormed the barricades of the bourgeois state."<sup>61</sup> Mallon argues that the central leadership of the MIR cultivated an association between their personas as the embodiment of what I call revolutionary masculinity and the images of Che "and drew personal authority from it."

60. For the most detailed account of the support by Dominican friars of the armed struggle, and the relationship of liberation theology to revolutionary movements in Brazil, see Frei Betto, *Batismo de sangue: A luta clandestina contra a ditadura militar*, 11th ed. rev. (São Paulo: Casa Amarela, 2000).

61. Florencia E. Mallon, "Barbudos, Warriors, and Rotos: The MIR, Masculinity, and Power in the Chilean Agrarian Reform 1965–74," in *Changing Men and Masculinities in Latin America*, ed. Matthew C. Gutmann (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2003), 180.



Combining Che’s persona and the “good looks, style, and brash manliness” of the *roto macanudo* (cool working-class guy), another masculine performance of Chilean working-class men, the MIR leadership fashioned a gendered comportment that attracted youth to the revolutionary organization. In her study of the organizing efforts among local MIR activists engaged in agrarian unrest in southern Chile, Mallon notes that “ironically the most successful organizers and rabble-rousers, attracted to the MIR precisely because of their intensely confrontational style and demeanor, were also the ones the central leadership was unable to control.” Moreover, as Mallon reminds us, the imitators of Che, while cultivating this revolutionary image, imposed compulsory heterosexuality and rejected transgressive gendered behavior.<sup>62</sup>

Just as Chilean left-wing leaders appropriated the image of Guevara to promote a radical and rebellious image, Brazilian youth also identified with his persona, especially his beard and long hair, which were signs of rebellious masculinity. Ivan Seixas remembered the impact that Che had on him as a young boy living in a working-class neighborhood in Rio Grande do Sul in 1966 or 1967. “I had long hair. It was a little because of being a member of the Beatles generation, but it was mostly because I loved the figure of Che, who had long hair, and he wasn’t considered a woman or a faggot [*viado*].” Seixas recalled one incident in which he suffered a physical attack because of his flowing mane. Walking home from the downtown post office, he passed by the city’s docks. “There were some dockworkers there, and me with my long hair. One of them said, ‘Is it a boy or a girl, a *guri* or *guria*?’ The others laughed. And, I, as always really crazy [*porra louca*], turned around and acting totally natural said, ‘Neither *guri* or *guria*, you motherfucker [*a puta que te pariu*],’ and then ran off like crazy.” Two dockworkers chased after him and held him down, demanding that he retract his epithet, but Seixas, who was 13 or 14 at the time, allegedly refused to give in and apologize.<sup>63</sup>

Although Seixas considered that he was primarily influenced by Che’s image, the throwaway comment that his long hair in some small way linked him to the Beatles generation is significant. For it was probably those elements of gender blurring that accompanied rock and roll, the hippie movement, Brazilian *tropicália*, and other cultural contestations of the late 1960s that provoked the anxiety and ire among the dockworkers. While Ivan thought of himself as imitating his revolutionary hero and understood that his long hair did not compromise his masculinity, his attackers had a much more simple reading of his appearance. For them, long hair, gender-bending, or colorful attire questioned

62. Ibid., 183, 194.

63. Seixas, interview, 13 Nov. 2002.

normative, appropriate gender behavior. Immediately below the surface of this anxiety was the belief that a male who presented himself accordingly must be a viado (faggot). Seixas insisted that one could have long hair, be masculine like Che Guevara, and not be a faggot. His attackers evidently could not make that distinction. Although international youth culture as it developed in Brazil may have broken down some traditional gender markers so that some young men could use long hair and colorful clothes without considering that these styles threatened their masculinity, new cultural behavior did not dissolve a widespread disdain for male homosexuality that was conflated with effeminacy.

