

13, 069 words, including bibliography

11, 865 words, excluding bibliography

Scandalous acts: the politics of shame among Brazilian travesti prostitutes

DON KULICK & CHARLES KLEIN

University of Manchester & San Francisco Department of Public Health

In a small, dimly-lit hotel room, a man and a transgendered prostitute have just had sex. The price of this transaction had been agreed on before the couple entered the room, and the man, now dressed and anxious to leave, removes his wallet from his back pocket.

The travesti straightens her bra-straps and eyes the man. "No", she murmurs, as she sees him open the wallet and take out a few notes. "More. I want more".

The man is startled. "What do you mean, you want more?", he asks warily. "We agreed on thirty *reais*, and here's thirty *reais*. Take it".

The travesti slips towards the door, in a swift, resolute gesture. "Listen love," she says calmly, blocking the man's exit, "The price went up. You wanted me to fuck you. You sucked my dick. That's more expensive. That's not thirty *reais*. It's sixty".

The man growls that the travesti can go fuck *herself* if she thinks she can rob him like that. He flings the notes in his hand at her and moves towards the door. But the travesti moves too. Practiced. Fast. She slams her purse on the floor and plants her feet firmly apart, in a stance that makes her seem thicker, stronger, more expansive. A pair of tiny nail scissors flash in her hand. Suddenly afraid, the man stops in his tracks. He stands in front of the travesti, staring at her and wondering what to do next. Suddenly, he sees her coral-red mouth open and he hears her begin to shout; to utter loud, harsh, venomous screams that fill the room, the hotel, and, horrifyingly, it seems to the man, the whole neighborhood:

"Have shame you pig! You disgraceful faggot! You act like a man but you come in here and want to be fucked more than a whore! You sucked my dick and begged me to fuck you! Disgusting faggot! *Maricona* without shame! You're more of a woman than I am! You're asshole is wider than mine is! You're more of a *puta* than me!"

In travesti parlance, what is occurring here is *um escândalo*, a commotion, a scandal. A scandal is an example of what ethnographers of communication call a performative genre: it is a named act that has its own structure, dynamics, and intended consequences. Like all performatives, scandals have illocutionary force; that is, they announce a specific intention on the part of the speaker -- in this case, the intention is the conferral of shame. Scandals also ideally produce a set of perlocutionary effects, namely the surrender by the client of more money than he had agreed to pay in the first place. I

In order to blackmail her client and scare him into parting with more money than he would ever agree to, a travesti will "give a scandal" (*dar um escândalo*). Scandals constitute one of the everyday, mundane means by which individual travestis see to it that they earn enough money to support themselves. They are not collective actions. Although scandals can turn into brawls, in which other travestis within hearing distance will come to the aid of their colleague and help attack a particularly violent or recalcitrant client, for the most

part, they are singular actions taken by individual travestis. Indeed, travestis actually prefer not to involve other travestis in scandals, since they know that they will have to split their takings with any travesti who helps them extract money from a client.

Despite their individualistic nature, scandals can be analyzed as a kind of politics -- a micropolitics certainly, and one that produces only small-scale and temporary crinkles in the overall social fabric. But these little crinkles are not altogether without interest. Or irony. For note: in excoriating their allegedly heterosexual clients for being effeminate homosexuals, *travestis are drawing on the exact same language that is habitually invoked by others to condemn travestis and to justify violence against them.* What is perhaps most striking about scandals is that they do not in any way correspond to the noble "hidden transcripts" of resistance that liberal scholars like James Scott expect to find among oppressed groups (Scott 1990). Scandals do nothing to contest or refute the socio-cultural basis of travestis' abject status in contemporary Brazilian society. Quite the opposite -- instead of challenging abjection, scandals cultivate it. And with a skill that is nothing short of dazzling, travestis use scandals as a way of extending the space of their own abjection. A scandal casts that abjection outward like a sticky web; one that ensnares a petrified client, completely against his will.

But not only do scandals compel their recipient to explicitly acknowledge his relationship to a travesti (and listen as his own ontological distance from travestis is challenged and mocked); scandals also force the client to part with more of his money than he had intended. In this way, scandals can be seen as resolutely political actions that result in both recognition *and* redistribution -- to use the two terms continually bandied about and debated in philosophical and political science debates about recognition struggles. Furthermore, despite their locally-managed nature, scandals draw on large-scale structures for their intelligibility and their efficacy. The existence and salience of these large-scale structures suggests the possibility that scandals could be tapped and extended into larger, more organized and more collectivized spheres.

Our contribution to this volume on Recognition Struggles concerns the relationship between scandals and the emerging political activism of Brazilian travestis. Since the early 1990s, Brazilian travestis have been forming activist groups and making demands for recognition and rights. These demands -- which include protection from brutal police violence, the possibility of using their female names on certain official documents, and the right to appear in public space unharrassed -- seem modest and even self-evident in our eyes. However, we want to argue that there is something fundamentally *scandalous* about travesti demands. In emerging as a public voice and asserting entitlement to equal citizenship rights with others, we see travesti activism as building on the same kinds of principles as those which structure scandals. In both cases, travesti politics is a politics anchored in shame. It is a politics that invokes and activates specific structures of shame not in order to contest them, but, rather, in order to extend their scope, to imbricate others. In both scandals and their more recognizably activist modalities of political action, travestis transgress public decorum and civil society not by rejecting shame (and championing something like 'Travesti Pride'), but by inhabiting shame as a place from which to interpellate others and thereby incriminate those others. In doing this, we want to argue that travestis are deploying what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has called a "shame-conscious" and "shame-creative" vernacular; one that inflects the "social metamorphic" possibilities of shame (Sedgwick 1993:13,14). This means, in turn, that travesti demands for more money from clients, or for uninhibited access to public space are not what Nancy Fraser (1997:23) has dubbed "affirmative" demands for redress. They are not demands that build upon and enhance existing group differentiation in order to claim additional recognition. Instead, travesti demands are *transformative*, in Fraser's terms -- they work to undermine group differentiation (between normal, upstanding citizens, and low-life, perverse travestis) by foregrounding and challenging the generative structures that permit that differentiation to exist in the first place.

Travestis in Brazil

As already mentioned above, travestis are males who refashion their appearance, their self-presentational styles, and their physical bodies in a markedly feminine direction. The word *travesti* derives from *transvestir*, or cross-dress. But travestis do not only cross-dress. Sometimes beginning at ages as young as eight or ten, males who self-identify as travestis begin growing their hair long, plucking their eyebrows, experimenting with cosmetics, and wearing, whenever they can, feminine or androgynous clothing such as tiny shorts exposing the bottom of their buttocks or T-shirts tied in a knot in above their navel. It is not unusual for boys of this age to also begin engaging in sexual relations with their peers and older males, always in the role of the one who is anally penetrated. By the time these boys are in their early teens, many of them have already either left home, or been expelled from their homes, because their sexual and gender transgressions are usually not tolerated, especially by the boys' fathers. Once they leave home, the overwhelming majority of travestis migrate to cities (if they do not already live in one), where they meet and form friendships with other travestis, and where they begin working as prostitutes. In the company of their travesti friends and colleagues, young travestis learn about estrogen-based hormones, which are available for inexpensive over-the-counter purchase at any of the numerous pharmacies that line the streets in Brazilian cities. At this point, young travestis often begin ingesting large quantities of these hormones. By the time they reach their late teens, many travestis have also begun paying their colleagues to inject numerous liters of industrial silicone into their bodies, in order to round out their knees, thighs, and calves, and in order to augment their breasts, hips, and, most importantly (since this is Brazil), their buttocks.

Despite irrevocable physiological modifications such as these, the overwhelming majority of travestis do not self-identify as women. That is, despite the fact that they live their lives in female clothing, call one another 'she', and by female names, and endure tremendous pain to acquire female bodily forms, travestis do not wish to remove their penis, and they do not consider themselves to *be* women. They are not transsexuals. They are, they say, homosexuals -- males who feel "like women" and who ardently desire "men" (i.e. masculine, non-homosexual males). Much of a travesti's time, thought and effort is spent fashioning and perfecting herself as an object of desire for those men.

