

# Challenging National Heroes and Myths: Male Homosexuality and Brazilian History

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For many foreign observers, from Buenos Aires to San Francisco and Paris, Brazil is a tropical paradise where uninhibited and licentious Brazilian homosexuals are free to express sensuality, sexuality, or camp. Lenten Mardi Gras festivities have come to represent an alleged cultural and social toleration for homosexuality and bisexuality in that country.<sup>1</sup> Apparent permissiveness during Carnival, so the stereotype goes, symbolizes a sexual and social regime that unabashedly accepts fluid sexual identity, including male-to-male sexuality.<sup>2</sup>

When Carnival costumes have been cast off and life returns to normalcy, a somewhat different picture regarding the acceptance and toleration of homosexuality in Brazil emerges. A May 1993 poll that interviewed a cross section of 2,000 Brazilian men and women revealed persistent anxiety over homosexuality. While fifty percent confirmed that they had daily contact with homosexuals at work, in their neighborhood, or in bars and clubs which they frequent, fifty-six percent admitted that they would change their behavior towards a colleague if they discovered he or she were homosexual. One in five would drop all contact with the person. Thirty-six percent would not employ a homosexual, even if he or she were the best qualified for the position. And, of those interviewed, seventy-nine percent would not accept their son going out with a gay friend.<sup>3</sup>

Homophobia manifests itself in more violent ways as well. For almost two decades, Luiz Roberto Mott, an anthropologist and the founding president of Grupo Gay da Bahia, the country's longest-surviving gay-rights organization, has been collecting data about the indiscriminate murder of homosexual men, lesbians, and transvestites in Brazil. In 1996 he published the results of his

research, in conjunction with the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, in a volume entitled *Epidemic of Hate: Violations of the Human Rights of Gay Men, Lesbians and Transvestites in Brazil*. That study revealed the shocking statistic that "a homosexual is brutally murdered every four days, a victim of homophobia that pervades Brazilian society."<sup>4</sup> Many of those killed are sex workers, transvestites, or gay men who have picked up someone for a brief sexual escapade and end up victims of robbery and then sadistic murders.<sup>5</sup> Unidentified groups or individuals commit most of these homicides. In an update of Luiz Motts 1996 report, Grupo Gay da Bahia documented 130 murders of gays, transvestites, and lesbians in 1997, recognizing that these statistics were incomplete because they lacked information from many of Brazil's states. Of the reported murders, 82 were gay men, 42 transvestites, and 6 lesbians.<sup>6</sup> As a result of these on-going human-rights violations, in recent years more than a dozen Brazilian gay men have requested political asylum in the United States based on sexual orientation.<sup>7</sup>

The contradictory images of permissive Carnival festivities and murderous brutality are startling, yet the tensions between tolerance and repression, acceptance and ostracism are deeply embedded in Brazilian history and culture. Just as the pervasive myth that Brazil is a racial democracy obfuscates deep-seated patterns of racism and discrimination, so too the notion that "there is no sin below the equator" obscures widespread cultural anxiety about same-gender sexual activity in Latin America's largest country.

Paradoxical phenomena regarding same-sex eroticism and bonding abound. João do Rio, a noted turn-of-the-century journalist from Rio de Janeiro, was widely known to enjoy sex with other men. Enemies attacked his effeminacy in the press. Yet an estimated one hundred thousand residents of Rio de Janeiro came out to mourn his death in 1921.<sup>8</sup> In more recent years, Dener and Clodovil, prominent fashion designers; Clovis Bornay, the long-time champion of Rio's Carnival luxury costume contests; Rogéria, a drag queen famous in the 1960s and '70s; and the stunningly seductive transsexual Roberta Close, all have become public personalities. These feminine and effeminate figures, who embody the opposite of normative behavioral traits of virility and masculinity expected of Brazilian men, have found widespread popular acceptance and circulate comfortably among elite social circles. Their effeminacy and outrageous behavior, however, serve as a foil, representing the amusing but inappropriate model, *not* to be emulated. Women may embrace these kinds of celebrities as long as their sons or boyfriends manifest no similar comportment. Likewise, men may find drag stars to be alluring figures because they perform as perfect imitations of pervasive masculine stereotypes of the ideal woman. Scandalous queens or buxom beauties may

enjoy relative social acceptance, as long as they are *other* mothers' and fathers' sons. In many ways, they reinforce rather than upset the overall rigidly defined gender system.

When a family does discover that a son is gay, parents and relatives might come to tolerate that fact as long as he is not overtly effeminate and people outside of the family do not know. Often, a "don't ask, don't tell" policy is implicitly in place. It still is not unusual for a grown man to continue living at home, where he contributes to the family income and goes out with gay friends on the weekends, but never mentions a boyfriend or the details of his social life to his family. If he moves out to set up his own apartment in order to have more freedom and independence, he might still assist in covering family expenses. Relatives learn to suspend the perennial questions about girlfriends or marriage prospects in order not to hear too many details that might break this family truce enveloped in silence or threaten supplementary income provided by a single son. For so many other men, marriage and children, with homosexual escapades on the side, become the answer to constant social pressure to conform, have a family, and follow social norms.