### Revolutionary Closets

In the late 1960s, Herbert Daniel, a medical student in Belo Horizonte, negotiated between two worlds. On one hand, he had begun to have furtive sexual encounters with people he met on the streets or in an area of the Municipal Park that was notorious for being a meeting ground for homosexuals.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, he desperately wanted to be a member of a revolutionary organization and implicitly knew that most members of the group that he wanted to join would not accept his sexual desires. One day, Laís Pereira, his best friend since junior high school and an active member of the student movement at the medical school, cautiously approached him with a query.<sup>65</sup> Someone within the Left had told her that he had seen Daniel leave the Municipal Park late at night. As Pereira recalls, she went to Daniel and asked him point blank if it were true, with the implicit suggestion that this meant that he had been seeking out a sexual partner among the shadows in the shrubs. Daniel, known for his quick mind and a fast tongue, offered a rapid-fire explanation. He was participating in a clandestine Marxist study group in the park, he explained, having chosen the location because it was hidden and discreet. At a time when secrecy about the details of political activities prevailed and one avoided questions about clandestine meetings, Pereira recalls that she bought this explanation and eliminated from her mind the possibility that Daniel was a homosexual or sexually involved with other men. Whether Pereira's acceptance of Daniel's improbable justification for his nocturnal whereabouts was an easy way for Pereira to allay her own suspicions and not deal with a harsh reality is hard to know, since, as she admitted, 35 years has muddied her memory in recalling the tale. This story,

64. Herbert Daniel, *Meu corpo daria um romance: Narrativa desarmada* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1984), 157–60.

65. Laís Pereira, interview with author, 6 Jan. 2008, Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

however, indicates Daniel’s clear understanding that he needed to be cautious about revealing his homosexuality, even to his best friend.

Another example also illustrates this point. Sometime in the late 1960s, a prominent leader of the National Union of Students (UNE), which the military regime had outlawed, shared an overnight train ride with another member of Ação Popular (AP).<sup>66</sup> Although AP had not opted for armed struggle in the late 1960s, the military dictatorship still banned the organization.<sup>67</sup> The leader, whom we shall call Carlos, had admitted to himself that he was attracted to other men, but he closely guarded this secret. During the tedious trip to a clandestine meeting of AP militants, Carlos’s traveling companion, also a member of AP, engaged in a circuitous monologue about psychology and sexuality in which he finally asked how Carlos would react if he found out that another member of the organization were a homosexual. Although Carlos was nervous because he feared that his answer might reveal something about his own covert sexual desires, he responded that it would make no difference to him. His colleague then concurred with his answer. The discussion ended there. Neither confessed their sexual inclinations for men, and to this day Carlos doesn’t know if his *companheiro* was testing him in order to prepare the groundwork for a revelation, trying to determine if Carlos were homosexual, or simply engaged in a theoretical discussion. Yet the icy fear that Carlos experienced as his fellow comrade cautiously posed the question reflected the constant dread that he felt about the possibility of being “exposed.” The tremendous trepidation about being rejected and ostracized from the tight-knit social network of friends from the student movement, who had become even closer comrades in the underground experience of the opposition to the dictatorship, acted as an effective silencing mechanism. If a militant revealed his sexual desires to a comrade, he ran the risk of being expelled from the organization and becoming a pariah. The ethos of the organization imposed a compulsory heterosexuality or at least an appearance of it.

These two examples, as well as the anecdote at the beginning of this article, offer a unilateral picture in which Brazilian leftists seem to have been incapable of accepting homosexuals within their ranks. Reality during this period, however, was much more complex, and there were countervailing trends to that of a generalized intolerance. In 1967, Daniel joined COLINA. That same year he fell in love with Erwin Duarte, a young member of the organization, to no

66. Carlos (pseudonym), interview with author, 17 May 1995, Brazil, tape recording.

67. Haroldo Lima and Aldo Arantes, *História da ação popular: Da JUC ao PC do B* (São Paulo: Alfa-Omega, 1984).

avail. In his memoir, Daniel mentions his passion for another comrade in his revolutionary group without offering details of the affair. Duarte, however, comfortably recounted the story of his friendship with Daniel three decades later. One evening the two were sharing a room, though separate beds. Before falling asleep, Daniel began a long and circumscribed monologue that eventually hinted at his passion for Duarte without explicitly stating so. At one point, Duarte cut off Daniel's roundabout discourse and asked him directly: "Are you saying that you are in love with me?" Daniel confessed that he was, and Duarte explained that although he didn't feel any attraction to other men, it didn't mean that they couldn't continue being friends. That solution still seemed to cause Daniel much grief, and as he also fleetingly mentioned in his memoir, he turned to Angelo Pezzuti, his best friend in the organization and a leader in COLINA, for consolation. None of the five other male members of the armed struggle group that I interviewed had known about Daniel's homosexuality at the time that they were involved in the armed struggle in Belo Horizonte, or at least today they do not recall that they knew it at the time. However, the one woman who participated in the organization's combat unit suspected it, although the subject never came up between them. Daniel, like Carlos, the student leader and member of Ação Popular, felt that he had to retain the secret of his personal desires, although he found at least one confidant who offered him support. Daniel would later, cautiously, find others.

