

GLOBAL COMMUNITIES AND HYBRID CULTURES¹

Early Gay and Lesbian Electoral Activism in Brazil and Mexico

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Abstract: Scholars have recast debates on globalization by emphasizing both national actors' selective appropriation of transnational practices and their hybrid reinvention in national settings. Drawing on Nestor García Canclini's concepts of "global communities" and "hybrid cultures," I explore these debates by comparing gay and lesbian activists' first experiments in electoral activism in Mexico and Brazil, both occurring in 1982. The different electoral strategies that prevailed in each country drew on the transnational arena in different ways. To explain these differences, I consider the relative strength of competing sectors within heterogeneous social movement fields and their variable participation in competing global communities. The relative influence of these sectors and thus the relative salience of specific transnational practices, in turn, reflected each movement's embeddedness in broader opposition movements to authoritarian regimes. Finally, I argue that these practices should be read contextually, with attention given to their transformation and limitations in national settings.

In 1982, gay and lesbian activists approached the electoral arena for the first time in Latin America's two most populous countries, Brazil and Mexico. Both elections took place under authoritarian regimes during protracted transitions to formal democracy. While parallel disputes over partisan alliances had bitterly split both movements, two quite different electoral strategies ultimately coalesced. In Mexico's presidential and congressional race, activists mobilized around gay and lesbian candidates, forging a tight electoral alliance with the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT), a small Trotskyist party that, while electorally insignificant, played an important role in both homosexual liberation and feminist movements at the time. In Brazil's gubernatorial and legislative elections, on the other hand, most activists ultimately eschewed such a close alignment with any

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single party, approaching candidates and parties across the ideological spectrum with a set of demands they pursued in legislatures after the race. Both movements' entry into the electoral arena reflected their embeddedness in broader movements for democratic change. Both also reflected certain activists' participation in the international arena, although in very different ways. This article does not seek to provide a full account of the conditions—both national and global—that permitted each electoral path to coalesce. Rather, it focuses on prevailing electoral strategies in 1982 as a window to explore how activists variably engaged in the global system, responding to national-level imperatives and constraints.²

Social movement theorists have paid growing attention to how international forces shape activism at the national level. Some scholars have argued that transnational institutions and norms regulating statecraft support national-level activists by expanding a repertoire of available tactics or providing the symbolic weight of precedent for particular demands (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Petchesky 2000; Ramirez, Soysal, and Shanaham 1997). Others have underscored how the changing global system—and specifically, in Latin America, a broad regional convergence on liberal democratic institutions and liberalized markets—has fundamentally transformed social movements, fostering their reconfiguration as narrowly defined interest groups or professionalized nongovernmental organizations (Alvarez 1997; Oxhorn 1998; Chalmers, Martin, and Piester 1997). This paper builds on these insights while challenging two common if often tacit assumptions about processes of globalization: that the global system can be understood in the singular—after all, there is only one world—and that symbolic and political practices appropriated from transnational repertoires are directly translatable at the national level (Tarrow 1998; McAdam and Rucht 1993).

To this end, I draw on the work of anthropologist Nestor García Canclini and postcolonial theorists to suggest two alternative understandings of activists' engagement with the international arena (Appadurai 1996; Chatterjee 1993, 1998; García Canclini 1995a, 1995b). First, without denying the growing weight of international norms in regulating tactics of governance across countries, I argue that beneath the level of state and international institutions, there is a much more heterogeneous and contested terrain, populated by various "global communities" participating in the transnational arena in *different* ways, though often overlapping and competing. Second, I suggest that political and symbolic practices appropriated from

2. As social movement activists approach the electoral arena they can draw on a repertoire of tactics, including running for office; seeking commitments from candidates or party leaders; organizing debates among candidates; or participating in campaigns. Here, I refer to the variable use of such tactics as "electoral strategies" or "electoral activism" (McCarthy, Smith, and Zald 1996).

this arena—whether at the level of social movement strategies or at the level of liberal democratic institutions, writ large—should not be read at face value, as uniform reproductions transplanted across national boundaries, but as embedded in societal settings and that attention must therefore be paid to processes of selection at work and to how such practices respond to contextual needs, often through hybrid reinvention.

Specifically, I argue that in both countries, the electoral strategies that coalesced in 1982 emerged not as the response of so-called “unitary rational actors” but within internally heterogeneous “social movement fields” through processes marked as much by conflict as by consensus (Armstrong 2002). Ultimately, prevailing strategies reflected both their principal advocates’ relative strength and influence within these fields and their variable engagement with the international arena. Their positions, however, were not fortuitous but shaped by broader transitions from authoritarian rule and the nature of progressive coalitions mobilizing against it in each country. In effect, these national factors also constituted a process of selection at work, determining the relative salience and use of particular transnational practices.

The argument in this piece proceeds in four sections. In the first, I briefly discuss the emergence of organized movements, the 1982 elections, and gay and lesbian electoral participation in more detail. The second section maps debates on partisan alliances within both social movement fields and discusses their embeddedness in broader movements for democratic change. The third section draws on García Canclini’s notions of global communities and hybrid cultures to examine how the principal advocates of each electoral path participated in the international arena in different ways, selectively appropriating, reinventing, and redeploying specific transnational practices to appeal to particular audiences at the national level. The conclusion draws theoretical implications for broader debates on transnationalism and democratization.

This piece draws on a broader comparative research project focusing on the relationship that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender activists in each country have established with political parties. This work involved approximately fourteen months of fieldwork in each country, which included over 100 interviews with activists, political party and state actors, movement allies, and opponents, again in each country, as well as extensive research in movement, state, and party archives. I should note that my use of the terminology “gay and lesbian” and “homosexual” is based on the political identities most activists used at the time, particularly in their state-directed efforts. This distinction is important to make in light of the literature on sexuality in Brazil and Mexico that emphasizes certain limitations of these categories and of identities structured around sexual object choice, a point to which I briefly return below (Carrillo 2002; Nuñez Noriega 1999; Carrier 1995; Parker 1999; Green 1999).