### "Miss São Paulo"

At a recent visit to the Centro de Estudos Brasileiros at the University of São Paulo, I toured the art collection of Mário de Andrade (1893-1945), a leading figure of the modernist movement that debuted in São Paulo in 1922 and revolutionized Brazilian literary, artistic, and cultural production. Born to a lower middle-class family in the city of São Paulo, Andrade first worked as a piano teacher and journalist. He became one of the most versatile Brazilian writers of the twentieth century, producing poetry, short stories, and novels. Andrade also excelled as a music, art, and literary critic, as well as a folklorist, musicologist, and ethnographer. His collection of poems, *Paulicéia Desvairada* (Halucinating São Paulo), published in 1928, is the seminal statement of the modernist movement, and his novel *Macunaima*, appearing the same year and based on extensive research of Brazil folklore and popular culture, analyzes the Brazilian national character. The author also served as the Director of São Paulo's Department of Culture from 1935 to 1938.

Mário de Andrade remained very protective of his private life. In 1929 he severed contacts with Oswald de Andrade, another titan of the modernist movement and no relationship to the author, after Oswald publicly imputed Mário's effeminacy in the *Revista de antropofagia*, (Cannibalist Review), a literary supplement of the *Diário de São Paulo*. Referring to Mário de Andrade as "our Miss São Paulo, translated into the masculine," Oswald de

Andrade signed the article with the pseudonym Cabo Machado, in an allusion to a sensuous and nationalistic poem, "Cabo Machado" (Corporal Machado), that Mário de Andrade had written in 1926 about a soldier by that name.<sup>9</sup>

At the end of my tour of Mário de Andrade's art collection, the following interchange took place with the guide, a scholar of the modernist writer: "Could you tell me," I asked our docent, "why Mário de Andrade broke off relations with Oswald de Andrade?" "Who knows?," she responded vaguely. "Wasn't it because of the column published in the *Revista de antropofagia* in which Oswald called Mário 'Miss São Paulo?'," I queried. "Well, that might have been the straw that broke the camel's back," she admitted. "Why are you so interested in the subject?," she asked. I explained that I was completing a book on male homosexuality in twentieth-century Brazil. "And is Mário de Andrade going to be in this book?," she inquired rather anxiously. "Yes and no," I responded, adding: "Unfortunately, we don't know much about his private sex life." "I think that is just fine," she insisted. "I don't see any need to do research into his private life." I retorted: "But we know a lot about the private life of Oswald de Andrade. Writers always comment on the influence of his female lovers such as Tarsília do Amaral and Patrícia Galvão. Why not study the influence of Mário de Andrade's homosexuality on his artistic production?" At that, she sighed. "Well, perhaps you are right," and she quickly walked away.

Indeed, Mário de Andrade led a discreet private life. Although it is currently widely acknowledged that he experienced strong sexual attractions toward other men, few details have been published about this aspect of his life. Moacir Werneck de Castro, a member of a group of young bohemians who socialized with Mário de Andrade when he lived in Rio de Janeiro from 1938 to 1941, later recalled that he and his cohorts had no idea that Andrade had led a double life or was a homosexual. Evidently, rumors and comments about Mário's sexual desires did not accompany him to Rio de Janeiro. According to Moacir Werneck de Castro, Andrade would spend endless hours with this new generation of aspiring writers and intellectuals, savoring their company, while apparently never initiating any sexual contacts with his youthful colleagues. Yet in retrospect, when learning about Mário de Andrade's homoerotic desires, Castro recognized the profoundly homosexual content of some of his writing.

Only one of Mário de Andrade's short stories, "Frederico Paciência," deals rather directly with his own homosexuality. Written and revised many times between 1924 and 1942, it was published posthumously in 1947. The story describes the romantic friendship of two students (presumably one being the author) who drift apart without consummating their desires other than

through furtive kisses and affectionate embraces. The narrator expresses relief that the friendship has dissolved and the two are separated by distance as if to imply that he, therefore, does have to face his own homosexual feelings for Frederico Paciência. Although Mário de Andrade did not create a sick and pathetic protagonist, he nevertheless left the reader with the impression that it was far better to repress homoerotic feelings than to express them openly. In many ways, this short story paralleled the real life of the modernist writer who also attempted to contain his sexual desires for other men and shrouded his personal life in a veil of secrecy.