Travestis occupy an unusually visible place in both Brazilian social space and the national cultural imaginary. They exist in all Brazilian cities of any size, and in the large southern cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, they number in the thousands. They are most exuberantly visible during Brazil's famous annual Carnival, but even in more mundane contexts and discourses, travestis figure prominently. A popular Saturday afternoon television show, for example, includes a spot in which female impersonators, some of whom are clearly travestis, get judged by a panel of celebrities on how beautiful they are and on how well they mime the lyrics to songs sung by female vocalists. Another weekly television show regularly featured Valéria, a well known travesti. *Tieta*, one of the most popular television *novelas* in recent years, featured a special guest appearance by Rogéria, another famous travesti. Another widely watched novela featured a saucy female lead whose speech was peppered with words from travesti argot, and who sounded, everybody agreed, just like a travesti (Browning 1996). But most telling of all of the special place reserved for travestis in the Brazilian popular imagination is the fact that the individual widely acclaimed to be most beautiful woman in Brazil in the mid-1980s was -- a travesti. That travesti, Roberta Close, became a household name throughout the country. She regularly appeared on national television, starred in a play in Rio, posed nude (with strategically crossed legs) in an issue of *Playboy* magazine that sold out its entire press run of 200,000 copies almost immediately, was continually interviewed and portrayed in virtually every magazine in the country, and had at least three songs written about her by well-known composers. Although her popularity declined when, at the end of the 1980s, she left Brazil to have a sex-change operation and live in Europe, Roberta Close remains extremely well-known. A book about her life appeared a few years ago (Rito1998),

and in 1995, she was featured in a nationwide advertisement for Duloren lingerie, in which a photograph of her passport, bearing her male name, was transposed with a photograph of her looking sexy and chic in a black lace undergarment. The caption read "*Você não imagina do que uma Duloren é capaz*" - "You can't imagine what a Duloren can do".

As it happens, famous individuals like Roberta Close, Valéria, and Rogéria are not representative of Brazil's travestis. Instead, they are more like exceptions that prove the rule. And the rule is harsh discrimination and vituperative public prejudice. The overwhelming majority of travestis live far from the protective glow of celebrity, and they constitute one of the most marginalized and despised groups in Brazilian society. Most travestis (like most Brazilians) come from working class or poor backgrounds, and many remain poor throughout their lives -- even though many, these days, also travel to Europe and earn enough money working there as prostitutes to return to Brazil and secure their own futures, and those of their mothers. In most Brazilian cities, travestis are harassed so routinely that many of them avoid venturing out onto the street during the day. And at night while at work, they are regularly the victims of violent police brutality and random assassinations by individuals or gangs of men who take it upon themselves to "clean up the streets", as local governments periodically order their police forces to do -- despite the fact that neither cross-dressing nor prostitution are criminal under the Brazilian legal code.

So the nature of the relationship between the Brazilian populace-at-large and travestis is hot-cold, and love-hate: hot and loving enough to propel a handful of travestis to national celebrity, and also to sustain a thriving market in which tens of thousands of travestis are able to support themselves through prostitution. But cold and hateful enough to ensure that the majority of those travestis live in continual anxiety that their right to occupy urban space will be publicly challenged and perhaps violently denied. Jovana Baby, founder and president of Brazil's first travesti activist organization *Grupo Astral (Associação de Travestis e Liberados de Rio de Janeiro)*, provided a pithy summary of popular Brazilian sentiments towards travestis when she remarked in an interview with Kulick that "Brazilians love travestis, as long as they stay on television or on the covers of magazines. A travesti on the street or, God forbid, in the family -- that is another story altogether".

Deferred signifiers

Ambivalent public sentiments toward travestis are mirrored in ambivalent public perceptions about the precise composition of travesti identity. One of the most striking dimensions of the Brazilian preoccupation with travestis is that despite the habitual presence of travestis in both what we might see as the 'high' contexts of popular culture and the 'low' contexts of seeing them on city streets and in the crime pages of the local newspaper (frequently in lurid close-ups as murdered corpses), there appears to be no clear consensus about what exactly travestis are. In the press, travestis are sometimes referred to as 'he', and sometimes as 'she'. Some commentators insist that travestis want to be women; others insist that they self-identify as men. Still others, especially those commentators influenced by postmodernist ideas, claim that travestis reject identity altogether. They are usually depicted as homosexuals, but occasionally this identity is elided, and they are identified, instead, as transsexuals. Expressed in structuralist terms, the result of these various depictions of travesti identity is that the signifier 'travesti' is continually deferred and never finally coalesces with a specific signified. This means that the Brazilian public can never be certain that it knows what 'travesti' means from one context to the next.

All of this is evident from the language used to discuss travestis, and we want to examine one example in detail to illustrate the kind of indeterminacy to which we are drawing attention here. On January 7, 1996, the Sao Paulo-state based newspaper *A Tribuna* ran a full-page story about an individual named Márcia Muller, who is identified as a travesti in the headline, in a head-shot photo captioned "The travesti Márcia Muller", and throughout the text. The story appeared under the headline "Travesti spends 45 days detained in Women's Jail" (*Travesti passa 45 dias preso na Cadeia Feminina*). In bold print and large lettering directly under

the rubric, the following text appears (the nouns and pronouns used to refer to Márcia Muller are highlighted in bold print):

What can have caused the police of [the city of] Disé to imagine that the travesti Márcia Muller was really a woman and put her (*a prendessem*) in the Women's Jail of Santos? Did the pseudohermaphrodite really look like a woman or was there just a tiny resemblance? The terrible mistake committed by the police is already cleared up, but there could be lasting disagreeable developments (*mas teria desdobramentos desagradáveis se perdurasse*). The female prisoners, naturally, protested against the intimacy of having to use the same bathroom as Márcia, her being a man (*sendo ela homem*). For the first time in this region, the Courts face such a problem (*se defronta com tamanho problema*).

The article reports that thirty-eight year-old Márcia Muller was arrested with eighty grams of cocaine and taken to the local police station. According to the newspaper, "In the police station, during a body search conducted by a policeman, the male sexual organ of the accused was perceived (*foi percebido órgão sexual masculino do acusado*), but because he was convicted (*porém como ele foi convicto*) claiming to be a hermaphrodite, and presenting documents plus check stubs with the name Márcia Muller on them, the end result was the Women's Jail".

"In the jail" the article continues, "there was a climate of speculation. The topic was discussed in all the jailcells. Some women believed that she was a hermaphrodite, but the majority doubted this and thought that their new colleague (*a nova colega*) was really a travesti".

One of the inmates who did not want Márcia in the jail contacted a criminal lawyer. This lawyer could do nothing, the newspaper explains, because "the girl (*a moça*; i.e. Márcia) was detained in the custody of Justice". In order to move Márcia out of the Women's Jail, a court order was needed. The lawyer brought the case to the attention of a judge, who had Márcia examined by a medical doctor.

"The doctor confirmed, after various examinations, including touching (*inclusive de toque*)" that *Márcia era homem mesmo* -- Márcia was really a man. But at this point, Márcia's lawyer intervened and argued that if his client was transferred to a male jail, her life would be in danger. In the end, Márcia was moved to the Men's Jail, but placed in a cell in the male jail that contained "two more travestis".

The final paragraph of the article contains the following coda, which, given the outcome of the doctor's examination, does more to add to the mystery of Márcia's identity than it does to resolve it:

Márcia Muller has all the features of a woman [?!], but has big feet and coarse hands. If it weren't for a low voice and a light sashay when walking (*sua voz desafinada e um ligeiro requebro no andar*), her conduct could easily be confused with that of a woman.

So even by the end of this 1,400 word report, Márcia Muller's sexed and gendered identity remains unresolved. Despite the fact that the article makes an explicit reference to Márcia's "male sexual organ", and to the medical examination that concluded that Márcia was "really a man", she is referred to with a masculine pronoun only once throughout the entire text (in the context of having had her male sexual organ "perceived"). In all other cases where gendered grammatical pronouns, articles and adjectives are used, Márcia is consistently referred to with female forms. At one point she is even called "the girl". In the series of questions prefacing the article, Márcia is called a "pseudo-hermaphrodite", even though it is later determined that she is in fact not one. And even though it would seem that the issue of Márcia's sex/gender is finally resolved with the Court order to transfer her to the Men's Jail, the closing coda of the article reopens the issue, ending on a note of provocative indeterminacy.

The public uncertainty about what travestis are and who qualifies as a travesti that newspaper articles like this promote lays the foundation for what scholars like Charles Taylor (1992) and Axel Honneth (1995, 1996) would identify as the "misrecognition" of travestis. In other words, by keeping the referent of 'travesti' vague, articles like the one about Márcia Muller encourage people to not recognize their particular identity. And such a lack of recognition is not trivial or merely insulting -- both Taylor and Honneth argue at length that it is pernicious and profoundly harmful.