Regardless of the empathy that Pezzuti offered, Daniel's ultimate decision, as mentioned previously, was sexual abstinence. In *Passagem para a próxima viagem*, he recalled that it was a "sacrifice" that he was willing to make in order to be a revolutionary. Recounting his time involved in guerrilla training in 1970 in the Brazilian countryside in the Vale do Ribeira, Daniel wrote: "I was really happy in Ribeira because I *didn't* feel repressed. I felt what all of us must have felt [namely] that the lack of sex was a necessity of the struggle, as were the discomforts we suffered, such as the lack of food." In his memoir, Daniel recounted this incident to a former fellow combatant to explain his repressed desires while in the guerrilla movement. "You know, my friend, I wasn't exactly a homosexual militant. I was an exiled homosexual."<sup>68</sup> Daniel described this exile as an internal one, in which he had fled his own needs for sex, love, and affection. During the four years that Daniel was a militant and then a leader while participating in three different armed struggle organizations, he managed to share his secret with at least three different female militants, but as he stated in his memoir, the ethos of the Left created a climate in which he continued to feel that his homo-

68. Daniel, *Passagem para o próximo sonho*, 221. Emphasis in original.

sexuality was incompatible with revolutionary praxis. He remained abstinent for seven years.

Why was Daniel capable of revealing his repressed sexual desires to only a handful of people over the course of the years he was linked to the armed struggle? Why did Carlos refuse to reveal his deepest feelings to another comrade who seemed willing to talk about the question? Why did Chaim and Mário’s affair in prison lead to their ostracism and even a possible *justiçamento*? Why were the ideological edifices that considered concerns about sexuality as petit bourgeois deviations and homosexuality a manifestation of bourgeois decadence too powerful to tumble? In part, the dynamic of the armed struggle left little room for collective personal or existential debates.

By the early 1970s, most groups had become trapped in a vicious cycle. Clandestine units needed to plan bank robberies and other actions to have sufficient funds for safe hideaways and to stay a step ahead of the police. Instead of accumulating arms and resources to mount rural guerrilla activities, which the radical Left almost universally agreed was the strategic means to overthrow the regime, most organizations ended up concentrating on day-to-day survival. Within this dynamic of survival for survival’s sake, the revolutionary Left became more and more isolated in the underground. Within this context, even attempting to raise new questions about gender roles and sexuality must have seemed impossible.

Equally as important, left-wing militants caught up in the whirlwind of efforts to stay alive had little access to new ideas about sexuality or time to consider how to frame questions of sexuality within the discourses of the Left. They lacked the language or could not imagine confronting members of their organizations who had built their homophobic attitudes upon a complex framework of discourses about homosexuality that were deeply embedded within the Left and Brazilian society as a whole. As mentioned previously, few reports about “gay power” reached the Brazilian press. Censorship of news, including information about homosexuality and the developing international movement, was particularly harsh between 1969 and 1973, precisely the time that the armed struggle was at its zenith. Herbert Daniel and other revolutionary leftists with homoerotic desires simply did not have easy access to those ideas in the late 1960s.

Rather, the ethos of revolutionary masculinity prevailed as the embodiment of the revolution itself. Armed opposition to the regime demanded extreme sacrifice for the cause, but it seemed to offer a path toward defeating the dictatorship and beginning a radical restructuring of Brazilian society. This was also a means of self-fulfillment for radical youth. The Brazilian revolution required a “new man” who denied personal preoccupations and was willing to

transform himself to become an authentic revolutionary. The internal dynamics of different organizations required that those from middle-class backgrounds, who formed a majority in the organizations, needed to prove their worth as authentic revolutionaries by transforming themselves into human incarnations of the revolutionary ideal. Group social pressure, the desire to belong or fit in, and the revolutionary models available all conspired to reinforce this construction of revolutionary masculinity.