As the interchange with the docent and scholar at the Centro de Estudos Brasileiros reveals, the sexual orientation of certain Brazilian national figures, like Mário de Andrade, is still deemed irrelevant by most academics. On the other hand, the multiple heterosexual escapades of other writers, such as Oswald de Andrade, Jorge Amado, or Gilberto Freyre, are seen as key elements in unlocking the inner workings of their artistic or intellectual production.<sup>10</sup> The docent at the Centro de Estudos Brasileiros was merely reflecting a generalized notion about Brazilian gay men or lesbians, namely, "You can do whatever you want behind closed doors, as long as you don't tell anyone about it."<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, the walls between public image and private reality by and large still remain impenetrable when it comes to homosexuality. In recent years, the Brazilian gay and lesbian rights movement, interfacing with international notions about "coming out" and "discovering gay and lesbian heroes," has challenged this traditional mind set. For example, in 1995 Luiz Mott, a long-time gay activist and professor of anthropology, issued a statement on the three hundredth anniversary of the execution of Zumbi asserting that the Palmares *quilombo* leader might have been gay. In response, Mott's life was threatened and his house and property were vandalized. Whether or not one agrees with Mott's reasoning, methodology, or conclusions (and on the issue of Zumbi's homoerotic orientation, I tend not to agree with them), the point is that, with rare exceptions, Brazilian national heroes and myths are inextricably interwoven with notions of heteronormativity. In general, those public figures known to enjoy or desire same-sex eroticism live precarious lives in which their sexual desires must be cloaked in layers of discretion and obfuscation. Their enemies may use the knowledge or rumor of homoerotic transgressions to ridicule or marginalize them. On the other hand, their intimate circle of friends or followers will often protect their image from outside scrutiny, since an admission of their sexual proclivities might tarnish their public persona. To illustrate this point, I will describe some of the ways in which public manifestations of homosexuality were portrayed by the press in turn-of-the-century Rio de Janeiro and how one prominent figure from the

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city's elite, with decided homoerotic desires, was treated by his peers as he negotiated an unstable position between acceptance and intolerance. In doing so, I suggest that examining attitudes toward the "marginal" and transgressive sexuality may help us comprehend some of the inner workings of Brazilian society and its shared cultures.

## **The Crossroads of Sin**

A rich male homoerotic subculture has existed in Brazil's largest urban centers from at least the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In Rio de Janeiro, Praça Tiradentes, known during the Empire as the Largo do Rossio,<sup>12</sup> was the center of this demimonde. From as early as 1870, men seeking sexual liaisons with other men appropriated the park surrounding the equestrian statute of Brazilian Emperor Dom Pedro I that graced the center of the square. So much clandestine sexual activity took place in the *praça* that in 1870 a city administrator sent a communiqué to the head of local government operations about the situation. He complained that the municipal guard in charge of making the rounds in the plaza gardens had "abandoned those same gardens for most of the day to the perversity of boys and ill-intentioned people."<sup>13</sup> The area, however, continued as an open space for men to meet other men for socio-erotic ends. As a result, in 1878, the Secretary of the Court Police had to take more drastic actions, "seeing how there are individuals who go there at late hours to practice abuses against morality, forcing this Division to have patrols in those gardens, impairing the police from being in other places."<sup>14</sup> He directed the four entrances to the gardens in the plaza's center to be closed every night at midnight. Two weeks later, in response to another complaint that, in fact, the square was not being closed down as ordered, a government official assured the Chief of Police that the gardens were, indeed, being sealed off at night. Moreover, the night patrols issued a whistle warning to guarantee that no one would remain in the area past closing time.<sup>15</sup> Regardless of police surveillance and control of the area, men persisted in using the park as a venue for trysts with other men interested in sexual liaisons.

Stately buildings, in the process of being remodeled in the latest French architectural style, surrounded Praça Tiradentes. Since the streets next to the park were also the termini of streetcar lines, this public space bustled with movement. The plaza's strategic location encouraged an eclectic combination of theaters, newly-inaugurated motion picture houses, concert hall hosting musical reviews and vaudeville performances, cabarets, popular cafes, and bars. Bourgeois Rio attended the elegant and spacious São Pedro Theater,

while middle and working-class customers had an array of cultural, culinary, libational, and sexual distractions close at hand.<sup>16</sup>

Nestled among these establishments of public entertainment in the vicinity around the plaza, one could find brothels and boarding houses in buildings that had once served as expansive dwellings for elite families. The city's demographic imbalance in favor of single young men, especially immigrants, and the large number of poor women from the countryside and overseas favored this sexual traffic. Prostitutes ranged from high-class *francesas*, with the allure of their French origins, and recently arrived immigrants from Eastern Europe, known as *polacas*, to light-skinned Afro-Brazilian *mulatas*.<sup>17</sup> Middle and upper-class men, engaging in fleeting bohemian forays in this demimonde, could mingle with prostitutes in popular establishments like the Stadt Munchen bar and restaurant, and the Café Suiço, which were right off of the Plaza. If not satisfied with the crowd in these meeting places, Carioca males could also wander a few blocks away to seek camaraderie or carnal pleasures in another vibrant center of nightlife in the Lapa neighborhood. Store clerks, students, and modest public servants that were unable to pay for the sexual services of women who boasted a French birthright could still find lower-class *polacas* and *mulatas* working near Praça Tiradentes.<sup>18</sup>

Amidst the nightlife that surrounded the statuesque homage to Brazil's first emperor, in the darkened theaters under flickering lights of newfangled cinematographs, and on the benches and among the shrubbery in the park, men who sought out other men for sexual escapades took advantage of the loosened morals in this city zone to conduct their own procurement of pleasure. The mounted monarch continued to be a reference point for male-to-male sexual and social encounters. Rio chronicler Luiz Edmundo recalled a typical scene set in 1901: "After eight at night lads with feminine airs, who spoke in a falsetto voice, bit on cambric handkerchiefs and laid their sheepish eyes on the manly and handsome statue of Mr. Pedro."<sup>19</sup>

