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Fight for Equality in Troubled Times: The Rise of the Early Gay Liberation Movement in

Brazil's Military Dictatorship through *O Lampião da Esquina*, 1978-1981

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Introduction

This research project looks at the development of the Gay Liberation Movement in Brazil through *O Lampião da Esquina*, the country's first gay publication to gain national circulation. A movement for gay rights emerged there during a military dictatorship that lasted from 1964 to 1985. During this period, the government had the power to torture its citizens and censor the media. Having this in mind, it is intriguing that a gay publication emerged in this context. At the time, economic instability and crumbling public approval rates motivated President Geisel to slowly transition back to democracy. It is in this context of transition that leftist and democratic social movements started to arise and that alternative newspapers like *Lampião* were able to emerge. Through an analysis of the articles present in *Lampião*, this paper aims to investigate the nature of the collaboration between Brazil's social movements during the late 1970s. The following analysis suggests that *Lampião* was crucial in offering gay people a platform where they could see themselves represented and create a sense of community with a culture of their own. It also argues that *Lampião* embodies the complex relationship between the Gay Liberation Movement and leftist groups.

Literature Review

The will to fight for LGBTQI+ rights seen during Stonewall in 1969 inspired many movements around the world. One of them was the Gay Liberation Movement in Brazil. This literature review is divided into themes and focuses on the scholarship written about the development of the Brazilian Gay Liberation Movement, its complex relationship with the left, and other social movements. Lastly, it tackles *Lampião da Esquina*, Brazil's first gay publication to attain national readership. Through this section, it is possible to see that the historiography

about this topic has changed significantly. While it initially focused more on the political context of the dictatorship, contemporary scholars increasingly highlight specific cultural production like *Lampião da Esquina* as a way to understand the movement from within.

Due to the censorship present in Brazil during its dictatorship, academic works about this topic only emerged in the late 80s and early 90s. As the works of James N. Green demonstrate, these early works originally focused on the political and social context of the movement rather than on the cultural productions that were published during the dictatorial period. As the scholarship progressed, scholars like Renan Quinalha, Carlos Ferreira, and Carlos Junior have taken a closer look at *Lampião*, establishing it as an important primary source that helps to understand the rise of the movement for gay rights in Brazil. It is important to note that some scholars who write about this period like James N. Green and João Silvério Trevisan were living in Brazil and were active participants of this movement. Consequently, the presence of their perspectives is paramount in any research about gay rights in Brazil.

To understand the rise of the Brazilian Gay Liberation Movement, it is crucial to address works by James N. Green. A Professor at Brown University, Green specializes in Brazilian and Latin American history. In *Beyond Carnival: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Brazil*, Green argues that the rise of the Brazilian Gay Liberation Movement was the result of a flexible political climate brought by the economic successes of the early 70s and the crisis generated by the Yom Kippur War in 1973.¹ Known as an “economic miracle,” the period between 1968 and 1973 saw an eleven percent yearly growth and resulted in a rise in support for the government.²

¹ James N. Green, “Down with Repression: More Love and More Desire, 1969-1980,” in *Beyond Carnival Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Brazil*, 1st ed. (University of Chicago Press, 1999), 244.

² Green, “Down with Repression,” 243.

This changed with the 1973 embargo by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. Record-high inflation in Brazil made previous government supporters vote for the only legal opposition party. The growth of the opposition forced President Geisel to change course and announce a slow transition to democracy.³ For Green, the political flexibility of this period emboldened people to go to the streets and make their voices heard.⁴ This is significant because it shows that the state's repressive measures delayed the emergence of a movement for gay rights in Brazil, which is separated from Stonewall by ten years. It was only in a period of relative openness that an organized movement for gay rights was able to form.

Green also argues that the movement for gay rights in Brazil is the result of the increasing occupation of urban spaces by gay people during the years of 1969 and 1978.⁵ For him, "this development was a part of the generalized phenomenon of increased consumer opportunities among the urban middle class."⁶ The opening of gay saunas, bars, and entertainment spaces brought visibility to gay people and set them as an integral part of society. In coming out of the ghetto and into broad daylight, gay people solidified their identity in a society that previously conditioned them to live in the shadows. It also offered a space for previously marginalized individuals to meet others who had similar experiences. This is crucial for the creation of a sense of community and for the future organization of pro-gay rights groups. In talking about the appropriation of urban spaces and the opening of gay establishments, Green highlights the role of the economy in creating an environment that allowed for a movement for gay rights to arise.

³ Green, "Down with Repression," 243.

⁴ Green, "Down with Repression," 244.

⁵ Green, "Down with Repression," 280.

⁶ Green, "Down with Repression," 245.

In *Devassos no Paraíso: A homossexualidade no Brasil da colônia à atualidade*, João Silvério Trevisan also emphasizes the role of the economy in the rise of the movement. A member of the editorial board of *Lampião da Esquina*, Trevisan is a Brazilian writer and gay rights activist. He was in exile in the United States during the mid-70s and brought many new ideas when he went back to Brazil. In his book, Trevisan agrees with Green that the economy played a crucial role in changing the zeitgeist of the Brazilian society to one where gay people could fight for a voice. For him, consumption normalized *gay* as an identity.⁷ This is seen when looking at the great success that publications and advertisements had when they included homosexual characters.