When it comes to travestis, these scholars are, of course, in a sense, right. Uncertainty about Márcia Muller's identity led to her being subjected to invasive physical examinations, and had her lawyer not succeeded in getting her placed in a cell with two other travestis, she would have been in real physical danger by being transferred to a men's prison. A more politically significant example of the harmful nature of travesti misrecognition occurred not long ago in an interview with the then-mayor of Rio de Janeiro, Luis Paulo Conde, in the monthly gay magazine *Sui Generis*. In an otherwise generally affirmative and sympathetic interview about homosexuality, the mayor suddenly announces that he finds travestis "offensive" (*O que agride é o travesti*). The reason? "A travesti doesn't admit to being gay. He dresses in women's clothes to be accepted by society. When he puts on the clothes, it's to be accepted by society. Since society doesn't accept homosexuality, he creates a woman so that he will be accepted". Now, leaving aside the mayor's intriguing suggestion that Brazilians might be more tolerant of men in dresses than they are of homosexuals, here we have a case of misrecognition in which mayor Conde denies the homosexual component of travesti identity, thereby necessarily disqualifying them from any of the rights or protections that he might eventually be willing to grant homosexuals.

But while public ambivalence about travesti identity is indeed harmful in many of the ways discussed by Taylor and Honneth, it not *only* harmful; and this is a point that seems likely to be missed by the analytical frameworks elaborated by those scholars. For besides constituting damage, public uncertainty about the precise nature (and hence, the precise boundaries) of travesti identity *also* generates a space of ambiguity that travestis can use to their advantage. If travesti identity remains fuzzy, it becomes possible to suggest that the identity, or at least key dimensions of the identity, is/are not specific to travestis, but are, instead, shared by others who do not self-identify as travestis. Hence, ambivalence provides travestis with a wedge that they can use to insert themselves into the identificatory constellations of others, and, in doing so, compel a reconsideration and perhaps even a reconfiguration of those constellations.¹

A forced realignment of identity is what we believe travesti scandals accomplish. Scandals publicly accuse a travesti's client of being a depraved effeminate homosexual, one who is so pathetically abject that he actually pays money to be abased at the hands of a person who herself is at the very nadir of sociocultural hierarchy.

The reason why scandals work (that is, the reason why they nine times out of ten produce the desired result of more money) is because travestis are right. Or, rather, scandals work because travestis *might be right*. The great majority of a travesti's clients would certainly hotly disagree with travesti assertions that they are depraved effeminate perverts. However, because the boundaries of travesti identity are not neatly demarcated

¹ Besides ambivalence -- or rather, another dimension to ambivalence that makes it possible for travestis to interfere in the identity constructions of others is the fact that they are taboo, in the Freudian sense of being rejected and prohibited by ideology, and, at the same time, therefore, desired. As Freud discusses, anyone who has violated a taboo becomes taboo himself "because he possesses the dangerous quality of tempting others to follow his example: why should *he* be allowed to do what is forbidden to others? *Thus he is truly contagious* in that every example encourages imitation" (Freud 1950: 42; first emphasis in original, second added). Georges Bataille's (1986) development of Freud's thoughts on taboo can also be mentioned here, since according to Bataille, and with clear relevance for the dynamics of travesti scandals, the shame associated with the breaking of sexual taboos is engendered as female.

or entirely clear-cut for most people, the possibility remains open that travesti ontology does not occupy the place of the absolute Other, in relation to the public-at-large. On the contrary, because the contours of travesti identity are ambiguously outlined in relation to others, there is a distinct possibility that travestis might be right when they point a finger and assert affinity with a particular individual. Especially if that individual did what the travesti says he did (and he may or may not have -- who can know for sure?), public perception of the man will change, and he will be resignified by anyone who hears (or hears about) the scandal as someone who does indeed share a(n until that moment) secret affiliation with his travesti accuser.

So travesti scandals raise a specter of ontological similarity between the travesti and her client. But they depend for their effectiveness on the simultaneous assertion of the shameful nature of that ontology ("Have shame you pig! You disgraceful faggot!"). Shame here becomes the channel through which identification flows; the contours within which it takes form. Eve Sedgwick has addressed this identity-delineating power of shame in her essay on the politics of performativity. Sedgwick argues that whereas guilt is an affect that focuses on the suffering of another (and the self's blame for that suffering), shame concerns the suffering of the self at the hands of another.² Furthermore, while guilt is a bad feeling attached to what one does, shame is a bad feeling attaching to what one is. "[O]ne therefore is *something*, in experiencing shame", Sedgwick explains (1993:12). But that is not all. For conferred by another, shame always responds. It *performs*, as Sedgwick phrases it. Often, embarrassment, a blush, an aversion of eyes, a turning away -- these are the responses, the performances, of shame. In the case of scandals, shame performs by compelling acquiescence to the travesti's demands for more money.

Sedgwick suggests that this performative dimension of shame has overtly political consequences. In order to better understand the import of this suggestion, let us first contrast it with the way in which shame has figured in the work of another scholar who has recently discussed shame and politics. In his writings on recognition struggles, philosopher Axel Honneth (1995:256-260; 1996:131-139) identifies shame as the "missing psychological link" (1996:135) that allows us to understand how economic privation or social repression can motivate people to engage in political struggle. Shame, in other words, explains how a subject can be moved from suffering to action. Honneth argues that shame is raised when one's interactional partners refuse to grant one the respect to which one believes oneself entitled. When this occurs, the disrespected subject is brutally brought up against the normally unreflected-upon fact that it is dependent on the recognition of others for its own sense of self. The affronted realization that the other's view of the self is, in Honneth's terms, "distorted", constitutes the motivational impetus to identify specific others as the source of oppression, and, hence, as the target of political struggle. In Honneth's framework, shame is thus the psychological bedrock of political action. And the psychological goal of political struggle is the elimination of shame.

Sedgwick's view is different. Like Honneth, Sedgwick argues that shame in the self is conferred by others, and that the experience of shame is a constitutive dimension of the identities of oppressed people. Unlike Honneth, however, Sedgwick stresses that shame is a crucial component in *all* identity formation. "[O]ne of the things that anyone's character or personality is", she insists, "is a record of the highly individual histories by which the fleeting emotion of shame has instituted far more durable, structural changes in one's relational and interpretive strategies toward both self and others" (1993: 12-13). In other words, all of our socializing experiences in which our behavior and expression was/is controlled with sharp reprimands like "People are looking at you!" are important nexuses in the construction of our identities. This implies that forms of shame cannot be considered as "distinct 'toxic' parts of groups or individual identity that can be excised" through consciousness raising or recognition struggles (1993: 13). Instead, shame is integral to the

² As Darwin noted in his discussion of shame and guilt, shame is raised not by one's sense of guilt, but, rather, by "the thought that others think or know us to be guilty" (1965:332).

very processes by which identity itself is formed; which means that the extinction of shame would be, in effect, the extinction of identity itself. Therefore, instead of fantasizing about the end of shame, Sedgwick proposes that shame be acknowledged, embraced, and put to transformative political use. In this framework, the goal is not the end of shame. The goal is the refiguration of shame as "a near inexhaustible source of transformational energy" (1993: 4), and its creative deployment in political struggles.

This creative deployment can occur in a variety of registers, many of them, Sedgwick speculates, as yet unimagined. But travestis certainly hit on one of them when they began to claim shame as a place from which they might speak and hail others, asserting power to resignify those others, and compelling them to respond in wished-for ways. In scandals, what gets redesignated are the public (and sometimes perhaps also the privately-felt) identities of a number of individual men. For a long time it seems that this was enough for travestis. Nowadays, though, some travestis have decided that they have bigger fish to fry. Instead of contenting themselves with redefining the public perceptions of a few men who pay them for sex, these travestis are turning their attention to redefining the public perceptions of more consequential entities, such as the concept of Brazilian citizenship and the nature of human rights. These are the targets that get focalized in travestis' more recognizably activist modes of political activism, and it is to these forms of political struggle that we now turn.

Travesti political activism

The emergence of travesti political struggles in Brazil can only be understood in the context of the rise of Brazilian gay and AIDS activism during the past two decades, since these movements, although not always welcoming travestis or responding to their concerns, have heavily influenced the content and organizational structures of travesti activism (Daniel 1989; Daniel and Parker 1990; Green 1999; Klein 1999; MacRae 1990, 1992; Parker 1994, 1999; Terto Jr. 2000; Trevisan 1986). Brazilian gay and AIDS organizing in turn have been strongly shaped by two larger political processes, namely, the redemocratization of Brazilian society during the late 1970s and 1980s (Alvarez 1990; Skidmore 1988) and the rapid expansion of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) during the 1980s and 1990s (Fernandes 1994; Landim 1988, 1993). The following discussion traces the development of Brazilian gay and AIDS activism and highlights the various interconnections between the two movements. We then turn our attention to contemporary travesti political struggles and their complex blend of AIDS, gay, and specifically travesti-related issues.