Both the public spaces and the varied entertainment options offered ample opportunities for men to congregate with others of like-minded sexual and social affinities. The half-dozen theaters, countless bars, cabarets, and music halls also employed some of these men as actors, dancers, singers, waiters, and service employees. A favorite meeting place for this crowd was the Café Criterium, located immediately across from the park, where "actors and young lads with high-pitched voices who wore rice powder make-up and rouge" socialized.<sup>20</sup>

In turn-of-the-century Brazil, the term *fresco*, with the dual meaning of both a fairy (or faggot) and something fresh, became a common double entendre used to poke fun at effeminate men or those assumed to engage in "passive" anal sexual encounters with other men. Moreover, *frescos* were

intimately associated with the Largo do Rossio. The term's multiple uses appeared in the *Dicionário Moderno* (Modern Dictionary), a slim tongue-in-cheek compilation of erotic and pornographic slang, published in 1903: "*Fresco*—adjective meaning cool weather, depraved due to modernization. Almost cold, mild, agreeable, that which is neither hot nor warm. That which is whimsical and breezy. One finds them in the hills and in the Largo do Rossio."<sup>21</sup> Not only is a space associated with the *fresco*, but the figure evokes a relationship between social degeneration and modernization, as if the process of urbanization and the transformation of traditional ways has produced same-sex erotic behavior.

The renovation of the Largo do Rossio during the urban renewal project at the beginning of the twentieth century provided one cartoonist the opportunity to link *frescos* to the plaza. An ink drawing and a sardonic poem entitled *Fresca Theoria (Requerimento)*—Fresh Idea [or Fairy's Idea] (Petition)—appeared in a 1904 issue of the magazine *O Malho*, which specialized in humor and political satire. In the cartoon, a man in a fashionable straw hat, flowery bow tie, short tight jacket, and busily-textured close-fitting pants stands with his buttock protruding, lending his figure an S-shape, the classical pose of women in turn-of-the-century drawings. His index finger is resting pensively on his chin as he ponders his new idea and the request that he is going to make to the city government. Behind him is a garden with the statute of Dom Pedro I in the background, an obvious reference to the Largo do Rossio. Since the recent relandscaping of the park had temporarily diminished access to the grounds for cruising and courting, the protagonist, represented by the artist as a male prostitute, has found himself out of work. The poem reads: "Given the cruel destruction / Of the Rossio of my dreams / The unemployed Muse, / Although in gloomy verses, / Will take a risk. / It is a rather hard shock / That constrains ones freedom / In this ungrateful profession, / And from the mayor of the city / I require compensation."<sup>22</sup>

The author of this poem associates the square with male effeminacy and streetwalking, as if sex between men could only take place if an exchange of money occurred. In the cartoon, the flashy fop even considers petitioning the government for some type of financial support because of the temporary unavailability of the plaza as a site to earn his keep. The stereotyped well-dressed dandy, who lacks manly comportment and entertains foolish ideas, is quickly identified with homosexual prostitution. One can assume that the middle-class readership of *O Malho*, who could afford to purchase this satirical magazine, understood the constellation of markers, which included effeminate body language and exaggerating raiment, that pointed to the ridiculed figure of the *fresco*.



The conflation of particular forms of dress, prostitution, exaggerated unmanly behavior, the term *fresco*, and the specificity of the Largo do Rossio as a privileged space for same-sex erotic adventures occurs in another cartoon from the same period, also published in *O Malho*. The drawing, entitled *Escabroso* (Unseemly), captures two men in conversation. One is a mature male, quite large, almost monstrous in size, with a goatee, walking cane, and a rough masculine appearance. The other figure, a man with a much smaller frame and a hint of a pencil-moustache, is stylishly dressed with a flower in his lapel. He coyly looks downward and holds a Japanese fan in his left hand. A curled pinky suggests effeminacy. His other hand caresses the edge of the fan. The more delicate man comments: "It's so hot. Neither cashew juice nor any other refreshment is enough, sir. I think that I go out every night in search of some place which is fresh [or cool]." To which his burly companion replied: "Won't the Largo do Rossio do?"<sup>23</sup>

Once again, a play on words allows the cartoonist to portray commonly held social notions about the *fresco* and his territoriality. The corpulent, masculine gentlemen is capable of classifying his shy and demurring friend and delegating him to an appropriate urban territory where he can cool down while warming up with some sexual adventure. The artist operates on the assumption that the average reader will know the slang term for an effeminate man and thus understand the double-meaning of his remark.

In many ways, the public forms of sociability employed by *frescos* paralleled normative heterosocial public interactions among the middle and upper classes during the Brazilian *belle époque*. Prior to the first decade of the twentieth century, the Carioca elite frequented Rua do Ouvidor, a narrow, half-mile long street in downtown Rio, lined with shops offering the latest in London and Parisian styles and other European luxury goods.<sup>24</sup> The 1905 inauguration of Avenida Central, the crown jewel of the early twentieth-century urban renovations, shifted fashionable social interactions to this wide boulevard that also connected to Avenida Beira-Mar, and thus linked Avenida Central to the southern neighborhoods bordering Guanabara Bay. In these three sites, well-to-do pedestrians displayed their latest foreign sartorial acquisitions by strolling along the streets and imitating the French *flâneur*.