An example given by Trevisan that illustrates the success of advertisements showcasing homosexual content is one for a heavy cream brand, which played with the word “fresco,” or fresh. In Portuguese, it can also mean delicate, effeminate; a word associated with gay people. In the advertisement, an effeminate waiter serves the product to customers. While he does so, others scream “fresh!” and the waiter looks proud, thinking they meant him. When the person serving notices that they are talking about the product, he looks disappointed, and the advertisement ends.⁸ The reception was mixed: after the first few days it aired, there were protests by gay activists, who believed it promoted a limited view of what it meant to be gay. There were also protests by the conservative right, who criticized the company for displaying homosexuality on television. Despite initial resistance, the sales of the product rose rapidly and 84% of people who watched the advertisement said they loved it.⁹ The significance of this is that it shows that even

⁷ João S. Trevisan, *Devassos no Paraíso: A homossexualidade no Brasil da colônia à atualidade*, 4th ed. (Rio de Janeiro, 2014), p.281.

⁸ Trevisan, *Devassos no Paraíso*, 280.

⁹ *Ibid.*

in a society where censorship was present, people were starting to open up to seeing gay people as people, not a group on the sidelines of society. Tying Green and Trevisan's arguments together, it was the increasing occupation of urban spaces, the economic successes of the urban middle class and the flexible political climate of the mid-70s that allowed for this openness.

It was in this context of transition to democracy that *Lampião da Esquina*, the country's first gay newspaper to gain nationwide readership, emerged. In the article "The Emergence of the Brazilian Gay Liberation Movement, 1977-1981," James N. Green presents his readers with the history of the movement and the rise of *Lampião da Esquina*. According to him, the founding of the newspaper was inspired by Winston Leyland's 1977 visit to Brazil.¹⁰ Founder of the United States' most important gay publication of this period, *Gay Sunshine*, Leyland visited Brazil to research for a special issue on Brazil, which he planned to release in 1979. While in Brazil, Leyland met with many gay activists and inspired them to create a publication in Brazil where they could talk about homosexuality, gay activism, *machismo*, and increase the visibility of other social movements. While Green provides a thorough historical background to the founding of the newspaper and its eventual downfall in 1981, he does not analyze the newspaper's contents and their significance. He also fails to analyze it in light of *Gay Sunshine* in order to see what *Lampião* borrowed from it and what it changed.

This gap in the scholarship was filled by, among others, Carlos Ferreira, who wrote "Imprensa Homossexual: Surge o Lampião da Esquina." In it, he highlights the importance of the alternative press in being a platform for political activism.¹¹ Citing Bernardo Kucinski, Ferreira

¹⁰ James N. Green, "The Emergence of the Brazilian Gay Liberation Movement, 1977-1981," *Latin American Perspectives* 21, no. 1 (1994): 44.

¹¹ Carlos Ferreira, "Imprensa Homossexual: surge o Lampião da Esquina," *Revista Alterjor* 1, no. 1 (2010): 1-13.

explains that alternative means of communication were born out of the desires of leftist organizations of being in the center of the political transformation they were fighting for and the desire of academics and journalists to find an alternative place to academia where they could express their thoughts.¹² In writing about their political concerns, the alternative press aimed at creating social change through information.¹³

For Ferreira, *Lampião* followed this script. In his article, he quotes *Lampião* to show that already on its first issue it explained why a homosexual newspaper was necessary by saying that they wished “to destroy the standard image of the homosexual as someone who lives in the shadows, prefers the night and sees their sexual preference as a curse.”¹⁴ For *Lampião*’s editors, “a minority needs a voice.”¹⁵ As a source, Ferreira’s article is relevant because it shows that *Lampião* wished to bring gay people out of the ghetto and into the light; to show that they were an integral part of society like everybody else. For the author, *Lampião* also wished to expand the national identity to include homosexual as a valid way of seeing one’s self.¹⁶ Ferreira is also crucial in filling the gap in the scholarship where *Lampião* is often mentioned as an important source in the period of the formation of the Gay Liberation Movement yet it is rarely analyzed.

Another scholar who contributes to the scholarship regarding *Lampião da Esquina* is Carlos Humberto Ferreira Silva Júnior.¹⁷ In his article “Libertação gay no Brasil: discursos e enfrentamentos do jornal *Lampião da Esquina* durante a abertura política (1978-1981),” Junior

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ferreira, “Imprensa Homossexual,” 5.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ferreira, “Imprensa Homossexual,” 4.

¹⁷ Carlos Humberto Ferreira Silva Júnior, “Libertação gay no Brasil: discursos e enfrentamentos do jornal *Lampião da Esquina* durante a abertura política (1978-1981),” SCIELO, accessed October 24, 2021, <https://www.scielo.br/j/interc/a/m5dGgdRDhVcybHL6gc83wsw/?lang=pt>.

argues that the newspaper *Lampião da Esquina* played an important role as a political outlet for the Brazilian gay liberation movement. To develop his argument, Junior examines *Lampião's* articles in detail and looks at the relationship that the newspaper had with other contemporary publications. In doing so, Junior shows that *Lampião* had a stable relationship with publications that were in favor of gay liberation, even mentioning them in some of their editions.¹⁸ He also reveals that *Lampião* had an important role in bringing new information to Brazil by translating articles from other international publications. Although Junior is effective in demonstrating the political activism of *Lampião*, he is ineffective in exploring thoroughly why *Lampião* did not thrive after 1981. By briefly mentioning the fragmentation of the newspaper, Junior leaves his reader eager for more information. However, he offers an excellent overview of *Lampião's* development and the role it played in giving gay people a voice.