In 1964, the Brazilian military staged a coup d'état and forced João Goulart, a leftist president, to flee the country. Over the next few years, an authoritarian regime was gradually institutionalized (Skidmore 1988; Burns 1993). Repression was particularly strong from 1968 to 1973, and many who actively opposed the dictatorship were imprisoned or forced into political exile. In the mid 1970s, a more "moderate" wing of the military assumed power and instituted the *abertura*—or political opening—thereby beginning Brazil's lengthy redemocratization, which was only completed in 1989 with the first direct presidential elections in more than 25 years.

The *abertura* generated an intense surge of political and social mobilization. In the late 1970s, movements such as worker's organizations, neighborhood associations, ecclesiastical base communities, women's organizations, environmental groups, and Afro-Brazilian groups, sprang up throughout Brazil. Building on democratic principles and grassroots mobilization, this "revolution in everyday life" (Scherer-Warren and Krischke 1987) represented a break from traditional Brazilian politics and its history of clientelism, hierarchy and populism (see Burns 1993 for excellent summaries of these dimensions of Brazilian political history, and Scheper-Hughes 1992 for a vivid account of their continued existence in contemporary Brazilian life). Given the continued dangers of directly confronting the legitimacy of an "opening" but still authoritarian regime, the new social movements served as an important organizing arena for social and political sectors who opposed the dictatorship.

It is within this context of widespread political and social mobilization that the Brazilian homosexual movement arose (Green 1999; MacRae 1990, 1992; Trevisan 1986).³ In 1979, Brazil's first homosexual newspaper, *Lampião*, was launched in Rio de Janeiro. That same year, *SOMOS-Grupo de Afirmção Homosexual* (We Are—Homosexual Affirmation Group) was established in São Paulo. During the same period, homosexual liberation groups were established in several other Brazilian states, and in April 1980, representatives from these organizations met in São Paulo at the first Brazilian Congress of Organized Homosexual groups. The movement achieved particular public notoriety several months later through a historic protest march against police violence in São Paulo that brought together nearly one thousand people, including many travestis (MacRae 1990).

In terms of its sexual politics, the early Brazilian homosexual movement stressed the subversive dimensions of sexuality, including sexual freedom, androgyny, and what today is often referred to as “gender fucking.” Rather than decry the social marginality of homosexuals, movement leaders argued that outrageous and “shameful” dimensions of homosexuality, such as camp, gender-bending and promiscuity, should not only be celebrated at the personal level; those phenomena also constituted a creative, anti-authoritarian force that could work against the dictatorship and transform society. Although they focused on gender and sexual politics, the homosexual liberation activists also worked with the opposition movement more generally, and with movements such as those developed by feminists, Afro-Brazilians, and indigenous peoples. In these political alliances, homosexual leaders adopted a discourse that emphasized citizenship and democracy (MacRae 1990, Trevisan 1986).

It did not take long, however, for the marked gender, class, racial and political differences among group participants to threaten the cohesion of the still-young gay liberation movement. For example, internal tensions within the São Paulo based SOMOS (We Are) group, which had become the most influential Brazilian homosexual liberation organization, reached crisis proportions in May 1980, when nearly all of its female members left in mass to form the Lesbian-Feminist Action Group. The remaining men then largely divided into anarchist and Trotsky-ite factions. Similar schisms occurred at the *Lampião* newspaper. By the end of 1981, with SOMOS in tatters and *Lampião* having closed its doors, the first-wave of Brazilian homosexual mobilization had more or less ended. As Edward MacRae (1990, 1992) argues, this decline resulted from a combination of the internal conflicts noted above and a more general shift in political energy from social movements to party-oriented electoral politics in the multiple party, democratic electoral system was implemented in the early 1980s. These conflicts and the changing political landscape were compounded by significant transformations in the organization of Brazilian homosexuality during this period, including the rapid growth of gay identity politics and gay consumer culture, neither of which was easily reconcilable with the movement's anarchism and anti-consumerism (Green 1999; MacRae 1990, 1992; Parker 1999).

The beginning of the AIDS epidemic in Brazil in the early to mid-1980s raised new challenges for an already fragile and fragmented movement. Was AIDS a gay issue? If gay groups worked on AIDS, would they be re-enforcing the public perception that AIDS was (only) a gay disease, thereby potentially re-enforcing the shame and stigma associated with AIDS and increasing discrimination against gay Brazilians?⁴

³ Although organized homosexual political organizations and movements are a relatively recent phenomenon in Brazil—as well as the world more generally—Brazil has a long history of homosexual subcultures and social spaces (Green 1996, 1999; Mott 1989; Parker 1999; Trevisan 1986). It is interesting to note that during the late 1970s and early 1980s, most activists used the term “homosexual” rather than “gay” to describe their liberation movement. In the 1980s and 1990s, “gay” has been used increasingly by participants to describe themselves and their political movement.

⁴ On the connection of the stigmas associated with AIDS and homosexuality in Brazil, see Costa 1992; Daniel 1989; Daniel and Parker 1990; Galvão 1985, 1992; Klein 1996; Moraes and Carrara 1985a, 1985b; Terto Jr. 2000.

Given governmental apathy in response to an increasingly out-of-control epidemic, would taking on AIDS issues overwhelm gay groups and prevent them from working on specifically gay issues (e.g. fighting anti-gay discrimination and violence, supporting gay rights legislation, building a gay community)? Facing these dilemmas, Brazilian gay groups in the 1980s made different choices—some, such as the *Grupo Gay da Bahia* (Gay Group of Bahia) in Salvador and the *Grupo Atobá de Emancipação Homossexual* (Atobá Group for Homosexual Emancipation) in Rio de Janeiro were among the first groups, gay or otherwise, to develop AIDS prevention and education activities in Brazil (see Daniel and Parker 1993; Galvão 1997; Parker 1994; Terto Jr. et. al., 1995). Others, such as *Triângulo Rosa* (Pink Triangle) in Rio de Janeiro, initially declined to work extensively on AIDS-related issues (Câmara da Silva 1993).

With the founding of Brazil's first AIDS service organization – the Support Group for AIDS Prevention/GAPA—in 1985 in São Paulo, a new type of organization entered the Brazilian political stage and greatly influenced the shape of AIDS and gay activism in Brazil. Like many political groups formed in Brazil in the 1980s and 1990s, GAPA-São Paulo structured itself as a non-governmental organization (NGO). It sought and received considerable financial support from North American and European philanthropic organizations to work on AIDS-related issues (on the dramatic growth of NGOs and the “third sector” in Brazil during the past two decades, see Fernandes 1994; Landim 1988, 1993). With these resources, GAPA-São Paulo implemented a comprehensive array of AIDS-related programs and activities, including providing social services for people with AIDS, conducting AIDS education and prevention campaigns, countering media misinformation, criticizing governmental apathy, and attempting to mobilize civil society in response to the epidemic. This model of responding to the AIDS epidemic through semi-professionalized, internationally funded AIDS specific NGOs (AIDS-NGOs) became the dominant paradigm for AIDS activism in Brazil (Galvão 1997; Klein 1994, 1996). Beginning in 1989, a national AIDS political movement began to articulate itself through a series of semi-annual and then annual National Meetings of AIDS-NGOs. By 1992, there were nearly 100 AIDS-NGOs in Brazil (Galvão 1997). Today, there are more than 400.

Not surprisingly given the significant impact of the Brazilian AIDS epidemic on men who have sex with men, throughout the 1980s and well into the 1990s many of the leaders and active participants at these AIDS-NGOs were gay-identified men, including some who had participated in the first-wave of the Brazilian homosexual movement. Yet despite the involvement of many gay-identified men, these organizations did not consider themselves to be gay groups, and until the mid-1990s most AIDS-NGOs primarily directed their prevention activities toward the “general population.” This is not to say that gay-related issues were of no interest to AIDS-NGOs, as can be seen in the work of Herbert Daniel,⁵ a noted writer and leftist and gay political activist. In 1987 Daniel began working at Brazil's second oldest AIDS-NGO, the Brazilian Interdisciplinary AIDS Association (ABIA) in Rio de Janeiro. At ABIA, Daniel played the lead role in developing one of the first sexually explicit and culturally sensitive AIDS prevention materials directed toward men who have sex with men. In early 1989, Daniel discovered that he was HIV+ (Daniel 1989). Recognizing the need for an organization focused primarily on the political dimensions of living with HIV/AIDS, Daniel formed *Grupo Pela VIDDÁ* (Group for the Affirmation, Integration, and Dignity for People with AIDS) in Rio de Janeiro later that year.⁶

⁵ During the dictatorship, Herbert Daniel participated in the underground resistance before leaving Brazil as a political exile. Upon returning to Brazil, and before becoming a noted AIDS activist, he worked primarily on gay and environmental issues. Daniel died of AIDS-related complications in March 1992.