COMING OUT AND INTO ELECTIONS

In both Brazil and Mexico, homosexual liberation movements emerged as public actors in the course of the 1970s. In Mexico City, a few intellectuals led by theater director Nancy Cárdenas founded the first group in the country, the Homosexual Liberation Front (FLH), in 1971 after a Sears Robuck employee in the city was fired for his homosexuality. Like other groups to emerge in the decade (SexPol, 1974; Lesbos, 1977), the FLH met primarily as a consciousness-raising group, maintaining a limited public presence. It was only in 1978 that gay and lesbian activists participated in their first public marches in the country. On July 26, the Homosexual Revolutionary Action Front (FHAR), a new group largely comprising gay men and transvestites, named for a French homosexual liberation group known for its radical politics, participated in a march commemorating the Cuban Revolution. On October 2, it was joined by Lambda, a group of gay men and lesbians, and the lesbian group Oikabeth in a second march marking the tenth anniversary of the government massacre of student protestors in Mexico City's Tlatelolco Plaza. In both cases, activists thus marked not only a new public presence but a clear identification with the left. The three new groups that emerged that year would spearhead an early wave of activism that would last until the mid-1980s.

The year 1978 also saw the emergence of an organized movement in Brazil. That year, a group of intellectuals and academics from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, who had been brought together to collaborate on an anthology of Latin American gay fiction with San Francisco's Gay Sunshine Press, founded *Lampião da Esquina*, an alternative newspaper that sought to cover topics of interests to gays and lesbians in particular as well as other "minorities." The same year, activists in São Paulo founded Somos, the country's first homosexual liberation group. Two years later, most of the women in it split to form the country's first independent lesbian organization, the Autonomous Lesbian Feminist Group (GALF). By this time, the movement had reached an early peak, with over twenty groups throughout the country, though it too would suffer a decline by the mid-1980s. Between both movements' emergence as public actors in 1978 and activists' first broad-based efforts to approach the electoral arena four years later, the question of alliances with political parties had provoked quite heated debates.³

3. While 1982 marked the first time broad-based movements engaged in electoral activism in each country, it was not the first election in which the question of homosexuality was raised. In 1978, a single candidate ran unsuccessfully for federal deputy in Pernambuco, Brazil on a platform of homosexual rights. In Mexico, Victor Amezcua Fragoso, the manager of a transvestite theater troop, unsuccessfully sought a candidacy for federal deputy with the ruling PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) in 1979, with actress Veronica Castro as his runningmate.

In both countries, the elections that year marked a significant moment not only for the movements but for a broader democratic opposition to authoritarian regimes. In Brazil, it was the first election to be held under the multiparty system with which the military government had replaced the earlier bipartisan system (which it too had installed) in an effort to divide an increasingly effective opposition. The deceptively renamed Social Democratic Party (PDS), which supported the military government, and the Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB), once the only opposition party, faced three other parties for the first time, including the Workers' Party (PT), created in 1980.

Not unlike the gradual process of democratization taking place in Brazil, the Mexican government responded to social upheavals in the 1960s and 1970s through a combination of repression and piecemeal tinkering with electoral institutions to channel discontent. A series of electoral reforms, notably the Federal Law for Political Organizations and Electoral Processes of 1977, had paved the way for the legal registration of a number of new political parties on the left and their entry into electoral politics. By 1982, the United Socialist Party of Mexico (PSUM), the product of an alliance led by the former Communist Party, had resolutely embarked on the left's electoral and parliamentary turn, becoming the second largest opposition party. To the left, it faced the radical challenge of the recently registered PRT, whose presidential candidate that year Rosario Ibarra de Piedra, the founder of the country's first human rights organization whose own son had been "disappeared" in the government's dirty war against the left, captured some attention in the press as a symbolic challenge to the democratic ritual being enacted in the race. For broad opposition movements to authoritarian regimes, the elections revolved primarily around democratization. For many on the left and in civil society, the challenge was to expand this political project beyond the narrowly institutional and into the social, economic, and in this case sexual terrain. The question for gay and lesbian activists was how.

In Mexico, activists' principal electoral vehicle was an alliance with the PRT and the creation of a gay and lesbian commission to support the party and its gay and lesbian candidates. In January, activists from Mexico City's main groups held a press conference declaring their support for Rosario Ibarra and urging gay and lesbian citizens to vote. On February 20, the newly founded Rosario Ibarra Lesbian and Homosexual Support Committee (CLHARI) organized a meeting to discuss the election, attended by about 150 activists, at the Hotel Galeria Plaza.⁴ CLHARI would launch six activists for federal deputy: three for the post and

4. J. Martín Moreno Durán, "Apoyo del 'Tercer Sexo' a la Candidata del PRT," *La Prensa*, January 28, 1982; Leslie Serna, "'Estaré donde sea que haya un oprimido': RIP," *Bandera Socialista*, no. 220, March 1, 1982.

three as running mates. Two tickets ran in Mexico City and the other in Guadalajara, with one man and one woman on each.⁵

Participants in CLHARI approached the election not as a doorway into the state but as a stage for political theater to increase the movement's visibility and mobilize support. As candidate and Lambda activist Claudia Hinojosa declared at the fourth gay and lesbian pride march that year: "The CLHARI campaign is not a manual of electoral illusions because we never believed in the parliament as a liberatory space for gays and lesbians. We used the electoral arena to talk about ourselves; about the need to organize and participate."⁶ Electoral activities thus focused largely on campaign rallies and public protests. In a subsequent assessment of the effort, one of its principal architects and another candidate Max Mejia—a dual militant in Lambda and the PRT—cited among its achievements the establishment of new gay and lesbian groups in Nogales and Monclova as well as Mexico City; the organization of the first gay and lesbian public marches and the First Gay Cultural Week in Guadalajara; and activists' first experiment in mobilizing a nationwide campaign.⁷

The story was quite different in Brazil, where—despite most groups' relatively weak institutionalization and limited financial resources—activists approached the electoral arena more along the lines of an interest group (Rucht 1996). In this regard, most activists throughout the country rejected such a close alignment with any single party and approached candidates to some extent regardless of party affiliation or sexual orientation. While visibility was certainly a desired windfall, the strategy also sought political leaders' commitment to the movement's agenda after the race. Activists pursued this course through both local initiatives and what essentially became an informal, loosely coordinated nationwide network.