The art of *flânerie*, or *footing*, as it was alternately called, involved meandering through the city to see and to be seen. Stopping to greet acquaintances, gossip with friends, or window-shop reflected a privileged social status. Wealth and certain professions enabled upper and middle-class men to spend leisure time in this seemingly purposeless endeavor. While poorer classes frequented these same city streets, their movements were linked to the necessities of work. The *flâneur*, on the other hand, had the time and

resources to enjoy the finer aspects of the modern city at a casual pace. Properly accompanied middle and upper-class women could also partake of this leisurely activity, as broad paved sidewalks replaced narrow pot-hole ridden streets and inadequate passage ways.<sup>25</sup>

Weaving along these fashionable spaces, young men and "decent" women could flirt with each other when appropriately accompanied or chaperoned. Friends could pass on the latest gossip or introduce an unattached cousin who might be visiting from the countryside or another city. Men who sought out other men for sexual adventures in public parks or along the fashionable avenues of downtown Rio could easily blend into the milling crowd of people browsing by store windows, stopping at cafes to discuss politics, or pausing at confectioneries for sweets. Just as two female friends might shop on Rua do Ouvidor and concurrently see which young lawyers or businessmen were out and about, or two students from the school of medicine might sip coffee while seeing which attractive daughters of the Carioca elite were enjoying some fresh air, so too *frescos* used this public forum to seek out new partners and adventures. Moreover, because men had considerably much more freedom to occupy the streets than did women, it would not be unusual at all for a single man to meander back and forth between the Largo do Rossio and Avenida Central or wait patiently on a park bench for a young lad to join him. While well-bred women would not venture out unaccompanied after sunset, *frescos* could readily roam the streets and parks of downtown Rio looking for sexual adventures well into the night.

### João do Rocio

Perhaps no one personified both the *flâneur* and the Carioca dandies more than the most famous *fresco* of turn-of-the-century Rio, Paulo Alberto Coelho Barreto, commonly known by one of his *noms de plume* as João do Rio.<sup>26</sup> This *belle époque* literary figure wrote eloquently about the art of *flânerie* in a collection of essays entitled *A alma encantadora das ruas* (The Enchanting Spirit of the Streets), which was originally published in 1908. In the introduction to the book, he described what it was to *flaner* or stroll: "To *flaner* is to be a vagabond and reflect, to be a fool and comment, and have the virus of observation linked to that of vagrancy. To *flaner* is to go about in the morning, during the day, at night."<sup>27</sup> This definition of the *flâneur* was somewhat different from the aimless strolling by Carioca high society down Rua do Ouvidor or Avenida Central. João do Rio's willingness to be a *flâneur* included exploring the city's poor neighborhoods, an endeavor certainly not the same as promenading in fancy attire in the exclusive downtown areas. His journalistic interest in investigating the city's exotic and dangerous spots at all

hours of the day and night as a modern-day roving reporter, however, produced imaginative vignettes of everyday life in turn-of-the-century Rio. Yet his urban meandering can be read as something more than that of the inquisitive correspondent seeking the next interesting story for an eagerly awaiting readership. João do Rio's decided sexual taste for other men leads one to speculate about multiple meanings behind his celebratory prose in favor of the art of metropolitan strolling. Although little is known about the particulars of his erotic adventures, his nocturnal wanderings through Brazil's capital in search of innovative journalistic material may have also afforded him the opportunity to enjoy the sexual company of the sailors, soldiers, and common people who were the subjects of his articles and essays.<sup>28</sup>

João do Rio was born in Rio de Janeiro to a middle-class family in 1881. He gained literary prominence at age twenty-three through a series of journalistic reports about Afro-Brazilian and other non-Catholic religious practices in the nation's capital.<sup>29</sup> His willingness to comb the city's hillside slums and visit poor and working-class suburbs in order to provide sensationalist accounts of the capital's demimondes also revolutionized Carioca journalism, and he is credited with being Brazil's first modern reporter. During his lifetime, he produced over 2,500 newspaper articles, short stories, and essays on urban life.<sup>30</sup> At age twenty-nine, João do Rio won election to the Brazilian Academy of Letters, an honor he campaigned to receive with single-minded determination.

His meteoric rise to the highest-ranking literary circles was not easy. João do Rio faced several obstacles. His mother was of Afro-Brazilian origins. He was principally a journalist and reporter, as opposed to a novelist or poet. And, he aspired to enter the closed circle of Brazil's *letrados* at a young age. These elements were not automatic barriers to the Academy. After all, Machado de Assis, the founding president of the Brazilian Academy of Letters, was himself a mulatto of humble origins, and other journalists had been admitted to the society prior to João do Rio. Nevertheless, racism among the elite, the notion that success based on journalism did not quite match other literary endeavors, and his youth made his entry into the hallowed halls of high culture complicated. More importantly, however, was the fact that he was known to be a *fresco*. According to one biographer, Brazil's senior literary figure, Machado de Assis, and the eminent statesman, Barão do Rio Branco, organized a faction to block João do Rio's election to the Brazilian Academy of Letters on two occasions because of his questionable moral turpitude.<sup>31</sup>