### Reassessments

All of this was to change after the government successfully dismantled the armed struggle organizations. In prison, in exile, or totally cut off from revolutionary activity and in hiding, militants began to rethink their past and elaborate new political and personal paths for the future. Alipio Freire, a leader of the Maoist organization Ala Vermelha (Red Wing), and his fellow comrades imprisoned in São Paulo, for example, went through a long process of internal self-criticism and concluded that the armed struggle had been a failed strategy.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, Chaim recalled his time in prison: “We had lost the battle, and the main thing now was to think about how to get out of prison and find other ways to do political work, be in contact with society, find out what was happening, instead of spending our time in jail singing the *Internationale* and playing the game of political prisoner.”<sup>70</sup> Likewise, Espinosa began a reassessment of his past political activities while serving time for being a leader of revolutionary organization and realized that the guerrilla strategy would not topple the dictatorship. When he was released from prison, he returned to his working-class hometown, where he engaged in political work and became a journalist.<sup>71</sup>

Chaim’s and Mário’s reassessment of the past political practice also provided the framework for the challenge to their would-be executioners. It would seem that Chaim’s unwillingness to continue hiding his personal life while in prison also fueled his offensive posture. Indeed, he turned the tables on his aggressors by inverting traditional stereotypes about male homosexuality while

69. Alipio Freire, interview with author, 27 Nov. 2009, São Paulo, Brazil, digital recording. Freire published a collection of recollections about the prison experiences of revolutionaries that documents the debates and discussions that took place in prison. Alipio Freire, Izaías Almada, and J. A. de Granville Ponce, eds., *Tiradentes, um presidio da ditadura: Memórias de presos políticos* (São Paulo: Scipione Cultural, 1997).

70. Chaim (pseudonym), interview with author, 22 June 2004, Brazil.

71. Roberto Espinosa, *Abraços que sufocam e outros ensaios sobre a liberdade* (São Paulo: Viramundo, 2000).

at the same time appealing to and reinforcing the ideal of revolutionary masculinity by claiming to be more macho than his aggressors. The fact that he had not revealed information while tortured placed him in a superior position to those who condemned him. By demasculinizing those who discussed a justiça-mento, he neutralized their potency.

Daniel also began to reassess his past political involvement, although in quite different circumstances. After virtually all of the members of his organization had been arrested or gone into exile, Daniel remained secluded in a closed apartment until Claudio Mesquita, a supporter of the armed struggle, offered him assistance. While in hiding, the two began a long dialogue about personal and political questions, including their homosexuality.<sup>72</sup> In 1974, they managed to obtain fake passports and fled the country. They began a relationship in 1975 and remained in European exile for seven years. In 1979 in Paris, the center of Brazilian exiles in Europe, Daniel and Mesquita organized a debate about homosexuality that created a sharp division within the community of several hundred former leaders and militants of the revolutionary movements living abroad. Some exiled revolutionaries refused to discuss the question, arguing that it was a personal matter and a secondary issue that diverted attention away from what should have been their main focus: demanding amnesty for all political prisoners and exiles. Most of those leftists also maintained traditional notions about homosexuality. Others defended an open discussion on the topic within the Brazilian Left, and a growing minority supported the ideas of the feminist and gay and lesbian movements.<sup>73</sup> For the event, Daniel authored a document, "Homosexual: Defense of Their Interests?" that presented a radical theoretical discussion about the politics of homosexuality.<sup>74</sup>

The times had changed in Brazil as well. In 1974, with the economy in crisis, and as the last remnants of the armed struggle were crushed and a robust legal political opposition to the regime emerged, Ernesto Geisel, the fourth military president, initiated a slow-motion move toward democracy. Once again in 1977 students took to the streets to demand the end of the military dictatorship. Opposition politicians won the 1978 elections in most major urban centers. Left-wing activists clamored for an amnesty law, which was approved in

72. Herbert Daniel, *Meu corpo daria um romance* (Rio de Janeiro: Codecri, 1984).

73. Denise Rollemberg, *Exílio: Entre raízes e radars* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1999), 224–27; Jean Marc Van der Weid, interview with author, 13 Aug. 2010, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Gloria Ferreira, interview with author, 10 Oct. 2010, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, digital recording.

74. Herbert Daniel, "Homossexual: Defesa dos interesses?" republished in *Gênero* (Niterói) 8, no. 2 (2008): 15–21.



1979 and permitted the return of political exiles and the release of most political prisoners. Many of them reintegrated into politics during the democratization process and became important leaders in the reorganized Brazilian Left.