⁶ Like many AIDS-NGOs during this period, and paralleling epidemiological realities (e.g. men who have sex with men were the largest category of people with HIV/AIDS in Brazil at this time), most of the participants at *Pela VIDDÁ* in its first years were gay-identified men.

Grupo Pela VIDDA represented an epistemological and practical break in Brazilian AIDS activism and served as a critical reference for AIDS-related programs and politics throughout the 1990s.⁷ Unlike its counterpart AIDS-NGOs in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Pela VIDDA did not provide direct services to people with HIV/AIDS or focus on developing educational materials and activities. Instead, under the leadership of Daniel, Pela VIDDA articulated a political project that emphasized citizenship and solidarity in the face of the "civil death" (*morte civil*) experienced by people living with HIV/AIDS in Brazil. By civil death, Daniel referred to the then prevalent practice in Brazil—and indeed throughout the world—of treating people with HIV/AIDS as already dead even though they were still alive. This civil death was often internalized by people with HIV/AIDS. Facing the various shames associated with AIDS (i.e. its rhetorical links to promiscuity, contagion, and homosexuality), many individuals became either socially invisible or the passive subjects of sensationalistic media coverage (see Daniel 1989; Daniel and Parker 1990; Galvão 1992; Klein 1996; Terto Jr. 2000).

A significant dimension of Daniel's political project was to openly assume the "shame" of AIDS, and use it to formulate political goals. From the position of a person living with the stigma of HIV, Daniel asserted that *everyone* in Brazil was living with AIDS. This argument is not a new one -- it had been powerfully formulated by gay groups in the United States and the UK as soon as the magnitude of the epidemic -- and also the magnitude of government inaction -- became evident. What is important about the argument, however, is that it reterritorializes shame, relocating it not so much in individual bodies, as in the political structure of society. It also importantly refigures people associated with AIDS as active articulators, rather than passive recipients, of shame. In other words, arguments like those deployed by Daniel and Pela VIDDA fashioned shame as a powerful position from which individuals could speak and demand hearing.

Despite the vitality and political possibilities of Daniel and Pela VIDDA's vision of "living with HIV/AIDS" and its explicit incorporation of both (homo)sexuality and AIDS within a broader political discourse, throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s the relationship between AIDS-NGOs and gay groups—and gay and AIDS activists—remained complex and often antagonistic (Câmara da Silva 1993; Vallinoto 1991). Part of this antagonism resulted from different approaches to sexual politics, since during this period, most of the more visible Brazilian gay groups, such as the Gay Group of Bahia, adopted a vision of sexual politics that focused on promoting gay identities and eliminating—rather than reterritorializing—the shame associated with homosexuality. But equally important were questions of money, expertise, and representivity, particularly as AIDS-related organizations came to outnumber and in many respects eclipse gay groups in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This ascendancy of AIDS-NGOs resulted in competition and at times antagonism between AIDS and gay groups. On the one hand, AIDS organizations, positioning themselves as the "AIDS experts," questioned the quality of gay group based AIDS prevention activities. On the other hand, prominent gay leaders criticized AIDS organizations for not developing more activities directed specifically toward male homosexuals. They further resented that AIDS groups were receiving considerable funding from agencies of international cooperation which was largely unavailable to groups who focused exclusively on gay issues.

These tensions between AIDS and gay organizations diminished throughout the 1990s. One critical factor in this *reproachment* was Brazil's receiving a loan of more than \$160 million from the World Bank in 1992 to develop and implement a comprehensive National AIDS Program (Galvão 1997).⁸ As part of this so

⁷ Other Pela VIDDA's were established in São Paulo, Curitiba, and Goiania in the early 1990s. Pela VIDDA-Rio de Janeiro's National Conference of People Living with HIV/AIDS, which has been held annually since 1991, has also played a critical role in promoting visibility and political voice among people living with HIV/AIDS.

⁸ The Brazilian federal government was required to allocate an additional \$90 million of its own in order to receive the \$150 million loan, bringing the total project to \$250 million dollars.

called "World Bank Project," over the period 1993 to 1998 more than \$9 million dollars was distributed to nearly 200 community-based organizations who worked on AIDS-related issues—not only AIDS-NGOs, but also gay, travesti, sex worker, and women's organizations who previously had been largely outside of AIDS-related funding circles.⁹ This expansion in the types of organizations receiving federal AIDS funding was complemented by the creation of projects and subcommittees within the National AIDS Program that focused on specific "higher risk" populations, such as men who have sex with men and sex professionals (both categories explicitly referencing travestis) as well as injecting drug users and incarcerated populations. The availability of these funds and the opportunities for constructive dialogue offered through the National AIDS Program helped decrease competition between AIDS-NGOs and gay groups and stimulated a significant growth in the 1990s of AIDS-NGO and gay group based HIV prevention activities directed toward men who have sex with men. These programs in turn have played important roles in the emergence of more visible gay communities in Brazil.¹⁰ Cooperation between AIDS and gay groups has been further re-enforced with the re-establishment of the Comissão Nacional de AIDS (CNAIDS/National AIDS Commission), which includes various gay and AIDS activists.¹¹

These shifts in the content of AIDS prevention programs and the patterns of AIDS industry funding must be situated alongside the changes in the landscape of same-sex sexuality that have been occurring in Brazil over the course of the AIDS epidemic (Klein 1999; Parker 1996, 1999; Parker and Terto Jr. 1995, 1998; Terto Jr. 2000). For despite much hyperbole predicting the demise of homosexuals and their supposedly "contaminated" ghettos in the early years of the epidemic, Brazilian gay oriented commercial establishments expanded in both number and type during the 1980s and especially the 1990s, and male homosexuality – including travestis – became everyday topics within the mainstream media. This increased gay visibility has been complemented by gay-oriented national magazines (e.g. *Sui Generis, G*), which have been critical nodes in the emergence of a vital and media oriented national gay culture (Parker 1999). At the same time, gay political activism has grown dramatically in Brazil during the mid to late 1990s. From a handful of groups at the end of the 1980s and 60 groups in 1995, there are now nearly 100 gay groups in the *Associação Brasileira de Gays, Lésbicas and Travestis* (ABGLT, Brazilian Association of Gays, Lesbians, and Travestis). In addition, gay rights issues are being seriously considered in the national political arena. For example, a domestic partnership proposal was introduced in the National Legislature in 1998, where it initially faced little organized opposition. More recently, opposition to the measure from conservative and religious sectors (e.g. Protestant fundamentalist groups and certain sectors of the Catholic Church) has intensified, and gay rights activists have been working with legislators to mobilize political and popular support around these and other gay rights issues.

⁹ Grants from a second and smaller loan from the World Bank, "AIDS II," began to be dispersed to community-based organizations in early 1999.

¹⁰ Two of the most dramatic examples of the cross fertilization between AIDS prevention activities and the emergence of gay communities in Brazil are the "Prevention of AIDS for Men who Have Sex with Men" project in Rio Janeiro and São Paulo, which was established in May 1993 by three prominent AIDS-NGOs (Pela VIDDA-Rio de Janeiro, ABIA, and Pela VIDDA-São Paulo) (see Parker, 1999; Terto, Jr. et al, 1995, 1998) and the "Men at Night" project, which began in 1995 under the direction of Nuances, Porto Alegre's principal gay group (Klein, 1999). These projects involved active collaboration between AIDS/NGOs, gay groups, and gay commercial establishments and situated AIDS prevention within discussions around sexuality/sexual identity and homosexual collectivities at local, national and global levels.

¹¹ Appointed members to the National AIDS Commission have included long-time gay activist Luiz Mott (head of the *Grupo Gay da Bahia*), a representative of the Rio de Janeiro based gay group *Arco-Íris* (Rainbow Group), and representatives of two AIDS-NGOs with histories of working with gay and travesti populations (i.e. GAPA/Rio Grande do Sul and GAPA/Belo Horizonte).