In his analysis of *Lampião da Esquina*, Renan Quinalha focuses on the topic of identity. Professor of Law at the Federal University of São Paulo, Quinalha was a student of James N. Green and developed his Ph.D. project on the gay liberation movement in Brazil. Green, Trevisan, and Ferreira have argued that the Brazilian Gay Liberation Movement aimed to solidify gay as an identity and that consumerism played a significant role in that endeavor. In a recent article titled “*Lampião da Esquina na Mira da Ditadura Hetero-Militar de 1964*,” Quinalha expands their argument to show that newspapers of the alternative press like *Lampião* aimed at not only cementing gay as an identity but also at expanding the very notion of what it meant to be gay. Quoting the same section from *Lampião* as Ferreira, Quinalha argues that one of the goals of the newspaper was to break with the stereotypical depiction of homosexuality that was

¹⁸ Junior, “*Libertação gay no Brasil*,” 152.

widespread in Brazil until the late 70s.¹⁹ This is significant because it shows that *Lampião da Esquina* was actively trying to pluralize both the national identity of Brazil and of gay people.

In the same article, Renan Quinalha also investigates the response of the dictatorial government to the Gay Liberation Movement in light of *Lampião*. Despite the slow transition to democracy and ease in censorship laws, censorship was still in place, and the government tried to use it to shut down *Lampiao* and other publications that went against the Catholic and Conservative views that ruled Brazilian society. On April 2, 1979, shortly after the newspaper's founding in 1978, the main editors of *Lampiao* were called to testify at the headquarters of the Federal Police in Rio de Janeiro. There, they were interrogated and took mugshots. The police aimed to investigate charges that *Lampiao* had violated law no. 5250, the Press Law, which limited what could be published by a given publication. According to the police, *Lampiao* wanted to “destroy our culture, interests, family values, customs and common aspirations.”²⁰ Quinalha shows in his book *Contra a Moral e os Bons Costumes Lampião da Esquina na Mira da Ditadura Hetero-Militar de 1964* that many major newspapers of the time published articles regarding the government's attempt to shut down *Lampiao*, which suggests the greater space that gay rights were starting to occupy in public discourse.

Quinalha also shows that international institutions like the *National Gay Federation* from Dublin, *Lesben & Schwule* from Hamburg, and the *National Gay Task Force* from the United States, filed a complaint to Brazil's Ministry of Justice in favor of *Lampião da Esquina*.²¹ In response to this, *Lampiao* fought back: on the cover of its 12th edition, it published the mugshots

¹⁹ Renan Quinalha, “Lampião da Esquina na mira da ditadura hetero-militar de 1964,” *Cadernos Pagu*, June 4, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1590/18094449202100610004>..

²⁰ Renan Quinalha, *Contra a Moral e os Bons Costumes Lampião da Esquina na Mira da 4 Ditadura Hetero-Militar de 1964* (Companhia das Letras, 2021), 232.

²¹ *Ibid*, 237.

taken by the police department of their editors and included an article mocking the government's persecution. Due to national and international support, the Ministry of Justice decided to stop its efforts to shut down *O Lampião da Esquina*. Effectively, *Lampião* had won the fight.

In showing this, Quinalha paints a picture of a gay movement that was internationally connected, one that offered a hand when others were in need. He also shows that *Lampião* was not only inspired by liberation movements from abroad but also that it inspired foreign groups to act and express their discontent with the situation in Brazil. In terms of its methodology, Quinalha's article and book are successful in the same area where Ferreira succeeds: while Green focuses on the political context surrounding *Lampião da Esquina*, Ferreira and Quinalha contribute to the scholarship by basing their analysis on *Lampião's* articles and structure, elevating it as an important primary source. However, Green played a crucial role in pioneering the study of the movement in Brazil, and it is his publications that academics like Ferreira and Quinalha based their research on.

Another important theme in the scholarship regarding the movement for gay rights in Brazil is the internal fragmentation experienced by many gay groups in the early 80s. In order to understand it, Green and Trevisan are crucial as both were living in Brazil at the time and were actively involved in major gay rights organizations. At the time, the main groups were called *Somos* and *Facção Homossexual da Convergência Socialista*, of which many of the founders of *Lampião* were participants. In the aforementioned "The Emergence of the Brazilian Gay Liberation Movement, 1977-1981," Green characterizes the split in the movement for gay rights as an inability to agree on the extent to which a movement for gay rights should work with other social movements.²² On one side stood people who believed that gay rights organizations ought

²² Green, "The Emergence of the Brazilian Gay Liberation Movement," 47.

to work with other leftist movements because, by uniting their forces, they could build a larger resistance to the government. On the other, stood those who were concerned about the homophobia intrinsically present in many Trotskyist organizations and believed that they either could not work together or that leftist groups would not see the fight for gay rights as a primary concern. This is significant because it shows how complex the relationship between the gay liberation movement and other social groups was. Green's article is a valuable source to understand this complexity as he manages to hide his own opinions and writes a truly unbiased account.

Green also investigates homophobia in leftist organizations in a recent biography about Herbert Daniel. In "Exile Within Exile," he tells the touching story of Herbert Daniel, a Brazilian socialist activist who died of aids in the early 90s. Green argues that Daniel's life showcases not only the changes Brazil was going through but also that he was an active agent of those changes.²³ Daniel joined leftist organizations while studying Medicine in Minas Gerais and soon became radicalized. This is seen on his participation in the kidnapping of the German and Swiss Ambassadors to force the dictatorship to release political prisoners, which lead Daniel to leave Brazil for Europe. For Green, he lived an exile within another exile because Daniel was exiled from his country but also from his sexuality. In a touching passage from his writings, Daniel writes that he had to "forget his sexuality" in order to be a part of the revolution and that he had chosen the revolution. For him, it was impossible to be gay and be a part of the revolutionary movement. Green's biography of Daniel contributes greatly to the scholarship regarding the gay

²³ James N. Green, *Exile within Exiles: Herbert Daniel, Gay Brazilian Revolutionary* (Duke University Press, 2018), 6.

liberation movement because it offers a specific person whose life embodies the struggles that the movement for gay rights and leftist groups were going through.