At the local level, for instance, the three main groups in São Paulo—GALF, Somos/SP, and Outra Coisa—approved a joint strategy, resolving: 1) not to support any candidate or party for the election to preserve the movement's autonomy; and 2) to present all the parties with a list of demands. Later, they organized a debate on homosexuality and feminism, attended by candidates across party lines. Activists from Rio de Janeiro's two main groups, Auê and Somos/RJ, likewise presented a list of demands to candidates, regardless of party affiliation (Míccolis 1983).

Two tools became particularly important in coordinating local efforts. First, activists directed a questionnaire to all the political parties, calling on

5. Another gay candidate also ran for federal deputy that year, with the newly created Social Democratic Party, also Trotskyist, but failed to mobilize much support within the movement.

6. Jorge Aguilera, "Cuarta marcha: 'Estamos en todas partes,'" *La cultura en México*, July 21, 1982.

7. Max Mejia, "Un primer balance de CLHARI," *Bandera Socialista*, no. 236, August 30, 1982.

them to take a stand on homosexuality. Ultimately, only the PT responded, having repudiated discrimination against homosexuals in its first national program. The second was a petition that the Grupo Gay da Bahia (GGB) had begun circulating the previous year at the annual conference of the Brazilian Society for Scientific Progress and activists around the country circulated among candidates before the election. The petition called on the federal government to suspend the application in Brazil of paragraph 302.0 of the World Health Organization's International Code of Diseases (ICD), which at the time still categorized homosexuality under the rubric of "Deviance and Sexual Disorders." It also called for a constitutional guarantee to protect citizens from discrimination based on sexual orientation. In fact, the petition thus laid the foundation for activists' two principal legislative campaigns of the 1980s.

In short, while activists in Mexico pursued a new left strategy of community organizing and visibility in the public square, Brazilian activists approached the election like an interest group, presenting a list of demands to candidates across party lines that they pursued through legislatures after the race. In one way or another, each strategy reflected its principal advocates' variable engagement with the international arena in response to local imperatives. Before considering the transnational dimension, therefore, I turn to how each strategy coalesced at the national level.

MAPPING SOCIAL MOVEMENT FIELDS

As I suggested above, the analytic category of "social movement" can be deceptively unifying, obscuring organizational, strategic, and ideological differences as well as differential access to resources and relations of power (Melucci 1996; Rucht 1996; Chalmers, Martin, and Piester 1997). The concept of "field" offers one useful way to take this internal heterogeneity into account (Armstrong 2002). Setting aside the simplifying assumptions of rationalist approaches, which generally assume the identities and interests of social movements to be unitary and given, such an approach permits a closer understanding of the processes and tensions giving rise to particular strategies, including national actors' variable participation in the transnational arena. Here, I briefly contextualize the prevailing electoral strategies discussed above within social movement fields in which what was "rational" was in fact contested. I then turn to national-level factors that shaped the course of these debates, in effect also determining the relative salience and use of particular transnational practices, as I elaborate in the following section.

The question of party alliances became, along with tensions between gay men and lesbians, the primary cleavage dividing both movements in the early 1980s. In both countries, the dispute pitted, on the one hand, "dual militants" linked to tiny Trotskyist parties—the PRT Homosexual

Work Commission (CTH) in Mexico and the Gay Faction of the Socialist Convergence in Brazil—and, on the other, activists rallying around the banner of movement autonomy, variably defined. Within both social movement fields, dual militants advocated a socialist orientation and a broader commitment to the “general (i.e. class) struggle.” More specifically, they pressed for the creation of nationwide umbrella organizations among activists and alliances with other progressive sectors. Such parallel proposals in some sense reflected a united front strategy borrowed from the partisan left as well as the sector’s vanguardist orientation, with its emphasis on consciousness-raising through community organizing, both nationally and transnationally.

In Mexico City, for instance, CTH dual militants, most of whom were active in Lambda, promoted gay and lesbian activists’ incorporation into progressive umbrella organizations like the National Front for the Liberation and Rights of Women, a feminist coalition, and the National Front Against Repression, Mexico’s first human rights coalition, led by Rosario Ibarra—both created in 1979. Within the movement, activists fostered alliances through the creation of umbrella organizations like the short-lived Front for Lesbian and Homosexual Civil and Political Rights. In a 1983 document, the CTH called the Front its top priority within the movement, “Precisely because it is through this Front . . . that we can intercede for the adoption of a feminist-socialist perspective in the HLM [Homosexual Liberation Movement].”⁸ Of course, CLHARI itself was perhaps the most extensive effort to encourage ties both among activists and across progressive sectors.

Broadly speaking, autonomists’ rejection of dual militants in both countries revolved around the style and substance of what they advocated; in other words, around the closely related questions of *how* and *what* the homosexual liberation movement should represent. Regarding *how* it should represent, many activists who emphasized precisely a disruption of social disciplines as a strategy for liberation saw leftist activists’ proposals as a bureaucratization and containment of liberation politics that undermined this effort. Drawing on feminist critiques, many lesbian activists in particular regarded party politics as merely an extension of the state, inevitably tainted by its hierarchical structures of patriarchal authority. Regarding *what* it represents, the debate revolved largely around the tradeoffs entailed by alliances: the degree to which activists should establish commitments to issues that many did not see as directly relevant to gays and lesbians as well as the sometimes extensive sacrifices that potential allies often demanded in the movement’s own agenda, particularly in terms of visibility. In Mexico City and São

8. PRT (Comisión de Trabajo Homosexual), 1983, “La línea del PRT en el movimiento de liberación homosexual y su instrumentación.”