How do travestis fit within these emerging gay communities and the resurgence of the Brazilian gay movement? As discussed above, travestis occupy a complicated and shifting position within Brazilian (homo)sexual worlds. If travestis are sometimes admired and desired for their beauty and sensuality, many Brazilians—including a sizable number of gays and gay leaders—consider travestis to be a shameful group whose ostentatious presence and frequently scandalous behavior discredits gay Brazilians and the gay political movement. This marginalization of travestis within gay worlds is further demonstrated by the relatively low levels of travesti involvement in (non-travesti specific) gay activism. For example, despite the existence of a travesti-led "department of travestis" at the Brazilian Association of Gays, Lesbians, and Travestis (ABGLT), the overall presence and influence of travestis within the ABGLT is quite limited. This lack of presence of travestis within the organized Brazilian gay movement occurs at regional levels as well—at the 1994 meeting of the Southern Regional Meeting of Lesbian and Gay Groups in Porto Alegre, only one of more than the 30 participants who attended was a travesti. Nor are travestis generally active participants in the growing Brazilian "pink market" (Klein 1999; Parker 1999), since its costs, middle class cultural values (e.g. respectability), and emphasis on masculine gay male aesthetics present an inaccessible and often hostile environment for most travestis.

Facing these barriers to participation in Brazil's emerging gay culture and gay political movement, over the past decade and a half travestis have grounded their political organizing around AIDS-related issues. Jovana Baby of ASTRAL observed pithily in an interview with Kulick that travesti activism has "ridden on the back of the AIDS". In other words, to the extent that travestis have established formal organizations, programs and venues, it has been entirely through AIDS-related funding, usually from the Ministry of Health. This kind of funding has placed specific limits on how travesti activism is articulated and how it is perceived. However, travestis like Jovana Baby have made sure that those limits have been enabling limits.

Scandalous citizenship

As sex workers, travestis were particularly hard hit by the AIDS epidemic. It is difficult to estimate the number of travestis who have died of HIV-related illness since statistics on AIDS in Brazil do not report on travestis – travestis are subsumed under the category "men" and "homosexual transmission." Travestis are agreed, however, that they have lost innumerable friends and colleagues to AIDS, and they are emphatic that the transmission of HIV continues to constitute a profound threat.¹²

Travesti involvement in the Brazilian response to AIDS dates to the mid-1980s, when the travesti Brenda Lee founded a support house/hospice for travestis living with HIV and AIDS in São Paulo. In most cases, travesti focused AIDS-related projects and the travesti organizations they support have been established by charismatic leaders like Brenda Lee and Jovana Baby, although several important travesti groups are on-going programs within AIDS-NGOs and gay organizations (e.g. GAPA/Belo Horizonte,

¹² There are several reasons for this. One is that even though the overwhelming majority of travestis do use condoms with their clients, condoms can burst or slip off and remain inside a travesti's anus after intercourse. There are also travestis who are less careful about using condoms, either because they know or suspect themselves to be HIV+, or because they are desperate for money and a client offers to pay them more if they agree to be penetrated (or even to penetrate him) without a condom. Astonishingly, these kinds of clients remain common (for some interesting analysis and interviews with clients who say they do not use condoms when they visit male prostitutes, see Veneziani and Reim 1999: 199-252). A final reason why HIV remains a grave threat to travestis is because condoms are almost invariably dispensed with entirely in a travesti's private relationship with her boyfriend(s). Using a condom with a man one loves would be like treating him like a client, and it is well documented that one of the ways prostitutes (not just travestis) mark the status of their partner as special is to not use condoms during sex (see Kulick 1998:242, n 3 for a discussion).

GAPA/RS, Gay Group of Bahia). With the expansion of the National AIDS Program in the early 1990s, and its commitment to the distribution of condoms and safer-sex education within "special populations" such as men who sex with men and sex professionals,¹³ the number of travesti-led and travesti-related programs in Brazil has grown from a handful in the early 1990s to approximately twenty today.

Since 1993, the Ministry of Health, at times in collaboration with international philanthropic agencies who fund AIDS-related programs, has underwritten an annual national conference called the "National Meeting of Travestis and Open-Minded People who Work with AIDS" (*Encontro Nacional de Travestis e Liberados que Trabalham com AIDS*). These meetings usually gather together about two hundred participants, and they have developed into crucial arenas where politically conscious travestis meet one another and discuss strategies and demands. However, even though travestis are thematically foregrounded at these conferences, they are numerically far outnumbered (three to one) by the "open-minded people" who work with AIDS.¹⁴ Many of these "open-minded people" have little contact with travestis in their day-to-day work and seem to attend the conference because it is one of the more colorful of the AIDS-circuit conferences that occur throughout Brazil every year.

The focus on AIDS, in addition to resulting in travestis being outnumbered at these conferences, has also had a constraining effect on which topics can be discussed. A recurring complaint from travestis is that too much time is spent discussing condom use and safer-sex programs, and too little time is devoted to other issues that are of great importance to travestis, such as police violence or the construction and maintenance of travesti in-group solidarity. Nonetheless, despite having AIDS as their principal focus, travestis have been able to expand the agendas of these national conferences to include issues such as social exclusion, gender and sexuality identity, violence, sex work and citizenship.¹⁵

One of the effects of conferences like the "National Meeting of Travestis and Open-Minded People who Work with AIDS" is that they cement an association in the public mind between travestis and AIDS which dates to the beginnings of the Brazilian AIDS epidemic. One of the first published reports about AIDS in Brazil, for example, reported the research of a Brazilian clinician who claimed that the recently discovered epidemic could be traced to the injection of female hormones and "infected" silicone by travestis (Daniel 1993:33). As a result of this history, an already well-established connection between travestis and AIDS is reinforced every time a travesti group receives government funding, since these resources are inevitably tied to HIV prevention work. In political activist contexts, this continually foregrounded link between travestis and AIDS is restricting in some ways, as the travestis who want to talk about issues like police violence at the annual conference regularly point out. However, the fact that travesti claims are channeled and heard through an AIDS discourse gives travesti political actions a particular character and potential in which shame emerges as a key position from which travestis speak and demand hearing.

Much like Daniel and Pela VIDDA's politics of "living with AIDS" discussed above, travesti political strategies have been centered upon highlighting and reterritorializing shame. Whenever travestis organize a protest march, which they do at the conclusion of every "National Meeting of Travestis and Open-Minded

¹³ See Larvie (1998), who has argued that international and national governmental agencies who work on AIDS issues (e.g. the World Health Organization, the Brazilian National AIDS Program) have played a critical role in the very creation of categories (e.g. sex professionals, men who have sex with men, transgendered people, street youth) around which travestis and other disempowered groups often organize.

¹⁴ This active involvement of non-travestis in travesti political organizations is mirrored at AIDS/NGO as well. For example, GAPA/RS' travesti groups have nearly always been led by non-travestis.

¹⁵ Similarly, the travesti groups at the Support Group for AIDS Prevention in Porto Alegre, although organized primarily to promote HIV prevention and to improve the quality of life of travestis with HIV/AIDS, spend much of their time on violence, personal safety, discrimination, and gender/sexual identity issues (Klein, 1996, 1998, 1999).

People who Work with AIDS,” and which local groups occasionally do in their home cities to protest police brutality,¹⁶ many of the protestors take care to wear their most outrageous attire—revealing lingerie-style clothing that they would normally only display while working the street late at night. In other words, in these contexts travestis play up, rather than down, their difference from others, and fill public space with their most scandalous avatars. Just like a scandal turns space inside out by making the most intimate interactions public, travestis walking down a city’s main stream in broad daylight in tight bodices and miniscule shorts resignify that space and saturate it with an intimacy that refuses to be contained by normative, oppressive notions of privacy. This kind of public manifestation of normally concealed persons and intimacies is a striking example of what sociologist Steven Seidman calls queer politics. “Queer politics is scandalous politics,” Seidman argues, writing generally, but in language that is highly felicitous to the point we are making here, “queers materialize as the dreaded homosexual other imagined by straight society that had invisibly and silently shaped straight life but now do so openly, loudly, and unapologetically.”¹⁷