As seen, the scholarship about the emergence of the Brazilian Gay Liberation Movement has changed significantly. James N. Green's works are crucial to understand the political scenario during which the movement was founded. Like Green, João Silvério Trevisan also contributes greatly to the emergence of the movement as both were active participants of many of the events they write about. While both do not analyze *Lampião* in detail, Green played an important role in pioneering the field internationally and Trevisan's book still stands as an important landmark in the research of gay rights in the country. The gap in the scholarship regarding the movement and *Lampião da Esquina* was filled by Renan Quinalha, Carlos Ferreira, and Carlos Junior, who analyze *Lampião* in detail and elevate it as an important primary source. However, there is still a need in the scholarship for works about *Lampião da Esquina* in English. While there are a few works in Portuguese about the newspaper, their accessibility is naturally limited to Portuguese speakers. The field would be greatly enhanced with more scholars like Green, who brings the attention of international institutions and scholars to a topic that still offers language barriers.

I - O Lampião da Esquina and the Construction of Gay Identities

O Lampião da Esquina played a pivotal role in shaping the development of a gay identity in Brazil. The unwillingness of *Lampião's* editors to use English terminology reveals that they were trying to build something distinctly Brazilian. Their use of informal language and incorporation of Brazilian queer vocabulary into their essays further illustrates the point that *Lampião* had a strong identity from the start. By using terms often shouted at queer people, *Lampião* claims that vocabulary with pride and humor. Furthermore, their inclusion of various

letters and essays from readers in sections like “Cartas na Mesa” and “Ensaio Populares” reinforces *Lampião*’s objective: bringing gay people out of the ghetto, out of the shadows, and to show Brazil’s society that they not only deserved to be respected but demanded to exercise their right to love and be their truest selves.

Already on its first issue, *Lampião* was clear about its goal. In an essay titled “Leaving the Ghetto,” its editorial board argued that gay people needed to “say no to the ghetto and, consequently, leave it.”²⁴ Their goal was not simply to come out and be accepted, but to “rescue that which all societies constructed under *machismo* neglected us: the fact that homosexuals are human beings and therefore have every right to fight for the realization of that condition, as such.”²⁵ They end their essay with a strong statement: “we will put every effort to demoralize that concept which some want to impose on us -- that our sexual preference can negatively interfere with our actions in the world we live in.”²⁶ Therefore, *Lampião* did not wish for special treatment. What they wished was for gay people to be seen as people like anybody else. *Lampião*’s editors strategically sensed the changing zeitgeist of the slow democratization period and saw as their responsibility to provide gay people a platform for political and civil discourse.

In his essay “The Emergence of the Brazilian Gay Liberation Movement, 1977-1981”, James Green addresses this changing political and social scenario. In it, he argues that “The Brazilian gay liberation movement emerged from the interaction of the international gay movement and the changing political situation in Brazil.”²⁷ Inspired by the 1969 Stonewall Riots, Mexico and Argentina started their movements for gay rights in the early 1970s. In

²⁴ *Lampião da Esquina* – Edição Zero, Rio de Janeiro: Lampião, April 1978

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ James N. Green, “The Emergence of the Brazilian Gay Liberation Movement, 1977-1981,” *Latin American Perspectives* 21, no. 1 (1994): 38.

tandem, Brazil was living its most repressive dictatorial era under Garrastazu Medici, who used to be the head of the secret police.²⁸ For the author, “in this environment of repression, there was no political space for an organized gay movement.”²⁹ However, this changed when General Ernesto Geisel replaced Medici in 1974. The rapidly increasing oil prices resulted in significant opposition to the government, which led to the opposition party, Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (Brazilian Democratic Movement, MDB), to win parliamentary seats. Combined with student protests in 1978, the government understood it had to change its approach in order to stop a growing opposition. Consequently, Geisel decided his administration would start a process of slow transition to democracy, which would be concluded in the mid-1980s.

For Green, this period of political openness allowed for a movement for gay rights to finally arrive in Brazil. In his book *Beyond Carnival: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Brazil*, he argues that “by the 1970s, a distinct new identity had taken hold within the homosexual subculture of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo.”³⁰ For him, this was due to a combination of factors, including the appropriation of public spaces by gay groups and the interactions that such appropriation resulted in.³¹ Consequently, homosexual visibility was increased and a new identity started to take shape. *O Lampião da Esquina* was a product of this cultural environment of increasing visibility of gay people. The initial success of *Lampião* can be understood through this scenario where a group that had been historically hidden suddenly started to come out and be seen as active members of society. Because of their historical

²⁸ Green. “The Emergence of the Brazilian Gay Liberation Movement,” 40.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ James N. Green, “Down with Repression: More Love and More Desire, 1969-1980,” in *Beyond Carnival Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Brazil*, 1st ed. (University of Chicago Press, 1999), 268.

³¹ James N. Green, “Conclusions,” in *Beyond Carnival Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Brazil*, 1st ed. (University of Chicago Press, 1999), 280.

discretion, an increasing visibility naturally lead to discourse, and that is precisely where *Lampião* came in: by allowing for discourse regarding gay issues, *Lampião* caught the attention of a country debating the role of gay people in their society.