Paulo in particular (where both the Socialist Convergence and the PT were the strongest), the conflict between Trotskyist dual militants and autonomists bitterly divided movements in the early 1980s. Indeed, in the former case, CLHARI itself produced a split that resulted in two gay and lesbian pride marches in 1982.

Despite these disputes, however, there were certain underlying assumptions on which both sectors agreed. First, both tended to prioritize a politics of visibility in the public square over state-directed efforts, although differences arose over the content of that politics. In essence, this reflected a common skepticism about the efficacy of existing state institutions in changing the relations of power structured around sexual stigma at the level of everyday life. Second, while autonomists generally resisted a close alliance with the partisan left, most were nonetheless relatively sympathetic with its broader goals and tenets and suspicious of parties of the right and center.

In Brazil, a few activists who challenged both of these assumptions emerged. On the one hand, they underscored the importance of approaching the state and political elite, particularly given the limited resources of a relatively small movement. On the other, they regarded partisan alliances more instrumentally than ideologically, as a vehicle to press a narrowly defined identity-specific, state-directed agenda. Two activists in particular played a significant role advancing this approach. One was anthropologist Luiz Mott, who founded the GGB in Salvador in 1980: today Brazil's oldest surviving gay group and one of its most important. The second was João Antonio Mascarenhas, a lawyer and independent activist originally from Rio Grande do Sul but residing in Rio de Janeiro, who played a major role coordinating efforts among activists nationwide during the election and following up on them in legislatures afterward. Indeed, he became one of the principal architects of the movement's state-directed strategy during the decade.

Embedded Fields in Democratic Transitions

To understand the processes of conflict and alliance-building among these sectors that ultimately produced two different electoral paths in 1982, each movement's embeddedness within a broader polity and movement for democratic change must be taken into account. One crucial difference shaping the course of these debates was in the electoral arenas themselves. Most important, while formal democratization in both countries would proceed through a piecemeal tinkering with electoral institutions in response to opposition gains, in 1982 this process had clearly proceeded further in Brazil. Indeed, the military government had replaced the bipartisan system in response to the opposition's mounting effectiveness in eroding its hold on power through electoral gains.

While a gradual electoral opening had already begun in Mexico, it would only gain significant momentum after the challenge by the National Democratic Front, led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, in 1988. In 1982, the hegemonic party system dominated by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was only beginning to erode; and beyond the rotation of elites linked to the ruling party, the function of elections was still largely a ritual performance of the regime's claims to democratic standing.⁹

Despite the undeniably tighter constraints in Mexico, it is important to keep in mind that alternative paths were not only thinkable but discussed in the country at the time. Beyond the debates mentioned above, one might ask more pointedly why the movement made little effort to approach the most important party on the left that year—the PSUM—particularly in light of activists' inroads into the Mexican Communist Party, its predecessor, which adopted a resolution on sexuality at its nineteenth congress in 1981 that was unprecedented for any communist party in the region and that the PSUM retained in its program. Indeed, this very question was raised at the Gay and Lesbian Cultural Week in Mexico City that year, prompting considerable debate among activists on their relations with political parties.¹⁰

Similarly, in Brazil, alternative strategies were not only thinkable but tried. Indeed, a few gay candidates ran that year. While most steered clear of the movement and did not run as openly gay, São Paulo State Assemblyman João Baptista Breda (PT; formerly MDB) was running for reelection. After being "outed" during his term, Breda had proven a public ally for activists, for instance, calling unprecedented public hearings on a wave of massive police raids targeting homosexuals. His campaign could certainly have proven an effective vehicle for the kind of symbolic politics taking place in Mexico, and indeed, a few activists linked to the PT did participate in it, suggesting that alternatives were possible. The campaign, however, never fostered the kind of broad-based mobilization represented by CLHARI, as reflected in

9. In Brazil's elections for the Federal Chamber of Deputies, for instance, the military's PDS and the opposition PMDB would capture 43.2 percent and 43.0 percent of the valid votes, respectively, with the rest going to the populist Democratic Labor Party (PDT, 5.8 percent); the resurrected Brazilian Labor Party (PTB, 4.5 percent); and the PT (3.6 percent). By the admittedly questionable official results in Mexico, the PRI and the PAN (National Action Party) captured 69.3 percent and 17.5 percent of the votes for the federal chamber respectively. The PSUM became the second largest opposition party, garnering 4.4 percent of the votes, with remaining votes distributed among several smaller parties, including 1.3 percent for the PRT (Brazil: 1982 Legislative Election, <http://www.georgetown.edu/pdba/Elecdata/Brazil/legis1982.html> and Mexico: Resultados Electorales para la Cámara de Diputados, 1961–91 <http://www.georgetown.edu/pdba/Elecdata/Mexico/mex61-91.html>. *Political Database of the Americas*. Georgetown University.)

10. Braulio Peralta, "José Ramón Enriquez: Debe ser autónomo el movimiento homosexual," *Uno mas uno*, June 24, 1982.

the resolution by the city's principal groups refusing to make any endorsements.

The different political opportunities opened by electoral institutions in each country undeniably shaped gay and lesbian electoral participation that year. Clearly, for instance, activists in Brazil would not have embraced a strategy of approaching candidates across party lines were there not candidates across party lines who could be approached. For the purposes of this discussion, however, I would highlight these arrangements' impact less in terms of the electoral opportunities they opened and more in terms of how they shaped the political culture of the broader progressive alliances pressing for democratic change, alliances within which gay and lesbian social movement fields in each country emerged and participated.

In Mexico, the ruling party's authoritarian hold on power was opposed on the right by the National Action Party (PAN) and on the left by a relatively small community of social movement activists, progressive journalists and intellectuals, and leftist party militants. Beyond the fact that the PAN was an unlikely ally for gay and lesbian activists given its roots in the Catholic Church and its socially conservative base, the divided opposition reinforced a tight-knit though internally diverse ideological community on the left of the ruling party, within which debates on sexuality and gender emerged in the country, particularly in the capital, in the 1970s. In Brazil, on the other hand, the right-wing military regime was opposed by a broader, more ideologically diverse though more politically unified democratic front encompassing sectors ranging from Marxists to centrist liberals and even old-line political bosses, and although many gay and lesbian activists, including many autonomists, identified with the left, the movement overall reflected this relatively greater ideological heterogeneity. In both cases, social movement fields' embeddedness within these variably constituted democratic alliances implied that the former to some extent shared the terms of debate and ideological range of the latter.