In a more politically open environment, new social movements also emerged. Feminist, Afro-Brazilian, and gay and lesbian organizations formed. In April 1978, a group of intellectuals began publishing *Lampião da Esquina*, a monthly newspaper that provoked a nationwide debate about gay and lesbian issues. The journal also promoted itself as a vehicle to defend women, blacks, indigenous people, and the environment; the newspaper's cover stories featured news of the women's movement, the United Black Movement, and other social and political mobilization.<sup>75</sup> In 1979, a left-wing sector emerged within the gay and lesbian movement that sought a dialogue with the Brazilian Left and the labor movement about homophobia and discrimination.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, feminists and black activists debated new ideas about gender and race both within the array of new organizations and publications and more broadly among wide sectors of the opposition to the military regime, as the country slowly moved toward democratic rule.<sup>77</sup> Many leftists began rethinking political strategies, and in 1980, in coalition with trade unionists and church activists, they founded the Workers' Party. At its first convention in September 1981, labor leader Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva declared, "We will not permit homosexuality to be treated as a sickness, much less as a case for the police."<sup>78</sup> Although this did not mean that the Brazilian Left had entirely rethought questions of gender and sexuality, it marked the beginning of a shift in attitudes toward homosexuality.<sup>79</sup>

Some members of the politicized generation of 1968 did not easily embrace these new ideas. Many leftists still argued that feminism divided men and women. Others insisted that discussing racism in Brazil created hostility between whites and blacks that was alien to Brazilian culture. In public debates about homosexuality, some argued that the fight for equal rights for gays and lesbians divided the broad opposition to the military dictatorship.<sup>80</sup>

75. See, for example, *Lampião da Esquina*, no. 8 (Jan. 1979), no. 11 (Apr. 1979), no. 15 (Aug. 1979), and no. 30 (Nov. 1980).

76. Green, "Desire and Militancy."

77. See Alvarez, *Engendering Democracy in Brazil*, and Michael George Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, 1945-1988* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994).

78. *Folha de São Paulo*, 28 Sept. 1981, p. 6.

79. For details of this process, see Green, "Desire and Militancy."

80. Dantas, "Negros, mulheres, homossexuais e índios nos debates da USP," 9-10; Green, "Desire and Militancy," 57-70.

One former revolutionary who returned with the 1979 Amnesty Law ended up in the center of this storm of controversies. Fernando Gabeira, who had participated in the kidnapping of the US ambassador in 1969, began granting interviews in which he supported feminist ideas, the environmental movement, and the emergent gay movement. Many of his former comrades in arms quickly dismissed him. In their minds, he was no longer a part of the struggle. He had *desbundado*. To top it off, he had worn a scandalously skimpy bikini swimsuit (*tanga*) on an Ipanema beach, and the rumor immediately spread throughout the Left that he was probably a homosexual. Gabeira recalled the reaction to an interview that he gave for *Lampião da Esquina* soon after returning from exile. "After that interview, the rumors [about my sexuality] increased. Some old friends congratulated me for my sincerity and even thought that my deposition could help them in a reevaluation of their own trajectory as machos. Others didn't keep up with my rhythm. They accepted me as a terrorist, but not as a homosexual."<sup>81</sup> The fact that Gabeira was actually not gay didn't seem to matter much to those who felt uncomfortable with the former guerrilla's new politics and public persona.

In 1981, Herbert Daniel, who had repressed his homosexuality while participating in the revolutionary Left, returned from European exile and became a published author. In 1986, he ran for the State Assembly in Rio de Janeiro on a leftist platform that included a strong defense of the rights of gays and lesbians, with the expectation that he would be elected with the support of what was thought to be a new voting block.<sup>82</sup> He was, however, soundly defeated. Although gay and lesbian groups had organized throughout the country, the movement remained small and overwhelmed with responding to the AIDS crisis. The Workers' Party had formally come out against discrimination of gays and lesbians, yet activists within the party felt frustrated with the lack of concrete support for their cause.<sup>83</sup> It would take another decade for a second more powerful wave of activism to emerge, which eventually built strategic alliances with the Workers' Party and other sectors of a transformed Left to carry out national campaigns against homophobia and discrimination.

81. Fernando Gabeira, *Entradas e bandeiras* (Rio de Janeiro: Codecri, 1981), 99; "Fernando Gabeira fala, aqui e agora, diretamente dos anos 80," *Lampião da Esquina* 2, no. 18, Nov. 1979, pp. 5–8.

82. Liszt Vieira, interview with author, 28 June 2006, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

83. Roberto de Oliveira Silva, interview with author, 19 July 1997, São Paulo, Brazil, tape recording. At the time, Silva was a leader of the Grupo de Gays e Lésbicas do PT in São Paulo.