Although inspired by international publications like *Gay Sunshine*, *O Lampião da Esquina* displays many unique features. *Gay Sunshine*'s structure is academic: it used formal language, did not use photos often and heavily promoted academic articles regarding queer history, as well as books and poetry. Although *O Lampião da Esquina* was inspired directly by *Gay Sunshine*, it had a significantly different approach. *Lampião* often used informal language, publishing news reports and opinion pieces with slang and inside jokes. It also relied more on news reporting than *Gay Sunshine*, which featured extensive and detailed essays. Additionally, *Lampião* used images and illustrations more often. This is not to say that *Gay Sunshine* did not use images. However, it is important to highlight that *Lampião* used photos on almost every page, while *Gay Sunshine* rarely did so. The content of the photos is also distinct: *Gay Sunshine* often featured implicitly sexual or full frontal nudes of men, while *Lampião* rarely used sexual photos. When it did, they were implied, never explicit like *Gay Sunshine*'s. A possible explanation could be the harsh censorship laws that *Lampião* had to constantly navigate. Below is a sample of these publications where these structural differences are clear.



Gay sunshine. Number 38. Winter, 1979. Contemporary Culture Collection (CCC)



Lampião da Esquina – Edição Número 15, Rio de Janeiro: Lampião, August

Another key feature of *Lampião*'s language is its reluctance to use terms in English, choosing instead to translate these terms to use a spelling that was closer to Portuguese pronunciation. An example of that which is repeatedly featured in *Lampião*'s pages is the word gay, which its editors changed to *guei*. This indicates an effort of *Lampião* to create something that was uniquely Brazilian, something Brazilian readers could relate to. They also made frequent usage of slang and vocabulary from the Brazilian gay subcultures in their essays. In doing so, *Lampião* claims terms that were previously seen as offensive such as *bicha*, equivalent to *faggot* in English.

A common practice among minority groups, this act of taking ownership of the offensive language used towards them is seen, for instance, in *Lampião*'s column titled "Bixórdia." A combination of the word *bicha* (faggot) with the word *mixórdia* (mess, act of mixing), *Bixórdia* was a humor/gossip column where *Lampião* made constant usage of the vocabulary of the Brazilian gay subcultures. First appearing on their fifth volume, it constantly featured unique vocabulary and comments from the authors in parenthesis. These features are seen from the moment the column was first introduced to their readers, where the authors used various slurs commonly used to describe queer people while explaining the purpose of the column.

For them, *Bixórdia* was:

A representation of all that is free, what is allowed. Everything is serious, nothing is sad. A living paradox (*so chic, I love it*), in which we mix *viados, bichas, perobos, tias,*

*sobrinhas, primas, entendidos, gueis, transadores, maricones, paneleiros, frescos, frutas e xibungos. All is allowed, right darlings?*³²

By using language seen at the time as offensive, *Lampião* claims it as their own. They also show the great variety of roles queer people had in Brazilian society and the many ways in which they referred to themselves. Another technique used by the newspaper was to imitate the way queer people talked through their writing. In the same section, Bixórdia's authors quote someone saying "look here my looove."³³ Additionally, they ask their readers to help them come up with a plural for *bicha*, as a way to "enrich and rescue the *guei* vocabulary."³⁴ Sections like these demonstrate *Lampião*'s commitment to their goal of giving visibility to gay people by offering them a platform where they could see themselves and their language represented.

The language utilized by *Lampião* can also be used to infer the audience the newspaper was trying to reach: everyone who identified as queer regardless of class or level of education. By using well-known queer vocabulary, *Lampião* provided gay people all over the country with a publication where they could see themselves represented through their language. In accordance with their goal of bringing gay people out of the ghetto, *Lampião*'s large circulation meant that even gay people in relatively isolated areas who might not know other queer people could feel a sense of community through their essays, interviews, and funny gossip columns. *Lampião* connected gay people in a nationwide web of communication that made previously isolated people feel like they were not alone. In other words, it helped to build *guei* as an identity by

³² *Lampião da Esquina* – Edição Número 5, Rio de Janeiro: *Lampião*, October 1978, [https:// www.ibdsex.org.br/collection/lampiao-da-esquina-edicao-cinco/](https://www.ibdsex.org.br/collection/lampiao-da-esquina-edicao-cinco/), p.12.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

showing them that their language, a part of gay culture, was important and worthy of being printed in their newspaper.

Another instance that shows *Lampião*'s commitment to giving gay people a platform where they could see themselves represented is through one of their recurring sections. Named "Cartas na Mesa" (Letters on the Table), it featured selected letters from their readers and their responses to criticism and compliments. Even though having a section where a publication addresses its reader was not a new concept, *Lampião* differs from standard publications by the almost two pages of letters published and by the language used in them. In one of these letters, titled "*Lampião* is Undressed," the authors give constructive feedback and at times harshly criticize *Lampião* articles: "Paraguassu's article does not succeed in being neither funny not serious, if it's trying to be funny, it does not work, and if its a serious article, it lacks interest and it is outdated."³⁵ The fact that *Lampião* published multiple letters like these and responded to them highlights their commitment to having a publication that was connected to its reader and that was open to changing its approach depending on the feedback they received. It also reveals a community of readers that was critical of what they read and did not shy away from voicing their opinions. Having in mind that this is a period of dictatorship and censorship, a critical reader offering feedback to a publication is an important feature to highlight.