For dual militants in Mexico, this meant there was a more receptive audience to a proposed electoral alliance with the PRT, even among autonomists participating in CLHARI. In other words, dual militants retained a relatively greater influence in 1982. This responsiveness in part reflected the greater salience of a Marxist discourse in the movement overall and the relative prioritization of a symbolic logic of representation that was more about "presenting who we really are" (or would like to be) for the purposes of community organizing than about gaining a foothold in the state. Indeed, I would argue not only that this shared logic of symbolic representation reflected the movement's embeddedness within the left, but also that it helps to explain activists' embrace of the PRT, even to the exclusion of other leftist parties less forthcoming in

their support, as alliances had to be *thick* with ideological consistency; not *thin* with conjunctural strategy.

In contrast, while in Brazil dual militants linked to the Socialist Convergence had played a prominent role in the early years of the movement in São Paulo, their participation and influence had declined substantially by 1982. This was partly due to the tiny party's reorientation away from the student sector and toward workers after it entered the PT as an organized current, but it also reflected the fallout of rancorous divisions surrounding the question of autonomy, culminating at the First Meeting of Brazilian Homosexuals in São Paulo in 1980. By 1981, the movement in that city had fractured into eight to ten tiny groups, some of which formed an umbrella collective called the Autonomous Homosexual Movement (MHA). The broader political fallout of the split was that the question of autonomy, which for many became a standard against which to gauge activism, became more significant. Indeed, Mascarenhas strongly criticized São Paulo activists' resolution on autonomy, arguing that their refusal to make any endorsements reflected a basic misunderstanding of the tit-for-tat nature of electoral politics under representative democracies: a division that, again, underscores the heterogeneous perspectives of activists working together that election.¹¹

In short, the different electoral paths taken in 1982 grew out of processes of conflict and coalition-building within heterogeneous social movement fields. In Brazil, many autonomists, while somewhat skeptical about the efficacy of state-directed efforts, worked together with activists advocating the importance of a state-directed agenda, giving these efforts geographic scope. In Mexico, the CTH—and the left more broadly—retained a greater influence within the movement, garnering the support of many autonomists who participated in CLHARI.

I should note that the literature on social movements in the region has focused some attention on the question of autonomy (Vargas 2002; Ray and Korteweg 1999). While this literature has certainly contributed to our understanding of tensions within social movements and the potential pitfalls of alliances with parties or the state, it has often echoed debates among activists themselves on whether or under what circumstances autonomy is good or bad. The discussion above suggests that such qualifications may obscure a level of politics by presuming and naturalizing a unitary rationality that should itself be regarded as a political outcome. On the one hand, it points to autonomy as itself a contested category, even among its advocates. On the other, it links the fate of *competing* "rationalities" to broader processes of formal democratization; processes,

11. João Antônio Mascarenhas, Rio de Janeiro, to Antonio Carlos Tosta, São Paulo, 6 July 1982, no. 228/82, Edgard Leuenroth Archive, University of Campinas (hereafter referred to as AEL-UNICAMP).

moreover, with a transnational dimension that should likewise not be regarded as politically neutral. I now turn to how prevailing electoral strategies in 1982 reflected their principal advocates' variable engagement with the international arena and to how the conflicts discussed above also, in effect, produced variable imprints on globalization.

GLOBAL COMMUNITIES AND HYBRID CULTURES

Focusing on the global market, García Canclini (1995a) posits an international system populated by multiple global communities of "interpretive consumers" of symbolic practices. He imagines one community consuming a given set of cultural products (Brahms, Cortazar, and Sting), for instance, and another consuming another set (Julio Iglesias, Alejandra Guzman, and Venezuelan soap operas). Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, such patterns of consumption can be linked to the variable constitution of these communities' status or identity. The implication is a certain identification of communities across national boundaries, constituted by the consumption of shared repertoires, themselves understood as plural.

By noting the interpretive dimension of this consumption, however, García Canclini cautions against reading national actors as passive recipients of "foreign ideas." In this regard, he underscores not only a process of selection at work in the appropriation of particular practices but also their reinvention in national settings. In these settings, "culture" is consequently understood as a hybrid terrain, where particular actors combine transnational practices with local ones, reinventing them to suit their needs. While blurring the line between the national and the foreign, this approach does not imply that either hybrid cultures or global communities are free of power asymmetries, exclusions, or conflict. Rather, it provides an analytic approach that frames globalization as a contested and polyvalent process, focusing attention on what practices are appropriated, by whom, and to what effect.

From Social Movement Fields to Global Communities

Reading "consumption" broadly and expanding the notion of community to encompass production and political participation, we can imagine different sectors in social movement fields participating in the global system in *different* ways, though overlapping and competing. The electoral strategies that came to prevail in each country reflected their principal advocates' variable participation.