In travesti protest marches, this loud unapologetic body of the homosexual other is significantly juxtaposed with a particular kind of linguistic form. What is interestingly absent from travesti street demonstrations is language and placards asserting things like “Travesti Pride” or “Proud to be a travesti.” On the contrary, on the surface of things, the language of travesti public protests is not particularly outrageous: “Travestis are human beings,” a placard might propose, modestly. “Travestis are citizens,” a chant might proclaim. Nothing seriously scandalous here, one might think. However, the scandal in this case lies precisely in the very straightforwardness and simplicity of the message. For if travestis are human beings, they deserve to be accorded respect and human rights, like other human beings. And if they are citizens, then the very concept of citizenship has been revised. Linguistically, what gets foregrounded in these activist manifestations is sameness with non-travestis. Non-linguistically, however, stark difference from non-travestis is conveyed through dress, demeanor, and the sheer fact that so many travestis gather together in one place at one time. So what is happening here is that at their most different, their most shameless, travestis assert that they are most *like* everyone else.¹⁸

Once again, this brings up back to scandals. In the same way they do when they challenge the ontological difference between their clients and themselves by shouting that the client is just as abject as they are, travesti political activism refuses what Nancy Fraser calls “affirmative” demands for redress. That is, travesti activism refuses to build upon and enhance group differentiation in order to claim additional recognition without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them. Instead, travesti demands pressure group differentiation by declaring sameness from a position of difference, thereby disclosing and

¹⁶ For example, in August 1994 approximately thirty travestis and fifty of their “Open-Minded” supporters staged a protest march through the streets of downtown Porto Alegre in response to the killing of the travesti Cris Loira (a GAPA group participant) by a client on the streets of Porto Alegre’s main travesti prostitution zone (Klein, 1996, 1998).

¹⁷ There is a substantial and growing literature, mostly by geographers, on “queering public space”. All scholars who write on this make the point that the mass appearance of gays, lesbians and/or transgendered persons in public space ‘queers’ it: i.e., it (a) reveals that public space thought to be unmarked or neutral in regard sexuality is in fact heavily saturated with *heterosexuality* (hence the common reaction to such manifestations as scandalous and unseemly), and (b) it reterritorializes the space to be space that can host queers (see e.g. Bell and Valentine 1995; Duncan 1996; Hubbard 2001; Nast 1998)

¹⁸ We are indebted to Roger Lancaster’s formulation of a similar point in his discussion of this ethnographic data, which comes from Klein 1998 (Lancaster 1998:270). We have augmented Lancaster’s observations with our own to foreground the notion of shame.

challenging the generative structures that produce particular configurations of hierarchically ranked differentiation in the first place. In Slavoj Žižek's terminology, this is a "political act proper".¹⁹

Conclusion

The question that remains to be asked is whether the scandalous acts of travesti activists constitute a politically effective strategy. Are travesti assertions of shared ontology politically transformative? Do they produce desirable results? Do they work?

That, alas, is difficult to say. Travesti political activism is still nascent in Brazil, and it is still far too bound up with the initiatives and actions of charismatic individuals like Jovana Baby to constitute anything even approaching a coherent political movement. The overwhelming majority of travestis have little political consciousness, and they are much more concerned with being beautiful, earning money, and travelling to Italy to become what they call *européias* (that is, rich and sophisticated "European" travestis) than they are in participating in activist protest marches or travesti political organizations. Furthermore, despite the enormous visibility accorded them in the Brazilian press²⁰ (which is sometimes positive, even though it does remain heavily slanted towards images of travestis as vaguely comic, but hard-nosed and dangerous criminals), travestis continue to face grave discrimination from politicians like the mayor of Rio de Janeiro, who, it will be recalled, is of the opinion that travestis are confused cowards who dress in women's clothes only to be accepted by society. Travestis are also openly disparaged and discriminated by Christian churches of all denominations, and by large segments of the Brazilian population who find them scary and shameless.

Equally problematic for travesti political organizing is the grave discrimination travestis experience from one of their seemingly most likely political allies, gay men and lesbians. Not only are travestis at the margins of Brazil's emerging gay culture, pink economy, and gay political movement, but, as we have mentioned previously, many Brazilian gay men and lesbians are hostile toward travestis because they think travestis give homosexuals a bad name. In their formal political statements, however, travestis disregard this, and they typically position themselves alongside—if not within—gay rights discourses. For example, the 1995 Constitution of the National Network of Travestis, Transsexuals and Open-minded People defines itself as

a non-profit, civil organization fighting for the full citizenship of female and male homosexuals in Brazil, giving priority to travestis and transsexuals, encompassing as well sympathizers and friends who we call open-minded people.

The 1995 Constitution also identifies at least one political strategy through which to work toward this objective, namely, the promotion of

actions together with groups that suffer discrimination and social prejudice, with the intention of guaranteeing Travestis, Gays and Transsexuals the right to exercise their full citizenship, always respecting the autonomy of their organizations.

¹⁹ Žižek makes a useful distinction between political acts that "remain within the framework of existing social relations", and what he calls the "political act proper". A political act or intervention proper "is not simply something that works well within the framework of existing relations, but something that *changes the very framework that determines how things work*" (1999:199, emphasis in original)

²⁰ The anthropologists Hélio Silva and Cristina de Oliveira Florentino estimate that the Rio de Janeiro equivalents of daily tabloids like the British *Sun* or *Daily News* feature articles about travestis on the average of twice a week (1996:107).

Given the often antagonistic nature of travesti/gay interactions described above, it remains to be seen whether the realities of travesti difference and the goal of political sameness (i.e. full citizenship) can be reconciled. If travestis face major challenges in working with gay groups with whom they share certain affinities and previous collaborations, what is the likelihood that they will be able to reach out and form new partnerships with other socially oppressed groups, many of whom hold travestis in even more disdain? And even if these political alliances could be formed in ways which respect the autonomy of travestis and travesti activist organizations, might they not require travestis to renounce—or at a minimum downplay—the very qualities (i.e. gender/sexual ambivalence, scandalous acts) that are central to travesti social identities and scandals?

Despite all these challenges, there is some indication that travesti political activism might be making some headway, at least in some contexts and in some circles. For example, at a July 2000 meeting in Brasília (the country's capital) between travesti representatives and officials from the Ministry of Health, it was decided that all future material pertaining to travestis published by the Ministry would be examined by a travesti before it went to press.²¹ It was also decided that in the future, the Ministry would break with Portuguese grammatical convention and employ feminine grammatical articles, pronouns and adjectives when referring to travestis – so instead of writing *o travesti* [sg.] or *os travestis* [pl.], using the grammatically prescribed masculine articles, future texts will write *a travesti* and *as travestis*, using the feminine forms. These may seem like purely symbolic concessions, but the travestis present at the meeting regarded them as significant victories.

And then there is Lair Guerra de Macedo Rodrigues, former Director of Brazil's National Program on Sexually Transmissible Diseases and AIDS. Guerra de Macedo Rodrigues is one influential individual who seems to have gotten and appreciated the message that travesti political actions strive to convey. In a speech delivered in 1996, the Director referred to travestis as model citizens. “Our society is one that can no longer live with fears and taboos that certainly only impede our objectives,” she asserted,

(We must) involve ourselves in this ceaseless battle against discrimination and violence. Even if it means that we must fight against the intolerance of more conservative juridical and religious postures. *The organization of travesti groups, especially following the advent of AIDS, is evidence of the beginning of the arduous task of defending citizenship* (quoted in Larvie 1999:539, emphasis added).

Just as Brazil is one of the few countries in the world where a travesti could be declared the country's most beautiful woman, so it is perhaps the only one where travestis could be held forth as beacons of civil responsibility that other citizens ought to follow. In the eyes of those who do not like travestis and wish they would just shut up and disappear, this, perhaps, is the biggest scandal of all.

²¹ This had been a major bone of contention between travesti groups and the Ministry of Health since the Ministry financed and published a text called *Manual do Multiplicador – Homossexual* [The Manual for Multipliers – Homosexuality, BMOH 1996]; a “multiplier” is the Ministry's term for engaged persons who develop educational methods and practices in specifically targeted communities). The *Manual* explained homosexuality for people who work with HIV prevention programs. The part of the Manual that concerned travestis, authored by the then-president of the Gay Group of Bahia, Luiz Mott, discussed travestis in ways many of them found deeply offensive. For example, the text designates travestis as *rapazes de peito* (boys with breasts) and asserts in lurid language that they are part of “the same subculture (*subcultura*) of violence that dominates the subculture of prostitution” (BMOH 1996:26). This text led to heated protests from travesti groups and demands that future official texts about travestis be written in consultation with travesti representatives.

Acknowledgments

Our biggest thanks go to the other contributors to this volume, especially its editor, Barbara Hobson, for crucial feedback, criticism and suggestions. Don Kulick has read versions of this text at invited seminars held in various departments at the Universities of Bergen, Dublin, London, Manchester, Uppsala, and New York University. He would like to thank everyone present on those occasions for their questions and critical comments.