After complex campaigning on his own behalf, however, João do Rio was admitted to the prestigious association with his third nomination. Emílio de Meneses, an important member of the capital's literary circles, allegedly

composed a couplet that revealed some degree of public disdain for the young author. Once again playing on the double meaning of *fresco* as an effeminate homosexual and as something cool, the verse went: "Predicting the coming heat / The Academy, which worships the cold, / Not being able to buy fans / Opened its doors to João do Rio."<sup>32</sup>

On numerous occasions, João do Rio's enemies linked him to public symbols of homosexuality in order to discredit him. One such reference appeared in the 1911 issue of the satire magazine *O Gato*. A full-page cartoon showed João do Rio and Olavo Bilac, Brazil's leading poet, admiring a statute. Bilac's index finger touches the figure's buttock. João do Rio gazes down on the nude from the front. Bilac comments: "Superb, isn't it?" João do Rio replies: "How wonderful it would be if all men were like that!"<sup>33</sup> Whether Olavo Bilac actually sexually desired other men remains unclear. His biographers insist that his lifelong bachelor's status was the result of a failed love for a young woman.<sup>34</sup> He certainly did not generate the animosity that João de Rio received. Even if the cartooned innuendoes about Bilac's desires are baseless, they reveal the vulnerability of public figures to such accusations.

One favorite means to attack João do Rio was to rechristen him João do Rocio, thus associating him with the *frescos* of the Largo do Rocio. In 1920, one political enemy opposed to João do Rio's stand in favor of Portuguese fishing off the Brazilian coast wrote: "João do Rocio has founded a journal called *Pátria* which should be called *Mátria* because in matters that have to do with Paulo, everything is feminine." This author then went on to warn: "the poor and persecuted Brazilian fishermen . . . know how to kill fish and also know how to kill traitors and passive pederasts."<sup>35</sup>

João do Rio embodied the cultural aspirations of the Brazilian elite who imitated Europe's latest styles. He mimicked the latest continental literary ideas and fashions and recycled them in Brazil to an amused upper-class audience. While João do Rio played the sophisticated Europeanized fop to perfection in public, he, like Mário de Andrade, remained discreet about the particulars of his private life. Perhaps João do Rio's own concern for personal circumspection explains why a known *fresco* managed to rise to the heights of Brazilian society. As long as João do Rio praised and reproduced the norms valued by the upper classes, he remained their darling. Jeffrey Needell, in *A Tropical Belle Époque*, echoes this observation. João do Rio, Needell argues, "wrote about the Carioca elite's own world, not as it was, but as the elite *wanted* it. In the fantasies thus created of the Carioca *belle époque*, he helped make the Carioca elite self-conscious, and delightedly so. Moreover, by making elite culture and society the center of his flattering attention, he helped to legitimize it."<sup>36</sup> When he challenged a popular view, as in the case of

his editorial stance in favor of Portuguese fishing interests in Brazil, this curtain of toleration fell; and, he was left vulnerable to all of the prevalent social stereotypes and prejudices regarding *frescos*.

A frivolous fop could enjoy fame and fortune as long as his personal life remained discreet, unmentioned, and unrecorded and his public positions uncontroversial. The same could be said of other celebrated literary figures, such as Mário de Andrade, whose sexual and amorous encounters with other men remain clouded in mystery and protected by national myths. Indeed, the pattern of social toleration of flamboyant effeminate figures that reproduce the cultural status quo will persist throughout the twentieth century. *Haute couture* designers, fashionable hairdressers, and famous drag stars who conform to normative notions of the feminine find a protected niche among the elite as long as they seem to reinforce the traditional representations of the feminine or the effeminate.

### Mediated Toleration

Like Mário de Andrade, other artists, composers, and writers who frequented bohemian sites in Rio in the 1930s and '40s achieved a relative acceptance within their social milieu while carefully guarding the secrets of their sexual desires from a wider audience. Such was the case with the famous singer Francisco Alves (1898-1952), the "rei da voz," who had a "preference for boys," and according to one contemporary witness did not even hide the fact that he had had sexual escapes with men in public places. The popular singer Jorge Goulart recalled how people protected the myth surrounding Chico Alves: "In our group Chico's sexual habits were open discussion, they said that he was a *fanchono*, that he liked to have sex with boys. I mentioned this fact to some people; [but] the subject was taboo. They wouldn't allow the myth to be touched, or rather the myth couldn't stand information like that, as if it were the worst thing imaginable."<sup>37</sup> Alcir Lenharo, an historian of Brazilian popular singers of this period, explained that members of a given group of Carioca bohemians might have been protective of the public image of a fellow artist or drinking partner who belonged to their social network. However, these *fanchonos* often suffered ridicule and discrimination from the very same people who shielded knowledge of their homosexuality from the outside world.<sup>38</sup>

In the last two decades, dozens of politicized Brazilian lesbian, gay, and transgendered organizations, in conjunction with an international movement, have affected traditional notions about same-sex eroticism.<sup>39</sup> A noted shift has occurred in representations of homosexuality in the media. Congressional representatives of the left-wing Workers' Party have initiated legislation to

provide domestic partnership benefits to same-sex couples. Clusters of Brazilian academics are expanding the intellectual production about homosexuality, as reflected in a Conference on Homoeroticism in Literature held at the Universidade Federal Fluminense in May, 1999, and the formation of a Working Group on History and Homoeroticism at the Brazilian Historical Association (ANPUH) in July, 1999. Nevertheless, Brazilian icons such as Mário de Andrade still remain enveloped in a protective shroud, as if public knowledge and discussion of their own sexual desires somehow could detract from the power of their intellectual production.