In Brazil, Mascarenhas and Mott, in particular, established early contacts with activists abroad that had a significant impact on the overall movements' subsequent trajectory. Particularly important on the eve of the election were contacts with European activists linked to the International

Gay Association, or IGA (today, the International Lesbian and Gay Association [ILGA]). At the time, for instance, several groups in Brazil had established “twinning” partnerships with European counterparts, who provided information and, on rare occasions, limited funding.¹²

In a 1982 letter to an activist in Norway, Mascarenhas described his efforts to coordinate an informal nationwide network of activists, drawing on these contacts:

I elaborated a very ambitious and time-consuming plan that I am carrying out. First, I translate the most important news I find in the newspapers I receive (*Gay News*, *Le Gai Pied*, *Fuori!*, *The Body Politic*), and I forward them to the eight [most active] gay groups, as some material I receive from European friends. Second, in long letters and long-distance calls, I discuss the goals I think most meaningful for the Brazilian Gay Liberation [sic] and I say how I suppose they can be attained, and what I imagine [are] the best tactics to employ. Third, I try to act as a cheerleader and a catalyst also to infuse them [with] hope and enthusiasm. Fourth, I strive to form a national gay circuit. To do this, the bits of news I receive from a group I send to others to foster a sense of belonging; besides, when I write to a group, I mail copies of my letter to the others, so all examine the same subject almost simultaneously.¹³

Interestingly, the letter went on to cite winning the support of the centrist PMDB as a central goal that election year, one that more left-leaning activists clearly did not share. In another letter, for instance, Mascarenhas responded to a Somos/SP leader’s repudiation of a fellow activists’ joining the (reformist) party:

As I see it, even for tactical reasons, we should hope that Brazilian *bichas* (queens) vote for more than one party, as we would thus have more congressmen seeking to please us. This, in fact, is what happens in the United States (where there are gay associations in the Democratic Party and gay associations in the Republican Party); in Great Britain (Labour and Conservative Parties); and in Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Spain.¹⁴

The statement is noteworthy not only because it justifies a strategy of crossing party lines against more left-leaning sectors of the movement but because it does so by citing a specific transnational model, in effect affirming the narrowly identitarian, rights-based approach of a liberal interest group.

Such linkages with the transnational arena were reflected more specifically in the two main tools used to coordinate electoral efforts that year among activists around the country: the survey sent to political parties and the petition against the World Health Organization’s ICD

12. João Antônio Mascarenhas to gay and lesbian groups, 26 December 1981, AEL-UNICAMP.

13. João Antônio Mascarenhas, RJ, to Karen-Christine Friele, Oslo, Norway, 29 March 1982, no. 160/82, AEL-UNICAMP.

14. João Antônio Mascarenhas, RJ, to Luzenário Cruz, SP, 21 December 1981, AEL/UNICAMP.

Paragraph 302.0. Mascarenhas received the former from the Scottish Homosexual Rights Group, which was linked to IGA, adapting it from a global survey of parties promoted by the association.¹⁵ Mott began circulating the latter the same year that the Council of Europe approved Resolution 756, calling on the WHO to eliminate the reference. When the Federal Medical Council finally suspended the paragraph's application in the country in 1985, Mascarenhas noted that Brazil followed Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden in this ruling.¹⁶

If the electoral strategy that came to prevail in Brazil reflected its principal advocates' participation in a global community in very specific ways, CLHARI, in its own way, reflected its proponents' parallel participation in a different one. Broadly, such a strategy cannot be understood without taking into account the transformation of the Marxist left internationally and the participation of the PRT (and thus the CTH) within it. More specifically, in the late 1970s, the United Secretariat of the IV International, the Trotskyist current to which the PRT belonged, promoted a global discussion of women's liberation among its sections, leading to the adoption of a resolution on the issue in 1979. The resolution challenged many dogmas of the Marxist left prevailing in Mexico (and internationally) at the time, notably the privileging of class as the pivotal cleavage driving history to the exclusion of the so-called "specific struggles." The resolution instead framed the fight against sexism as a necessary component of a broader revolutionary project, concluded that women's liberation could not be reduced to class, and called for the elimination of laws criminalizing homosexuality and discrimination more broadly.¹⁷

Within the PRT, the resolution served as an important reference point for militants raising questions of gender and sexuality. Hence in 1978, when a tiny group of militants first raised the idea of organizing the CTH, their founding document stated: "We have taken the initiative of this political work, departing from the experiences—of which, incidentally, we know little—of the IV International."¹⁸ Likewise in 1983, when the party's Central Committee approved a resolution on homosexual liberation, unprecedented at the time for any party in Latin America, it rooted this position in the

15. International Gay Association (IGA), "Political Parties: World Survey 1981," AEL-UNICAMP; João Antônio Mascarenhas, Rio de Janeiro, to Peter Ashman, Essex, England, 26 January 1982, no. 51/82, AEL-UNICAMP.

16. João Antônio Mascarenhas, "Comunicado no. 1/85 do Triângulo Rosa: A campanha contra o código 302.0, histórico e consequências," Rio de Janeiro, 25 March 1985, AEL-UNICAMP.

17. "Resolución del Secretario Unificado de la IVa." Internacional, 1978: *Revolución Socialista y la Lucha por la Liberación de la Mujer*, Mexico, D.F.: Folletos Bandera Socialista, no. 59.

18. PRT and Lambda members, Untitled Document, 1978 (No author identified other than militants of the PRT and Lambda), mimeo in author's possession.

crisis of Marxism of the 1960s and the subsequent development of the IV International as “the first [international] Marxist organization not only to understand but to adopt the liberation of women and sexual liberation as an intrinsic part of the socialist revolution.”¹⁹ To the extent, therefore, that an international current incorporated issues of gender and sexuality as meriting attention on their own terms, albeit within a broader project of social transformation, national actors could draw on these developments to bolster their position at home.

From Global Communities to Hybrid Cultures

But the deployment of transnational practices should not be read as a mere replication of “foreign” ideas. Rather, attention must be paid not only to the variable selection of particular practices but to their specific application and possible reinvention at the national level. For the purposes of this discussion, moreover, it is important to keep in mind that the dynamics of “globalization” at work in the early 1980s were occurring at two significant and interrelated levels. If on the one hand, we find certain tools for social movement activism crossing national boundaries, these developments must be read in the context of a broader regional convergence on liberal democratic institutional norms as “the only game in town” (Linz and Stepan 1996). At both levels, one should be attentive to the uses, transformation, and limitations of transnational practices in national settings.

Again, gay and lesbian activism emerged in the course of formal democratic transitions in both countries. In different ways, the electoral processes underway in 1982 were thus constrained not just by institutional shortfalls—electoral fraud, for instance—but by the relatively shallow penetration of liberal democratic institutions more generally, given their embeddedness in highly skewed arrangements of power in the private sphere. Indeed, perhaps one of the most remarkable aspects of early gay and lesbian activism in both countries was that activists were fully aware of these limitations but were nonetheless able to take advantage of the institutional opportunities available to them, if at times for strictly symbolic ends.