References

- Alvarez, Sonia 1990. *Engendering democracy in Brazil: women's movements in transition politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bataille, Georges 1986 [1957]. *Erotism: death and sensuality*. San Francisco: City Light Books.
- Bell, David and Gill Valentine (eds.) 1995. *Mapping desire: geographies of sexuality*. London: Routledge.
- BMOH (Brazilian Ministry of Health) 1996. *Manual do Multiplicador – Homosexual*. Brasília: Ministério da Saúde.
- Browning, Barbara 1996. The closed body. *Women & Performance: a Journal of Feminist Theory* 8(2): 1-18.
- Burns, E. Bradford 1993. *A history of Brazil, third edition*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Câmara da Silva & Cristina Luci. 1993. "Triângulo Rosa: a busca pela cidadania dos Homossexuais." Master's Thesis, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro.
- Costa, Jurandir Freire. 1992. *A inocência e o vício: estudos sobre o homoerotismo*. Rio de Janeiro: Relume-Dumará.
- Daniel, Herbert. 1989. *Vida antes da morte/Life before death*. Rio de Janeiro: Jabotí.
1993. The Bankruptcy of Models: Myths and Realities of AIDS in Brazil. In *Sexuality, Politics and AIDS in Brazil: In Another World?*, Herbert Daniel & Richard Parker, 33-47. London & Washington D.C.: The Falmer Press.
- Daniel, Herbert & Richard Parker. 1990. *AIDS: a terceira epidemia*. São Paulo: Iglu Editora.
1993. *Sexuality, politics and AIDS in Brazil*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Darwin, Charles 1985. *The expression of the emotions in man and animals*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Duncan, Nancy 1996. Renegotiating gender and sexuality in public and private places. In *Bodyspace: destabilizing geographies of gender and sexuality*, edited by Nancy Duncan, 127-45. London: Routledge.
- Fernandes, Rubem Cesar. 1994. *Privado porém público: o terceiro setor na América Latina*. Rio de Janeiro: Relume-Dumará.
- Freud, Sigmund 1950. *Totem and taboo*. New York & London: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Fraser, Nancy 1997. *Justice interruptus: critical reflections on the "postsocialist" condition*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Galvão, Jane. 1985. "AIDS: a 'doença' e os 'doentes'." *Comunicações do ISER* 4:42-47.
1992. AIDS e imprensa: um estudo de antropologia social. M.A. Thesis, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Antropologia Social do Museu Nacional da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro.
1997. As respostas das organizações não-governamentais brasileiras frente à epidemia de HIV/AIDS." In *Políticas, Instituições e AIDS: Enfrentando a Epidemia no Brasil*, edited by Richard Parker, 69-108. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor/ABIA.
- Green, James N. 1996. Beyond carnival: homosexuality in twentieth-century Brazil." Ph.D. diss., Department of History, University of California, Los Angeles.
1999. *Beyond carnival: homosexuality in twentieth century Brazil*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Honneth, Axel 1995. *The fragmented world of the social: essays in social and political philosophy*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
1996. *The struggle for recognition: the moral grammar of social conflicts*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

- Hubbard, Phil 2001. Sex zones: intimacy, citizenship and public space. *Sexualities* 4(1): 51-71.
- Klein, Charles H. 1994. Para onde caminham as ONGs na luta contra a AIDS. *HIVeaz*, 2:7-8.
1996. AIDS, activism and the social imagination in Brazil. Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan.
1998. From one "battle" to another: the making of a *travesti* political movement in a Brazilian City. *Sexualities*, 1:329-343.
1999. "The ghetto is over, darling": emerging gay communities and gender and sexual politics in contemporary Brazil. *Culture, Health, and Sexuality*, 1(3): 239-260.
- Kulick, Don 1998. *Travesti: sex, gender and culture among Brazilian transgendered prostitutes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lancaster, Roger 1998. Transgenderism in Latin America: some critical introductory remarks on identities and practices. *Sexualities* 1 (3): 261-274.
- Landim, Leilah (ed.). 1998. *Sem fins lucrativos: as organizações não-governamentais no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: ISER.
- (ed.). 1993. *Para além do mercado e do estado? Filantropia e cidadania no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: ISER/Série Textos de Pesquisa.
- Larvie, Sean Patrick. 1998. Managing desire: sexuality, citizenship and AIDS in contemporary Brazil. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago.
1999. Queerness and the specter of Brazilian national ruin. *GLQ* 5 (4): 527-558.
- MacRae, Edward. 1990. *A Construção da igualdade: identidade sexual e política no Brasil da "abertura."* Campinas, Brazil: Editora de UNICAMP.
1992. "Homosexual identities in transitional Brazilian politics." In *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America*, edited by Arturo Escobar and Sonia Alvarez, 185-203. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- .Moraes, Cláudia and Sergio Carrara. 1985a. "Um mal de folhetim." *Comunicações do ISER* 4:20-27.
- 1985b. "Um vírus só não faz doença." *Comunicações do ISER* 4: 5-19.
- Mott, Luiz. 1989. *O sexo proibido: virgens, gays e escravos nas garras da inquisição*. Campinas: Papirus.
- Nast, Heidi 1998. Unsexy geographies. *Gender, place and culture* 5(2): 191-206.
- Parker, Richard. 1994. *A construção da solidariedade: AIDS, sexualidade e política no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: ABIA, IMS-UERJ, and Relume-Dumará.
1996. "Empowerment, community mobilization, and social change in the face of HIV/AIDS." *AIDS* 10(suppl 3):S27-S31.
1999. *Beneath the equator: cultures of desire, male homosexuality and emerging gay communities in Brazil*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Parker, Richard and Veriano Terto, Jr. (eds). 1998. *Entre homens: homossexualidade e AIDS no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: ABIA.
- Rito, Lucia 1998. *Muito prazer, Roberta Close*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Rosa dos Tempos.
- Scott, James 1990. *Domination and the arts of resistance: hidden transcripts*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy 1992. *Death without weeping: the violence of everyday life in Brazil*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Scherer-Warren, Ilse and Paulo J. Krischke (eds.). 1987. *Uma revolução no cotidiano: os novos movimentos sociais na América Latina*. São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky 1993. Queer performativity: Henry James's 'Art of the novel'. *GLQ* 1(1): 1-16.
- Seidman, Steven 1997. *Difference troubles: queering social theory and sexual politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Silva, Hélio R.S., and Cristina de Oliveira Florentino 1996. A sociedade dos travestis: espelhos, papéis e interpretações. In *Sexualidades brasileiras*, edited by Richard Parker and Regina Maris Barbosa. Rio de Janeiro: Rene Dumará.
- Skidmore, Thomas E. 1988. *The politics of military rule in Brazil 1964-85*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Taylor, Charles 1992. *Multiculturalism and the "politics of recognition"*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Terto, Jr., Veriano. 2000. Homosexuality and seropositivity: the construction of social identities in Brazil. In *Framing the sexual subject: the politics of gender, sexuality and power*, edited by Richard G. Parker, Regina Maria Barbosa, and Peter Aggleton. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Terto, Jr., Veriano, Richard Parker, Muriel, Katia Guimarães, and Renato Quemmel. 1995. AIDS prevention and gay community mobilization in Brazil. *Journal of SIDA*, 49-53.
- Terto, Jr., Veriano, Edgar Merchán-Hamann, Kátia Guimarães, Maria Eugênia Lemos Fernandes, Murilo Mota, Vagner de Almeida, and Richard Parker. 1998. Projeto Homossexualidades: a prevenção de AIDS de homens que fazem sexo com homens no Rio de Janeiro e São Paulo. In *Entre Homens: Homossexualidade e AIDS no Brasil*, edited by Richard Parker and Veriano Terto Jr., 111-118. Rio de Janeiro: ABIA.
- Trevisan, João Silvério. 1986. *Perverts in paradise*. London: GMP Publishers.
- Vallinoto, Tereza Christina. 1991. "A construção de solidariedade: um estudo sobre a resposta coletiva à AIDS". Master's Thesis, Escola Nacional de Saúde Pública.
- Veneziani, Antonio e Riccardo Reim 1999. *I mignotti: vite vendute e storie vissute di prostitute, gigolò e travestiti*, seconda edizione. Roma: Castelvechi.
- Žižek, Slavoj 1999. *The ticklish subject: the absent center of political ontology*. Verso: London and New York.