## NOTES

1. An excellent example of the conflation of Brazilian homosexuality with Carnival in Rio de Janeiro is Júlio Gomes, *A homossexualidade no mundo* (Lisboa: by the author, 1979), 153-92. For an extensive critique of this perception, see James N. Green, *Beyond Carnival: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
2. See Richard G. Parker, *Bodies, Pleasures and Passions: Sexual Culture in Contemporary Brazil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 85-95 and 136-64.
3. "O mundo gay rasga as fantasias," *Veja* (12 May 1993): 52-53.
4. Luiz Roberto Mott, *Epidemic of Hate: Violations of the Human Rights of Gay Men, Lesbians and Transvestites in Brazil* (San Francisco: Grupo Gay da Bahia/International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, 1996), 1.
5. A case study of several of these murders that took place in São Paulo is: Antônio Sergio Spagnol, "O desejo marginal: violência nas relações homossexuais na cidade de São Paulo" (Master's thesis, University of São Paulo, 1996). For a journalistic account about the 1987-88 wave of murders of homosexuals in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, see Márcio Venciguerra and Maurício Maia, *O pecado de adão: crimes homossexuais no eixo Rio-São Paulo* (São Paulo: Ícone, 1988). For other examples of violence against gay men in Rio de Janeiro in the late 1960s and '70s, see also Luiz Carlos Machado, *Descansa em paz, Oscar Wilde* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Codecri, 1982).
6. Grupo Gay da Bahia, "Violação do direitos humanos e assassinato de homossexuais no Brasil 1997," *Boletim do Grupo Gay da Bahia*, no. 37 (January/February 1998): 32-48.
7. The first political asylum in the United States granted to a person for fear of persecution based on sexual orientation was the Brazilian Marcelo Tenório, at the time a 30-year-old house painter living in San Francisco. James Brooke, "In Live-and-Let-Live Land, Gay People are Slain," *New York Times* (12 August 1993): 3.
8. João Carlos Rodrigues, *João do Rio: uma biografia* (Rio de Janeiro: Topbooks, 1995), 255.
9. Cabo Machado [Oswald de Andrade], "Os Três Sargentos," [The Three Sergeants], *Revista de antropofagia*, in *Diário de São Paulo* (April 14, 1929), 6.
10. See, for example, Jeffrey D. Needell, "Identity, Race, Gender, and Modernity in the Origins of Gilberto Freyre's *Ouvre*," *American Historical Review*, vol. 100 (1) (February 1995): 51-77.
11. "Pode fazer o que você quiser dentro de quatro paredes, mas não diga nada a ninguém." See Parker, *Bodies, Pleasures and Passions*.
12. The word *rossio* means public square or open marketplace and is alternately spelled *rocio*.
13. Arquivo da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro. Codices 15.4.29, page 29, April 9, 1870.
14. Arquivo da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro. Codices 15.4.29, page 14, no. 5841, August 26, 1878.
15. Arquivo da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro. Codices 15.4.29, page 15, September 10, 1878.
16. Evelyn Furquim Werneck Lima, "Arquitetura do espetáculo: teatros e cinemas na formação