Interestingly, the possibilities and limitations of the liberal democratic institutions being implanted in Brazil were addressed quite explicitly by one of the chief architects of the movement’s state-directed efforts. At around the time of the election, Mascarenhas directly responded to the assertion that the experiences of gay and lesbian movements in advanced industrial countries were irrelevant to Brazil, given its vastly

19. Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores. 1983. “Liberación homosexual: Un análisis marxista.” Special issue, *Bandera Socialista*, no. 91.

different socioeconomic reality. He countered that those making such arguments were forgetting the crucial reality of class in Brazil, which made these experiences relevant, at least for some. Specifically, recalling historic arguments about “dual societies” in the country, Mascarenhas mentioned two important distinctions between the roughly 10 percent of the population comprising the middle and upper class and the rest of society.

First, he noted differences at the level of sexual identity itself. In an article entitled “The Third World and the Gay Liberation Movement” that he prepared for the Third Annual IGA Conference in 1981, Mascarenhas thus discussed differences in the organization of sexual practices in the country and the variable identities, prohibitions, and permissions attached to them across class lines:

Prejudices against homosexuals are a middle-class phenomenon in Brazil. The upper class does not care about them, and the working class’s sexual behavior, at least in large cities, is completely different. Very often, single urban workers are bisexual, and maintain a very masculine demeanor. When they have homosexual relations, with some frequency, they play both roles, but they do not think that this way of behaving makes them homosexuals. For them, homosexuals are those who have an effeminate demeanor. I would say that Brazilian workers have a truly revolutionary lifestyle. . . . For them, sex is something that you do and appreciate; not something to discuss. It therefore makes no sense for them to join gay liberation. . . . The only people in Brazil who might therefore be interested in the movement come from the middle class, those who suffer deeply from stigma and whose income allows them to face the problem politically.²⁰

The Brazilian middle class, he went on to argue, shared more in common with the European middle class than the regions’ respective working classes, and it was precisely consumption of this shared cultural repertoire that made the latter’s experiences relevant. But class divisions cut across more than sexual identity. Indeed, in Mascarenhas’s view, they cut across the very model of liberal democracy taking root in the nation, where the specter of a dual society again emerged. The 90 percent of Brazilians who were working class and poor, he wrote an activist in England, “do not bother with existing laws, as they [see] them—and correctly—as products of a world they do not share. Sad but true.”²¹

The middle and upper classes’ participation in the project of liberal modernity, whatever its limitations, also explained the strategic relevance of an international toolkit in 1982. Noting the elite origins of the country’s political leaders, Mascarenhas underscored two strategic uses of this

20. João Antônio Mascarenhas, “O Terceiro Mundo e o Movimento de Liberação Gay,” IGA Third Annual Conference—Agenda and Papers. Newsletter 81–1, Original manuscript, Grupo Gay da Bahia Archive.

21. João Antônio Mascarenhas, Rio de Janeiro, to Peter Ashman, Essex, England, no. 169/82, 5 April 1982, AEL-UNICAMP.

shared repertoire in appealing to them. First, it offered politicians the symbolic security of precedent: "For Brazilian politicians, homosexuality is at best a delicate matter; at worse, a burning one. They fear mainly to be ridiculed for endorsing gay rights, and they feel relieved when they see they are not supposed to do anything new, as before them, Oslo, Strasbourg, and Paris took the initiative." Second, he argued, Brazilian political elites' albeit subordinate participation in a transnational liberal project laid the groundwork for an effective counter-stigmatizing discourse: "These people are quite aware of human rights, even when they do not like to hear about them, and they do not like to be considered backward. For this bracket, Europe is very important as they suffer what we call 'cultural colonialism,' and of course Brazilian gays must take advantage of this."²²

Many activists at the time would no doubt have balked at such an assessment of the movement's limitations, and indeed, a number of questions can be raised about Mascarenhas's arguments. Undoubtedly, for instance, he underestimated the sexual stigma experienced outside the middle class, if sometimes organized around different constructions of sexual identities, and indeed class differences were reflected within the movement itself at the time. The two main groups in Rio de Janeiro, Auê and Somos/RJ, for instance, met in the northern and southern zones of the city and reflected the relatively working and middle class populations of each, respectively. Likewise, whatever the undeniable limitations of the country's formal democratic institutions, the results of the movement's state-directed efforts (like other aspects of Brazilian democracy) have in some instances penetrated beyond the 10 percent he envisioned. Still, it is worth underscoring that one of the principal architects of the movement's state-directed strategy in the 1980s understood, on the one hand, the contextual limitations of the formal democratic model being implanted in the country and thus of his own efforts, and on the other, its symbolic appeal as rooted in a transnational project of liberal modernity, which could be turned to the movement's advantage by playing on the political elite's aspirations to the status it conferred.

With regard to Mexico, the salient difference in each movement's relationship with the transnational arena has less to do with the question of access to international repertoires, which at least some activists in both countries had, and more to do with what was selectively drawn from these repertoires and how it was transformed and applied. In this regard, one former PRT Central Committee member who spearheaded early debates on gender in the party recalls the importance of the IV International in pressing for an opening in Mexico:

The International was a very important factor in our achieving a feminist position in the party as a party [and in] achieving a position in favor of gay liberation as

22. *Ibid.*

a party. And this has to do with two things. It is not only the ideological strength of the International, and its importance as a reference point, but the fact that large sections of the International . . . had mass women's movements going on [in their countries], which we did not have. . . . We didn't have that bottom up push that said: look, you asshole, you might think this isn't important but we have 50 women outside screaming, so you better listen. We didn't have that. We had the International, which the [Communist Party] didn't have.²³

Again, activists turned to a transnational repertoire for a stock of symbolic capital to support their claims. But here too, this use was selective, responding to national actors' specific needs in appealing to particular audiences, and must be read in this light. After all, while the United Secretariat had a number of sections around the world, not all of them broached discussions on gender and sexuality. One factor that made the PRT different was that—not unlike other radical left parties around the world, including the Socialist Convergence—it reflected a generational shift within the left and the growing importance of students as leftist cadres. While certainly not without differences, students and youth activists would in fact become particularly important allies for gay and lesbian activists within the Mexican left during the decade, in part because both sectors were the primary targets of the massive police raids and official abuse commonplace throughout the country at the time. In this context, the IV International became an important tool because it responded to the specific needs of a current within the PRT that was appealing to a new and relatively more receptive audience. Given the absence of a mass movement noted above, its salience as a legitimizing frame was further magnified.