II. Collaboration between Brazil's Social Movements

Although *Lampião* was focused on giving visibility to gay men, the activism present in their pages was not limited to queer rights. In an article published in its first issue titled "Women of the Entire World," *Lampião* complains about not having any women on the editorial board:

³⁵ *Lampião da Esquina* – Edição Número 3, Rio de Janeiro: *Lampião*, June 1978, <https://www.ibdsex.org.br/collection/lampiao-da-esquina-edicao-tres/>, p.14.

“the absence of women on *Lampião* is not, let it be said clearly, due to its editorial board; many invitations were sent, all of which were refused, but our columns remain open.”³⁶ Aguinaldo Silva, the author of this article, expands to say that “one of the questions this newspaper aims to raise is feminism; [...] in the case of women, discrimination is much more complex and happens regardless of sexual preference.”³⁷ Here, Silva revealed that *Lampião* was committed from its first issue to having a publication that was not limited to gay content, but open to other social movements who shared with them the condition of being socially oppressed.

Another example of *Lampião*'s willingness to feature a variety of social movements can be seen in the eighth issue, which focuses on indigenous people. In it, *Lampião* reinstates its mission: “since its first issue *Lampião* presented itself as a newspaper of minorities and it highlighted the indigenous community as one of those minorities we were committed to defend.”³⁸ It expands to say that “we remind those who identify with this fight that the indigenous community is not composed of mythical beings, masters of the forest, but a people with their own culture. One based on harmony with nature so complete that it includes sex: for them, this is the source of happiness and pleasure in all its forms.”³⁹ Having in mind that this was written in the 70s, a period known for its sexual liberation in many western countries, it is revealing that *Lampião* chose to look at the indigenous community not only through their culture but also their sexual practices.

Lampião utilized photos, lyrics of traditional hymns in indigenous languages, as well as illustrations featuring art from indigenous communities to highlight the importance of their

³⁶ *Lampião da Esquina* – Edição Zero, Rio de Janeiro: *Lampião*, April 1978

³⁷ *Lampião da Esquina* – Edição Zero, Rio de Janeiro: *Lampião*, April, 1978, p. 19.

³⁸ *Lampião da Esquina* – Edição Oito, Rio de Janeiro: *Lampião*, January, 1979, p. 5.

³⁹ *Lampião da Esquina* – Edição Oito, Rio de Janeiro: *Lampião*, January, 1979, p. 5.

cultural practices. The following is a page from *Lampião*'s eighth issue where one can see photos of indigenous people and the lyrics of the aforementioned hymn in the left bottom corner. In it, they specifically focus on native communities in Peru:



Lampião da Esquina – Edição
Número 8, Rio de Janeiro: Lampião,
January 1979,
<http://www.grupodignidade.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/37->

Here, *Lampião* includes the photos of three indigenous men of different ages as well as an artistic pattern from their community. Having in mind that during this time indigenous people were rarely featured in Brazilian media, *Lampião*'s inclusion of pages of analysis of their cultural practices strengthens the argument that the newspaper was committed to giving visibility to many social groups, not just gay men. It also indicates the collaboration between Brazil's activist groups and exemplifies the many instances where gay groups worked with those also fighting for equality.

Despite *Lampião*'s attempt to offer its newspaper as a platform to other social movements, it was often criticized by its readers for not doing it enough. On their fourth issue,

Lampião featured a letter in their section “Cartas na Mesa” which highly criticized them for only interviewing artists and intellectuals. Titled “O povão, onde está o povão?”⁴⁰ it says that:

To be frank: I did not like your newspaper. I say yours because I do not think it is from the entire class. It’s kinda trying to be intellectual, kinda pretentious. At first, that’s fine since there are many *faggots* out there thinking they know everything, going to Sala Cecilia Meireles⁴¹, with their noses up. What about the rest of us? What about the people? I think you guys should include more of the *faggots* so it’s not such an elitist newspaper.⁴²

In the same letter, the author also criticized *Lampião* for not including trans people in their editorial board. It is interesting that *Lampião* chose to publish critical letters like these. Often, its editors would reply to their readers’ concerns either in a section following their letter or through actively changing the newspaper’s format to correct its perceived mistakes. In this case, *Lampião* was quick to reply to attacks on its openness to featuring people that did not identify with homosexuality. In its next issue, *Lampião* featured an entire page condemning a decision of the judicial courts to arrest a plastic surgeon who had performed a sexual-reassignment surgery.⁴³ It also revealed that one of *Lampião*’s editors, Darcy Penteadó, was on live television personally criticizing the decision.

The complex nature of the collaboration between Brazil’s many social movements seen in *Lampião*’s eighth and fourth issues is addressed by Renan Quinalha. In his book, he discusses an event that occurred in February 1980. During the first days of that month, the second meeting of the Encontro Brasileiro de Homossexuais⁴⁴ took place at Fundação Getúlio Vargas, São

⁴⁰ “The people, where are the people?” (My translation).

⁴¹ Sala Cecília Meireles is a concert hall in Rio de Janeiro famous for its classical music performances.

⁴² *Lampião da Esquina* – Edição Quatro, Rio de Janeiro: *Lampião*, August 1978, p. 19.

⁴³ *Lampião da Esquina* – Edição Cinco, Rio de Janeiro: *Lampião*, October, 1978, p. 5.

⁴⁴ National Meeting of Brazilian Homosexuals.

Paulo.⁴⁵ Its purpose was to create a space where homosexual organizations were allowed to engage in a conversation about their goals. Interestingly, groups advocating for women's rights, rights of black people, and indigenous communities also attended. However, these were only allowed to join gay groups after they finished their meeting, which indicates that while there was collaboration, the gay liberation movement also created barriers.