### Postscript

Anyone doing oral histories about events that have taken place decades ago faces a series of theoretical and methodological questions related to memory and history. Although these questions lie outside the main focus of this article, it is worth presenting an alternative recollection of the story of Chaim and Mário without trying to unravel all of the reasons, motivations, and memory tricks involved in the different versions of the incident.

It would be reasonable to question whether Ivan Seixas accurately remembered the events that took place in his cellblock 40 years ago. At that time he was 16, his father had been killed under torture, and he was an intractable and stubborn political prisoner.<sup>84</sup> Although he claims that he had been tolerant toward homosexuality among his fellow leftists, it is just as likely that Seixas, who remains politically active, shifted his personal attitudes toward same-sex eroticism as Brazilian society became more tolerant toward homosexuality in the 1990s, when a mass-based movement mobilized millions in the streets to demand equal rights and an end to discrimination.

I conducted two interviews with Seixas about events that took place in the Tiradentes Prison in 1972, and a brief interview with Alipio Freire that confirmed the details of his story. Freire, who also remains politically active, witnessed the confrontation and agreed with Seixas's version of events.<sup>85</sup> Freire also confirmed that a leader of another political organization imprisoned in the same cellblock with him at the time had indeed threatened a summary execution. Whether that person would have actually carried it out in 1972, or was merely expressing revolutionary bravado, we will probably never know. The fact remains that in the early 1970s a significant segment of the Brazilian Left retained traditional notions about the immoral nature of homosexuality.

I nevertheless was eager to hear Chaim's memory of those events, and I finally managed to track him down and conduct an extensive interview. Without first retelling Seixas's version of the past, I asked him to recount what he remembered about any conflicts that involved him while he spent time in prison. During the interview, Chaim admitted that he had had an affair with Mário that had been discovered while they were both serving time. His sexual and romantic relationship with Mário had begun in 1967 while they were both university

84. Seixas, interview, 13 Nov. 2002. To this day, Seixas regards his decision to join his father in the Movimento Revolucionário Tiradentes as a noble endeavor, even though his entire family was imprisoned, his father killed during interrogation, and his mother forced to hear the death agony of her husband from the cell where she was being detained.

85. Telephone interview with Alipio Freire by author, 14 June 2006, Brazil, notes.

students, soon after Chaim joined the revolutionary movement, although they kept their affair secret. After Chaim left prison, he went into exile, married, and stopped having sex with men. “Until I met my wife, with whom I have been legally married for 25 years, he [Mário] was the great love of my life,” he stated.<sup>86</sup>

According to Chaim, when he first arrived at Tiradentes Prison, members of the other revolutionary groups treated him well. “It was a tactic for them to get to know about people from other organizations, but only those who had not given in while being tortured. They knew about my good behavior.” Just as Ivan had related in his story, Chaim, indeed, had not revealed any significant information under torture during interrogations.<sup>87</sup> However, he, Mário, and other members of his organization who had been arrested, convicted, and were serving time had begun to question their revolutionary ideals.

According to Chaim, he, Mário, and other comrades from his group had distanced themselves from the other political prisoners. “You start to be viewed badly. They label you as having given up politics and then you become one of two things—either you become a faggot [*bicha*] or you are considered cops, which is what happened to us. There was a guy who tried to talk to me, asking me what I thought about the revolutionary situation and such. By luck or for whatever reason, I didn’t say anything. Later I learned it was a trap, that anything that I said would have been a pretext for him and others who were waiting to attack me for being counterrevolutionary. That’s what happened.”

At this point, I recounted Seixas’s tale. Chaim laughed and exclaimed, “That’s great!” implying that he had enjoyed the story. “So it didn’t happen?” I queried. “I don’t think so,” he responded. When I pushed him on the matter, he continued. “It didn’t happen that way, but it could have been the summation of a series of stories about our day-to-day life that dragged on, and it makes sense. It could have happened. . . . I must have said it to one or two people privately, but I definitely didn’t go into someone’s cell and tell it to everyone. That I didn’t do.”

Later in our conversation, Chaim added: “It’s the way people remember. It’s like a kaleidoscope. The past is totally subjective and that’s how it stuck in his [Seixas’s] memory. And it could have happened. To tell you the truth, I wish that it had happened like that. I would be much prouder [if it had happened that way].”

86. Chaim, interview, 22 June 2004.

87. The fact that Chaim did not reveal information about his comrades is confirmed by a comment in the political police documents in the Public Archive of the State of São Paulo that he had been particularly intransigent and uncooperative while being interrogated, a comment rarely found in the written record. Documents in possession of author.