- do espaço público das Praças Tiradentes e Cinelândia. Rio de Janeiro 1813-1950" (Ph.D. diss., Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 1997), 112-125.
17. On the *francesas*, see Jeffrey D. Needell, *A Tropical Belle Époque: Elite Culture and Society in Turn-of-the-Century Rio de Janeiro* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 171-73. For a study of *polacas* and Jewish prostitution in Brazil, see Beatriz Kushnir, *Baile de máscaras: mulheres judias e prostituição: as polacas e sua associações de ajuda mútua* (Rio de Janeiro: Imago Editora, 1997) and Lená Medeiros de Menezes, *Os estrangeiros e o comércio do prazer nas ruas do Rio (1890-1930)* (Rio de Janeiro: Arquivo Nacional, 1992). An examination of prostitution in nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro is: Luiz Carlos Soares, *Rameiras, ilhoas, polacas . . . a prostituição no Rio de Janeiro do século XIX* (São Paulo: Editora Ática, 1992).
  18. Vivaldo Coaracy. *Memórias da cidade do Rio de Janeiro*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Belo Horizonte: Itatiaia, 1988), 97.
  19. Luiz Edmundo, *O Rio de Janeiro do meu tempo*, vol. 1 (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1938), 151-52.
  20. Danilo Gomes, *Antigos cafés do Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria Kosmos Editora, 1989), 108.
  21. "Fresco Adjetivo arejado de modernização depravada. Quase frio, ameno, suave, que não tem calor nem quenturas. Que faz frescuras, que tem o sopro da brisa. Encontra-se muito nos morros e no largo do Rossio." Bock [J. Brito] *Dicionário moderno* (Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Rebelo Braga, 1903), 39. My translation. Reprinted in Dino Preti, *A linguagem proibida: um estudo sobre a linguagem erótica* (São Paulo: T. A. Queiroz, 1983), 270.
  22. "Ante a cruel derrocada / Do Rossio dos meus sonhos, / A musa desocupada, / Embora em versos tristonhos, / Vai jogar uma cartada: / É bem dura a colisão / Que me tolhe a liberdade / Desta ingrata profissão; E ao prefeito da cidade / Requiero indenização! . . ." *O Malho* (Rio de Janeiro) 3, no. 93, (23 June 1904): 31. My translation.
  23. "Mas que calor tem feito! Não há cajuada, nem refrescos que cheguem . . . seu comendador! Calcule que todas as noites levo . . . à procura de algum lugar em que possa haver fresco. / O largo do Rossio não serve?" K. Lixto [Calixto Cordeiro], *O Malho* (Rio de Janeiro) 2, no. 20, (28 March 1903): 14. My translation.
  24. Jacomino Define, "A Rua do Ouvidor," *Kosmos* (Rio de Janeiro) 2, no. 1, (February 1905): 37-39; Needell, *A Tropical Belle Époque*, 164-6. See also Joaquim Manuel de Macedo, *Memórias da rua do Ouvidor* (Brasília: Editora Universidade de Brasília, 1988), and Danilo Gomes, *Uma rua chamada Ouvidor* (Rio de Janeiro: Prefeitura da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro, 1980).
  25. Rosa Maria Barboza de Araújo, *A vocação do prazer: a cidade e a família no Rio de Janeiro republicano* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1995), 326-28; Fantasio [pseudonym], "O namoro no Rio de Janeiro," *Kosmos* (Rio de Janeiro) 3, no. 7, (July 1906): 43-45.
  26. I have gathered information on João do Rio from the following sources: Gilberto Amado, *Mocidade no Rio e primeira viagem à Europa*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria José Olímpio Editora, 1958), 44-65; Raúl Antelo, *João do Rio: o dândi e a especulação* (Rio de Janeiro: Livrarias Taurus-Timbre Editores, 1989); Gentil Luiz de Faria. *A presença de Oscar Wilde na belle-époque literária brasileira* (São João do Rio Preto, São Paulo: Pannartz, 1988); Renato Cordeiro Gomes, *João do Rio: Vielas do vício, ruas da graça* (Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará, 1996); Raimundo Magalhães Júnior, *A vida vertiginosa de João do Rio* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1978); Ignácio de Lyra Neves Manta, *A arte e a neurose de João do Rio* (Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alvarez, 1977); Needell, *A Tropical Belle Époque*, 207-25; João Carlos Rodrigues, *João do Rio: uma biografia* (Rio de Janeiro: Topbooks, 1996); and Carmen Lúcia Tindó Secco, *Morte e prazer em João do Rio* (Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves; Instituto Estadual do Livro, 1978).
  27. João do Rio [Paulo Barreto], *A alma encantadora das ruas* (Rio de Janeiro: Secretaria

- Municipal de Cultura, Departamento Geral de Documentação e Informação Cultural, Divisão de Editoração, 1995), 5.
28. Jean-Claude Bernadet inspired my initial interest in João do Rio through a similar reading of the author's nocturnal meandering.
  29. The articles were published as *As religiões do Rio* (Paris: Garnier, 1904).
  30. João Carlos Rodrigues, *João do Rio: catálogo bibliográfico, 1899-1921* (Rio de Janeiro: Rio de Janeiro: Prefeitura da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro, Secretaria Municipal de Cultura, Departamento Geral de Documentação e Informação Cultural, Divisão de Editoração, 1994).
  31. Rodrigues, *João do Rio*, 59.
  32. Magalhães, *A vida vertiginosa de João do Rio*, 126. The original reads: "Na previsão de próximo calores / A Academia, que idolatra o frio, / Não podendo comprar ventiladores / Abriu as portas para o João do Rio."
  33. Seth [Álvaro Marins], *O Gato* (Rio de Janeiro), (1911). My translation. "Superbo, não é? Que delícia se todos os homens fossem assim!"
  34. See Raimundo Magalhães Júnior, *Olavo Bilac e sua época* (Rio de Janeiro: Companhia Editora Americana, 1974), 84-91; and Fernando Jorge, *Vida e poesia de Olavo Bilac* (São Paulo: Livraria Exposição do Livro, n.d.), 97-136, 150-62, 306-12.
  35. Magalhães, *A vida vertiginosa de João do Rio*, 245.
  36. Needell, *A Tropical Belle Époque*, 209.
  37. Alcir Lenharo, *Cantores do rádio: a trajetória de Nora Ney e Jorge Goulart e o meio artístico de seu tempo* (Campinas, São Paulo: Editora da UNICAMP, 1995), 28.
  38. *Ibid.*, 27.
  39. See James N. Green, "More Love and More Desire: The Building of the Brazilian Movement," in *The Global Emergence of Gay and Lesbian Politics: National Imprints of a Worldwide Movement*, ed. Barry Adam, Jan Willem Duyvendak, and André Krouwel, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 91-109

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