Lampião's ability to turn criticism about its representation into constructive feedback paints a picture of a newspaper that, like the gay liberation movement, was in a constant state of change. *Lampião* actively listened to its readers and willingly implemented major changes in their formatting, vocabulary, and even added entirely new columns. The fact that the newspaper received criticism also reveals that it had an engaged audience who thought critically about what was written about them and who did not let censorship laws get in the way of meaningful dialogue. However, it also reveals important questions that both the gay liberation movement and *Lampião* had to address in the late 70s: how much collaboration is ideal?; Does working with others get in the way of your own goals? Therefore, *Lampião* functions as an embodiment of the movement itself. The fact that both *Lampião* and the Gay Liberation Movement were struggling with the nature of their collaboration with others indicates that, in the late stages of the Brazilian dictatorship, the construction of identities outside the mainstream “conservative, white, middle class, heterosexual” was a process that did not happen overnight. It demanded active participation of various groups and constant discourse for minority groups to understand what their role in society was and how they can use their combined forces constructively.

III. The Gay Liberation Movement and the Left

⁴⁵ Renan Quinalha, *Contra a Moral e os Bons Costumes Lampião da Esquina na Mira da 4 Ditadura Hetero-Militar de 1964* (Companhia das Letras, 2021), 163.

On March 13th, 1964, 150,000 Brazilians went to the streets to show their support to João Goulard's new leftist economic measures. In the context of the Cold War, events like these attracted the attention not only of Brazil's right but also of international actors concerned about a growing socialist wave in the United States's sphere of influence. The Brazilian dictatorship started as a response to that growth. During the early 1960s, Brazil faced soaring inflation. In an attempt to deal with the situation, President Goulard introduced his *Base Reforms* in 1964, which included "rural land redistribution; nationalization of foreign-owned utilities; caps on rents and rent increases; doubling of worker wages, expansion of university slots; a campaign to eliminate illiteracy and electoral reform."⁴⁶ Inspired by Cuba's recent economic measures, Goulard nicknamed his approach *Brazilian Road*. His insistence on constitutional reforms threatened Brazil's right, who "feared Goulard would destabilize Brazil and spark a social revolution."⁴⁷ With the support of the United States, the recently formed military Junta against Goulard took control of the government in 1964. Therefore, the growth in popularity of leftist ideals was a crucial element driving the military discontent that eventually led to the 1964 coup d'état.

After Goulard lost the presidency, the Brazilian Communist Party fractured into small units of resistance while the dictatorial government continued to push its focus on developing the country's economy. Their vision for Brazil as an economic superpower was manifested in the period known as *the economic miracle*. Spanning from 1968 to 1973 during Castelo Branco's presidency, Brazil's economy grew dramatically and inflation decreased. This period of prosperity was suddenly brought to an end by a crisis caused by the 1973 Yom Kippur War.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Jerry Dávila, *Dictatorship in South America* (United Kingdom: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 27

⁴⁷ Dávila, *Dictatorship in South America*, 29.

⁴⁸ Dávila, *Dictatorship in South America*, 52.

Sky-rocketing oil prices and increasing public discontent resulted in the government's party *Aliança Renovadora Nacional*⁴⁹ losing popularity. With the *economic miracle* narrative shattered and massive strikes in 1978, President Ernesto Geisel realized it was time to change his economic and political approach and go back to the dictatorship's original intent: be a temporary measure meant to develop the country and prevent the spread of socialism. To do so, Geisel launched a program aimed at a slow and careful transition to democracy.⁵⁰ This transitional period allowed for social movements of all backgrounds to emerge from the shadow created by a decade of oppression.⁵¹

The Brazilian gay liberation movement was born in this context of democratization. Despite the birth of the US gay rights movement with the 1969 Stonewall Riots, gay activism took years to arrive in Brazil. By promoting conservative and traditional values, the government successfully created a political environment in which mobilizing was too risky. Although it was in the interest of both gay activists and the left to unite against a regime that oppressed them, gay organizations were apprehensive to work with socialists. For Green, this apprehension was justified as many left-leaning organizations promoted a heavily homophobic agenda.⁵² Although the Communist Party fractured in 1964, the view that homosexuality was “a product of bourgeois decadence” remained in many leftist groups since most were comprised of previous members of the party.⁵³ As a consequence, there was a duality with regard to collaboration between these two

⁴⁹ *National Renewing Alliance*.

⁵⁰ James N. Green, “The Emergence of the Brazilian Gay Liberation Movement, 1977-1981,” *Latin American Perspectives* 21, no. 1 (1994): 41.

⁵¹ Quinalha, *Contra a Moral e os Bons Costumes*, 131.

⁵² James N. Green, “Down with Repression: More Love and More Desire, 1969-1980,” in *Beyond Carnival Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Brazil*, 1st ed. (University of Chicago Press, 1999), 271.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

movements. On the one hand, cooperation existed, especially considering the fact that many gay people that were a part of gay organizations like *Somos* were leftist. On the other, there are many instances where the homophobic nature of Brazil's branch of Socialism created a real problem.