Finally, while the Communist Party indeed lacked the IV International as a reference, it is perhaps worth noting that a parallel story can be told regarding its own, more limited opening to homosexual liberation, which similarly drew on changes in the international Marxist left. The question was initially raised in the new party magazine *El Machete*. Its first issue, appearing in May 1980, included an interview on feminism and homosexuality with the noted public intellectual Carlos Monsivais, who had already played a central role raising debates on sexual politics in the country, particularly within the left. The militants linked to *El Machete* comprised a sector of the party associated with Eurocommunism and backed by long-time general secretary, Arnolando Martínez Verdugo. They later published several other stories on homosexual liberation and successfully pressed for a number of important changes at the party's nineteenth congress, including its resolution on sexuality. In Eurocommunism, they found tools to press both for the party's electoral and parliamentary turn and for a concomitant opening to "specific struggles"

23. Heather Dashner (Former PRT Central Committee member), in interview with author, Mexico City, 11 July 2000.

against more orthodox currents. In short, while Brazilian activists found tools in advanced capitalist countries they could use to appeal to the aspirations of a political elite across party lines, Mexican activists participated within a tight-knit community, more narrowly identified with the international left, and an entirely different set of tools and discourses became relevant.

CONCLUSION

Politically, the electoral strategies that came to prevail in 1982 established significant precedents for both movements. In Mexico, while activists have certainly tried other tactics in subsequent races, they have continued to rely more heavily on launching often symbolic candidacies with small left parties. In 1997, this strategy took a new turn when Patria Jiménez was elected the first openly lesbian federal deputy in Latin America, running with the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). Notably, Jiménez herself had been a CLHARI candidate, and she attained her position on the PRD candidate lists through its electoral alliance with the PRT. In Brazil, at least fifteen candidates elected that year had indicated some degree of support for the movement during the race.²⁴ Activists soon began approaching them as early doorways into the state, initiating a long trajectory of legislative activism. They too have tried other tactics in later races but have similarly continued to rely more on building networks of “sympathizers,” approaching candidates across party lines and regardless of sexual orientation.

Theoretically, the discussion has sought to contribute to broader debates on transnationalism and social movement activism in the context of democratization. With regard to the former, I have sought to explore how activists can participate in the transnational arena in different and even competing ways and how national-level factors can determine the relative salience and use of particular transnational practices. Departing from approaches that frame the global system in the singular, we can imagine a transnational arena that includes a number of competing, though overlapping global communities and processes of selection and adaptation at the national level, forming variable imprints on globalization. This understanding of the global system, moreover, opens new possibilities for a critical understanding of Latin America’s participation in a project of liberal modernity and of social movement activism in democratic transitions. Two final points can be made in this regard.

24. João Antônio Mascarenhas, RJ, Circular, no. 380/82, 8 December 1982, AEL-UNICAMP.

First, drawing on García Canclini's suggestion that participation in global communities can be constitutive of status or identity, the two electoral strategies that prevailed in 1982 ultimately framed the collective political identity of gays and lesbians in two very different ways: in Mexico, as a potentially revolutionary agent with a necessary commitment to broader structural change; in Brazil, as a rights-bearing minority group meriting representation in the liberal state. The point is worth making in light of the relationship sometimes drawn between the transition from Keynesian to neoliberal economic models and the transition from class-based, corporatist to more atomized forms of representation, including social movements, in the region (Oxhorn 1998; Chalmers, Martin, and Piester 1997). In Brazil in particular, the discussion above suggests that representation through the liberal formula of "rights-bearing individuals" preceded neoliberalism and is more closely associated with political rather than economic transformations. Needless to say, in the context of broader regime transitions and with the growing weight of transnational state regimes, the positions of global communities too has changed, both internationally and nationally, but an understanding of these processes as occurring in a plural and contested terrain also avoids reification of their effects as politically neutral or "rational."

Second, extending the notion of cultural hybridity to the political arena allows us to consider liberal democratic institutions' embeddedness in variably constituted relations of power in the private sphere. Optimistically, the discussion suggests a role for formal democratic institutions, even when ineffective in terms of their own purported ends. It is a symbolic role that the partisan opposition in both countries clearly used to its advantage in gradually eroding the "legitimacy" of authoritarian regimes, as the literature on democratization in the region has widely documented. This article points to a parallel and embedded process at the level of social movement activism and a fledgling gay and lesbian politics: to the extent that elections in regime transitions still defined the symbolic boundaries of "legitimate" public debate, these boundaries could still be contested.

Pessimistically, however, the discussion points not only to possibilities but more importantly to limitations. In this regard, whatever qualifications one might make to Mascarenhas's arguments about the class constraints on the democratic institutions taking root in Brazil, there is a sizeable literature from various corners suggesting that it contains more than a grain of truth. Along these lines, for instance, political scientist Guillermo O'Donnell (1999) has argued that the penetration of democracy in the region (and outside it) can itself be "mapped" on a sort of symbolic field through the institutional prism of citizenship, with areas marked in one color on this topography implying the full enjoyment of the rights of citizenship and those marked in another, that these rights exist only

on paper. Extending this discussion to social movement activism, this article thus suggests how activists' state-directed efforts might, perhaps not surprisingly, be conditioned by these maps.

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