Herbert Daniel, a prominent left-leaning revolutionary, embodies the struggles between socialist and gay groups. Inspired by political ideas of revolution and change, Daniel left his Medicine degree in the late 60s to take up arms. In his pursuit of being part of the armed resistance against the military government, Daniel decided to suppress his homosexuality.⁵⁴ In his words:

“My *petty-bourgeois* problems worried me as obstacles that prevented me from becoming a good revolutionary. Among them is 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 petty-bourgeois, if not reactionary — or I would make the revolution. I wanted to make the revolution. Conclusion: I had to ‘forget’ my sexuality.”⁵⁵

For Daniel, gay and leftist revolutionary were identities that could not co-exist. His touching account of having to suppress a part of himself in order to be able to fight the government strengthens the argument that there was no place for gay activism in many leftist organizations during this period. However, it does not suggest that he would have been able to live openly had he supported the dictatorship. Being openly gay in Brazil during the 1960s was risky, but many were part of the gay underground culture and were open about their sexual preferences to those they could trust. Herbert decided to neglect even that life as he saw it as incompatible with his obligations as a revolutionary. His refusal to exercise his sexuality also highlights the extent to which people were willing to go to bring down a government that was actively suppressing the liberties of millions through censorship and torture. Due to the

⁵⁴ James N. Green, *Exile Within Exiles* (Duke University Press, 2018), 79.

⁵⁵ Green, *Exile Within Exiles*, 45.

aggravating situation in the country, Daniel left Brazil in 1974 and spent years exiled in Europe, before returning to Brazil in 1981. After the democratization period started, Daniel reconciled with his gay identity and fought for the rights of queer people until his death due to AIDS in 1992.

This hostility between gay activism and leftist opposition to the military regime is seen on the pages of *Lampião da Esquina*. In July 1979 *Lampião* released its fourteenth issue with Luis Inacio Lula da Silva on its cover. President of Brazil for two terms in the 2000s, Lula was at the time the leader of a movement promoting the rights of workers and the face of leftist politics in the country. In this issue, *Lampião* gives great visibility to Lula's cause by interviewing him and therefore giving worker's organizations a platform to spread their beliefs. On the other hand, *Lampião* does not shy away from criticizing the movement for its homophobic and traditional views. The editors of the interview strategically intertwine Lula's answers with quotes from workers that reveal the prejudices embedded in the Brazilian left at the time. When asked their opinion about queer people, a worker interviewed by *Lampião* for this report said the following: "What girl? A faggot? Look, to me, the only way to deal with fags is by punching them. No, they have never done anything to me, but they better not!"⁵⁶ *Lampião* also quotes Lula saying that "To me, feminists have nothing better to do."⁵⁷ Here, *Lampião* fulfills the promise made on their first issue of giving visibility to minority groups while simultaneously showing their reader what

⁵⁶ *Lampião da Esquina* – Edição Número 14, Rio de Janeiro: *Lampião*, July 1979, <http://www.grupodignidade.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/37-LAMPIAO-DA-ESQUINA-EDICAO-14.pdf>, p.10.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

the real positions of this branch of the leftist movement were. Sections like these demonstrate the indifference of many in the left in Brazil to the rights of gay people.⁵⁸

Another instance that shows this complicated relationship is on the cover of *Lampião*'s thirty-third issue:



Lampião da Esquina – Edição
Número 33, Rio de Janeiro:
Lampião, February 1982,
<http://www.grupodignidade.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/37-LAMPILAO-DA-ESQUINA-EDICAO-33-FEVEREIRO-1981.pdf>, p.1.

Here, Fidel Castro is seen dressed as Carmen Miranda and says “Yo no creo en maricones. Pero que los hay, los hay,” which translates to “I do not believe in queer people although they do exist.” Aside from criticizing socialist views on homosexuality in their country, excerpts like these demonstrate that *Lampião* was aware of what was happening abroad and did not shy away from showing Brazilian readers what was the condition of gay people elsewhere.

⁵⁸ Carlos Humberto Ferreira Silva Júnior, “Libertação gay no Brasil: discursos e enfrentamentos do jornal *Lampião da Esquina* durante a abertura política (1978-1981),” SCIELO, accessed October 24, 2021, <https://www.scielo.br/j/interc/a/m5dGgdRDhVcybHL6gc83wsw/?lang=pt>.

Furthermore, they suggest an interconnectedness between movements for gay rights in different countries: *Lampião* was not only aware of the situation of queer people abroad, but actively offered them their pages as a platform for political activism. Having in mind that Castro's Cuba was an inspiration to Goulard's economic reforms, it is interesting that *Lampião* chose to mock Castro so openly. In doing so, it contributes to the discourse about leftist ideology in Brazil by showing that the previous popularity of Castro's economic reform in the country paint an incomplete picture of his regime. Although it had some revolutionary ideas, it was also an authoritarian regime, indifferent to the rights of gay people.

Lampião shows this connectedness between international gay liberation movements in its seventh issue, where it included three long reports on the devastating situation of gay activism in Argentina, Chile, and Mexico, whose movements for gay rights greatly inspired Brazilians to mobilize. In a translated report, two Argentinian gay activists in exile describe the intense homophobic sentiment that characterized leftist groups in their country: "the Argentinian left, in its entirety very homophobic, ignored us."⁵⁹ Interestingly, the Argentinian government blamed leftist movements, just described by gay activists as homophobic, for the spread of homosexuality in the country. For them, "Marxism used and is using homosexuality as an instrument to achieve its objectives." A subsequent analysis by *Lampião*'s editors of these statements ends with a quotation by Lopez Rega, an Argentinian minister, saying that "we need to get rid of homosexuals. We ought to lock them away or kill them."⁶⁰ Therefore, gay activism was not a product or a tool of leftist organizations determined to undermine the system. Rather,

⁵⁹ *Lampião da Esquina* – Edição Número 7, Rio de Janeiro: *Lampião*, December 1978, <http://www.grupodignidade.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/37-LAMPIAO-DA-ESQUINA-EDICAO-7.pdf>, p.10.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

right-wing governments were the ones using homosexuality as an instrument to suppress left-wing mobilization and justify their machiavellian actions.